

The Role of Consciousness in Marx's Theory of History

DAVID A. DUQUETTE
University of Kansas

I

In the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy we have Marx's famous phrase "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being which determines their consciousness." [1] Again in the German Ideology we find Marx saying that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" [2] and that "consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all. . . . moreover, it is quite immaterial what consciousness starts to do on its own." [3] Finally, in the Communist Manifesto Marx asks rhetorically "does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in a word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?" [4]

These well-worn phrases of Marx have been cited by many a writer who in attempting to explicate Marx's materialist conception of history have concluded that with Marx consciousness has exactly the opposite role that it had for Hegel. Whereas Hegel treated nature as a shadowy product of mind (Geist) Marx treats consciousness as a more or less epiphenomenal manifestation of material forces--a manifestation which at best can have the quality of being a mirror-image of reality, but which oftentimes functions as an illusion when it, attributes to itself causal powers which are really attributable to material forces. Marx himself seems to give credence to this interpretation when in the 1872 afterword to Capital he states that:

my dialectic is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite: To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea', he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea'. With me, on the other hand, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.[5]

Thus, Hegel's dialectic "is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell." [6]

These statements pose problems for the reader of Marx who feels obliged to conclude from a study of the whole of Marx's writings that in his materialistic conception of history consciousness must have a role which goes beyond that of being a mere passive reflection of reality. After all, isn't the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat more than just a consequence of its material conditions but in addition a social force which is required in order for the transition to be made from capitalism to socialism? Doesn't Marx's theory itself make a difference to the reality which it examines and analyses when it is applied to that reality for revolutionary purposes?

We can begin to get some perspective on these issues when we realize that many writers who interpret Marx's inversion of Hegel as leading to a trivialization of the role of consciousness in history have before hand confused Hegel's position, and in following out the implications of this inversion thereby confuse Marx's position. Thus, for example, although Marx was impressed with Feuerbach's 'transformative method' and applied it in his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right it is clear that Marx did not accept the epistemological consequences which Feuerbach drew in transforming Hegel's idealism into materialism. Indeed, Marx was highly influenced by Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, with its view that man's relation to reality is not fundamentally a passive relation but an active one in which the subject is involved in constituting the relation. Although it is a moot question as to whether Feuerbach actually did misinterpret Hegel--and in any case he was influenced by the tradition of mechanistic materialism which treated reality as a passive object of perception--it is

certain that when Marx applies the transformative method to Hegel the results differ from Feuerbach's. It is to an examination of Marx's first three Theses on Feuerbach that we will now turn in order to grasp these results clearly. Later we will apply these results to an understanding of the nature of production in general, and also address ourselves to the question of determinism in history. Finally, we will discuss some general criticisms of Marx's theory and evaluate its consistency in attempting to account for revolutionary practice.

II

In his first thesis on Feuerbach Marx criticizes Feuerbach's materialism for conceiving of reality "only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively." [7] Whereas idealism does develop the 'active side' of reality, although in a one-sided abstract form since it disregards the 'sensuousness' of this activity, materialism takes a 'theoretical attitude' towards sensuous objects, and hence cannot "grasp the significance of 'revolutionary', of practical-critical activity." [8]

How does idealism develop the active side of reality? As Marx points out in the Paris Manuscripts "the outstanding thing in Hegel's Phenomenology. . . is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-genesis of man as a process, conceives objectification as a loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man--true, because real man--as the outcome of man's own labour." [9] However, this 'active side' is comprehended only formally and abstractly because it occurs as a process within self-consciousness where labour is only 'abstractly mental labour', and where "the alienation of self-consciousness establishes thinghood." [10]

