

## Chapter 2

# The Young Hegelian

Little more than a year after his arrival as a student in Berlin, Marx wrote to his father that he was now attaching himself 'ever more closely to the current philosophy'. This 'current philosophy' was the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel, who had taught at the University of Berlin from 1818 until his death in 1831. Years later, Friedrich Engels described Hegel's influence in the period when he and Marx began to form their ideas:

The Hegelian system covered an incomparably greater domain than any earlier system and developed in this domain a wealth of thought which is astounding even today . . .

One can imagine what a tremendous effect this Hegelian system must have produced in the philosophy-tinged atmosphere of Germany. It was a triumphal procession which lasted for decades and which by no means came to a standstill on the death of Hegel. On the contrary, it was precisely from 1830 to 1840 that 'Hegelianism' reigned most exclusively, and to a greater or lesser extent infected even its opponents.

The close attachment to this philosophy Marx formed in 1837 was to affect his thought for the rest of his life. Writing about Hegel in 1844, Marx referred to *The Phenomenology of Mind* as 'the true birthplace and secret of his philosophy' (*EPM* 98). This long and obscure work is therefore the place to begin our understanding of Marx.

The German word for 'Mind' is sometimes translated as 'Spirit'. Hegel uses it to refer to the spiritual side of the universe, which appears in his writings as a kind of universal mind. My mind, your mind, and the minds of every other conscious being are particular, limited manifestations of this universal mind. There has been a good deal of debate about whether this universal mind is intended to be God or whether Hegel was, in pantheistic fashion, identifying God with the world as a whole. There is no definite answer to this question; but it seems appropriate and convenient to distinguish this universal mind from our own particular minds by writing the universal variety with a capital, as Mind.

*The Phenomenology of Mind* traces the development of Mind from its first appearance as individual minds, conscious but neither self-conscious nor free, to Mind as a free and fully self-conscious unity. The process is neither purely historical, nor purely logical, but a strange combination of the two. One might say that Hegel is trying to show that history is the progress of Mind along a logically necessary path, a path along which it must travel in order to reach its final goal.

The development of Mind is dialectical – a term that has come to be associated with Marx because his own philosophy has been referred to as 'dialectical materialism'. The dialectical elements of Marx's theory were taken over from Hegel, so this is a good place to see what 'dialectic' is.

Perhaps the most celebrated passage in the *Phenomenology* concerns the relationship of a master to a slave. It well illustrates what Hegel means by dialectic, and it introduces an idea echoed in Marx's view of the relationship between capitalist and worker.

Suppose we have two independent people, aware of their own independence, but not of their common nature as aspects of one

universal Mind. Each sees the other as a rival, a limit to his own power over everything else. This situation is therefore unstable. A struggle ensues, in which one conquers and enslaves the other. The master/ slave relationship, however, is not stable either. Although it seems at first that the master is everything and the slave nothing, it is the slave who works and by his work changes the natural world. In this assertion of his own nature and consciousness over the natural world, the slave achieves satisfaction and develops his own self-consciousness, while the master becomes dependent on his slave. The ultimate outcome must therefore be the liberation of the slave, and the overcoming of the initial conflict between the two independent beings.

This is only one short section of the *Phenomenology*, the whole of which traces the development of Mind as it overcomes contradiction or opposition. Mind is inherently universal, but in its limited form, as the minds of particular people, it is not aware of its universal nature – that is, particular people do not see themselves as all part of the one universal Mind. Hegel describes this as a situation in which Mind is ‘alienated’ from itself – that is, people (who are manifestations of Mind) take other people (who are also manifestations of Mind) as something foreign, hostile, and external to themselves, whereas they are in fact all part of the same great whole.

Mind cannot be free in an alienated state, for in such a state it appears to encounter opposition and barriers to its own complete development. Since Mind is really infinite and all-encompassing, opposition and barriers are only appearances, the result of Mind not recognizing itself for what it is, but taking what is really a part of itself as something alien and hostile to itself. These apparently alien forces limit the freedom of Mind, for if Mind does not know its own infinite powers it cannot exercise these powers to organize the world in accordance with its plans.

The progress of the dialectical development of Mind in Hegel’s

philosophy is always progress towards freedom. 'The History of the World is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom,' he wrote. The *Phenomenology* is thus an immense philosophical epic, tracing the history of Mind from its first blind gropings in a hostile world to the moment when, in recognizing itself as master of the universe, it finally achieves self-knowledge and freedom.

Hegel's philosophy has an odd consequence which would have been embarrassing to a more modest author. If all history is the story of Mind working towards the goal of understanding its own nature, this goal is actually reached with the completion of the *Phenomenology* itself. When Mind, manifested in the mind of Hegel, grasps its own nature, the last stage of history has been reached.

Marx

To us this is preposterous. Hegel's speculative mixture of philosophy and history has been unfashionable for a long time. It was, however, taken seriously when Marx was young. Moreover we can make sense of much of the *Phenomenology* even if we reject the notion of a universal Mind as the ultimate reality of all things. We can treat 'Universal Mind' as a collective term for all human minds. We can then rewrite the *Phenomenology* in terms of the path to human liberation. The saga of Mind then becomes the saga of the human spirit.

This is what a group of philosophers known as Young Hegelians attempted in the decade following Hegel's death. The orthodox interpretation of Hegel was that since human society is the manifestation of Mind in the world, everything is right and rational as it is. There are plenty of passages in Hegel's works which can be quoted in support of this view. At times he seems to regard the Prussian state as the supreme incarnation of Mind. Since the Prussian state paid his salary as a professor of philosophy in Berlin, it is not surprising that the more radical Young Hegelians took the view that in these passages Hegel had betrayed his own philosophy. Among these

was Marx, who wrote in his doctoral thesis: 'if a philosopher really has compromised, it is the job of his followers to use the inner core of his thought to illuminate his own superficial expressions of it' (D 13).

For the Young Hegelians the 'superficial expression' of Hegel's philosophy was his acceptance of the state of politics, religion, and society in early nineteenth-century Prussia: the 'inner core' was his account of Mind overcoming alienation, reinterpreted as an account of human self-consciousness freeing itself from the illusions that prevent it achieving self-understanding and freedom.

