

## DISCUSSION

### HISTORICAL MATERIALISM, IDEOLOGY AND ETHICS

#### I

In thinking about what a good society would look like and how it could come into being and sustain itself, it is important to ask who we are, how we got to be who we are and who we are likely to become. And to know who we are, it is essential to know what sort of society we are living in. That is to say, it is crucial to understand the basic social structures and dynamics of the society. We need to understand what makes it operate in the way it operates, what social and coercive mechanisms are at work, how these mechanisms function and what their underlying rationale is.

Work and how people work is one of the major elements in any society. And work is organized in a very distinctive way in capitalist societies. There is, however, nothing surprising in that since it is one of the distinctive modes of activity. What the study of social anthropology makes evident is that it is but one of many different ways that work has been organized, is being organized and can be organized. But work is essential for human survival; and, for the distinctive survival of any particular society, it is crucial that there be a certain determinate social organization. To understand that society and more generally to understand our own human possibilities, we need to understand why any particular society is organized in the way it is, how it came to be that way and what makes it change. It is particularly crucial to understand this about our own society if we are to understand why we are in a condition of alienated work, how we can change our society and what we would have to change to overcome that condition.

A just society, indeed even a perfectly just society, need not be a perfect society. A society could – at least as far as conceptual possibilities are concerned – be poor and just or rich and unjust. It would not be a good society without being a just society, but it could be just and still not be beyond moral criticism. It could, in addition to not being able to provide much satisfaction of life for the people within the society, be an unenlightened society, which, aside from the important factors of not exploiting anyone or

dominating anyone, provided little in the way of emancipation or a cultured liberating spirit. We need to understand, standing where we are, what we would need to do to make our societies just, more enlightened and more humane. We, of course, must also understand what justice and enlightenment are and what a humane and truly human society would look like. Indeed if we didn't have *some* understanding of that we would not understand how to go about making our society more just or humane. But, as Stuart Hampshire would put it, we at least have some pre-theoretical understanding of that and that pre-theoretical understanding, even with its ideological distortions, cannot be bypassed.<sup>1</sup>

However, in morality, ought implies can, and to understand what a just and a good society would be, we have to be able to understand how we can move from our present condition of alienation to an unalienated condition – and thus to a truly human and good society – or at least to a condition of lesser alienation. To know what to aim at we must know where we are standing and what we can achieve and this means, as I remarked initially, that we must have some understanding of the structure and dynamics of our society. And we need, to gain that understanding, to understand ourselves both synchronically and diachronically. That is to say, we need to understand where we are at now and our place in history.

Marx, and subsequent Marxists, have given us one such systematic account of the structure and dynamics of societies, including, most centrally, such an understanding of capitalist societies.<sup>2</sup> It is an account which has been called *historical materialism* and it is an account whose central features I shall delineate in the next section.

It is, of course, not the only account we can give of the structure of our society, but it is a systematic account – probably to date the most systematic account – and it is intricately developed and has been, to put it minimally, very influential. Marx used this methodology to analyze the emergence of capitalism and to give an account of how that social system organized production, distribution, consumption and social reproduction. He tried to delineate the essential features of capitalism and to show us how it functions. In doing this, he tried to show us who we are, how we got to be who we are and what we will, or at least can, become.

## II

Historical materialism in trying to understand the dynamics of society concentrates on examining the distinctive social arrangements of production of the society it is examining. It does this both synchronically and diachronically. That is to say, it looks at the present modes of production but it looks, as well, at earlier modes of production from which the present modes of production emerge and tries to gain some understanding of what modes of production will likely succeed the present modes of production.

People in any society produce by transforming objects – typically raw materials – into various artifacts using tools or some other means of production. In doing this, since people typically do this in groups, they also enter into social relationships with each other. As the ways of producing take a definite form, the other social relations take on a corresponding definite form.<sup>3</sup> An agricultural people who work with hand plows have one kind of social organization; and an agricultural people who have huge modern tractors and combines have another kind of social organization. The way we produce things is the basic determinant of our social organization and of our social life.

