

Marx's Understanding of Nature, Social Forms, and Practical Standards

by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explains Karl Marx's understanding of nature, human action, and a materialist standard of practical action. Marx's understands natural processes as not identical with human action. There are two types of human action for Marx: material action and social action. Material action can use natural processes. Social action does not directly use natural processes, but social action can promote how material action uses natural processes. The difference between natural processes, material action, and social action is important for Marx since it: maintains the independent reality of nature, maintains the development of material accomplishments as separate from social forms, and demonstrates the transitory status of social forms. This difference between material action and social action allows Marx to criticize certain social forms while praising the productive possibilities of the current level of technical development. A practical standard is developed using Marx's understanding of nature and human action. This practical standard is based on humans' necessary relationship to natural processes. Beneficial outcomes according to humans' material abilities and their existence as natural beings is established by application of the practical standard. The materialist standard of practical action can be understood as an ethical theory that is not based on traditional ethical criteria.

## **Acknowledgments**

This dissertation has been a long time coming. Its origin lies with the first person I would like to thank, Jonathan Pickle. Several years ago, Jonathan and I started a discussion about whether or not Marx's critique of Hegel was correct. This point ballooned into a more wide-ranging discussion of Marx's philosophic ideas. Jonathan eventually suggested we start a reading group, which we did, and eventually we read most of Marx's major works. Along the way I became less interested in writing my dissertation on Hegel and eventually settled on the current topic of Marx, nature, and ethics. So, in short, Jonathan Pickle is the most proximate cause I can find that moved me in the directions that produced this work.

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dissertation. I do not think this work could have been finished with out his support.

The other committee members Simon Critchley and James Dodd, and the dean's representative Anwar Shaikh, provided many challenging questions during my defense. I found their insights to be thoughtful and precise. Their comments will help me develop my ideas further. I would like to add that Anwar Shaikh's course on classical political economy that I attended was a great help for me in understanding Marx's thought.

No dissertation every written by any philosophy student at the Graduate Faculty should not thank Claire Martin. We all know that she is invaluable. If it were not for her efforts many students would never have finished their degrees. This includes myself. I am proud to say that Claire is a good friend of mine. My stay at the GF has been a happy one mostly because of Claire. We've had some great times over the years and I look forward to many more.

Finally, I must thank my lovely girlfriend of many years, Alise Wallis. She is a wonderful person and a great friend. She is a brilliant person and my intellectual development would not have been possible without her. The deepest roots of this dissertation lie in my relationship with Alise. Our conversations that started many years ago at Evergreen have lead to it. If it weren't for her it would have never been started. So I say to her, *Omnia Extares*.

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## **Abbreviations for Texts**

*C-1* = *Capital* volume 1

*C-3* = *Capital* volume 3

*CCPE* = *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

*EW* = *Early Writings*

*MEGA* = *Marx/Engels Gesamtausgabe*

*G* = *Grundrisse*. English Translation Penguin

*GI* = *The German Ideology*. Prometheus Books, 1998.

*MECW* = *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*. International Publishers, New York.

*MEW (3)* = *Karl Marx- Friedrich Engels – Werke, Band 3*. Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR, 1969.

*MEW (4)* = *Karl Marx- Friedrich Engels – Werke, Band 4*. Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR, 1972.

*MEW (23)* = *Karl Marx – Friedrich Engels – Werke, Band 23*. Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR, 1977.

*MESW* = *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works, in One Volume*. Progress Publishers, 1977.

*PS* = *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller.

*HW* = *G.W.F. Hegel Werke*. Werke in zwanzig Bänden. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1970.

## **General Introduction**

What is this dissertation about? Broadly, this dissertation is about Marx's understanding of how nature shapes standards for practical action. Humans develop abilities for the use of nature over time. These accumulated abilities enable humans to live their lives in new ways. New productive techniques bring about surplus product that in turn enables people to perform new activities or specialize in old ones. The time freed from necessary production, due to material development, opens up new ways of living. But, these new ways of living are not automatically accepted. The possibility of new ways of using free time has to be argued for and proved. Marx tries to do this by critiquing orthodox philosophy and political economy. Marx's critique is dependent on an implied standard of practical action. In this dissertation, I show the basis upon which Marx develops his implied standard and then I will present his standard in a systemized form. Overall I will argue for this statement: *the natural and material existence of humans is the basis Marx uses to develop a standard of practical action.*

In this dissertation, a practical standard is the determination of desirable outcomes and situations that can be chosen by people. The domain of the practical is actions performed by people that involve choice. The practical has been commonly described by philosophers as ethics, politics, and juridical judgments. In practical philosophy there have been standards that determine

actions as good or beneficial. In Aristotle, the fulfillment of human function is the standard for individual actions. This is the ethical. The standard for societal action, the political, is whether a state is to the benefit of all members, or to the benefit of a few or only one. Kant determines the morality of a practical action as a good will acting in accordance with the moral law. Utilitarianism determines an action as good when pleasure is felt or pain reduced. All of these judgments described involve the application of standards for decision making. Practical philosophy is concerned with what choices one should make.

Before defining some terms and moving into descriptions of the various parts of this dissertation, I will state why I have found it important to see Marx's understanding of nature and humans' appropriation of it as a basis for practical standards. First and foremost, Marx is a practical thinker in that he finds practical concerns to precede theoretical concerns. This is a well-known tenet of Marx's philosophy of history, but not necessarily a well understood tenet. Nature as a category of practical philosophy has had a varied and long career in western philosophy; I would venture that nature, in its various philosophic performances, has been a constant component of practical argumentation as long as there have been arguments about the practical. If not always fully enunciated in the history of philosophy, usually it has played an essential bracketing function in arguments

about human action. Such as, if the natural is defined as society x then society y can be determined as an unnatural societal arrangement.

The use of the concept of nature as a regulatory device in practical philosophy is to assist arguments in developing standards for evaluating actions; and simply understood practical philosophy's goal is to understand what is the best way to live. Understanding what is the best way to live means determining the best actions to achieve this. Definitions of nature are used to limit conceptions of action along broadly understood lines of rational and irrational, or agreement and disagreement. We can see that conceptions of nature are being used to argue one manner of existence over another. In short, determining what are our natural tendencies can further arguments about what society we should live in, and what societal ends we should strive for. Defining what is natural in our practical lives thus shapes our political thought. One can effectively "take off the table," so to speak, certain activities and goals if they are defined as *unnatural*, and just as effectively justify many unnecessary and irrational activities because they are seen as *natural*.<sup>1</sup>

### **Historical Examples of Practical Standards**

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<sup>1</sup> The current debate that claims it is unnatural for homosexuals to raise children, and thus argues that homosexual relationships and parenthood are not conducive to the best outcomes of society, is a contemporary example of using nature as an argument to preserve the status quo.

In the history of philosophy there have been some notable uses of nature to justify this judgment of actions. Not to dwell on too many examples, a few from ancient Greek philosophy will suffice. In Plato's *Republic*, nature as a regulating principle in constructing the just city is widespread; and it is used in sincere and insincere ways. The just city itself is a macro version of people's souls, so the nature of men is the nature of the city. Correspondingly, taming one's soul, one's bodily and psychic states and capacities, is the micro image of how a city is tamed. Plato's idea of a hierarchically ordered soul dictates how we are to control ourselves, and analogously, the city. Not only does the city start due to physical necessity, that is, the division of labour, but it collapses when the reproduction laws of guardians are ignored.<sup>2</sup> The types of poetry and music we play will stimulate different emotional states. Lies about the types of men's souls, which they are born with, validate and maintain the social order of the city.

These examples elucidate conceptions of nature being use to determine actions as rational or irrational. A city that does not divide the activities of ruling and production between different people is an irrational social arrangement according to Plato's *Republic*, because having people perform more than one task results in inferior outcomes and products. Having producers concerned with material production and rulers concerned with governance allows each person to

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<sup>2</sup> Plato 546b.

focus on one task, which will produce the best outcome or product.<sup>3</sup> Plato's argument on this point can be restated as such: the best outcome for activities is specialization and the best way to live would be a social arrangement that promotes specialization.