Why does Feuerbach's materialism take a 'theoretical attitude' which fails to grasp the significance of 'practical-critical activity'? In the German Ideology Marx tells us that although Feuerbach, unlike the 'pure materialists', understands that man as well as nature is a sensuous object, yet he conceives of man merely as 'object of the senses' and not as 'sensuous activity'. "Thus he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it." [11] For Marx this sensuous activity is

human labor, the production of material life, in which man distinguishes himself from animals by performing the 'first historical act', an act which is the "fundamental condition of all history." [12] Moreover, this activity is revolutionary in that it is involved in creating and changing reality, especially that reality which man experiences as alienation. Although at first consciousness is merely 'consciousness concerning the immediate sensuous environment', under conditions of alienation it can become a critical consciousness where in confronting reality with the idea of human liberation man acts on the basis of this idea to transform reality. Feuerbach, however, treats 'Man' as object of contemplation rather than as 'real historical man'. Therefore, "as far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist. With him history and materialism diverge completely." [13]

Where, then, does Marx stand with respect to traditional idealism and classical materialism? As one writer has expressed it Marx "urged a synthesis that would integrate the sensuousness projected by materialism and activity as projected by idealism." [14] In the Paris Manuscripts Marx referred to his position in distinction from both idealism and materialism as a "consistent naturalism or humanism" [15] and in the German Ideology he refers to the communist as a "practical materialist." [16] However we label it, Marx's conception of sensuous practice, upon which he bases his historical perspective on man, implies that there is a dynamic relation between consciousness and reality, a relation which is obscured when phrases of Marx, like those cited at the beginning of this paper, are taken out of the context of his overall thought.

Marx's second thesis on Feuerbach brings us to the question of the relation of theory and practice. Here Marx says that "the question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but a practical question. Man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice." [17] Does this mean that man literally creates truth out of his actions, or that the criterion of truth is some sort of pragmatic notion of success? Since Hegel viewed reality as the creation of reason, it might seem as if Marx, in bringing Hegel's notion of activity down to earth, is holding that practice creates reality. Actually, this is to some degree a correct interpretation, although it must be understood in an epistemological rather than an ontological context. In other words,

Marx does not believe that material reality is literally the creation of practice, but that this reality as involving a dynamic relation to man is only known by him concretely through practice. What Marx emphasizes here is that theory alone cannot grasp truth, which is the dynamic relation of man and world, but that only theory unified with practice can do this. Man's concrete being is the whole of this dynamic relation along with its terms, and hence when Marx says that being determines consciousness he must mean, as N. Rotenstreich has put it, "that consciousness is not cut off from existence and is not bound to an independent realm. Consciousness is only a part of existence, determined by its totality." [18] This perspective helps us to make sense not only of phrases in Marx such as 'being determines consciousness', but also of Marx's polemics against Hegel when he says that the Ideal is a reflection of the material world, for what Marx is attacking is a view which abstracts consciousness from the world and treats it as independent from sensuous practice. Marx's dynamic, organic conception of practice will be important when we examine the nature of production generally later on.

Before proceeding further, we should note that Marx's conception of practice does not imply that he is a 'pragmatist', despite the fact that there is a similarity between the pragmatic and the Marxist conception of truth. As Rotenstreich puts it, in Marx

practice has as its objective the total change of reality. Pragmatism is concerned explicitly with some particular changes in our experience or with some particular consequences, because pragmatism does not begin with the total conception of reality that must be practically materialized, but with a fragmentary and piecemeal hypothesis that has to be applied to a particular experience. [19]

Put another way, whereas Marx conceives of practice as 'realization', pragmatism "conceives of practice as the decision as to what to do and what means to employ in the doing." [20] Thus, Marxists would criticize Dewey's faith in 'creative intelligence' because it is not able to get to the real root of human alienation in society, not capable of understanding the materialist foundation of social change. [21] This inability of pragmatism to grasp the 'total conception of reality' seems to be rooted in its ontological assumptions. As J. Habermas points out, Pierce's logic of inquiry does not deal

adequately with the difference between that part of reality which is independent of human learning and control, and that part which we grasp hold of when it becomes the correlate of true statements about reality. In effect, Pierce "limits himself to a concept of reality that is exhausted in being the correlate of all possible true statements." [22] Marx, on the other hand, can be characterized as a realist in the sense that nature is the independent correlate of consciousness. In the transforming of natural objects into produced objects the latter do not lose their character of being-in-themselves but are nevertheless transformed into a constituted objectivity through human activity. This accomplishment is rooted in the labor process where nature is made objective for us by way of mediation with human subjectivity. Hence, "the category of man as a tool-making animal signifies a schema both of action and of apprehending the world . . . thus in materialism labor has the function of synthesis." [23]