It is a central claim of Marx and a major thesis of historical materialism that people's social relations are causally conditioned in a very fundamental way by the way they organize their productive life. Their social relations include those ideas about themselves and their social world that also come to have a public role: their moral conceptions, self-images, religious conceptions and legal conceptions, as well as their actual legal, moral and religious practices and systems. They are, to repeat, all causally conditioned in a very fundamental way by the way people organize their productive life. A crucial element in our coming to understand the relations of production of a society lies in understanding the forces of production of that society and the key to understanding a society's morality, religion and law lies in understanding its relations of production.<sup>4</sup> *Some* Marxists would put it in an even stronger form than that. They would say that the forces of production determine the relations of production and the relations of production in turn determine the superstructures (including the ideological forms) of the society, namely its social consciousness, its religion, its morality and its legal and political systems.

This claim is the central claim of one reading of historical materialism. On

a less stringent reading of historical materialism the claim would go as follows: the forces of production fundamentally condition the relations of production and the relations of production in turn fundamentally condition the ideology or the social consciousness of a society as well as its political and legal institutions. The stronger thesis is a form of *technological determinism*. It is captured in a famous pithy statement of Marx “. . . the hand-mill gives us feudalism, the steam-mill capitalism”. But whether we take the weaker formulation or the stronger one or some rational reconstruction in between, the underlying intent here is to find a key to what are the fundamental determinants of social change. Many Marxists believe that the fundamental determinants of social change are in the development of the productive forces and in their clash, as they develop, with the relations of production which first suit them and then later come to fetter them. Or, alternatively and distinctly, modes of production may internally conflict and, as they develop through that conflict, fundamental social change will occur. What we need clearly to see here – to flesh this out a little more – is that as the forces of production develop they develop in modes of production with certain relations of production, relations of production which, as I remarked, first suit them, but, then, as the forces of production continue to develop, they reach a point where they will cease to be so matched with the relations of production. As our productive capacities continue to develop, as they in fact do at least in industrial societies, our productive forces develop and at some point they will come to clash with the previously well-matched relations of production.

Before we proceed further, a few definitions are in order. When Marx talks about ‘productive forces’ or ‘productive powers’, he is talking about what is used to produce things. In its most rudimentary sense, the productive forces are what is used in production. On some very stringent conceptions of productive forces, only what contributes *materially* within and to production counts as a productive force. On other, less stringent, conceptions, the ways we organize work will also count as a force of production. Without taking sides here, we can, less controversially, say that what are the productive forces can be put forth schematically as follows:

*Productive Forces*

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|---|--|
| (1) Means of Production:  | A. Instruments of Production;<br>B. Raw Materials;<br>C. Spaces. |
| (2) Labour and labour power (that is the productive faculties of producing agents: their strength, skill, knowledge, inventiveness, etc.). <sup>5</sup> |  |

It is Marx' claim, on one influential account of his historical materialism, that the character of the economic structures (the relations of production) of a society are explained by the nature of the productive forces available to it.<sup>6</sup> It is also important to remember that these productive forces develop in history and that the degree of the development of the productive forces is the measure of a society's capacity to produce.

Productive relations, by contrast, are either, on the one hand, relations of ownership by persons of productive forces, or, on the other, relations presupposing such relations of ownership.<sup>7</sup> The totality of relations of production of a society constitutes its economic structure. The economic structure is just the entire set of production relations in a society. The relations of production can be seen as the various social roles people have centering around ownership. We have such relations where, for example, *X* owns *Y* or *Z* sells his labour-power to *X*. It is important to see that the above way of putting it is a condensed shorthand for convenience of expression. In reality the production relations are relations of *effective power and control* over persons and productive forces and only incidentally, but of course quite pervasively, relations of legal ownership. Ownership, in this context, must be defined or at least factually specified in terms of effective power. It is convenient to speak of ownership but in reality what we are talking about is effective power and control, without which ownership is a mere fiction.