Why Plato's argument is about nature needs to be further elaborated. The limits of actions are shaped by natural necessity. By specializing, one can provide a better outcome, "a finer job," Plato states.<sup>4</sup> The manipulation of nature is limited by two factors: our ability to appropriate natural processes, and available time. These two factors are interrelated, as for example, our ability to appropriate natural processes is dependent on our historical inheritance of production facilities, and how much of the days, weeks, months, and years of our lives we can contribute to developing our abilities. As we can see, our ability to appropriate natural processes is dependent on time, both as our inheritance of productive development and our available time for ability development (in Marxian terminology, the ratio of necessary to surplus labour). Vice versa, the time we have available for ability development is dependent on how our abilities for appropriating natural processes are already developed, that is, our production facilities we have historically inherited. My description of natural necessity is reaching beyond Plato's text, but I think it is attending to its point: an optimal

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<sup>3</sup> Concerning superior results from the division of labour and specialization, see Plato 370a.

<sup>4</sup> Plato 370a.

social arrangement for Plato's just city, is dependent upon our ability to control natural necessity. Our control over natural necessity, or more simply, natural processes, is our material ability.

In Aristotle's practical works, nature shapes not only what are the best ends for our actions, but our capacity to understand what those ends are. Aristotle's discussion of the greatest good as happiness of the contemplative life is dependent upon his definition of human function as the excellent development of rational faculties: "...we posit the function of a man to be a certain kind of life, namely, activity or *actions* of the soul with reason..."<sup>5</sup> Without determining a definitive function for humans, Aristotle cannot delineate between competing types of happiness, in particular the happiness derived from honors. Having the best type of happiness determined by our nature opens up the possibility for weighing types of actions and social arrangements against one another, and coextensively, enables one to more effectively plan practical arrangements than if the case was only one of individual preferences. Simply put, the best type of happiness is the type of life, or activity, that fulfills human function, which for Aristotle is the contemplative life.<sup>6</sup>

Function for Aristotle is thus effective for determining right action; that is, virtuous action. Without such a standard one is plunged into different types of

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle. *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*. 1098a 12-13. Italics are by the translator.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle 177a 11-19. Concerning the relationship of virtuous action to the fulfillment of function, see 1106a 24.

relativism, the most probable, acknowledged by Aristotle, is the merely political; the social arrangement that is based solely upon convention with no guidance given to reason. In the book on justice, Aristotle develops the contrast between convention and reason determined action in the legal/political realm.

There are some who think that all kinds of justice are such as these [i.e., legal],<sup>7</sup> in view of the fact that what exists by nature is unchangeable and has the same power everywhere, like fire, which burns here as well as in Persia, but that things which are just are observed to be subject to change. Such is not the case, however, although there is a sense in which this is true. Perhaps among the gods, at least, this is not the case at all, but among us there is something which is just by nature, even if all of what is just is subject to change. Nevertheless, some of what is just exists by nature and some not by nature. Now of things which can be otherwise, what kinds exist by nature also and what kind exist not by nature but by law or convention, if indeed they are alike in being both subject to change, is clear from the examples which follow; and the same distinction applies to the other cases. The right hand is by nature stronger, although it is possible for some men to become ambidextrous. As for the things which are just by convention or expediency, they are like standard measures; for measures of wine or of corn are not everywhere equal but larger in wholesale and smaller in retail markets. Similarly, what is just according to men and not by nature is not the same everywhere, since forms of government, too, are not all the same; nevertheless, there is only one form of government, which is by nature the best everywhere.<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle wants to establish the difference between the necessities of nature, the possibility of actions within the boundaries of natural necessity, and natural-practical standards. In the first distinction, Aristotle's example of fire

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<sup>7</sup> Translator's comment.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle 1134b 25 to 1135a 6.



which is the same in all places, natural forces cannot be other than what they are, and there is no possibility of choosing whether or not fire will burn in Persia. The second distinction is that natural necessity does provide a boundary to choice and action. Aristotle's example of a naturally strong right hand and ambidexterity denotes the possibility of actions within a natural boundary. Another example, which I find to be reminiscent of Aristotle's, is the impact food and exercise has on health and strength: one has a natural tendency towards health and strength that can be improved due to food and exercise. Our activities of exercise and proper eating to improve health and strength are circumscribed by our natural tendencies and limits.<sup>9</sup>

What is most important to us here is the final distinction, Aristotle's use of a natural-practical standard. This standard is based upon the definition of function, which means one should judge practical activities upon how they fulfill human function. Aristotle realizes that people live differently based upon their various conventions. But, different conventions do not mean that all social arrangements are optimal for the fulfilling of function, *because function is determined by our nature*. Humans' natural tendencies mean that one way of living and one societal arrangement is best, because it meshes with humans' natural aspects best. Human function circumscribes not only the possibilities of

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<sup>9</sup> The activities of training, correct exercise, and eating, are technical activities in Aristotle's system as opposed to practical activities regarding ethics and politics.

actions, but also their capacity to provide greater or lesser degrees of happiness. Aristotle finds that the contemplative life would provide “perfect happiness.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Marx’s Practical Philosophy**

As we see, conceptions of nature can have substantial significance in the construction of a practical theory. In these brief overviews of Plato and Aristotle I hope to have set the ground for discussing the roll of nature in Marx’s practical philosophy. Excluding Hegel, Aristotle is the thinker to whom I find Marx most closely related; and his relationship to Hegel is based on critique, that is, Marx cites Hegel mostly to show how he is wrong and to also introduce his own ideas.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Marx quotes few thinkers approvingly. He rather cites them to critique their ideas; but this is not the case with Aristotle. When Marx quotes him it is commonly to support his own position. He breaks radically with Hegel on the role of nature in practical philosophy, which Marx discusses in his early work *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State*. Marx embraces a materialist historical account of the genesis of the state as opposed to an idealist historical account. This places Marx in alignment with Aristotle whose typology of state forms is based on historical examples and class relations rather than permutations of thought. Marx is in many ways a historically *developmental* minded Aristotelian.

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle 1177a 18.

<sup>11</sup> Allen Wood finds Marx to be similar to Aristotle on several matters but does not provide a thorough comparison of their philosophic positions, see his *Karl Marx*, second edition.

Aristotle conceives of various social arrangements being possible, and so does Marx; the difference between the two thinkers is that Marx finds that some social arrangements can only occur at certain stages in the development of the productive forces.<sup>12</sup> This difference radically alters the how the society's purpose, living well,<sup>13</sup> and an individual's function can be achieved, since the types of lives people may live at various levels of productive development can be very different.

As we have seen, a practical standard is commonly understood as an ethical standard. Since Marx finds himself not to be an ethical thinker, I have opted for the use of the term practical standard as opposed to ethical standard. The similarities between Marx's and other practical philosophies can easily be seen; they are all interested in the described domain of practical philosophy, which is what choices should one make. Should one present the limits to human development inherent within the social relations of capitalism or should one defend these limits as real ones that cannot be overcome? Should one advocate the end of the wage system or higher wages? Should the hierarchies of workplace and society be accepted as necessary and beneficial or unnecessary and detrimental?

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle considers a development of household to village to city-state, but not a fuller range of social arrangements, see 1252a 1 to 1253b 1.

<sup>13</sup> See Aristotle 1252b 30 on the city-state's natural purpose.

Why should one choose to condemn capitalism as Marx does? Well, Marx condemns capitalism because it separates humans from natural processes and our developed tools and devices for using nature effectively, thereby reducing our ability to satisfy needs and develop new skills and interests. Capitalism, in its best form, diminishes humans' potential to provide for themselves and to develop new capacities. Marx has a good reason for condemning capitalism. Like all practical philosophy, Marx provides a standard that capitalism fails to meet; this means that capitalism is not conducive to the best outcomes and situations for people, defined as people's ability to satisfy their needs and develop new skills and interests.

Marx determines that these outcomes are best for humans by showing how humans are natural creatures who develop activities for using nature over time. Humans are natural creatures; they are part of the natural world. Marx considers all things to be part of the natural world; there is no separable reality. As natural creatures humans are corporeal, objective, and organic. A determination of the human subject mandates, if we are to consider humans natural creatures, that we must take these three attributes into account. Humans are objects among other objects, all of which occupy and take up space. These physical objects are in relation to one another, and integrated in the processes of the natural world. It is important that our understanding of physical objects related by natural processes

maintains the distinctiveness of humans as living creatures. The relationship of humans to the natural world is one of organic metabolism between objects. Humans could be thought of as matter alone, but thinking of humans in this way misses the distinctiveness of humans as living creatures. Humans, as living creatures, means their living form has to be maintained if they are to continue as living creatures. Humans have necessary natural-organic requirements to maintain their living form.