J. Habermas has pointed out that in contrast to Kant, Fichte and Hegel, this notion of synthesis does not produce a logical structure which can be thought of either as detached a priori from empirical reality or as developing out of the movement of pure self-consciousness; rather, it takes place in the medium of labor and results in a structured reality which manifests itself in the system of social labor. Thus, "the point of departure for a reconstruction of synthetic accomplishment is not logic but the economy." [24] This synthesis, however, can never be an absolute one as in Hegel's philosophy of identity in difference between mind and nature, since the unity of objective and subjective through practice is, to a degree, imposed on a Nature which remains external and independent with respect to the subject. The experience of this externality and independence of nature is manifest in man's subjection to natural laws which constrain his activity. But since human reality which is fundamentally an historical reality (i.e., the development of men's productive abilities through time) is only concrete in its synthesis, any talk about nature 'in-itself' is just as abstract as talk about pure self-consciousness. [25]

In the third thesis on Feuerbach Marx holds that previous materialism, which emphasizes that men are products of their circumstances, "forget that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself." [26] In other words, there is a reciprocal relation between man and his cir-

cumstances such that not only are men's circumstances historically conditions on the human being who constitutes his environment through sensuous activity, but these conditions are reconstructed through practice as well. Viewed concretely as man's historical conditions, and not abstractly as nature 'in-itself', man's circumstances cannot be radically separated from his activity; rather, both must be seen as aspects of man's social reality taken as a whole. As Rotenstreich has suggested, activity and circumstances "cannot be separated even to fix the temporal antecedence of the one over the other. Production, which is--as Marx said--the first historical act, contains the characteristic tension of practice, that is, the circumstances and the change. Here we have no first foothold." [27]

Finally, revolutionary practice and criticism go hand in hand for Marx. The critical reform of consciousness through analysis of its mystical forms enables men to explain to themselves the meaning of their actions. Revolutionary activity which is not properly informed ceases to be effectively revolutionary, as Marx indicates in his critique of the Gotha Program. Marx's abandoning of philosophy in turning to historical materialism is the abandoning of a mode of theorizing which remains abstract, but it does not involve abandoning theory altogether since practice must be guided critically by theory. However, for theory to become a 'material force' it must turn 'relentless criticism' away from religion and philosophy to political economy. "It is clear that the arm of criticism cannot replace the criticism of arms. Material force can only be overthrown by material force; but theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses." [28] As to whether Marx developed the concept of criticism sufficiently such that it could serve, not only as a guide to men's productive activity in the strict sense, but as a guide to the activity of class struggle, especially as this takes place on the ideological level, with call for further comment after we have examined Marx's understanding of the general nature of production and addressed ourselves to the question of determinism in history.

III

Now that we have examined the philosophical groundwork for Marx's understanding of the relationship of consciousness to reality in sensuous human practice we

can turn to an examination of Marx's view of the nature of production in general. What we want to show here is that when Marx actually engages in a critique of political economy his method is consistent with his view of the dialectical interaction of man and world as he stated it philosophically. I will go into some detail in explicating his view of production in general since it provides a good example of Marx's dialectical approach to political economy.