The mode of production of a society is the combination of the existing forces of production and the existing relations of production.<sup>8</sup> It is what in any culture is the culturally and historically distinctive way of producing. These distinctive ways of producing, constituting the mode of production, provide us with a way to periodize history, for every society can be characterized by its particular dominant mode of production. Thus we have, according to Marx, the history of the West divided into periods according to the dominant modes of production. We have slave, feudal and capitalist societies and now the emerging socialist societies all with their distinctive modes of production.

Forces of production, relations of production, economic structure and modes of production are, of course, central conceptions in Marx and Marxism. They are key conceptions in the very idea of historical materialism. There is no understanding of Marxism without gaining an understanding of them. But it also is important to understand the following conceptions as well: base, superstructure, ideology, social surplus and social class.

The term 'base' also frequently occurs in Marxist literature and in discussions of historical materialism. The term 'base' is just another term for the 'economic structure of society', i.e., the sum total of production relations.<sup>9</sup> The Marxist conception parallel to it is 'superstructure'. The superstructure of a society is to be understood as the non-economic institutions of society. That is to say, its legal system, its political system, its morality, its religion, its kinship structure, its rituals and the like.

The term 'ideology' is also a crucial term in Marxism. But what we are talking about here is not easy to ascertain. The term 'ideology' and its cognates in other languages is used in a bewildering number of ways. Even within the Marxist tradition it is used differently by different thinkers and Marx and Engels themselves used it in somewhat different ways in different contexts. Two partially distinct but not conflicting conceptions of ideology will perhaps do at least for an initial characterization. (1) "An ideology is an intellectual structure which in fact serves the interests of one class of society, but which puts itself forward as serving the interests of the whole society."<sup>10</sup> (2) "An ideology is a set of commonly held values that contributes to the stability and cohesion of a given society by legitimizing the position of the dominant class that appropriates the surplus."<sup>11</sup> Both definitions bring out elements that are important in the concept of ideology. The second, with its stress on values, highlights the fact that ideologies are normative; they, directly or indirectly, affect conduct and articulate a conception of how we should live, what we should expect and how we should relate to each other. The first definition, by contrast, with its stress on 'intellectual structures', brings out how an ideology gives us a conception of the world and our place in it and a set of interpretive categories. The second definition also stresses a functionalist point, namely a point about how ideologies function, when they are properly working, to contribute to the stability and cohesion of a class society of a given type. In that way they function to protect and perhaps enhance the power of the dominant class in that society. An ideology does this by 'legitimizing' the power and position of that class. An ideology, that is, protects the power of the dominant class by infusing in the people, captured by that ideology, a belief in the legitimacy and the authority of that class and that social order. In this way it serves as an instrument of domination and is a crucial element in the class struggle. However, the first definition stresses, in a way the second does not, how this form of domination typically works by way of a trick, a mystification,

though often not a deliberate or intentional mystification. This technique of domination serves to protect the interests of the dominant class in the society, but it does so by making it appear to the people, held captive by that ideology, that its maxims and practices are for the good of everyone, i.e., they are in the interests of the society as a whole. It is this that is the mystification or the trick. People accept a bunch of practices and ways of doing and viewing things which they believe to be in the interests of society as a whole – to be for the good of everyone alike – while in reality these practices tend to harm the interests of the dominated or producing class while supporting the interests of the dominant or appropriating class. Of course, the situation is not seen in this way by the people who are captives of that ideology. If it were so seen, it would not be an ideology.

It is because of this that ideologies are also said to be systems of illusory ideas and to involve false consciousness. Moreover, in this specific Marxist sense, no one accepts the fact that he has an ideology.<sup>12</sup> It is rather something the other chap has. As soon as a person's belief system, or a part of his belief system, is seen by him as an ideology, or as ideological, it is no longer accepted by the person or persons involved as being a part of his belief system. From the agent's point of view – that is as something the agent could accept for himself and reason and act in accordance with – ideologies could only be unconscious.