During his student days in Berlin and for a year or two afterwards Marx was close to Bruno Bauer, a lecturer in theology and a leading Young Hegelian. Under Bauer's influence Marx seized on orthodox religion as the chief illusion standing in the way of human self-understanding. The chief weapon against this illusion was philosophy. In the Preface to his doctoral thesis, Marx wrote:

Philosophy makes no secret of it. The proclamation of Prometheus – in a word, I detest all the gods – is her own profession, her own slogan against all the gods of heaven and earth who do not recognize man's self-consciousness as the highest divinity. There shall be no other beside it.

(D 12–13)

In accordance with the general method of the Young Hegelians, Bauer and Marx used Hegel's own critique of religion to reach more radical conclusions. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel referred to the Christian religion at a certain stage of its development as a form of alienation, for while God reigns in heaven, human beings inhabit an inferior and comparatively worthless 'vale of tears'. Human nature is divided between its essential nature, which is immortal and heavenly, and its non-essential nature, which is mortal and earthly. Thus individuals see their own essential nature as having its home in another realm; they

are alienated from their mortal existence and the world in which they actually live.

Hegel, treating this as a passing phase in the self-alienation of Mind, drew no practical conclusions from it. Bauer reinterpreted it more broadly as indicating the self-alienation of human beings. It was humans, he maintained, who had created this God which now seemed to have an independent existence, an existence which made it impossible for humans to regard themselves as 'the highest divinity'. This philosophical conclusion pointed to a practical task: to criticize religion and show human beings that God is their own creation, thus ending the subordination of humanity to God and the alienation of human beings from their own true nature.

So the Young Hegelians thought Hegel's philosophy both mystifyingly presented and incomplete. When rewritten in terms of the real world instead of the mysterious world of Mind, it made sense. 'Mind' was read as 'human self-consciousness'. The goal of history became the liberation of humanity; but this could not be achieved until the religious illusion had been overcome.

## Chapter 3

# From God to Money

The transformation of Hegel's method into a weapon against religion was carried through most thoroughly by another radical Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach.

Friedrich Engels later wrote of the impact of the work that made Feuerbach famous: 'Then came Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* . . . One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians.' Like Bauer, Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* characterized religion as a form of alienation. God, he wrote, is to be understood as the essence of the human species, externalized and projected into an alien reality. Wisdom, love, benevolence – these are really attributes of the human species, but we attribute them, in a purified form, to God. The more we enrich our concept of God in this way, however, the more we impoverish ourselves. The solution is to realize that theology is a kind of misdescribed anthropology. What we believe of God is really true of ourselves. Thus humanity can regain its essence, which in religion it has lost.

When *The Essence of Christianity* appeared, in 1841, the first meeting between Marx and Engels still lay two years ahead. The book may not have made as much of an impression on Marx as it did on Engels, for Marx had already been exposed to similar ideas through Bauer; but

Feuerbach's later works, particularly his *Preliminary Theses for the Reform of Philosophy*, did have a decisive impact on Marx, triggering off the next important stage in the development of his thought.

Feuerbach's later works went beyond the criticism of religion to the criticism of Hegelian philosophy itself. Yet it was a curious form of criticism of Hegel, for Feuerbach continued to work by transforming Hegel, using Hegel's method against all philosophy in the Hegelian mode. Hegel had taken Mind as the moving force in history, and humans as manifestations of Mind. This, according to Feuerbach, locates the essence of humanity outside human beings and thus, like religion, serves to alienate humanity from itself.

More generally, Hegel and other German philosophers of the idealist school began from such conceptions as Spirit, Mind, God, the Absolute, the Infinite, and so on, treating these as ultimately real, and regarding ordinary humans and animals, tables, sticks and stones, and the rest of the finite, material world as a limited, imperfect expression of the spiritual world. Feuerbach again reversed this, insisting that philosophy must begin with the finite, material world. Thought does not precede existence, existence precedes thought.

So Feuerbach put at the centre of his philosophy neither God nor thought, but man. Hegel's tale of the progress of Mind, overcoming alienation in order to achieve freedom, was for Feuerbach a mystifying expression of the progress of human beings overcoming the alienation of both religion and philosophy itself.

Marx seized on this idea of bringing Hegel down to earth by using Hegel's methods to attack the present condition of human beings. In his brief spell as editor of the *Rhenish Gazette*, Marx had descended from the rarefied air of Hegelian philosophy to more practical issues like censorship, divorce, a Prussian law prohibiting the gathering of dead timber from forests, and the economic distress of Moselle wine-



growers. When the paper was suppressed Marx went back to philosophy, applying Feuerbach's technique of transformation to Hegel's political philosophy.

Marx's ideas at this stage (1843) are liberal rather than socialist, and he still thinks that a change in consciousness is all that is needed. In a letter to Arnold Ruge, a fellow Young Hegelian with whom he worked on the short-lived *German-French Annals*, Marx wrote: 'Freedom, the feeling of man's dignity, will have to be awakened again in these men. Only this feeling . . . can again transform society into a community of men to achieve their highest purposes, a democratic state.' And in a later letter to Ruge about their joint venture:

we can express the aim of our periodical in one phrase: A self-understanding (equals critical philosophy) of the age concerning its struggles and wishes . . . To have its sins forgiven, mankind has only to declare them for what they are.

(R 38)

Up to this point Marx had followed Feuerbach in reinterpreting Hegel as a philosopher of man rather than Mind. His view of human beings, however, focused on their mental aspect, their thoughts, and their consciousness. The first signs of a shift to his later emphasis on the material and economic conditions of human life came in an essay written in 1843 entitled 'On the Jewish Question'. The essay reviews two publications by Bruno Bauer on the issue of civil and political rights for Jews.

Marx rejects his friend's treatment of the issue as a question of religion. It is not the sabbath Jew we should consider, Marx says, but the everyday Jew. Accepting the common stereotype of Jews as obsessed with money and bargaining, Marx describes the Jew as merely a special manifestation of what he calls 'civil society's Judaism' – that is, the dominance in society of bargaining and financial interests

generally. Marx therefore suggests that the way to abolish the 'problem' of Judaism is to reorganize society so as to abolish bargaining.