In the introduction to the Grundrisse Marx states that the phrase 'production in general' is a 'rational abstraction' insofar as it singles out and fixes the common features of all stages of production historically. This abstraction is useful in that it saves us from repetition of these common features when examining each stage, but it is no substitute for empirical examination since these general features 'constitute something very complex' and are found in conditions which have "essential points of difference." [29] Marx criticizes those modern economists who in failing to remember this "are trying to prove the eternal nature and harmony of existing social conditions." [30] Also, in postulating production as subject to eternal laws independent of historical development, as opposed to distribution which is viewed as an arbitrary, contingent process, these economists artificially divorce production from distribution and tend to see "only an accidental reflective connection in what constitutes an organic union." [31]

In his explanation of the general nature of production Marx examines the relation between production, distribution, exchange and consumption. He begins by telling us that a mere linear characterization is inadequate: for example, production as the starting point, consumption as the end point and distribution and exchange as the middle. Rather, these elements must be related together as comprising an organic whole. Production is dependent on and internally related to consumption in that the latter provides the individual human being for whom there are products, for whom the product in consumption is a 'real' product. "Consumption gives the product the finishing touch by annihilating it, since the result of production is a product, not as the material embodiment of activity, but only as an object for the active subject." [32] Also, consumption creates the necessity for new production by providing its impulse and guiding aim, "it furnishes the objects of production in a form that is still subjective. No needs, no production. But consumption reproduces the need." [33]

On the other hand, consumption is dependent on production in that the latter furnishes the former with its material as a potential product, as well as giving consumption its character (e.g., eating with utensils as opposed to with hands) and creating in the consumer a want for its object through its availability. Thus, production and consumption are related such that "each appears as the means of the other and as being brought about by the other, which is expressed as their mutual interdependence." [34] Marx goes on to exhibit the interdependence of the other elements as well by showing that just as the form of distribution is determined by the manner of participation in production, distribution determines the organization of production through the distributing of the means of production as well as the distribution of manpower through the division of labor. Finally, while production determines circulation and exchange, the latter is also included in and determines the former in that "the exchange of activities and abilities which takes place in production" is essential to the character that it has. [35]

Despite this 'mutual interdependence' of elements Marx also seems to indicate that there is a fundamental asymmetry in these relations. He says

Consumption, as a natural necessity, as a want, constitutes an internal factor of productive activity, but the latter is the starting point of realization and, therefore, its predominating factor, the act in which the entire process recapitulates itself. [36]

How are we to understand this qualification? Are we to conclude that Marx's thought here is somewhat confused, that what he acknowledges on the one hand he denies on the other?

In recapitulating his view of how these elements are related together Marx says that they are not to be seen as all strictly identical, even though internally related, but as different aspects of the same totality (to use a Hegelian phrase, an identity-in-the-differences). Again, he says that production predominates but it becomes clear that he does not mean production in the narrow sense, production conceived in abstraction from the other elements, but production as including these elements within it. Thus Marx states that "a definite form of production thus determines the form of consumption, distribution, exchange and also the mutual relations between these various elements. Of course, production in its one sided form is in its

turn influenced by other elements." [37] We see, then, that the sense in which production predominates with respect to the various elements is the sense in which the whole of an activity predominates its parts; the mutual interaction which takes place between the various elements does so within the context of their organic relation to the whole. Marx, therefore, does not conceive of production in its one sided or narrow sense as ultimately having primacy in determining the other elements considered as external to it, since this notion of production is simply an element along with the others in production as a whole and can only be separated from production as a whole through abstraction. [38]

This discussion of production by Marx has significant implications for the issue of determinism in history, an issue which has direct bearing on the question of the role of consciousness in history, i.e., whether consciousness is little more than the causal result of impersonal material forces. Deterministic renderings of historical materialism consistently fail to appreciate what Marx inherits from Hegel when the former applies dialectics to the critique of political economy. William H. Shaw, for example, advances an interpretation which he calls 'technological determinism' in which the productive forces are 'in the long-run determinant of social change'. What he means by this is that "changes in the relations of production are always a result of changes in the productive forces." [39] He recognizes that the productive forces cannot be viewed as a sufficient condition for changes in the relations of production since Marx's theory requires that discrepancies between the two be allowed to occur, that they become at certain levels of development contradictory. Shaw concludes from his examination of Marx and Engels' works that they attached some sort of 'ontological primacy' to material production and that "the introduction of new relations of production is contingent on the development of the productive forces in a way in which those forces are not dependent on the relations." [40] Since society will not give up its acquired productive forces, the relations of production must be in the subordinate position of accommodation. The development of the productive forces is thus a 'natural' one and provides a "solid foundation for the investigation of human society." [41] Although Shaw recognizes the validity of viewing the system of production as an organic unity, he holds, nevertheless, that one element of this unity does have causal primacy, namely the forces of production. Shaw also

recognizes that the concept of the productive forces is an abstraction from the social world, yet he holds that only by viewing them as the underlying rhythm of historical progress for Marx can there be an understanding of the development of the relations of production, and hence social development generally.