When Marxists employ the term 'social surplus' they speak of that part of a society's "total potential product remaining once it has met the basic requirements needed to maintain the society at a subsistence level".<sup>13</sup> It is important to recognize that what counts as a subsistence level is not simply determined biologically but also to a degree in cultural and historical terms. Thus what would be a subsistence level at one time and place would not be at another time and place.

Finally 'social class' is defined in the following terms. Where a society is developed enough, as most societies are, to have a social surplus, there develop conflicts, given the fact that there is also scarcity, as to who will appropriate it. It is, as a matter of fact, possible in such societies with such a social surplus to distinguish broad social groups. There is the *producing group*: that group which produces the surplus. And there is a group who does not produce but *appropriate* the surplus by means of either direct or indirect, disguised or undisguised, coercion. Where this obtains we have a distinct appropriating group. When we have such distinct groups we have social classes.

Social class, notice, is most fundamentally distinguished or determined by the relations of people to the forces of production. For our society *proletarians* (the working class) are those people who produce commodities but neither own nor control the means of production, but, to work, must sell their labor power as a commodity to others who own and control the means of production.<sup>13</sup> Capitalists, by contrast, are those who appropriate the surplus. They are an appropriating class. Where we have a group of people (typically a cohesive group) who do not also (except incidentally) produce, but own and control the means of production and hire wage labor as a commodity, whose labor power they control and whose products they appropriate, we have a capitalist class. There are, in our society, other intermediate classes as well. But in capitalist societies the capitalists and the proletarians are the main classes.

Generally classes are determined by a person's relation to the means of production. Capitalists own and control the means of production; proletarians do not own (except sometimes incidentally) means of production but must sell their labor power to capitalists who in turn direct how they shall use the means of production to serve the capitalists' interests. A social class is defined as a group of people who have a common relation to the appropriation of the surplus.

Whether the proletarians and capitalists are aware of it or not, they are in reality situated in a condition of class struggle. It is there, sometimes overt, sometimes hidden, but it is pervasive in our social life, manifesting itself whenever there is a strike or a labor dispute. The rational thing to do for capitalists, as members of the appropriating class, is to extract surplus from the producing class. It should, within the limits of keeping its own stable dominance, try to increase the surplus it appropriates from the producing class. By contrast, it is natural for proletarians to resist this and keep the surplus extraction to as little as possible and, where they can, to abolish that relation of appropriation altogether. Because the two classes have antagonistic interests, class struggle is an inherent element of any class society. That so many people are so unaware of it and that many would resist such an awareness shows something of the pervasiveness and depth of bourgeois ideology.

## III

These are some of the fundamental conceptual categories of Marxism, categories which are particularly important for historical materialism, itself a central element in Marxism and an important element in trying to understand the dynamics of epochal social change. What we should recognize is that these fundamental conceptions of historical materialism – forces of production, relations of production, mode of production, base and superstructure, ideology, social surplus and social class – provide the schemata for a description of an objective structural viewpoint laying bare the anatomy of a society.