The importance of this essay is that it sees economic life, not religion, as the chief form of human alienation. Another German writer, Moses Hess, had already developed Feuerbach's ideas in this direction, being the first, as Engels put it, to reach communism by 'the philosophic path'. (There had, of course, been many earlier communists who were more or less philosophical – what Engels meant was the path of Hegelian philosophy.) Now Marx was heading down the same route. The following quotation from 'On the Jewish Question' reads exactly like Bauer, Feuerbach, or Marx himself, a year or two earlier, denouncing religion – except that where they would have written 'God' Marx now substitutes 'money':

Money is the universal, self-constituted value of all things. Hence it has robbed the whole world, the human world as well as nature, of its proper value. Money is the alienated essence of man's labour and life, and this alien essence dominates him as he worships it.

(J 60)

The final sentence points the way forward. First the Young Hegelians, including Bauer and Feuerbach, see religion as the alienated human essence, and seek to end this alienation by their critical studies of Christianity. Then Feuerbach goes beyond religion, arguing that any philosophy which concentrates on the mental rather than the material side of human nature is a form of alienation. Now Marx insists that it is neither religion nor philosophy, but *money* that is the barrier to human freedom. The obvious next step is a critical study of economics. This Marx now begins.

Before we follow this development, however, we must pause to note the emergence of another key element in Marx's work which, like economics, was to remain central to his thought and activity.

## Chapter 4

# Enter the Proletariat

We saw that when the Prussian government suppressed the newspaper he had been editing, Marx started work on a critique of Hegel's political philosophy. In 1844 he published, in the *German-French Annals*, an article entitled 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction'. The critique which this article was to introduce remained unfinished, but the 'Introduction' stands alongside 'On the Jewish Question' as a milestone on the road to Marxism. For it is in this article that Marx first allocates to the working class a decisive role in the coming redemption of humanity.

The 'Introduction' starts by summarizing the attack on religion made by Bauer and Feuerbach. This passage is notable for its epigrams, including the frequently quoted description of religion as 'the opium of the people', but it says nothing new. Now that human self-alienation has been unmasked in its holy form, Marx continues, it is the task of philosophy to unmask it in its unholy forms, such as law and politics. He calls for more criticism of German conditions, to allow the German people 'not even a moment of self-deception'. But for the first time – and in contrast to Bauer and Feuerbach – Marx suggests that criticism by itself is not enough:

The weapon of criticism obviously cannot replace the criticism of weapons. Material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory also becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses.

(169)

In his initial recognition of the role of the masses, Marx treats this role as a special feature of the German situation, not applicable to France. Whereas in France 'every class of the nation is *politically idealistic* and experiences itself first of all not as a particular class but as representing the general needs of society', in Germany practical life is 'mindless' and no class can be free until it is forced to be by its *immediate* condition, by *material* necessity, by its *very chains*'. Where then, Marx asks, is the positive possibility of German freedom to be found? And he answers:

In the formation of a class with *radical chains* . . . a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering . . . a sphere, in short, that is the *complete loss* of humanity and can only redeem itself through the *total redemption of humanity*. This dissolution of society as a particular class is the *proletariat*.

(172-3)

Marx concludes by placing the proletariat within the framework of a transformed Hegelian philosophy:

As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy.

More explicitly:

Philosophy cannot be actualized without the superseding of the proletariat, the proletariat cannot be superseded without the actualization of philosophy.

(173)

Here is the germ of a new solution to the problem of human alienation. Criticism and philosophical theory alone will not end it. A more practical force is needed, and that force is provided by the artificially impoverished working class. This lowest class of society will bring about 'the actualization of philosophy' – by which Marx means

the culmination of the philosophical and historical saga described, in a mystified form, by Hegel. The proletariat, following the lead of the new radical philosophy, will complete the dialectical process in which humans have emerged, grown estranged from themselves, and become enslaved by their own alienated essence. Whereas the property-owning middle class could win freedom for themselves on the basis of rights to property – thus excluding others from the freedom they gain – the property-less working class possess nothing but their title as human beings. Thus they can liberate themselves only by liberating all humanity.

Before 1844, to judge from his writings, Marx scarcely noticed the existence of the proletariat; certainly he never suggested they had a part to play in overcoming alienation. Now, like a film director calling on the errand-boy to play Hamlet, Marx introduces the proletariat as the material force that will bring about the liberation of humanity. Why?

Marx

Marx did not arrive at his view of the proletariat as the result of detailed economic studies, for his economic studies were just beginning. He had read a great deal of history, but he does not buttress his position by quoting from historical sources, as he was later to do. His reasons for placing importance on the proletariat are philosophical rather than historical or economic. Since human alienation is not a problem of a particular class, but a universal problem, whatever is to solve it must have a universal character – and the proletariat, Marx claims, has this universal character in virtue of its total deprivation. It represents not a particular class of society, but all humanity.

That a situation should contain within itself the seed of its own dissolution, and that the greatest of all triumphs should come from the depths of despair – these are familiar themes in the dialectic of Hegel and his followers. (They echo, some have said, the redemption of

humanity by the crucifixion of Jesus.) The proletariat fits neatly into this dialectical scenario, and one cannot help suspecting that Marx seized upon it precisely because it served his philosophical purposes so well.

To say this is not to say that when he wrote the 'Introduction' Marx knew nothing about the proletariat. He had just moved to Paris, where socialist ideas were much more advanced than in Germany. He mixed with socialist leaders of the time, living in the same house as one of the leaders of the League of the Just, a radical workers' group. His writings reflect his admiration of the French socialist workers: 'The nobility of man', he writes, 'shines forth from their toil-worn bodies' (MC 87). In giving so important a role to the proletariat, therefore, the 'Introduction' reflects a two-way process: Marx tailors his conception of the proletariat to suit his philosophy, and tailors his philosophy in accordance with his new-found enthusiasm for the working class and its revolutionary ideas.

## Chapter 5

# The First Marxism

Marx had now developed two important new insights: that economics is the chief form of human alienation, and that the material force needed to liberate humanity from its domination by economics is to be found in the working class. Up to this stage, however, he had only made these points briefly, in essays ostensibly on other topics. The next step was to use these insights as the basis of a new and systematic world-view, one which would transform and supplant the Hegelian system and all prior transformations of it.

Marx began his critical study of economics in 1844. It was to culminate in Marx's greatest work, *Capital*, the first volume of which was published in 1867, later volumes appearing after Marx's death. So the work Marx produced in Paris, known as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, was the first version of a project that was to occupy him, in one form or another, for the rest of his life.