Humans cannot be understood in their actuality if we determine them solely as natural creatures. Humans are not only corporeal, objective, and organic; they are also historical creatures. They have different abilities to manipulate the natural world to meet their necessary biological requirements. This ability to manipulate the natural world is humans' capacity for material activities. Material activity is the use of natural processes, matter, and energy in which the appropriation of nature is qualitatively changed from the point of natural processes alone. Humans of course have always appropriated nature to meet their biological needs. The line between a natural appropriation of nature and a material appropriation of nature can be quite fine. A material activity is the use of natural processes that may accumulate overtime as skills and knowledge. Material activities are qualitatively different than natural processes because of the accumulation of ways of using nature over time.

We can determine a natural appropriation of nature negatively as an appropriation that requires no accumulation of skills and knowledge over time. This may be a chimera, since hominids before *Homo sapiens sapiens* used tools, so humans were always tool users. This also means that biologically current humans always materially appropriated nature. Humans have always had a historical dimension to their existence. One cannot abstract the accumulation of skills and knowledge away from human experience and say this is what human really are. A determination of human existence has to take the material appropriation of nature into account to determine a practical standard.

### **Marx's Materialist Standard of Practical Action**

In determining a practical standard for people Marx is interested in using the reality of human existence as the basis for a standard. Since humans are natural and material, Marx seeks a materialist standard. A materialist standard of practical action is grounded on the natural and material existence of humans, as opposed to a social or idealist account. A social account would take the mores of a current social form as the standard; the basis for a social standard would be the demands for reproduction of the social form. An idealist account would take the structure of thought as the basis and the agreement of thought and action as the standard.

Marx takes the demands of humans as natural/historical beings as the basis for developing a practical standard. The materialist basis for Marx's practical standard is humans' necessarily access the natural world to provide for their needs. As physical and organic beings, humans have to have access to natural processes if they are to perform any material activity. To provide for their biological needs, and to engage in the cultural life of their communities, humans need to have access to natural processes in their historically contemporary form of the means of production. The means of production are typically understood as the tools, machines, spaces, money, and materials of production; to this list I would add the knowledge and skills needed to use these devices to conduct and understand the processes of production. Access to natural processes/means of production is required for humans to maintain their living form and to develop additional abilities. We can see that this connection is needed as a precondition to perform any activity, material or otherwise. To enjoy leisure time, one needs of course to have enough food, water, shelter, and security to be able to enjoy it, and really, just to have, leisure time. Studying also requires these biological preconditions and also access to time free from producing one's subsistence. But, to study, one also needs access to materials and people. One can't study unless one has books and equipment and people to learn from. All of these preconditions, biological or material, are natural processes that have been made

by productive technique. Being able to take advantage of these productions is to have access to the means of production. One's life would be impossible to live without access to the means of production. We fabricate our lives by using nature.

Access to the means of production is the effective control over the means of production, including investment and output. Sufficient access includes being able to make decisions not only over the direct labour process, but also over questions regarding total product produced by society and the repercussions that follow from production. All of these matters affect how the lives of people in a society actually are: What activities are available to what people? Who knows what in this society? Who controls which devices? Who controls which form of labour and capital? What uses of time are available to which people? Understanding who controls the means of production in its totality can answer these questions. How one can live one's life - unemployed, trapped in low-wage employment, overworked, not having to work, learning science or not, enjoying economic and physical security – depends on access to the means of production.

Within capitalism, access to the means of production is not universal, which means that all people in society do not have equal access to the means of production. Some people have control over small amounts of the means of production. Some people have control over large amounts of the means of



production. And most people have control over no amount of the means of production. An example of this lopsided control can be demonstrated by looking at the distribution of income and wealth in the United States. In 2001, the top 1% of the population held 39.7% of net financial assets, the next 9% of the population held 40.1%, and the remaining 90% of the population held 20.2%. In contrast, household income distributed to this 90% of the population was 54.8%, the next 9% of the population was 25.2%, and the top 1% of the population had 20% of total income.<sup>14</sup>

This maldistribution of access to the means of production, in tangible and less tangible forms, means that how people live their lives can differ greatly. People's ability to use natural processes and the means of production directly affects people's life prospects. If people do not have access to the means of production they cannot live their lives to the fullest potential available to them in their time. Marx finds the unequal distribution of access to the means of production to be the major barrier for people being able to live secure and fulfilling lives, or at least the chance to attempt to live a fulfilling life.

The basis of the materialist standard of practical action is that for humans to be biologically and historically active they need access to the means of

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<sup>14</sup> Table 4.1, page 279 in *The State of Working America 2004/2005* by Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto. Also of note, in 2001 in the United States, the top 0.5% held 25.6% of all common stock, table 4.7 page 287.

production. This brings us to stating what is the materialist practical standard: reasonable universal self-actualization of one's projects.

Actualization of one's projects is the satisfaction of biological and historical needs. The term project is used to convey an understanding of need satisfaction that is not immediate. Some needs, like becoming educated, raising a family, developing a skill, studying a natural phenomena, living a secure life, or committing oneself to a life's work, are not satisfied in the same time frame as the need to eat immediately. But security of nutrition also does not occur in the same time frame as securing one meal.

Self-actualization is the satisfaction of one's project by oneself. This implies that one has direct control over the means of production. This provision is to preserve Marx's idea of the associated producers and to avoid the problem of a benevolent tyrant.

Universal self-actualization is control over the means of production collectively by society. This is to prevent ownership sliding into individual producers, which implies that one's property could be alienated. Collective ownership of property cannot be alienated by a society unless that society's ownership pattern is de-legitimized.

Reasonable universal self-actualization means that actualization has to be to the benefit of the actualizers. This prohibits actions that harm the actualizers.

Harm can be a tricky notion, but we can have a deflationary account that considers harm any action that inhibits actualization in the short or long term. This would include assault, unnecessary imprisonment, alienation of collective property or personal property, overwork, limits to access to the productive forces due to social hierarchies (class, bureaucratic elitism, sexism, or racism), destructive overuse of the means of production, underinvestment in the means of production, irrational development of the means of production, and environmental destruction.

Overall, we can understand Marx's materialist practical standard as a philosophic prescription for action. Marx defines what is beneficial for people as the materialist basis. The separation of people from the means of production is alienation in Marxian terminology. It is beneficial for humans to have access to the means of production. It is detrimental for this access to be inhibited, when their access is alienated from them. Access to the means of production is necessary for humans as natural/historical creatures. For human subjects to act, they have to manipulate nature. They have to appropriate natural processes to meaningfully perform any action. A person could be considered without their use of natural processes, without considering the material industrial history their society has inherited, regardless of their physical and organic connection to the natural world. But, this is to envision people in a way that may be abstractly true

but does not demonstrate their actuality. To understand what is beneficial to people we need to understand them as what they are. Marx understands people as objectively physical beings that are part of the natural world, which they have progressively learned to use over time through material activities.

### **Social Activities and Illusion**

Now that we have discussed what is real for Marx in regard to humans and what are desirable outcomes prescribed by a materialist practical standard, next we need to address what is false and illusory for Marx. Marx spends most of his writing career showing why capitalism is undesirable according to what is beneficial to humans. But he also uses much of his ink explaining how orthodox political economic understandings of capitalism and human action are flawed.

In this dissertation, what Marx critiques as the illusory elements of human society is called the social. The social, broadly considered, includes: classes, class interests, activities of promotion, and ideology. Definitively, the social and social activities are the relationships that occur between people and things that do not have any real physical connection to the material activities' use of natural processes. Social activities promote ends that serve class interests directly or indirectly, and meet the demands for reproduction of the social form in which these activities of promotion are generated. The logic of capital accumulation is a

social end. Social activities ride upon material activities but do not affect the physical outcome of material activities. They may affect the pace of material activities, the distribution of product from material activities, or the type of material accumulation that serves the demands of capitalist accumulation. Analytically, social activities can be separated from material activities without affecting their physical outcome as noted above.