Aside from the fact that Shaw's notion of productive force determinism provides a rather weak sense of determination (a more interesting notion would hold the productive forces to provide sufficient conditions, or both necessary and sufficient conditions, for changes in the relations of production), [42] is clear from Marx's discussion on production that although production taken in the narrow sense (and the notion of productive forces is a further refinement or narrowing of this sense of production) may constitute a necessary condition for the existence of other elements in a way in which they do not do so with respect to production, Marx's view of production in the broader sense exhibits an interdependency of elements such that each, in its own particular way, is a necessary condition for the other. We can abstract these elements apart from one another and notice the various sorts of interactions they exhibit and observe various sorts of dependencies, but it is clear for Marx that when we do this we are no longer dealing with production as a unity, and thus not looking at it concretely. To give one part of the whole some sort of ultimate primacy over the rest, as Shaw attempts to do, by way of certain analytical distinctions is to reintroduce the sort of mechanistic explanation Marx criticized, and even despite Shaw's recognition that "for Marx the productive forces are human forces, by and large man's creations, employed in his material reproduction of society." [43] But then why even call this by the name 'technological determinism'? If the productive forces are human forces then a concept of human self-determination would seem to be more appropriate, as well as consistent with the organic model of activity which Marx inherits from Hegel. [44]

IV

The question of the role of consciousness in history also applies to the issue of the relationship between the material base and superstructure in Marx's writings, where now we are not talking about material production only but society as a whole. There are three ways in which we can view the relation of base and superstructure. It can be understood statically as

the difference between those forms of social organization which spring directly out of the mode of production, and those others, religious, legal, political, philosophical, etc., which do not. Secondly, the dynamic relation between base and superstructure can be stated in terms of either a correspondence or contradiction between the two, where the superstructure either furthers or hinders the development taking place in the base. Finally, there is a practical connection between base and superstructure by way of social classes in which the contradiction between base and superstructure is carried out in the form of class struggle.[45]

Now the relation between base and superstructure is often thought of in terms of primary and derivative structures respectively, but it is important to see that if Marx's philosophical model of human reality is to be applied consistently, then, analogously to production, the formation of the superstructure cannot be understood as a mere reflex of the base. It is true that when the superstructure manifests ideological distortions of social reality it will appear as a shadowy projection of that reality, and hence exhibit the character of a dependent and conditioned lesser reality. But this does not rule out the possibility that various forms of consciousness manifest in the superstructure may not only grasp social reality at its core, but also provide the theoretical-practical impetus for revolutionary transformation of reality. Here the social forces of change do not mechanically spring up out of the economic base, but are nurtured in the interaction of the base with the superstructure.

Is this line of thought consistent with the pronouncements of Marx and Engels on historical materialism? According to Martin Seliger, Marx's theory of history bears the 'sin of overstatement' in that this theory contains the extreme position that all ideology is 'false consciousness' (a term coined by Engels, not Marx), that it is a distortion of reality which is a necessary consequence of the dependence of thought upon socio-economic conditions.[46] In support of his thesis Seliger points to passages in Marx such as those quoted at the beginning of this paper, and he takes particular note of one passage in which an analogy is made between ideology and a camera obscura in which real world relationships are inverted. [47] Although Seliger acknowledges that Marx and Engels made statements, both in the German Ideology and elsewhere, that deviate from their 'dogmatic' thesis, he concludes that "this indicates their failure to think through the

matter systematically,"[48] and that in allowing apparent exceptions to this thesis "Marx simply made statements offending against his general rules without ever showing any awareness that he was doing so."[49] Moreover, Seliger accuses Marx and Engels of a grander inconsistency in failing to reconcile their 'dogmatic conception of ideology' with their "express belief in the objectivity of their 'positive science.'"[50] In other words, Marx's identifying of certain ideologies as 'false consciousness' (e.g., the bourgeois ideology) presupposed a knowledge of the criteria of correct thinking, of an objective theory of social thought which is impossible if all social thought is distorted as a result of being dependent on socio-economic conditions.