The 1844 version of Marxism was not published until 1932. The manuscript consists of a number of disconnected sections, some obviously incomplete. Nevertheless we can see what Marx was trying to do. He begins with a Preface which praises Feuerbach as the author of 'the only writings since Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Logic* containing a real theoretical revolution'. There are then sections on the economics of wages, profits, and rent, in which Marx quotes liberally from the

founding fathers of classical economics like J.-B. Say and Adam Smith. The point of this, as Marx explains, is to show that according to classical economics the worker becomes a commodity, the production of which is subject to the ordinary laws of supply and demand. If the supply of workers exceeds the demand for labour, wages fall and some workers starve. Wages therefore tend to the lowest possible level compatible with keeping an adequate supply of workers alive.

Marx draws another important point from the classical economists. Those who employ the workers – the capitalists – build up their wealth through the labour of their workers. They become wealthy by keeping for themselves a certain amount of the value their workers produce. Capital is nothing else but accumulated labour. The worker's labour increases the employer's capital. This increased capital is used to build bigger factories and buy more machines. This increases the division of labour. This puts more self-employed workers out of business. They must then sell their labour on the market. This intensifies the competition among workers trying to get work, and lowers wages.

All this Marx presents as deductions from the presuppositions of orthodox economics. Marx himself is not writing as an economist. He wants to rise above the level of the science of economics, which, he says, simply takes for granted such things as private property, greed, competition, and so on, saying nothing about the extent to which apparently accidental circumstances are really the expression of a necessary course of development. Marx wants to ask larger questions, ignored by economists, such as 'What in the evolution of mankind is the meaning of this reduction of the greater part of mankind to abstract labour?' (By 'abstract labour' Marx means work done simply in order to earn a wage, rather than for the worker's own specific purposes. Thus making a pair of shoes because one wants a pair of shoes is not abstract labour; making a pair of shoes because that happens to be a way of getting money is.) Marx, in other words, wants



to give a deeper explanation of the meaning and significance of the laws of economics.

What type of explanation does Marx have in mind? The answer is apparent from the section of the manuscripts entitled 'Alienated Labour'. Here Marx explains the implications of economics in terms closely parallel to Feuerbach's critique of religion:

Marx

The more the worker exerts himself, the more powerful becomes the alien objective world which he fashions against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, the less there is that belongs to him. It is the same in religion. The more man attributes to God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; then it no longer belongs to him but to the object . . . The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his work becomes an object, an external existence, but also that it exists outside him, independently, alien, an autonomous power, opposed to him. The life he has given to the object confronts him as hostile and alien.

(EPM 78-9)

The central point is more pithily stated in a sentence preserved in the notebooks Marx used when studying the classical economists, in preparation for the writing of the 1844 manuscripts:

It is evident that economics establishes an alienated form of social intercourse as the essential, original and natural form.

(M 116)

This is the gist of Marx's objection to classical economics. Marx does not challenge the classical economists within the presuppositions of their science. Instead he takes a viewpoint outside those presuppositions and argues that private property, competition, greed, and so on are to be found only in a particular condition of human existence, a condition of alienation. In contrast to Hegel, whom Marx

praises for grasping the self-development of man as a process, the classical economists take the present alienated condition of human society as its 'essential, original and definitive form'. They fail to see that it is a necessary but temporary stage in the evolution of mankind.

Marx then discusses the present alienated state of humanity. One of his premises is that 'man is a species-being'. The idea is taken directly from Feuerbach who in turn derived it from Hegel. Hegel, as we saw, told the story of human development in terms of the progress of a single Mind, of which individual human minds are particular manifestations. Feuerbach scrubbed out the super-Mind, and rewrote Hegel in less mysterious human terms; but he retained the idea that human beings are in some sense a unity. For Feuerbach the basis of this unity, and the essential difference between humans and animals, is the ability of humans to be conscious of their species. It is because they are conscious of their existence as a species that human beings can see themselves as individuals (that is, as one among others), and it is because humans see themselves as a species that human reason and human powers are unlimited. Human beings partake in perfection – which, according to Feuerbach, they mistakenly attribute to God instead of themselves – because they are part of a species.

Marx transforms Feuerbach, making the conception of man as a species-being still more concrete. For Marx 'Productive life . . . is species-life.' It is in activity, in production, that humans show themselves to be species-beings. The somewhat unconvincing reason Marx offers for this is that while animals produce only to satisfy their immediate needs, human beings can produce according to universal standards, free of any immediate need – for instance, in accordance with standards of beauty (*EPM* 82).

On this view, labour in the sense of free productive activity is the essence of human life. Whatever is produced in this way – a statue, a house, or a piece of cloth – is therefore the essence of human life made

into a physical object. Marx calls this 'the objectification of man's species-life'. Ideally the objects workers have freely created would be theirs to keep or dispose of as they wish. When, under conditions of alienated labour, workers must produce objects over which they have no control (because the objects belong to the employers) and which are used against those who produced them (by increasing the wealth and power of the employers) the workers are alienated from their essential humanity.

A consequence of this alienation of humans from their own nature is that they are also alienated from each other. Productive activity becomes 'activity under the domination, coercion and yoke of another man'. This other man becomes an alien, hostile being. Instead of humans relating to each other co-operatively, they relate competitively. Love and trust are replaced by bargaining and exchange. Human beings cease to recognize in each other their common human nature; they see others as instruments for furthering their own egoistic interests.

Marx

That, in brief, is Marx's first critique of economics. Since in his view it is economic life rather than Mind or consciousness that is ultimately real, this critique is his account of what is really wrong with the present condition of humanity. The next question is: What can be done about it?

Marx rejects the idea that anything would be achieved by an enforced wage rise. Labour for wages is not free productive activity. It is merely a means to an end. Higher wages Marx describes as 'nothing but a better slave-salary'. It would not restore significance or dignity to workers or their labour. Even equal wages, as proposed by the French socialist Proudhon, would only replace individual capitalists with one overall capitalist, society itself (*EPM* 85).

The solution is the abolition of wages, alienated labour, and private

property in one blow. In a word, communism. Marx introduces communism in terms befitting the closing chapter of a Hegelian epic:

Communism . . . is the genuine resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man; it is the true resolution of the conflict between existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species. It is the riddle of history solved and knows itself as this solution.