An example of the difference between material activities and social activities can be demonstrated with an example of garbage removal. In this example let us have a garbage truck and three people who work on the truck. One of these people drives the truck and the other two throw cans, whether they change roles while they pick up garbage is *beside the point*. Now the material activity of garbage collection is for the truck to be driven on a certain route where garbage is located, the garbage to be picked-up, and then the garbage brought to the dump. As I said before, as long as one person drives and two people put the garbage in the truck, the crew follows the routes, and the garbage is brought to the dump, the material activity of garbage collection has been performed. The social relations and social activities affecting the material activity of garbage collection would be class relationships and activities of promotion that shape but do not alter the material activity of garbage collection. The class relationships of the three-person crew could be they all own the truck together, one or two of them own the

truck and the other one(s) work for them, or they all work for another person(s).

The social activities of promotion would be acts that encourage the speed of garbage removal and distribution of the total value accrued to garbage collection (who gets paid how much). These social relationships and social activities of promotion do not affect the physical outcome of the material activity of garbage collection.

One can effectively perform the desired material activity without the social. The social is objectively not necessary for the material performance of the activity. But the social is necessary for the recognition of the material activity within a specific social form. People can grow food, synthesize chemicals, and control an atomic reactor without owning the land, seed, chemicals, or machinery. People do not have to be proletarians or serfs to farm or make clothes. A person can be taught Boethius without paying for the instruction. Class designations are objectively meaningless in respect to the physical attributes of material activities. Do the vibrations of air change when engineering principles are uttered by the owner of a firm rather than when uttered by an employee? Do the principles change? Of course they don't.

Class relationships and activities that promote social ends can be a barrier to the self-actualization of one's projects. This is because the meeting of class interests and social ends are not isomorphic with the actualization of one's

projects. The development of the productive forces, when promoted by the social demands of capital accumulation, are developed according to what best suits accumulation according to the controlling class interests. The productive forces are to meet the needs of humans as natural and historical creatures. But when they are developed according to the demands of capital accumulation they may be developed in a manner that entails: unemployment, destruction of productive capacity, ceasing production regardless of need satisfaction, environmental destruction,<sup>15</sup> dangerously low wages, overwork, poverty, curtailing of the social wage, and maldistribution of productive advances such as health care, education, and housing.

The social may be a barrier to the actualization of one's projects. It is definitely a barrier for self-actualization due to the limits of redistribution within capitalism. Marx wants to stress that if the social is not necessary for the objective performance of a material activity then there is no reason for us to maintain social activities and social relations. This can particularly be seen as the case since the social has ends that are not only different from need satisfaction but can also be hostile to need satisfaction. When distribution of medicines are withheld due to the logic of capital accumulation, then social relationships are hostile to need satisfaction.

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<sup>15</sup> See *Capital* volume 1 p 638 on capital accumulation causing destruction of the soil.

In his work, Marx explains how humans are objectively natural and materially-historical creatures and then implicitly develops a materialist practical standard based on the objective reality of the human experience. This implied standard is used by Marx to criticize orthodox political economy and to develop general considerations of socialism.

### **Overview of the Parts and the Topics of this Dissertation**

To show how the material existence of humans is the basis for a standard of practical action, I will need to first show why the natural and the material are the actual for Marx, and second I need to show why the social, as defined by Marx, is spurious; with this done I can then go on to present Marx's standard of practical action. Part 1 of this dissertation is a consideration of Marx's understanding of the natural and its difference from the material. Part 2 is a consideration of Marx's understanding of the social and his critique of social relations through the use of material determinations. Part 3 is a systemized version of Marx's materialist standard of practical action.

For the sake of exhibition we could phrase Marx's standard in regard to Aristotle's conception of function: if human function is actualization of one's projects, then human function is fulfilled when one's projects are actualized. This standard can also consider degree; some states of existence can be more or less



conducive to self-actualization. Marx's standard of practical judgment can be used to compare different social arrangements and can be used as a basis for critiquing a social arrangement for not optimizing the capacity for self-actualization. In comparing this phrasing with Marxian terminology, one is alienated when the current social arrangement is not an optimal use of the productive apparatus for self-actualization. The use of the productive apparatus in a fashion that is not optimal for self-actualization is thus an impairment to self-actualization.

In review, Marx's understanding of practical standards and nature can be stated as:

- (1) Nature is objectively real for Marx and the regularities of its natural processes can be discovered via material activity.
- (2) Material activities are the use of natural properties to appropriate other natural properties. Material activities can be accumulated over time and change humans' relation to nature and other humans.
- (3) Social activities are actions performed to promote the class interests of a specific social form.
- (4) Material activities can satisfy direct and indirect needs of people whether physical or otherwise. That is satisfaction of the need for caloric intake and a life's work.

(5) Social activities are used to satisfy class interests.

(6) Marx finds that material activities that appropriate nature are real, but social activities obscure this reality, thus a means of determination is needed to critique social forms and discern reality as the material and the natural.

(7) Marx implicitly develops a standard of practical action that can be used to determine the reality of the material and the natural and to critique social forms.

### **Does Nature Have Value?**

This question is not about whether or not nature has exchange value, but whether nature is intrinsically valuable, as in a deontological sense. In this brief section I will discuss whether or not nature has any dignity; that is intrinsic value. Marx finds that nature is useful to us: “A thing can be a use-value without being a value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labour. Air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forests, etc. fall in this category. A thing can be useful, and a product of human labour, without being a commodity. He who satisfies his own need with the product of his own labour admittedly creates use-values, but not commodities.”<sup>16</sup> Also, Marx finds that it is prudent to preserve nature for the use of future generations.<sup>17</sup> Nature is necessary for human existence and the development of abilities, but this does not mean that nature has

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<sup>16</sup> *C-1* p.131; *MEW (23)* p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> *C-3* p. 949.

dignity. Marx finds that the degradation of natural processes when human existence is threatened, or possible action diminished, can be considered harmful to humans.<sup>18</sup>

But, he does not seem to find that the degradation of natural processes is a violation of the dignity of nature. But, as we see, Marx does have practical standards for humans and their use of nature. His practical theory, at least as regards nature, is just not deontological. But, the use of nature for enjoyment is not excluded in this conception. Nature can be a use-value that satisfies the need of enjoyment, whether in hiking, rowing, or gazing at it. The quality of our lives would be immensely lessened if we lost such need satisfactions. But, this still only means that nature is useful and not that it has dignity.

### **Discussion and Definition of Terms**

*Nature and Natural processes:* For our practical philosophical purposes, nature is composed of matter, energy, and the processes that occur through matter and energy. The natural is the processes of nature. These processes are the regularities of matter and energy that can be discovered and used through human material activity. In this work, natural processes and the processes of nature will be use interchangeably. As we will see below, natural processes are not the same

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<sup>18</sup> *C-1* p. 638; *MEW (23)* pp. 529-530.

as the activities of humans, even if human activity is composed of natural processes.

*Material:* The material is the components of nature, matter and energy, and natural processes that have to be subject to the activities of humans. An example of this can be brought out by a distinction: we could have a waterfall that develops due to the natural process of erosion, or a waterfall can be built through the activities of humans manipulating the process of nature, water flow, gravity, the impermeability of stone, etc. Following Cohen, I find that the productive forces are material.<sup>19</sup>

*Activity:* An activity is something done by a human. Examples of activities are humans digging for tubers, humans calculating the trajectory of planets, humans teaching other humans Kant, humans engineering a bridge, humans building a bridge, humans testing theories, humans killing other humans, humans treating other humans' wounds, and humans telling fantastical tales, to name a few. I have defined activities as exclusive to humans to preserve the distinction between the natural and the material. This is done in order to maintain two important conceptions: the independent reality of nature, and the activity of discovery. One could discover the independent processes of nature via material activities, in this case experiments. By separating natural process and material

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<sup>19</sup> Cohen, G.A. *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence (Expanded Edition)*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

activity, we can maintain an epistemic theory that allows us to have an accumulated conception of knowledge and not a formal one. Some examples of the accumulation of knowledge that preserves the distinction between natural processes and explanations of experiments are: the explanation of a pendulum is no longer understood as restricted sub-lunar motion but as the effect of gravity upon a moving body; the motion of a thrown object is no longer explained due to impetus but is understood as energy transferred to the object.

