

Phil 114, April 16, 2012
**Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, from Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*,
pp. 147–50, 154–55, 159–66, 169, 172–75, 186–88, 193–200**
**Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,
Preface, third paragraph**
**Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1*,
Afterword to the Second German Edition, last four paragraphs**

Marxian vs. Hegelian Dialectic:

Marx contrasts his “rational” dialectical method with Hegel’s “mystifying” version.

Marx endorses the *dialectical* part of Hegel’s method:

“because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary”

Like Hegel, Marx believes:

- each given stage of human society and the historical changes from one stage to the next is:
- explained by certain forces
- that both lead to and then overcome certain limits or contradictions,
- where the individuals caught up in and contributing to these changes not only do not aim at them, but moreover often have no awareness that that is what they are doing.

However, for Marx, these forces are *material*, rather than *ideal*. In Marx’s view, Hegel erroneously projected the processes of human thinking into the world, imagining that the world was somehow itself governed by these processes of thinking (the “Idea” or “Reason”). On the contrary, for Marx, the world is governed by material forces. Indeed, human thinking is itself explained by material forces, rather than the other way around.

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of “the Idea,” he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos [mythical Greek craftsman who fashions the world] of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of “the Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

More specifically, for Hegel:

- History is driven by *intellectual “forces”*: i.e., Spirit’s striving to become conscious of itself as free.
- Each historical stage of society reflects, and is to be understood by reference to, the level of self-consciousness of freedom that it has achieved.
- When the given stage of society impedes further emergence of self-consciousness, it is transformed by the actions of world-historical figures so as to permit a higher degree of self-consciousness.

Whereas for Marx:

- History is driven by the development of *material forces*: i.e., “productive forces.”
- Each historical stage of society is to be understood by reference to the level of development of its productive forces. These productive forces then explain its “relations of production,” which in turn explains its “legal and political superstructure” and finally its “ideology.” (Note how this is the reverse of Hegel; the intellectual is only the very last effect in a causal chain rooted in the material.)
- When the relations of production of a given stage of society impede the further development of its productive forces, those relations of production are transformed so as to facilitate the further development of its productive forces. Similarly, when superstructure or consciousness impedes the necessary change in the relations of production, they in turn are transformed so as to permit that change.

Marx’s historical materialism:

The third paragraph of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society...

Productive forces = what is *used in* producing the means and comforts of life

1. Means of production:
 - a. Raw materials
 - b. Tools
2. Labor *power*: the potential to supply human activity or *labor*. The difference between labor power and labor is going to be crucially important later on. If I don’t show up for work on Wednesday, then (at least in the short run) this does *not* reduce my labor *power* on Wednesday, although it does reduce—to zero—my *labor* on Wednesday.

Relations of production = *effective control* of persons over productive forces, e.g., to use them, to alienate them, to take the fruits of their use, to exclude others from using them, etc.

Some key examples of (classes defined in terms of) relations of production:

1. A *slave* is a laborer (although Marx might have avoided this term) who controls *none* of his labor power and *none* of the means of production he uses.
2. A *serf* is a laborer (although Marx might have avoided this term) who controls *some* of his labor power and *some* of the means of production he uses. (E.g., has some land and farms it when he can, but is obligated to work part of his week on the estates of his lord.)
3. A *proletarian* is a laborer who controls *all* of his labor power and *none* of the means of production he uses. (E.g., your GSIs, who don’t own the classroom, the class roster, the means for entering grades, etc.) Even though they control their labor power, they must sell it in order to produce anything.
4. *Independent producer* is a laborer (although Marx might have avoided this term) who controls *all* of his labor power and *all* of the means of production he uses. (E.g., the guys

in the Desi Dog van.)

Note that the productive forces of a society can be understood independently of its relations of production. What can be produced—e.g., how much labor power there is, how many hoes, how much arable land—is different from who controls what parts of its production.

Economic structure = the abstract pattern of relations of production in a society.

1. The “*ancient*” economic structure is one where laborers are predominantly slaves.
2. The *feudal* economic structure is one where laborers are predominantly serfs.
3. The *bourgeois* or *capitalist* economic structure is one where laborers are predominantly proletarians. (Wait: why “capitalist”? What does laborers owning their labor power but not the means of production have to do with “capital” or “capitalists”? We’ll see eventually.)

...the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

Legal and political superstructure: in stable societies, it consists largely in legally recognized rights of ownership, and means of enforcement, that reflect or constitute the kind of effective control in which that society’s relations of production consist.

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

Development of productive forces = *growth* of productive forces, i.e., more can be produced with the same (duration of) labor.

First, the relations of production of a given society are the way they are because at that society’s level of development such relations are conducive to the further development of the productive forces.

- Thus, for example, the relations of production within Victorian Britain were capitalist, because the level of development of productive forces at the time was sufficient to sustain capitalist relations (whereas those of, e.g., ice-age hunter-gatherers was not) and because capitalist relations are exceptionally good at developing productive forces. Why? Again, we’ll see more about this later on. But it is partly because capitalist societies are geared toward accumulating “exchange-value” (“money,” to a first approximation) *for its own sake*, rather than simply serving human needs and wants.

Second, when existing relations of production retard the further development of productive forces, they are replaced by relations of production more conducive to that development.

- When Britain had developed productive forces sufficient to sustain capitalist relations of production, feudal relations broke down and were replaced by capitalist relations. Principally, peasants were (i) kicked off the land and so deprived of the means of production and (ii) “freed” to sell their labor power to whomever they wished, rather than being bound for life to work part-time for their lord. That is, they became proletarians. In many cases, this change in the relations of production came before changes in the legal superstructure. Serfs just stopped obeying the old laws that prohibited freedom of movement and soon the old laws came off the books.

It may help to think of the explanatory relationship between productive forces and relations of production by analogy to natural selection. The relations of production may *cause* productive forces to grow, but those relations of production *are selected for* (e.g., survive in competition) because they cause productive forces to grow. Similarly for the explanatory relationship between relations of production and superstructure.

In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish 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, artistic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production.

People in a given society typically understand that society, and the conflicts and changes it experiences, in a variety of religious and moral terms. But this consciousness does not explain, but rather is explained by, productive forces, relations of production, and their conflicts. Such consciousness often takes the form of “ideology”: beliefs about the nature of society that are (i) at least to some extent sincerely held, rather than simply something people pay lip service to, (ii) explained by productive forces and relations of production, and (iii) serve to reinforce those conditions.

No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation. In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production—antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence—but the

productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.

Capitalism is not the final stage for Marx, only the final stage in the “prehistory of human society.” The “purpose” of capitalism is to develop productive forces to such a level that there is abundance that a different and better society (or, perhaps, genuine *human society* for the first time) will be possible. When capitalism develops productive forces to that level, capitalist relations of production will then themselves be replaced.

What will this society be like, and why will it be “better”? Again, we’ll see more on this later. But the outlines of an answer would seem to be this: Because the society will be so productive that people will not need to labor *for others*—liberating society from class oppression and all of its attendant ills—and that people will not need to *labor* (much) for their own means of life—so that they can devote themselves to more fulfilling, actualizing, less alienating forms of activity.

Review Questions:

1. Why is it natural to think “worker in someone else’s factory” when you hear “proletarian”? Could there nevertheless be a worker in someone else’s factory who wasn’t a proletarian?
2. “Well-defined legal property rights promote economic development.” Is this claim necessarily incompatible with Marx’s claim that legal superstructure is explained by the development of productive forces?
3. Is there a sense, for Marx, in which even capitalism is “historically” justified? How so?