(EPM 89)

One might expect that Marx would go on to explain in some detail what communism would be like. He does not – in fact nowhere in his writings does he give more than sketchy suggestions on this subject. He does, however, gesture at the enormous difference communism would make. All human senses, he claims, are degraded by private property. The dealer in minerals sees the market value of the jewels he handles, not their beauty. In the alienated condition caused by private property we cannot appreciate anything except by possessing it, or using it as a means. The abolition of private property will liberate our senses from this alienated condition, and enable us to appreciate the world in a truly human way just as the musical ear perceives a wealth of meaning and beauty where the unmusical ear can find none, so will the senses of social human beings differ from those of the unsocial.

These are the essential points of ‘the first Marxism’. It is manifestly not a scientific enterprise in the sense in which we understand science today. Its theories are not derived from detailed factual studies, or subjected to controlled tests or observations.

The first Marxism is more down to earth than Hegel’s philosophy of history, but it is a speculative philosophy of history rather than a scientific study. The aim of world history is human freedom. Human beings are not now free, for they are unable to organize the world so as to satisfy their needs and develop their human capacities. Private

property, though a human creation, dominates and enslaves human beings. Ultimate liberation, however, is not in doubt; it is philosophically necessary. The immediate task of revolutionary theory is to understand in what way the present situation is a stage in the dialectical progress to liberation. Then it will be possible to encourage the movements that will end the present stage, ushering in the new age of freedom.

Marx

Marx's writings after 1844 – including all the works which made him famous – are reworkings, modifications, developments, and extensions of the themes of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. The number and bulk of these writings make it impossible to discuss each work adequately. (Their repetitiveness would make it tedious, anyway.) So from here on I shall depart slightly from a strict chronological account. I shall begin by tracing the development of the materialist conception of history, which Marx himself described as the 'guiding thread for my studies' (P 389), and Engels, in his funeral oration by Marx's grave, hailed as Marx's chief discovery, comparable with Darwin's discovery of the theory of evolution. This will occupy the next two chapters. I shall then consider Marx's economic works, principally, of course, *Capital*. Since *Capital* was written only after Marx had arrived at the materialist conception of history, the departure from chronological order in this section will be slight. It will be greater in the next and last of these expository sections, which will assemble from passages of varying vintage Marx's thoughts on communism and on the ethical principles underlying his preference for a communist rather than a capitalist form of society.

# Chapter 6

## Alienation as a Theory of History

Marx's first published book – and, incidentally, the first work in which Engels participated – attacked articles published in the *General Literary Gazette* (*Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*), a journal edited by Marx's former friend and teacher, Bruno Bauer. Since Bauer's brother was a co-editor, the book was mockingly entitled *The Holy Family*. The best comment on it was made by Engels: 'the sovereign derision that we accord to the *General Literary Gazette* is in stark contrast to the considerable number of pages that we devote to its criticism'. Nevertheless some passages of *The Holy Family* are interesting because they show Marx in transition between the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and later statements of the materialist conception of history.

One section is a defence of the French socialist Proudhon and his objections to private property. Marx is still thinking in terms of alienation:

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels comfortable and confirmed in this self-alienation, knowing that this alienation is its own power and possessing in it the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself ruined in this alienation and sees in it its impotence and the actuality of an inhuman existence.

Then comes a passage in which the outlines of an embryonic materialist theory of history are clearly visible:

In its economic movement, private property is driven towards its own dissolution but only through a development which does not depend on it, of which it is unconscious, which takes place against its will, and which is brought about by the very nature of things – thereby creating the proletariat *as* proletariat, that spiritual and physical misery conscious of its misery, that dehumanization conscious of its dehumanization and thus transcending itself . . .

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian or even the whole proletarian movement momentarily *imagines* to be the aim. It is a question of *what* the proletariat is and what it consequently is historically compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is prescribed, irrevocably and obviously, in its own situation in life as well as in the entire organization of contemporary civil society.

(HF 134-5)

Marx

The structure of this and surrounding passages is Hegelian. Private property and the proletariat are described as ‘antitheses’ – the two sides of a Hegelian contradiction. It is a necessary contradiction, one which could not have been otherwise, for to maintain its own existence private property must also maintain the existence of the property-less working class needed to run the factories. The proletariat, on the other hand, is compelled to abolish itself on account of its miserable condition. This will require the abolition of private property. The end result will be that both private property and the proletariat ‘disappear’ in a new synthesis that resolves the contradiction.

Here we have an early version of the materialist theory of history. The basis of the dialectical movement Marx describes is the economic imperatives that flow from the existence of private property. The

movement does not depend on the hopes and plans of people. The proletariat becomes conscious of its misery, and therefore seeks to overthrow capitalist society, but this consciousness arises only because of the situation of the proletariat in society. This is the point Marx and Engels were to make more explicitly in a famous passage of *The German Ideology*: 'Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness' (GI 164).

According to Engels' later account of the relationship between German philosophy and the materialist conception of history, 'the first document in which is deposited the brilliant germ of the new world outlook' is not *The Holy Family* but the 'Theses on Feuerbach' which Marx jotted down in the spring of 1845. These 'Theses' consist of eleven brief remarks in which Marx distinguishes his own form of materialism from that of Feuerbach. Because of their epigrammatic form they have become among the most quoted of Marx's writings. Because Engels published them in 1888, long before any of Marx's other early unpublished writings appeared, they are also among the most misunderstood.

Despite Engels' accolade, the 'Theses' largely recapitulate points Marx had made before. They attack Feuerbach and earlier materialists for taking a passive view of objects and our perception of them. Idealists like Hegel and Fichte emphasized that our activities shape the way we see the world. They were thinking of mental activity. A child sees a red ball, rather than a flat red circle, only when it has mentally grasped the idea of three-dimensional space. Marx wants to combine the active, dialectical side of idealist thought with the materialism of Feuerbach: hence 'dialectical materialism' as later Marxists called it (though Marx himself never used this phrase).

By the active side of materialism Marx meant practical human activity. Marx thought that practical activity was needed to solve theoretical problems. We have seen examples of this. In 'On the Jewish Question'



Marx wrote that the problem of the status of Jews, which Bauer had seen as a problem in religious consciousness, would be abolished by reorganizing society so as to abolish bargaining. In 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', Marx argued that philosophy cannot be 'actualized' without the material weapon of the proletariat. And in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* Marx had referred to communism as 'the riddle of history solved'. This 'riddle of history' is, of course, a theoretical problem, a philosophical riddle. In Marx's transformation the contradictions of Hegelian philosophy become contradictions in the human condition. They are resolved by communism.