I have excluded other organisms as performers of activities mostly because Marx does so. Marx seems to find there is a difference between human's and animals in regard to our different abilities to plan mentally. The famous example in Marx's writings is of the spider and the architect, where the architect plans his construction ahead of time as a mental picture whereas the spider does not. I myself find the distinction to be of little importance other than to maintain the difference between activities and processes. We construct experiments and develop explanations in order to understand our own behaviors and our own physical processes. The line between the processes of our body and the activities that explain them is a fine line since we use our own natural processes to perform activities.

The distinction between natural process and activity is a reasonable distinction based on humans *actively* causing the occurrence. I actively eat food

and I passively digest food; so eating food is an activity and digesting food is a process. This distinction becomes blurred with something like sleep, since I may actively not go to sleep but I will eventually pass out due to the process of rest. We have learned how to manipulate our natural processes with chemicals that can prevent process of rest, at least for a time. This sleep example muddies the distinction between process and activity to a negligible degree. Thus, an activity is humans damming a river by filling it with fallen wood, as opposed to the natural processes of beavers filling the river with wood, or the natural processes wood being washed down stream to a point where it could bottleneck and dam the river.

Also, Marx's consideration that humans produce their world first by conceiving it where the spider does not, establishes a line between human activity and animal activity. Since humans can harness animal activity (a sheep's wool, a cow's milk, a silkworm's silk, a chicken's egg, mold cultures for cheese and yogurt, let alone raising animals themselves for food) it appears that humans use life in ways that other animals do not. But, what of the fish or the bird that cleans a shark's or hippopotamus' teeth? I think the distinction between the activities and the natural processes is quite slippery, and why we think it is not slippery or think that there must be a hard and fast rule is an inherited philosophic bias towards humans as different than other animals. For the purposes of this

dissertation we will consider activity as something actively done by a human being.

*Material activity:* A material activity is an activity performed by a human that uses natural processes. As I stated above, material activity is the use of natural processes, matter and energy, in which the appropriation of nature is qualitatively changed from the point of natural processes alone. When I speak of practices, this can be considered as a term that is isomorphic with the phrase human material activity. Material activities are not value free. Material activities can be perverted from their material end by types of social promotion.

*Social:* The social is ideas, distinctions, or conceptions *associated* with the material and/or material activities but that are unnecessary for explaining material activities or performing material activities. Although the social may endorse or promote a material activity, it is not a material activity. Following Cohen I find that production relations are social.<sup>20</sup> Class distinctions are social distinctions. My use of social and social activity in this dissertation is restricted to this definition. Broader definitions of the social are not used. To stress the use of the term social in this dissertation, I am only using the term social to designate the phenomena that are related to the promotion of material activities. The social, in this dissertation does not include, communication, knowledge, or inter-personal

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<sup>20</sup> Cohen, G.A. *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. p. 98.

activities. In my use, the social does not include friendships, acquaintanceships, or some group relationships (see *Groups* below). But the social does include class relationships.

*Social Activity:* Social activities are activities that can promote material activities but are not necessary for the performance of material activities. An example Cohen uses to distinguish the two types of activities is the difference between organizing production and policing workers.<sup>21</sup> Organizing production is a material activity, since it involves humans using or altering nature and/or natural processes; whereas, policing workers is a promotion of certain ends of a production process other than the furnishing of a product, such as patterns of distribution, remuneration for labor performed, and speed of production (to name a few).<sup>22</sup>

*Material relations:* Material relations are between humans and material activities and/or the material. An example of this is the relationship between humans and the activity of damming the river, or the relationship between humans and the river dammed by humans. Following Cohen, work relations are material relations, since they are between humans and matter regarding material manipulation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen, G.A. *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> Concerning promotion or motivation as a social activity in Cohen *Karl Marx's Theory of History* cit. p. 32-33.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, G.A. *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. pp. 111-114.



*Social relations:* Social relations are between humans and social activities.

An example of this is the relationship between humans and the activity of policing. The activity of policing involves the acknowledgment of some people acting as the police and some that are policed, receptive or not to the police's position of social authority. But, it is important to note, the activity of policing can occur regardless of all members of a society acknowledging the dominant social positions. Thus, there can be a social situation where social activities are being performed outside of the acknowledged social apparatus. An example of this is an invading country implementing its social distinctions upon a populace who does not acknowledge the distinction or the invading country's social apparatus. Another example is when people are forced into a proletarian status. They did not do so willingly, but are socially determined as proletarian labour nonetheless. The forcing of people to acknowledge social positions may involve physical violence. But, unlike the material, the social as such does not physically exist. A courthouse is just a structure; it is the place where legal judging occurs only under certain social arrangements.<sup>24</sup>

*Note on the distinction between the material and the social:* The social only exists as people's intentions, whereas the material exists regardless of people's intentions. Example: juridical laws only exist as long as there is a

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<sup>24</sup> See Cohen, G.A. *Karl Marx's Theory of History* chapter 8 on this and related issues.

society that maintains them as intentions to their actions. But the building that was built, the courthouse, to implement the law may exist after those intentions are given up by a society. This building may become a school, a home, a factory, etc.

*Groups:* Humans can form groups for various purposes: friendship, entertainment, producing use-values, political ends, etc. We can also understand humans forming groups that are not voluntary, such as grouping people due to racial or sexual stereotypes, and important for us, grouping people as society. In this dissertation I will sometimes discuss people as acting as groups in contradistinction to people acting socially. Since this dissertation is using the term ‘social’ and ‘socially’ in a very limited sense, my use of the term group or groups is to identify ways people interact with each other that are not isomorphic with the social relations of class and social activities of promoting class interests whether directly or ideologically. With my use of the term group we can identify many interactions between people that are not inherently determined by class relations. Interactions such as producing use-values, creating art, or spending time with friends can all be done without class distinctions. These examples separate the use of the term social from a sociological use.

My intent is to identify and develop implicit standards of action in Marx’s work. A standard of action is to prescribe outcomes and not only to describe

current situations. The latter task of only description is a sociological one, whereas the practical philosophic task is to understand current situations and explain why these situations do not fulfill a certain standard. Marx wants us to understand humans existing in groups that do not have to adhere to the capitalist social standards of class and the social activity of capital accumulation. Humans can interact as groups without the social covering of capitalism.

*Society:* In this dissertation, the term society is used to refer to groups of people existing in a defined geographic area with a determinate political arrangement corresponding to a determinate mode of production. A nation state is a society. The international world is a society. A society is not the same as the social. Most societies, such as a capitalist one, are composed of social relations and material relations current to the time under examination. A socialist society, according to some interpretations, may only be composed of material relations.

*Self-actualization of one's projects:* Self-actualization of one's projects is the satisfaction of needs. The term project is to entail that many needs - education, health, employment, and a life's work – are not immediately satisfied; their satisfaction can take a long period of time.

*The Materialist Standard of Practical Action:* The materialist standard of practical action is the universal self-actualization of one's projects achieved when one can reasonable access the historically current technological apparatus

according to the minimum possibilities of production and distribution without infringing on others' self-actualizations of their projects according to the same reasonable access. In a more succinct form, the materialist standard of practical action is reasonable universal self-actualization of one's projects.

## **Part I: The Distinction between Natural Processes and Material Activities**

### **1. General Remarks on the Distinction between the Natural and the Material**

Marx understands humans as natural beings. What it means for humans to be natural beings is to identify human activities as originating from their natural status. This does not mean that humans as natural beings entails a lack of conscious choice or that there is a timeless, as apart from material development, authentic state that humans are in or should aspire to. Understanding humans as natural beings means that for humans to self-actualize their projects one needs to take their natural condition into account as an ultimate factor.

Basing self-actualization upon humans' natural condition is in contrast to various other practical standards, too many to discuss at length here. One mistakenly similar standard to a materialist one is utilitarianism, which at first blush may seem to be materialist also. Considering Mill's standard of utility, maximum pleasure and minimum pain, the difference with Marx is evident. Marx emphasizes the material achievement of one's projects whereas Mill's standard is concerned with comparable psychic states. As I have stated previously, the closest thinker in regard to Marx's practical standard is Aristotle.<sup>25</sup> I will not dwell on the similarities here, nor do I intend to suggest that Aristotle is a materialist. For both Aristotle and Marx the desired outcomes of actions are

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<sup>25</sup> This similarity between Marx and Aristotle has been identified by Wood (2004).

evaluated not on pleasure or moral law but the best fulfillment of humans' natural capacities. These considerations of practical standards will be dealt with in the third chapter.