In putting these conceptions to work in understanding the dynamics of capitalism, it is important, right at the start, to recognize that slave societies, Asiatic mode of production societies, feudal societies, capitalist societies and socialist societies all are characterized by profoundly different relations of production. These different economic structures provide a good starting point for analyzing these societies, including, of course, capitalist society. With each of these different relations of production, there is associated a distinctive set of property laws and conceptions of property and possession. These in turn require distinctive legal institutions and a *distinctive* type of State as the fundamental coercive authority in a given territory. To support and legitimate these institutions a distinctive ideology will also have to be in place. Such ideological institutions, along with the legal and political institutions, are typically thought to be the superstructure of the society. The superstructure is thought to have the general character it has because the base (the relations of production) has the character it has. The most fundamental causal influence goes from base to superstructure, but there are also, and crucially, causal relations going the other way as well. For a time superstructures may fetter the development of the base, as when, in one instance, established legal property relations, impede the emergence of new relations of production – new relations of effective control over the forces of production – or, in another, when new political conceptions, either radically reformist or revolutionary, help to destabilize entrenched relations of production. In certain situations the superstructure constrains the mode of production; in other situations it develops it, just as economic structures sometimes help develop forces of production, while all the same remaining fundamentally dependent on them. The forces of production are at the same time continuing to expand, sometimes more rapidly and

sometimes more slowly, but, except for temporary reversals (such as what happened for a time after the fall of the Roman Empire), the history of the human society as a whole has been such that, when our time span is over epochs, there has been a continued development of the forces of production.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, or so at least historical materialists have maintained, either the forces of production of some given society or some set of societies come in conflict with entrenched relations of production, which, though initially matched with the forces of production, come now, as the forces of production develop further, to fetter them, or a whole mode of production (the forces and relations together) will come into conflict with the superstructure. Such a situation with its resulting class struggle will eventually cause a rupture or an extensive alteration in the relations of production and there will come into being a whole altered mode of production which will eventually cause a change in the superstructure, though the superstructure, when it has a dominant ideology, can often slow that development down or halt it altogether for a time. But it is also true that a revolutionary ideology can, under certain circumstances, accelerate it. In seeing how this works, we should come to recognize that the superstructure both rests upon and is also essential for the maintenance of the relations of production that constitute the economic base of the society. There is not a unidirectional relation between base and superstructure with causal relations only going one way. Base affects superstructure and superstructure in turn affects base. It is only in strawmen critiques of Marxism that the base is simply seen as unidirectionally determining superstructure and no allowance is made for the various complex ways in which social custom, tradition, culture, kinship, world views, family relations, religion, politics and juridical forms affect, that is in some measure condition, the base. It is only that the base, the economic structure, is the more fundamental determining factor. It is, together with the forces of production, what in the last instance determines the direction of social change.<sup>15</sup>

The key to social change is in the unfolding conflicts, or, as Marxists usually put it, contradictions within a mode of production between the forces of production and the relations of production. When Marx and Marxists use 'contradiction' in this context it does not mean the same thing it means in logic. In logic we speak of a contradiction if two propositions are so related to each other that one of them must be true and both cannot be true. 'Trudeau is Prime Minister of Canada' and 'It is false that Trudeau is Prime

Minister of Canada' contradict each other. One must be true and both cannot be true. But that is not at all what Marx and Marxists are talking about when they speak of contradictions in capitalist societies or contradictions in feudal societies. For Marx and Marxists a contradiction obtains – in a Marxist sense of 'contradiction' – when a society's economic organization frustrates the optimal use and development of its accumulated productive power or, to put it in other words, a contradiction obtains "when the prospects opened by its productive forces are closed by its productive relations".<sup>16</sup>

There is the crucial empirical fact – or at least alleged fact – that the forces of production *tend* to develop and grow over time, though the rate and manner depends on the type of relations of production in place.<sup>17</sup> However, because of the vested interests of the dominant class, the relations of production typically develop much less rapidly than forces of production. As a result they tend, except in periods after a revolutionary change, including the periods of rapid development after a revolution has been stabilized, to fetter the development of the productive forces. Where, at certain junctures of history, these *status quo* preserving relations of production actually frustrate the development and the optimal use of the society's productive powers, we have what Marx calls a contradiction in society. The contradiction is between the productive forces (powers) and the productive relations. Certain productive relations are making impossible the further development of the productive forces and so a contradiction occurs. This is the objective background against which class conflict and class struggle develops. This produces a period of social crisis which is resolvable only by a fundamental social transformation which is normally, indeed perhaps always, accomplished by a social revolution.