The 'Theses on Feuerbach' are the principal source of the celebrated Marxist doctrine of 'the unity of theory and practice'. This unity some think of as scribbling Marxist philosophy during quiet moments on the barricades. Others take it as meaning that one should live in accordance with one's theoretical principles – socialists sharing their wealth, for instance. The intellectual background of the 'Theses' makes it clear that Marx had neither of these ideas in mind. For Marx the unity of theory and practice meant the resolution of theoretical problems by practical activity. It is an idea which makes little sense outside the context of a materialist transformation of Hegel's philosophy of world history.

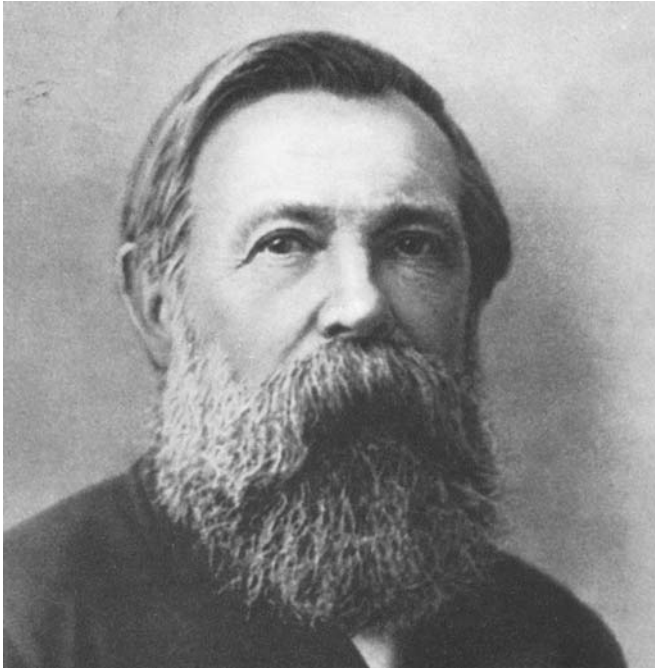
The eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is engraved on Marx's tombstone in Highgate Cemetery. It reads: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it' (T 158). This is generally read as a statement to the effect that philosophy is unimportant; revolutionary activity is what matters. It means nothing of the sort. What Marx is saying is that the problems of philosophy cannot be solved by passive interpretation of the world as it is, but only by remoulding the world to resolve the philosophical contradictions inherent in it. It is to solve philosophical problems that we must change the world.

The materialist conception of history is a theory of world history in which practical human activity, rather than thought, plays the crucial role. The most detailed statement of the theory is to be found in Marx and Engels' next major work, *The German Ideology* (1846). Like *The Holy Family* this was a polemic of inordinate length against rival thinkers. Marx later wrote that the book was written 'to settle our accounts with our former philosophic conscience' (P 390).

This time Feuerbach is included in the criticism, although treated more respectfully than the others. It is in the section on Feuerbach that Marx and Engels take the opportunity to state their new view of world history:

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals . . . Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or by anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life . . .

In direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics and all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness no longer seem to be independent. They have no history or development. Rather, men who develop their material production and their material relationships alter



8. Friedrich Engels (1820-95), Marx's co-author, friend, benefactor, and the first Marxist

their thinking and the products of their thinking along with their real existence. Consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness.

(*GI* 160, 164)

This is as clear a statement of the broad outline of his theory as Marx was ever to achieve. Thirteen years later, summing up the 'guiding thread' of his studies, he used similar language: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness'. With *The German Ideology* we have arrived at Marx's mature formulation of

the outline of historical materialism (though not the detailed account of the process of change).

In view of this, and Marx's later description of the work as settling accounts with his 'former philosophic conscience', it might be thought that his early interest in alienation has now been replaced by a more scientific approach. It has not. Henceforth Marx makes more use of historical data and less use of abstract philosophical reasoning about the way the world must be; but his interest in alienation persists. *The German Ideology* still describes the social power as something which is really nothing other than the productive force of individuals, and yet appears to these individuals as 'alien and outside them' because they do not understand its origin and cannot control it. Instead of them directing it, it directs them. The abolition of private property and the regulation of production under communism would abolish this 'alienation between men and their products' and enable men to 'regain control of exchange, production and the mode of their mutual relationships' (*GI* 170).

Marx

It is not the use of the word 'alienation' that is important here. The same point can be made in other words. What is important is that Marx's theory of history is a vision of human beings in a state of alienation. Human beings cannot be free if they are subject to forces that determine their thoughts, their ideas, their very nature as human beings. The materialist conception of history tells us that human beings are totally subject to forces they do not understand and cannot control. Moreover the materialist conception of history tells us that these forces are not supernatural tyrants, for ever above and beyond human control, but the productive powers of human beings themselves. Human productive powers, instead of serving human beings, appear to them as alien and hostile forces. The description of this state of alienation is the materialist conception of history.

# Chapter 7

## The Goal of History

We have traced the development of the materialist conception of history from Marx's earlier concern with human freedom and alienation, but we have not examined the details of this theory of history. Is it really, as Engels claimed, a scientific discovery of 'the law of development of human history', comparable to Darwin's discovery of the law of development of organic nature?

The classic formulation of the materialist conception of history is that of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, written in 1859. We have already seen a little of this summary by Marx of his own ideas, but it merits a lengthier quotation:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of

their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – what is but a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic – in short, ideological – forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

(P 389–90)

Marx

It is commonly said that Marx divided society into two elements, the ‘economic base’ and the ‘superstructure’, and maintained that the base governs the superstructure. A closer reading of the passage just quoted reveals a threefold, rather than a twofold, distinction. The opening sentence refers to relations of production, corresponding to a definite stage of the material powers of production. Thus we start with powers of production, or ‘productive forces’, as Marx usually calls them. The productive forces give rise to relations of production, and it is these relations – not the forces themselves – which constitute the economic structure of society. This economic structure, in turn, is the foundation on which the superstructure rises.

Marx’s view may be clearer if made more specific. Productive forces are things used to produce. They include labour-power, raw materials, and the machines available to process them. If a miller uses a handmill to grind wheat into flour, the handmill is a productive force.