This chapter is concerned with the division between the natural and the material for Marx. This division, as described in the introduction, is based on the difference between humans' natural processes and humans' material activities. These two can be distinguished as the natural capacities of humans, such as the capacity to manipulate one's physical environment or the capacity to digest food, and material activities, such as the ability to farm, the ability to draw a map, or the ability to conduct a rigorous experiment. The difference between the material and the natural for Marx is the distinction between historically developed actions and those aspects of humans' biological existence that are bracketed apart from actions. This line between the natural and the material is quite fine, as we shall see. The isolation of humans as biological beings apart from their activities is difficult to understand since human material action can change our biological possibilities. Simply, the line between the material and the natural is one of control by action. The material is the control of natural processes through human actions, whereas the natural is natural processes apart from such controlling actions. This line between the material and the natural is barely perceptible in Marx's early writings. The distinction is really between idealist conceptions of

activity and historically determined actions. These historically determined actions form the place that Marx will fill with material activity. This line becomes progressively more distinct throughout his writing career, with a definite conceptual plateau arrived at in the *German Ideology*.

Marx defines the natural capacities and material activities of humans to be separate, but not exclusively, from social activities. The social includes economic modes of production, political relations, and religious conceptions. I emphasize human activities as free from social relations since social relations are able to masquerade as material relations.<sup>26</sup> This demystification of social relations is one of Marx's main focuses in his writings. Marx's critiques of social relations are common in his works, where he juxtaposes them against actual material relations.

The division and relationship of the material and the social will be dealt with specifically in chapter 2. Since social relations can help or hinder the development of material relations, that is, the productive forces, the interaction of the material and the social is complex. The complexity of this relationship still does not overshadow Marx's understanding of the material as the real. This overlap and mystification of the material, and humans' natural interests, is why, I think, Marx spent so much time critiquing social relations. Trying to understand

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<sup>26</sup> The distinction of whether all social relations are alienating is presently left aside. Some Marxian philosophers, such as G.A. Cohen, find communism to be the overcoming of social relations and not just the overcoming of alienating ones. See *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*, pp. 105-108 and 129-133.

what is essential human activity is a key component to his critique, not only scientifically, but also in regard to Marx's commitment to human emancipation; this accordingly merits the development of a rigorous standard of practical action. Marx uses philosophic critique and social scientific inquiry to understand people's material conditions in order to properly conceive what emancipation can and should be. The illusion of social relations has hindered people from comprehending what their real condition is, and following this, what are rational actions.

From his earliest writings onward Marx considers the real to be the natural world. How Marx considers the natural world in respect to human emancipation and his conception of materialism does develop over time. I will review Marx's work in historical order to reconstruct his understanding of what it means for humans to be natural beings, and through this review also to understand what is distinctive about Marx's practical materialism. The understanding of humans as natural beings that Marx develops and settles on is produced early in his writing career. His later writings are elaborations of this conception but the core structure is maintained. This core understanding conceives of humans as essentially corporeal, objective, and organic creatures. Understanding humans in these terms is to describe humans as physical creatures that exist in a reciprocal relationship with other creatures and things, in particular, the natural world. The descriptive



term that is left out of this description of humans is the historical. A more determinant understanding of humans is not only their corporeal, objective, and organic status, but also the historical dimension of their activities, their material existence. Since the material is the acquiring of skills, abilities and knowledge of the natural world over time, it is distinct from humans understood apart from history. The addition of history in understanding humans in the development of the distinction between the material and the social is latent in Marx's writings before the *German Ideology*, and from this work onward the distinction is explicit. Marx critiques Feuerbach for not making this distinction. Because of this shortcoming he finds Feuerbach to remain effectively idealist. This consideration will be dealt with in greater detail in the sections below. But first, we need to cover the build up to the distinction between the natural and the material.

## **2. Previous Literature about Marx and Nature**

Before moving into considering Marx's early writings, I wish to clarify the distinction between my position and two other commentators on Marx's understanding of nature, Alfred Schmidt and George Márkus.<sup>27</sup> Both of these thinkers correctly identify the naturalness of Marx's conceptions of humans and

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<sup>27</sup> The works in question are Schmidt's *The Concept of Nature in Marx* and Márkus' *Marxism and Anthropology*.

human activity, but they miss the distinction between the natural, the material and the social. G.A. Cohen has effectively argued for a distinction between the material and the social in his work *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*. Schmidt and Márkus find that there is only a distinction between the natural and the social for Marx, thereby they leave out material activities. This lacuna in their work leads them to not effectively identify the act of discovery that material activity is comprised of. The line between the material and the natural is the line between what is known and what is not, in regard to physical phenomena. This knowledge is achieved through material exploration of the natural world. Also, leaving out material actions causes Schmidt and Márkus to also misunderstand the development of material history apart from social history. This distinction between the material and the social makes the critique of social forms almost impossible because there is not a standpoint to critique them from. My approach to understanding Marx's practical materialism is to add the explanation of material activities identified by Cohen to the traditional determinations of natural and social that Schmidt and Márkus use. This three-term understanding of practical materialism helps identify and clear up problems of determinism and social critique. My analysis of Marx's practical materialism departs in many ways from Schmidt's and Márkus' work.

Schmidt's work on Marx's understanding of nature has no unifying thesis. His book is about the concept of nature in the writings of Marx but he draws heavily on Hegel without adequately stating their differences. Schmidt makes the mistake of confusing Hegel's position of nature with Marx's at many points in his work. The use of Hegel's categories of nature to explain Marx's understanding of nature being controlled through labour is not substantiated in Marx's writings.<sup>28</sup> Schmidt, in general, confuses the Hegelian philosophic journey of Spirit, where one gains self-knowledge, with the Marxian practical project of need satisfaction. The Hegelian position is pre-determined where the Marxian one is indeterminate. The problems of identity and non-identity are not of central importance in Marx's practical philosophy; as for Hegel, identity and reconciliation are intrinsic to his project.<sup>29</sup> Schmidt, at these points in his work, tries to turn Marx into Hegel. This would not be a problem if Schmidt were trying to develop a synthesis of their two positions. But, he is not trying to do this; he is rather using Hegel as a stand-in for Marx. This use of Hegel obscures Schmidt's analysis of Marx's understanding of nature.

Schmidt correctly finds that for Marx human existence is determined by their appropriation of nature and that we can never understand human existence without also understanding how group activities structure our appropriation of

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<sup>28</sup> Schmidt, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Schmidt, p. 137

nature.<sup>30</sup> But Schmidt does not fully identify the distinctions between natural processes, material actions, and social actions. By only identifying that humans are not identical with nature,<sup>31</sup> he lumps all human actions into the social without determining the difference between actions that manipulate natural processes and actions that only promote this manipulation: “Although nature and its laws subsist independently of all human consciousness and will for the materialist Marx, it is only possible to formulate and apply statements about nature with the help of social categories.”<sup>32</sup> This is correct at face value. Our understanding of nature is only possible through our appropriation of it by material labouring activity. Nonetheless, Marx wants to distinguish the social determinations of appropriation (the development of productive forces only in agreement with capitalist accumulation) from the material-historical determinations of appropriation (the physical possibilities of need satisfaction).

Schmidt groups the demands of class interests with the materially determined results of natural processes appropriations. The distinction between natural processes and modes of production is necessary for Marx’s critique of orthodox political economy (see section 14 of this dissertation). Also, the distinction between a mode of production’s class relations and the untapped possibilities of the productive forces is the basis for new human relationships and

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<sup>30</sup> Schmidt, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Schmidt, p. 74 and p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Schmidt, p. 70.

societal organization. Schmidt packs together material activities and social activities under the term “social categories” without stressing the conflict between unmet human needs and the possibility of meeting those needs. Schmidt’s reading of Marx’s understanding of nature loses this key distinction between the material and the social. His reading, correspondingly, does not identify that Marx’s critique of orthodox political economy is dependent on the materialist determination of human history as separate from a social determination of human history.