#### IV

With this characterization of what might be called Marx' sociology in place let us return to our discussion of Marxism and ethics. It is understandable that not a few will believe or tend to believe that if this political sociology is approximately correct with its essential theses of historical materialism then morality totters. *Morality*, if such a conception of the social world is near to the mark, *can be nothing but ideology*. And there are, to support this, texts from Marx and Engels where they tell us that morality is ideology. The Communist movement, they tell us, shatters the basis of all morality.

Communists, they add, “preach no morality at all”. Morality and religion are seen by the class-conscious proletarian as “so many bourgeois prejudices behind which there lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests”. Marx and Engels, in two famous passages from their *German Ideology*, set out, in relation to historical materialism, their claim that morality is ideology:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men in their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

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, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.<sup>18</sup>

Note that among other things they speak there of “morality, religion, metaphysics and all the rest of ideology”, implying, as clearly as can be, that morality is ideology.

The claim that morality is moral ideology is most paradigmatically the claim that the moral ideas of a society, or at least the dominant moral ideas of a society, express the class biases and serve the interests of the dominant or the ruling class or classes of that society. There is a deep attack on moralism in Marx, as there is in Freud as well; there is in their work, as there was in Nietzsche’s, a *critique of morality*. (Paradoxically, it is a morally motivated, or in part, morally motivated, critique of morality.)

Yet Marx was also one of the great denouncers of all time. He roundly

condemned capitalism for its exploitation and for its degradation of workers. His works are peppered with value judgments, with critical assessments of social conditions, with moral condemnations of inhuman conditions. How do these things go together? Or do they go together in a coherent way?

I shall argue that they do go together. Marx develops a non-moralizing social science. By this I mean that the value judgments and moral condemnations in it turn no machinery. In his social science, they are like a free spinning wheel in the machine in so far as its scientific content is concerned.<sup>19</sup> The correctness or incorrectness of historical materialism does not turn on what we think is good or bad, desirable or undesirable or what ought or ought not to be. And the essential content of Marxist social science does not depend on what Marxists judge to be right or wrong or good or bad, desirable or undesirable.

All that notwithstanding, one can accept historical materialism and still believe in the objectivity of morality.<sup>20</sup> There is nothing in Marxism which commits one to subjectivism or moral skepticism. Contextualism, yes, but that is a different matter. But – and this is the other side of the coin – historical materialism does not commit one to objectivism in ethics either. Marxism is *neutral* here.

In coming to see that and how this is so, we should first come to see that the claim that morality is ideology is not to be understood as an epistemological or conceptual claim about the logical status of moral notions but as a thesis in the sociology of morals. It is not a claim about what all moral claims or moral beliefs *must* be, including, of course, our own moral beliefs. It is not a claim about the logical status of moral beliefs: a claim about what moral claims must be in virtue of what morality is. It is not, that is, a claim about the logic of moral discourse or about the very idea of a morality. Marx is not in there competing with Hume, Price or Kant, not to mention Ayer or Hare. His claim about morality is, by contrast, an empirical claim about the sociological function of morals in the stream of life. It is a claim about the social function of morality. Here is where, *vis-à-vis* morality, ideology enters most paradigmatically. He is asking what work morality typically does in society. The claim that morality is ideology or is ideological is not the claim that every moral utterance must be ideological or some claim about the logical status of moral utterances. Since there is no claim that there is something in the very nature of morality itself which makes all moral beliefs ideological, space is left in Marxism itself for a justification of a

socialist morality and for the *possibility* of a justified moral theory, a normative political theory, a disciplined socialist moral critique of capitalism and even for socialist principles of justice.<sup>21</sup> They will not be a part of the scientific corpus of Marxism or Marxist social science but this does not entail that they are unscientific conceptions but simply non-scientific ones. And it does *not* imply that they are in conflict with Marxist social science or even that the shape of those moral beliefs will not be deeply influenced by that science. It must be so influenced, for that is what gives these moral remarks their critical bite. It is in that way, as well, that Marx's powerful denunciations in *Das Kapital* and elsewhere do *not* seem arbitrary – and indeed are not arbitrary – for they are informed by that social theory, though this is not to say that they are entailed by it or that they are a functional part of that theory.