Relations of production are relations between people, or between people and things. The miller may own his mill, or may hire it from its

owner. *Owning* and *hiring* are relations of production. Relations between people, such as 'Smith employs Jones' or 'Ramsbottom is the serf of the Earl of Warwick', are also relations of production.

So we start with productive forces. Marx says that relations of production correspond to the stage of development of productive forces. In one place he puts this very bluntly:

The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist.

(PP 202)

In other words, when the productive forces are developed to the stage of manual power, the typical relation of production is that of lord and serf. This and similar relations make up the economic structure of society, which in turn is the foundation of the political and legal superstructure of feudal times, with the religion and morality that goes with it: an authoritarian religion, and a morality based on concepts of loyalty, obedience, and fulfilling the duties of one's station in life.

Feudal relations of production came about because they fostered the development of the productive forces of feudal times – the handmill for example. These productive forces continue to develop. The steam mill is invented. Feudal relations of production restrict the use of the steam mill. The most efficient use of steam power is in large factories which require a concentration of free labourers rather than serfs tied to their land. So the relation of lord and serf breaks down, to be replaced by the relation of capitalist and employee. These new relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, on which a capitalist legal and political superstructure rises, with its own religion and morality: freedom of religious conscience, freedom of contract, a right to disposable property, egoism, and competitiveness.

So we have a three-stage process: productive forces determine relations of production, which in turn determine the superstructure. The productive forces are fundamental. Their growth provides the momentum for the whole process of history.

But isn't all this much too crude? Should we take seriously the statement about the handmill giving us feudal lords, and the steam mill capitalists? Surely Marx must have realized that the invention of steam power itself depends on human ideas, and those ideas, as much as the steam mill itself, have produced capitalism. Isn't Marx making a deliberately exaggerated statement of his own position in order to display its novelty?

Marx

This is a vexed question. There are several other places where Marx says flatly that productive forces determine everything else. There are other statements which acknowledge the effect of factors belonging to the superstructure. Particularly when writing history himself, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, for instance, Marx traces the effects of ideas and personalities, and makes less deterministic general statements, for example:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.

(EB 300)

And what of the opening declaration of *The Communist Manifesto*: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles'? If the forces of production control everything, class struggles can be no more than the superficial form in which these forces are cloaked. Like the images on a cinema screen they would be powerless to affect the underlying reality they reflect. So why describe history as the history of class struggles? And if neither thought nor politics has any real causal



significance, what is the meaning of Marx's dedication, intellectually and politically, to the cause of the working class?

After Marx died, Engels denied that Marx had said that 'the economic element is the *only* determining one'. He and Marx, he conceded, were partly to blame for this misinterpretation, for they had emphasized the economic side in opposition to those who rejected it altogether. Marx and he had not, Engels wrote, overlooked the existence of interaction between the economic structure and the rest of the superstructure. They had affirmed only that 'the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary'. According to Engels, Marx grew so irritated at misinterpretations of his doctrine that towards the end of his life, he declared: 'All I know is that I am not a Marxist.'

Was Engels right? Some have accused him of watering down the true doctrine; yet no one was in a better position to know what Marx really meant than his lifelong friend and collaborator. Moreover the relatively recent publication of Marx's *Grundrisse* – a rough preliminary version of *Capital* and other projects Marx never completed – reveals that Marx did, like Engels, use such phrases as 'in the last analysis' to describe the predominance of the forces of production in the interacting whole that constitutes human existence (*G* 495). Right or wrong, one cannot help sympathizing with Engels' position after Marx died. As the authoritative interpreter of Marx's ideas he had to present them in a plausible form, a form not refuted by common-sense observations about the effect of politics, religion, or law on the productive forces.

But once 'interaction' between the superstructure and the productive forces is admitted, is it still possible to maintain that production determines the superstructure, rather than the other way round? It is the old chicken-and-egg problem all over again. The productive forces determine the relations of production to which correspond the ideas of the society. These ideas lead to the further development of productive

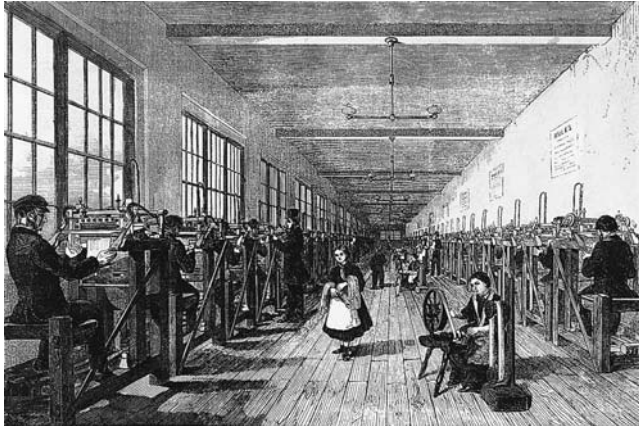
forces, which lead to new relations of production, to which correspond new ideas. In this cyclical movement it makes no more sense to say that productive forces play the determining role than to say that the egg ensures the continued existence of chickens rather than the other way round.

Talk of the productive forces 'finally' or 'in the last analysis' determining the other interacting factors does not provide a way out of the dilemma. For what can this mean? Does it mean that in the end the superstructure is totally governed by the development of the forces of production? In that case 'finally' merely stretches the causal chain; it is still a chain and so we are back with the hard-line determinist version of the theory.

Marx

On the other hand, if 'finally' not merely stretches, but actually breaks, the chain of economic determinism, it is difficult to see that asserting the primacy of the productive forces can mean anything significant at all. It might mean, as the passage from *The German Ideology* quoted in the previous chapter appears to suggest, that the process of human history only gets going when humans 'begin to produce their means of subsistence'; or as Engels put it in his graveside speech: 'mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.' But if politics, science, art, and religion, once they come into existence, have as much effect on the productive forces as the productive forces have on them, the fact that mankind must eat first and can only pursue politics afterwards is of historical interest only; it has no continuing causal importance.

Alternatively, describing the economic side as 'finally' asserting itself could be an attempt to say that although both economic and non-economic factors interact, a larger proportion of the causal impetus comes from the productive forces. But on what basis could one say this? How could one divide the interacting processes and say which



9. English factories in the mid-nineteenth century: men and women at work in the Patent Renewable Stocking Factory at Tewkesbury in 1860

played the larger role? We cannot solve the chicken-and-egg problem by saying that while the existence of the species is not due to the egg alone, the egg has more to do with it than the chicken.