John Plamenatz in commenting on Marx's treatment of consciousness in relation to the material conditions of social life notes that "this part of Marx's theory is so obscure and confused that there is no extracting from it a coherent account of how men's ways of thinking are related to other aspects of their life in society."[51] In criticizing what he takes to be Marx's position as presented in the German Ideology he further argues that "if consciousness, understood as the use of ideas, as conceptual thinking, is derivative in relation to material intercourse, it is so only in the sense that the earliest forms of material intercourse preceded it. It is not so in the sense that material intercourse, once consciousness has arisen, continues to affect it without being affected by it."[52] While noting that Marx 'often enough' implicitly admits this in various places (as in a passage from the Grundrisse where Marx distinguishes between hunger satisfied with utensils and hunger satisfied with the bare hands), Plamenatz concludes that Marx's "conception of man as a self-creative being is therefore incompatible with the account that Marx and Engels give in the German Ideology of how material intercourse is related to consciousness."[53]

Now there is no denying that there are terminological conflicts and inconsistencies in the works of Marx and Engels, and many of these can probably be explained as the result of carelessness and of issues which were incompletely thought out by the two thinkers, not to mention intentional overemphasis for the purpose of stressing what they had felt were unduly neglected points about the role of material conditions in social life. But to accuse Marx and Engels of a fundamental conceptual inconsistency is a much more

serious charge, and a few responses to that charge as expressed in the above views are in order.

First, the passages which Seliger selects from the German Ideology, the Holy Family, the Communist Manifesto, Capital and the Grundrisse are not nearly so clear and cannot with certitude be put into a unified context such that one could extract as a definitive standpoint a 'dogmatic' position by Marx and Engels on the role of consciousness in history. Indeed, one can gather many passages from these same works and arrive at a quite different conclusion, namely that ideas do have an efficacy historically and that the truths which ideas can convey are precisely what make the productive forces of history human forces. This conclusion, rather than Seliger's, is consistent with Marx's dialectical conception of human praxis as expressed in the Paris Manuscripts and the Theses on Feuerbach which we examined earlier. I would suggest that Seliger's analysis of the role of conceptual thought in Marx is not only insensitive to the concept of man that Marx elaborates on in his early writings, but also that Seliger's own understanding of dialectics is rather weak as is evidenced in the ease with which he reaches the conclusion that dialectical thinkers of the calibre of Marx and Engels were so blind and dogmatic as to fall into an obvious self-referential inconsistency.

Second, even if we were to grant Seliger that all ideology, as Marx and Engels sometimes used the word, is distortion of reality, this need not imply that all consciousness is 'false consciousness'. As Plamenatz himself points out, "though Marx occasionally uses the words 'consciousness' and 'ideology' in the same sense, he does not do so always. Consciousness is the wider term, for it covers all forms of conceptual thinking, whereas ideology is used nearly always in a narrower sense. Ideology is sometimes called 'false consciousness', which implies that it is only a part of consciousness." [54] In other words, the very concept of 'false consciousness' implies, at least for dialectical thinking, that there is a 'true consciousness', and it seems clear that Marx needed to rely on some such conception in order to justify how the proletariat could be able to come to an understanding of its historical role, an understanding which was in Marx's eyes requisite in order for revolutionary change to come about from capitalism.