The temptation is to think that moralities cannot be objective if historical materialism is true, for then moralities must in the very nature of the case be mode of production dependent. But their being so dependent does not mean they are all on a par, for, as Engels stressed, as the forces of production develop moralities come into being that best suit them and these moralities, like their corresponding forces of production, are also more developed than their predecessors. With more developed forces of production, we can more fully meet the wants and needs of human beings and as, in different epochs, different economic relations come into place which better suit these developed forces of production, so political arrangements and moralities will develop which will better suit those developed relations of production. This provides us with the rationale for saying that feudal morality is an advance over slave morality, capitalist morality (for all of capitalism's coming into the world "dripping blood and gore") over feudal morality and, as socialist societies come into place, socialist morality over capitalist morality (even though the transition might not be a picnic).

To say, as again it is not unnatural to say, that this assessment itself can be nothing but ideology is, in effect, to treat all superstructural notions as ideological. But that is a mistake.<sup>22</sup> All ideological conceptions are superstructural, but not all superstructural conceptions are ideological. Marx does not say, and there is no need to say, that all consciousness, including all self-consciousness, must be ideological. If that were so, Marx would have hoisted himself by his own petard and Mannheim would be similarly hoisted.<sup>23</sup> But Marx made no such assumption about the ideological character

of all superstructural beliefs. Ideology for him was a *sociological* category not an *epistemological* one. He was not saying that there is anything in the very nature of consciousness which makes it ideological, makes it something which answers to particular class interests. Indeed, our consciousness, particularly our images of ourselves, or our conceptions of how we are to act, are ideology-prone. This shows something about the class nature of our societies, the depth of our socialization into a class society and its pervasiveness, but it is not to say, or to give to understand, that all our thoughts, or that all thinking of all individuals (Marx, Engels and Lenin included), must, in the nature of the case, be ideological. There are moral beliefs, say 'Servitude is evil' or 'Satisfaction of one's basic needs is good', which are not *per se* ideological, though they are often enough embedded in ideological moral theories or moralities that are ideological. But the relevant point here is that they need not be. In a classless society they would still be correct moral judgments, though there would not be such a need to assert them. But they still would, if they were to be asserted, be justified moral beliefs and they do not, in themselves, serve the interests of any particular class or depend for their very existence or rationale on there being class societies. These moral beliefs (and their number could be easily multiplied) are something people, in a world without classes, would still have an interest in. There is no need to believe that all our moral beliefs serve class interests, distort our understanding of our lives and our position in the world or provide us with some religious or metaphysical comfort. We human beings have, among other things, some common human needs and it is reasonable for us to want them to be satisfied. Historical materialism gives us a developmental theory of social formations where later social formations come more adequately to meet the needs of human beings. Moreover, it gives us an explanation of moral progress. It is not the case that morality totters if historical materialism is true.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hampshire: 'Morality and Pessimism', in *Public and Private Morality*, Stuart Hampshire (ed.), Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 1–53.

<sup>2</sup> It, of course, is not the only one. We need to contrast it with other such holistic accounts such as those of Weber, Durkheim, Dewey and Pareto.

<sup>3</sup> G. A. Cohen: *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, Oxford, England, Clarendon Press, 1978, and William H. Shaw: *Marx's Theory of History*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> This has been clearly and extensively argued in the works cited in the previous footnote.

<sup>5</sup> G. A. Cohen: *op. cit.*, p. 41. Utilizing this much of Cohen does not commit me to taking sides with him here against the broader readings of 'productive forces' given by Richard Miller in his 'Productive Forces and Forces of Change', *The Philosophical Review* 90, No. 1 (January 1981), pp. 91–117.