In the absence of more plausible ways of making sense of the softening phrases used by Engels and – more rarely – Marx, the interpretation of the materialist conception of history seems to resolve itself into a choice between hard-line economic determinism, which would indeed be a momentous discovery if it were true, but does not seem to be true; or the much more pliable conception to be found in the *Grundrisse*, where Marx describes society as a ‘totality’, an ‘organic whole’ in which everything is interconnected (G 99–100). The view of society as a totality is no doubt illuminating when set against the view that ideas, politics, law, religion, and so on have a life and history of their own, independently of mundane economic matters. Nevertheless it does not amount to ‘the law of development of human history’, or to a scientific discovery comparable to Darwin’s

theory of evolution. To qualify as a contribution to science, a proposed law must be precise enough to enable us to deduce from it certain consequences rather than others. That is how we test proposed scientific laws – by seeing if the consequences they predict actually occur. The conception of society as an interconnected totality is about as precise an instrument of historical analysis as a bowl of porridge. Anything at all can be deduced from it. No observation could ever refute it.

It still needs to be explained how Marx, though obviously aware of the effect of the superstructure on the productive forces, could so confidently assert that the productive forces determine the relations of production and hence the social superstructure. Why did he not see the difficulty posed by the existence of interaction?

The explanation may be that belief in the primacy of the productive forces was not, for Marx, an ordinary belief about a matter of fact but a legacy of the origin of his theory in Hegelian philosophy.

Marx

One way to see this is to ask why, if Marx's view is inverted Hegelianism, the existence of interaction between ideas and material life does not pose exactly the same problem for Hegel's view (that the progress of Mind determines material life) as it poses for Marx's inversion of this view. Hegel's writings contain as many descriptions of material life influencing consciousness as Marx's contain of consciousness influencing material life. So the problem of establishing the primary causal role of one set of factors over the other should be as great for Hegel as for Marx.

Yet Hegel's reason for believing in the primacy of consciousness is clear: he regards Mind as ultimately real, and the material world as a manifestation of it; accordingly he sees the purpose or goal of history as the liberation of Mind from all illusions and fetters. Hegel's belief that consciousness determines material life therefore rests on his view

of ultimate reality and the meaning of history. History is not a chain of meaningless and often accidental occurrences, but a necessary process heading towards a discoverable goal. Whatever happens on the stage of world history happens in order to enable Mind to reach its goal. It is in this sense that what happens on the level of Mind, or consciousness, is the *real* cause of everything else.

Like Hegel, Marx has a view about what is ultimately real. His materialism is the reverse of Hegel's idealism. The materialist conception of history is usually regarded as a theory about the causes of historical change, rather than a theory about the nature of ultimate reality. In fact it is both – as Hegel's idealist conception of history was both. We have already seen passages from *The German Ideology* which indicate that Marx took material processes as real in a way that ideas are not. There Marx and Engels contrast the 'real life-process' of 'real, active men' with 'the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process'. They distinguish the 'phantoms formed in the human brain' from the 'material life-process, which is empirically verifiable'. The frequent reiteration of 'real' or 'actual' in describing the material or productive life of human beings, and the use of words like 'reflex', 'echo', 'phantom' and so on for aspects of consciousness, suggest a philosophical distinction between what is real and what is merely a manifestation or appearance.

Nor is this terminology restricted to Marx's early works. The contrast between appearance and reality is repeated in *Capital*, where the religious world is said to be 'but the reflex of the real world' (C I 79).

Also like Hegel, Marx thought that history is a necessary process heading towards a discoverable goal. We have seen evidence of this in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, where Marx criticized classical economists for saying nothing about the meaning of economic phenomena 'in the evolution of mankind' or about the

extent to which ‘apparently accidental circumstances’ are nothing but ‘the expression of a necessary course of development’. That this too is not a view limited to Marx’s youthful period seems clear from, for instance, the following paragraph from an article of his on British rule in India, written in 1853:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.

Marx

The references to ‘mankind’s destiny’ and to England as ‘the unconscious tool of history’ imply that history moves in a purposive way towards some goal. (The whole paragraph is reminiscent of Hegel’s account of how ‘the cunning of reason’ uses unsuspecting individuals to work its purposes in history.)

Marx’s idea of the goal of world history was, of course, different from Hegel’s. He replaced the liberation of Mind by the liberation of real human beings. The development of Mind through various forms of consciousness to final self-knowledge was replaced by the development of human productive forces, by which human beings free themselves from the tyranny of nature and fashion the world after their own plans. But for Marx the progress of human productive forces is no less necessary, and no less progress towards a goal, than the progress of Mind towards self-knowledge is for Hegel.

We can now explain the primary role of the productive forces in Marx’s theory of history in the same manner as we explained Hegel’s opposite conviction: for Marx the productive life of human beings, rather than

their ideas and consciousness, is ultimately real. The development of these productive forces, and the liberation of human capacities that this development will bring, is the goal of history.

Marx's suggestion about England's role in advancing mankind towards its destiny illustrates the nature of the primacy of material life. Since England's colonial policy involves a series of political acts, the causing of a social revolution in Asia by this policy is an instance of the superstructure affecting the economic base. This happens, though, in order to develop the productive forces to the state necessary for the fulfilment of human destiny. The superstructure acts only as the 'unconscious tool' of history. England's colonial policy is no more the ultimate cause of the social revolution in Asia than my spade is the ultimate cause of the growth of my vegetables.

If this interpretation is correct the materialist theory of history is no ordinary causal theory. Few historians – or philosophers for that matter – now see any purpose or goal in history. They do not explain history as the necessary path to anywhere. They explain it by showing how one set of events brought about another. Marx, in contrast, saw history as the progress of the real nature of human beings, that is, human beings satisfying their wants and exerting their control over nature by their productive activities. The materialist conception of history was not conceived as a modern scientific account of how economic changes lead to changes in other areas of society. It was conceived as an explanation of history which points to the real forces operating in it, and the goal to which these forces are heading.

That is why, while recognizing the effect of politics, law, and ideas on the productive forces, Marx was in no doubt that the development of the productive forces determines everything else. This also makes sense of Marx's dedication to the cause of the working class. Marx was acting as the tool – a fully conscious tool – of history. The productive

forces always finally assert themselves, but they do so through the actions of individual humans who may or may not be conscious of the role they are playing in history.

**Marx**