The implied relation between true and false consciousness in Marx seems to be the following. False consciousness involves conceptual thinking which offers general explanations of human behavior or whole aspects

of reality which are fundamentally mistaken due to the failure to grasp the nature of the material conditions underlying this thinking. Historically this arises from the cleavage between physical and mental labor, and the derogatory connotation of the term 'ideology' and 'false consciousness' seems to imply a stubborn refusal of such thinking to become scientific. This is not to say that such thinking is necessarily aware of itself as theoretically deficient, but only that it does serve the interest of a dominant class and is an expression of social alienation. Because of the self-serving character of this form of thought it treats its theories as indubitably and eternally true, unlike science which treats its theories as provisional and always subject to further testing.[55] True consciousness, on the other hand, involves an awareness of the connection between material conditions and conceptualization of ideas such that one is able to understand the real workings of the social relations of one's own time and of the general character of the development of the process of history as a whole. The proletariat, or at least its intellectuals, are not tied conceptually to artificial class interests because as the universal class the proletariat represents for Marx the interests of man as a whole, i.e., liberation from material and social domination in order to satisfy human needs in a free and creative manner.

Implicit in the above account is the distinction between ideology and science, and it does appear that Marx and Engels thought of their work as scientific and therefore immune to the sorts of objections which they raised against ideological thinking. However, it would be a mistake to think that they viewed their science as some sort of positivism which would completely relativize the truths of history. We have suggested above that Marx's method of treatment of production can be traced back to Hegelian origins, and we know that the Hegelian conception of science is rooted in the use of the organic model for explaining reality. Whatever decided differences result from Marx's 'inversion' of Hegel it is clear that Marx inherited from Hegel the assumption that history must be treated as a totality, that it has a hidden rationality which can be understood and that philosophical thinking can provide norms for the critique of one-sided conceptions of reality. As George Lichtheim has put it:

To Marx, as to any Hegelian, the actual world of empirical perception was only an imperfect realization--at times indeed a caricature--of the

real or rational world, in which man's essential nature (his rationality) will have overcome the reified existence he leads while the surrounding object-world is not perceived as the product of his own creativity. The attainment of this liberated state is the work of history, whose dialectic is not disclosed by empirical reflection, but by critical (philosophical) reflection upon the totality of the process.[56]

I would contend that it is precisely this 'totalistic' side of Marx which provides the framework for understanding the consistency of his thinking about the role of consciousness in history. It is true that at times Marx tends to provide analyses which abstract away from the totality of relations with which he is concerned for the purpose of isolating certain elements for close examination, and when these abstractions are looked upon as constituting Marx's final word on the subject he indeed appears as a positivist or relativist. It is only by keeping in mind the organic conception of reality which Marx utilises throughout his works that we can avoid this mistaken conclusion.

Having said all of this, we must admit that ultimately Marx appears ambivalent concerning the role of consciousness in history in that he does not apply in a clear fashion his model of human activity to the relation of base and superstructure, especially with respect to the place of theoretical critique of social consciousness. This may well be because as J. Habermas points out, "Marx reduces the process of reflection to the level of instrumental action. . . . Marx conceives of reflection according to the model of production." [57] As a result, Marx never quite gives up the classification of his science of man within the natural sciences, despite the fact that natural science lacks the element of reflection necessary for a humanistic critique of social reality.[58] Marx in defining labor as the synthesis of man and nature, as we saw in the discussion of the theses on Feuerbach, attempts to capture both the technical and practical dimensions of human existence, but whether the guiding concept of production can capture the dynamic of revolutionary or critical-practical activity is doubtful. Productive knowledge and critical-practical knowledge provide different frameworks of human activity, the first requiring a synthesis of man and nature through labor, the second a synthesis of man and man through class struggle.[59] Marx gave us at the core of his system a critique of political economy which would provide

knowledge of man's productivity but he did not provide a critique of ideology in order to clarify the exact relation between theory and revolutionary practice. Only something like the latter would have justified Marx's statement that "just as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy." [60]

NOTES

¹R. C. Tucker, ed. The Mark-Engels Reader, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1972) p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 119.

³Ibid., pp. 122-23.