<sup>6</sup> G. A. Cohen, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> This is somewhat controversial. Sometimes it is located instead in the forces of production or in the whole mode of production.

<sup>10</sup> John Stevenson: 'Marx's Theory of Ideology', *Radical Philosopher's News Journal* 9 (Fall 1977), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> There are some exceptions to this. It is not true *by definition* that all ideological ideas distort. The mark of the ideological, by contrast, is that which answers to class interests. Lenin, after all, can quite consistently speak of 'socialist ideology'. See here my 'A Marxist Conception of Ideology', in *Ideology, Philosophy and Politics*, Anthony Parel (ed.), Calgary, Alberta, The University of Calgary Press, 1983, and Joe McCarney: *The Real World of Ideology*, Sussex, England, Harvester Press, 1980.

<sup>13</sup> This is a good working definition but that it requires some refinement can be seen from an examination of G. A. Cohen's 'Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat' in Alan Ryan (ed.), *The Idea of Freedom*, Oxford, England, Oxford University Press, 1979 and his 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, No. 1 (Winter 1983), pp. 3–33.

<sup>14</sup> Yu I. Semenov: 'The Theory of Socio-Economic Formations and World History', in *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, Ernest Gellner (ed.), New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 29–88, and Kai Nielsen: 'Taking Historical Materialism Seriously', *Dialogue* 22, No. 2 (June 1983).

<sup>15</sup> There will be, as has been noted time and time again, trouble with talk of 'in the last instance'. Nobody knows exactly, or even very inexactly, when that is. It is hardly much of an improvement over 'the most fundamental determining factor'. Yet both are gesturing in the right direction. One thing of great importance in G. A. Cohen's attempt to use functional explanations in his defense of historical materialism is its attempt to capture exactly, without an appeal to such vague formulae, what they are gesturing at. G. A. Cohen: *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, pp. 249–296.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>17</sup> Kai Nielsen: 'Taking Historical Materialism Seriously'.

<sup>18</sup> *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker (ed.), New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1978, pp. 154–5.

<sup>19</sup> This is a slight overstatement. After all, Marxists believe that capitalism exploits the workers and this, where there is a feasible alternative, is unjust. But this belief is a part of Marxist theory, though hardly a very theoretically ramified or distinctive part of Marxist theory, and it is, as well, arguably a part of Marxist social science. So it is not quite true that value judgments play no role in Marxist social science. But my above claim is a pardonable exaggeration, useful in bringing out how very much of Marx's social science does not entail any moral views. (I should add that I am aware of Allen Wood's important conflicting views here, but I think that Gary Young in his

'Doing Marx Justice' in *Marx and Morality*, Kai Nielsen and Steven Patten (ed.), Guelph, Ontario, Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1981, pp. 251–68, has shown how thoroughly mistaken they are.)

<sup>20</sup> This thesis has been powerfully argued by William H. Shaw in his 'Marxism and Moral Objectivity', in *Marx and Morality*, pp. 19–44.

<sup>21</sup> Kai Nielsen: 'Capitalism, Socialism and Justice', in Tom Regan and Donald Vandever (eds.), *And Justice for All*, Totowa, NJ, Rowman and Littlefield, 1981; Jeffrey H. Reiman: 'The Possibility of a Marxian Theory of Justice', in *Marx and Morality*, pp. 307–322; and Svetozar Stojanovic: 'The Ethical Potential of Marx's Thought', in Tom Bottomore (ed.), *Modern Interpretations of Marx*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981, pp. 170–187.

<sup>22</sup> This is very clearly articulated and textually supported by John McMurtry in his *The Structure of Marx's World-View*, pp. 264–286.

<sup>23</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre: 'Ideology, Social Science and Revolution', *Comparative Politics* 5, No. 5 (April 1973), pp. 321–342.

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