Márkus has similar problems in his analysis of Marx’s understanding of humans and nature. First, Márkus does not identify the distinction between material activity and social activities sufficiently in his work. He contrasts “natural environment” with the “*social-cultural milieu*,” finding the latter “replaces” the former for humans.<sup>33</sup> This distinction forgets that Marx found that people have to be in continuous interaction with natural processes to live and create new ways of living.<sup>34</sup> Humans never overcome their natural characteristics; we may become more adept at satisfying our needs, and we may learn more about natural regularities, but we never replace the natural world. Márkus’ distinction loses the universality of material developments. The development of tools, techniques, and scientific knowledge are not culturally

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<sup>33</sup> Márkus, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *C-I* p. 283; *MEW (23)* p. 192.

specific for Marx. People of any culture or society can learn or use these achievements or devices without also needing the culture or society of their discovery: “Labour, then, as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself.”<sup>35</sup> By missing this distinction between material actions and social actions, Márkus loses the powerful revolutionary aspect of material development as congruent but not isomorphic with social development. If material development can be separated from social development at the point of social breakdown, the material use of the productive forces can continue past their social use. In other words, the means of production and labour power is not culturally specific, and thus human labour is not fixed to certain class relationships.

Second, Márkus’ analysis is overly dependent on the *1844 Manuscripts* in developing Marx’s understanding. This reliance on the *1844 Manuscripts* causes Márkus to utilize the idea of humans becoming naturalized in their use of nature even though this idea is dropped by Marx.<sup>36</sup> Marx seems to never use this idea again (see section 4 below). But, not only does Márkus’ reliance on the idea of naturalizing humans through labour neglect the development of Marx’s thought

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<sup>35</sup> *C-1* p. 133; *MEW (23)* p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Márkus, p. 14.

about nature, this idea has many problems that Marx wants to avoid. The idea of humans becoming naturalized through their labour merits a progressively developing identity between humans and nature that Marx critiques within the *German Ideology*.<sup>37</sup> An identity between humans and nature could maintain that certain modes of production may be considered natural for humans, meaning that all critique of this mode is pointless since it is in agreement with the ends of human activities. Humans are always natural and can always develop their abilities; there is no set of abilities that is more human than another set. Also, the naturalizing of humans through labour presupposes that humans can become identical with nature, a position that places experiment as subordinate to thought. Marx's comments in *Theses on Feuerbach* are in contradistinction to this position, in particular thesis two.

### **3. Works before the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*- Establishing Human's Natural Existence**

This part will be a review of *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* and *On the Jewish Question*. I think a consideration of these early pre-1844

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<sup>37</sup> *GI* pp. 44-45; *MEW* (3) pp. 42-43.

*Manuscript* works will provide an exposition of Marx's developing understanding of humans as natural.

*Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*

*Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* was written by Marx in 1843. In general, this work is Marx criticizing Hegel for putting the cart before the horse, or the Idea before empirical phenomena. What is of interest for us here is an early form of Marx's conception of the relationship of the natural, the material, and the social that he develops in his critique of Ethical Life chapter. A key portion of Marx's critique is to identify the historical and material causes of the various social relations that Hegel (as Marx's criticism goes) cites as manifestations of the Idea, as opposed to what Marx finds them to really be, empirical phenomena. In *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* one can identify an early attempt by Marx to develop a material understanding of human activity and use this understanding to criticize conceptions of social relations that do not conform to such an understanding.

Marx's criticism proceeds along the lines of describing the false identity of civil society and the state; this critique is structured around an understanding Marx has of humans' essential characteristics, which is falsely addressed in Hegel's conception of society. This understanding of humans' essence is used in



turn by Marx to criticize Hegel's conception of society. Marx doesn't effectively develop a concise theory of humans' essential characteristics in the *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, but he sketches the basic outlines of such a theory. He does this by showing how Hegel's conception of society mystifies what is real. Marx identifies Hegel's mystifying of society as the false determination of social relations as moments of the Idea, and not the result of historical or material development. Marx describes this as,

The 'end of the state' and the 'powers of the state' are mystified [*werden mystifiziert*] because they are made to appear as 'modes of existence' of 'substance' and are thus separated from their real existence: 'mind knowing and willing itself, educated mind'.<sup>38</sup>

Hegel takes such social relations as the monarch, civil servants, legislature, civil society, the Estates, and the family, to name a few, as modes stemming from Idea/substance and not from what is their real origin: the result of a historical processes.

In the above quote Marx hints at what humans' essential characteristics are with the terms "mind knowing and willing itself, educated mind."<sup>39</sup> These terms are used in contrast to the terms "modes of existence of substance." It is only in contrast to these latter terms that the criticism Marx provides can be

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<sup>38</sup> *EW* p. 73; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> "*dem sich wissend und wollend Geist, dem gebildeten Geist*", *ibid.*

understood. Marx's critique of Hegel's conception of the state is that actual phenomena, the ends and powers of the state, are understood as stemming from Hegel's idea of society as opposed to society's worldly historical development. Marx's critique of Hegel's conception of society is based on an understanding that Hegel is using a flawed epistemological model to understand social relations.

This epistemological model, in regard to the terms from the above quote, provides us with the understanding that in the evaluating of social relations and their possibilities we must approach them from the standpoint of *a knowing subject that is educated in history and can devise (will) possibilities*. This is in contrast to Hegel's standpoint of *a knowing subject that can know the possibilities of social relations through the modes of the idea*. The strength of the contrast concerns the cogency of one's knowledge, one that privileges the empirical. In short, the real world is the external world we know through empirical data and not through an idea; and a critique of social relations has to take this epistemological basis into consideration.

This epistemological critique of Hegel's conception of society is a quite raw and early form of Marx's understanding of material activity. But the kernel of his more developed understanding is present: a privileging of the empirical over the ideational. As we shall see later on, Marx's empiricism is not limited in understanding the scope of human activity to our current impressions. Rather,

Marx's empiricism is a critique of two conceptions of action: the ideational conception of activity above, and the extreme empiricism that takes current social forms as eternal social forms. Marx's criticism of both of these conceptions of action is that they are limiting, either by the limits of our ideational system or the limits of our current impressions. Marx finds that understanding our changing conceptions of what is real is based on what type of material and social relations our social form is comprised of. This understanding of the possibilities for action has the advantage of being historical and material, as opposed to the two previous conceptions that are fixed and/or supersensible. Idealist or extreme empiricist social theories' main flaws are that they present conceptions of the world that do not attend to specific historical periods and reduce the problems of a period to unalterable and necessary relationships.

In continuing our discussion of Marx's privileging of the empirical over the ideational in understanding humans' essential characteristics, we should consider this quote:

The activities and agencies of the state are bound to individuals (the state is effective only through individuals), but not to the individual conceived as a *physical* being, only as a being of the *state*; they are bound to the *state-like qualities* of the individual. It is therefore ridiculous for Hegel to assert that these offices 'are linked with particular persons in *an external and contingent way*'. On the contrary, they are linked to the individual by a *vinculum substantiale*, by an essential quality in him. They are the natural outcome of that essential quality. The confusion arises because

Hegel regards the activities and agencies of the state abstractly, for themselves, as opposed to particular individuality; in so doing he forgets that particular individuality is a human function and that the activities and agencies of the state are likewise human functions [*menschliche Funktionern sind*]; he forgets that the essence of the 'particular person' is not his beard and blood and abstract *Physis*, but his social quality, and that the affairs of state are nothing but the modes of action and existence of the social qualities [*soziale Qualität*] of men. It is self-evident, therefore, that in so far as individuals are to be regarded as the vehicles of the functions and powers of the state, it is their social and not their private capacity that should be taken into account.<sup>40</sup>

What is of interest for us here is the criticizing of individuals as abstract and the favoring of social individuals. This critique is in the same vein as we have seen above. Hegel is putting the functions of the state first and stating that certain qualities held by individual people follow from these functions. Marx understands this situation as one where the state is a product of social qualities of individuals. That is the state and its functions are the result of certain social relations between people. (Marx shows later on that the two major social relations that produce the state are classes relating to production and holdovers from feudalism, the monarch in particular.) The functions that people fulfill in the state are due to certain social relations between people and not because people are just alive (having beards and blood).

These findings can build upon what we have previously established regarding humans' essential characteristics. The real is the historical

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<sup>40</sup> *EW* p. 77-78; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 22.

circumstances of a society we have been born into and not the logical composition of society. Again we see that Marx identifies an epistemological problem in Hegel's conception of society. Hegel places the idea before the objects. Marx finds that the state is a result of certain historical processes and not the ideational aspects of a conception of society. People's social situation is the result of activities of people. A person's existence as a member of the state is not logical necessity but the outcome of particular actions by particular people.