⁴Ibid., p. 351.

⁵Ibid., p. 197.

⁶Ibid., p. 198.

⁷Ibid., p. 107.

⁸Ibid., p. 107.

⁹Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 90-92

¹¹Ibid., p. 135.

¹²Ibid., p. 120.

¹³Ibid., pp. 135-36.

¹⁴N. Rotenstreich, Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy (Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1965), p. 33.

¹⁵Tucker, p. 93.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁸Rotenstreich, p. 50.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 51.

²⁰Ibid., p. 53.

²¹R. Bernstein, Praxis and Action (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 228.

²²J. Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 131.

²³Ibid., p. 28.

²⁴Ibid., p. 31.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 32-35.

²⁶Tucker, p. 108.

²⁷Rotenstreich, p. 59.

²⁸Tucker, p. 18.

²⁹Karl Marx, The Grundrisse, ed. and trans. D. McLellan (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), p. 18.

³⁰Ibid., p. 19.

³¹Ibid., p. 21.

³²Ibid., p. 25.

³³Ibid., pp. 25-26.

³⁴Ibid., p. 26.

³⁵Ibid., p. 26.

³⁶Ibid., p. 27.

³⁷Ibid., p. 33.

³⁸This organic treatment of production resembles in important ways Hegel's notion of the life process: just as for Hegel there is a dialectical relation

between the subjective end which guides the process of organic growth and the realized end which is its terminus, so in Marx's analysis of productive activity human subjectivity is always involved in giving production the concrete character that it has. Throughout the Grundrisse Marx's treatment of production illustrates how he applies the dialectics of human practice to political economy.

³⁹W. H. Shaw, Marx's Theory of History (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978), p. 37.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 62.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 66.

⁴²I am indebted to Professor Rex Martin for this observation.

⁴³Shaw, p. 151.

⁴⁴G. A. Cohen refers to this organic type conception of production as a form of what he calls 'functionalism', one of the typical features of which is the mutual dependency of the parts with respect to the whole. Cohen's major objection against attributing this conception to Marx is that it fosters conservatism with respect to change, since each element in the whole is more or less confined to a function which benefits the whole. I disagree with Cohen that revolutionary change cannot be allowed on the basis of this model. If we view the model dynamically rather than statically then it does not rule out growth in the relations of its elements or even the development of defective relations. Revolutionary change, as the etymology of the word indicates, involves putting things back into their proper order, and here it would mean the re-establishment of the proper relation of the elements with respect to the whole. Cohen is right that one cannot explain revolutionary change on the basis of applying this model to production, but that is because this explanation requires taking into account the role of theory as it operates at the level of the superstructure. Thus, in order to explain revolutionary change the organic model must be extended beyond the mode of production to society as a whole with its maze of multifarious relations, both material and ideological.

⁴⁶Karl Korsch, Karl Marx (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1938), pp. 185-88.

⁴⁷Martin Seliger, The Marxist Conception of Ideology, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 30-45.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 32; see Tucker p. 118 for the full context of the passage.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 45.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 40.

⁵²John Plamenatz, Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 211.

⁵³Ibid., p. 215.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 216.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 217.

⁵⁶George Lichtheim, The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 217-18.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁸Habermas, op. cit., p. 44.

⁵⁹Engels' letters to Schmidt and Bloch reflect this ambivalence between treating historical materialism on the model of natural science on the one hand, and recognizing the role of ideological critique and how it 'reacts in turn upon the economic base' on the other. Unfortunately, in contrast to Marx's discussion of production in the introduction of the Grundrisse where he explicitly refers to the organic model, Engels' remarks about the relation of economic base and superstructure are not terribly helpful or coherent. In particular, when Engels talks about production in the narrow sense as being the ultimate determining element in history he appears to be making precisely the sort of mistake that Marx warns against, viz., the drawing of universal conclusions from an abstraction apart from the whole.

⁵⁵Habermas, p. 55; see also Hannah Arendt's The Human Condition for a similar criticism of Marx.

⁶⁰Tucker, p. 23.