One could understand humans' essential characteristics as the result of the of the history of human actions and not the parameters of our cognitions. In understanding humans' essential characteristics in respect to Marx's critique of Hegel, we can see that Marx is concerned with how we understand social relations. Identifying social relations as the result of logical categories fetters the possible activities of knowing subjects by understanding these social relations as the limits of possible social relations. But, identifying social relations as the result of historical occurrences enables one to understand these social relations as changeable. Conceiving of social relations as the result of logical categories is not what a study of one's social form renders. If one finds that the current social relations are due to the parameters of the idea, this is to ignore the activities of people that actually produced these relations. Considering actions as

manifestations of the ideas endorses the conception that social change is pre-determined or, perhaps worse, unnecessary.

In the above passage we can see the development of the division between the material and the social as the consideration that the functions of the state are “human functions” and “social qualities of men.” We don’t find a succinct division between the material and the social that is present in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, but there is the realization that the activities of people can be divided into material and social actions. Here there is a blurring of the distinction between the material and the social when the functions of the state are considered as the result of human functions and social qualities. Social relations, when developed fully in Marx’s later work, are coverings to material relations. That is, a material process has a social covering due primarily to what production relations are shaping the material process. There is some hint in the above passage that state activities are material activities with a certain social covering; but there also appears to be a conflation of the material and the social in this passage. Material relations and social relations are both empirical phenomena; both, then, are real phenomena that produce our social forms. Marx is identifying material and social relations too closely in this passage, seemingly because both conform to the epistemological standard he has developed. Marx has yet to introduce the distinction between them, even though he is effectively critiquing an obscured

understanding of social relations, mistakenly described by Hegel as actuality. The distinction between the natural and the material is absent from Marx's critique of Hegel. This may account for Marx's unclear distinction between material activities and social activities. Marx has a distinct criticism of Hegel's idealist social theory, but his own social theory is underdeveloped at this point of his life to effectively provide a counterpoint. Marx has analyzed why Hegel's idealist system is on poor epistemological footing but he hasn't yet determined what is actuality. This lack of an explanation of what is actual prevents Marx from developing, with the tools he uses in *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, a sound system of human action. With what Marx has developed at this point he is trapped in only social relations. He has no ground from which he can critique social-historical notions. As we shall see, material action is the basis of actuality Marx identifies to launch his critique.

### *On the Jewish Question*

*On the Jewish Question* was written by Marx as a criticism of Bruno Bauer's ideas of freedom and politics. Marx's criticism of Bauer's idea is reminiscent of his critique of Hegel, in the sense that Bauer is confusing social relations with what is materially essential. simply, Bauer confuses true emancipation with a political distinction between the public and the private

concerning religion. The distinction that Bauer endorses is that religion should be relegated to the private, thus eliminating a religious caste system (with Jewish people as not full members of a state). With religion out of the public, the state now has a supposedly emancipated citizenry. Marx quotes Bauer,

The Jew should not be emancipated because he is a Jew, because he has such an admirable code of universally human ethical principles. Rather, the *Jew* will recede behind the *citizen* and be a *citizen*, in spite of the fact that he is a Jew and is to remain a Jew;...<sup>41</sup>

Marx finds this answer to a religious caste system to be a rearrangement of social relations but not a demystification of them. The social relation of religion is still a consideration in Bauer's political emancipation. People, in considering actions, can identify, 'what are actions of a citizen?' or, 'what are the actions of a person of religion *q*?' The retention of social relations is for Marx a limitation of people's capacities and the preservation, even if relegated to the private, of illusions.

In his critique of Bauer's ideas, Marx begins to develop an understanding of humans as materially active. As Marx did in his above critique of Hegel's idea of the state, Marx contrasts a proto-material conception of what is essential to people's existence, and thus their emancipation, to a social relation. There are

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<sup>41</sup> Marx quotes this passage from Bauer's "The Capacity of Present-Day Jews and Christians to Become Free." in *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz*, Zurich 1843, p. 57. *EW* p. 214; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 143.



two social relations that Marx critiques in *On the Jewish Question*: the religious and the political. Marx's critique of the division of the material and the social deals with these same topics of the religious and the political; he identifies them both as social phenomena.

Marx's critique of the religious and the political is interrelated; he critiques political emancipation for ignoring what religions and individuals really are, and the religious for being a mystified conception of people's existence. His critique is, on the one hand, a critique of trying to divide social existence into public and private, and, on the other, a critique of religion as mystification. To quote Marx,

The difference between the religious man and the citizen is the difference between the tradesman and the citizen, between the day-labourer and the citizen, between the landowner and the citizen, between the *living individual* [*lebendigen Individuum*] and the citizen. The contradiction which exists between religious man and political man is the same as exists between the *bourgeois* and the *citoyen*, between the member of civil society and his *political lion's skin*.<sup>42</sup>

The splitting of man into *public* and his *private* self and the *displacement* of religion from the state to civil society is not one step in the process of political emancipation but its *completion*. Hence political emancipation neither abolishes nor tries to abolish man's *real* religiosity.<sup>43</sup>

The division of one's social existence into public and private is a false division. It is impossible to divide the social relations concerning an individual

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<sup>42</sup> *EW* p. 220-221; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 149

<sup>43</sup> *EW* p. 222; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 150.

into parts that have supposedly no interaction. This division is presented at its strongest when Marx contrasts the living individual with the citizen. How could the living individual, the organic and discrete person, engaged in manipulating nature and sustaining himself, be separated from the political individual, the citizen. Marx finds this to be contradictory, since the needs of the living individual and the political individual are inseparable because there is no complete separate field of action occupied by these two sides of a person. This is why Marx states, “The perfected political state is by its nature the *species-life* [*Gattungsleben*] of man in *opposition* to his material life [*materiallen Leben*].”<sup>44</sup> The living individual is not fully represented in political life. The material existence of the living individual is emaciated by the mistaken conception of species existence that the political assumes. Needs of a living individual (production) go unanswered in the political sphere, because the political conception of real existence does not acknowledge the community nature of these needs. The living individual is a member of a community of producers and has needs due to this membership. The political existence of this individual neglects these because political existence is founded on the division between civil society (bourgeoisie, labourer) and the state (citizen), the division between the public and the private. The state is a false totality, based on a spurious understanding of

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<sup>44</sup> *EW* p. 220; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 148.

people's material existence: "In the state, on the other hand, where he is considered to be a species-being [*Gattungswesen*], he is the imaginary member of a fictitious sovereignty, he is divested of his real individual life and filled with an unreal universality."<sup>45</sup>

This division of people's existence as public and private is not only a neglecting of their material existence and needs; it is also a neglect of the religious. Above, Marx states the divide between the religious and the political is the same between civil society and the state. Relegating one's capacity as religious to a private affair is again an attempt to divide the social existence of people into parts that cannot be separated. The religious, for Marx, is a social relation. Social relations are in contrast to material relations. Their division being that social relations are ideas that explain phenomena, often in correspondence to a certain social mode (feudalism, capitalism). Material relations are objective relations between people and things.<sup>46</sup>

Religion for Marx is not an objective relation, but a social idea. Thus the religious being relegated as private but not critiqued as a social relation produces the spurious understanding that the religious is not illusory. The preservation of

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<sup>45</sup> *EW* p. 220; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 149.

<sup>46</sup> An example of a material relation would be a garbage pick-up crew of three people consisting of one truck driver and two people who throw the garbage into the truck. A social relation would be this same crew but one of the workers is also owner of the truck and employs the other two. The social relation of employer and employee, and owner and owned, is specific to a certain social mode. On work relations and material relations see G.A. Cohen, 2000, pp. 111 ff.

the religious as private prevents the true emancipation of people, which is their objective material relations liberated from the covering of social relations.<sup>47</sup>

Social relations are extraneous to people's existences; they have no role except to preserve artificial relationships between people, whether that of king and subject, or employer and employee.

The sovereignty of man – but of man as an alien being distinct from actual man – is the fantasy, the dream, the postulate of Christianity, whereas in democracy it is a present and material reality [*sinnliche Wirklichkeit*], a secular maxim.<sup>48</sup>

The religious as a social relation is a fantasy derived from people's actual condition. It approximates reality, but since its reference is to mere ideas and not objective relations, the religious is not only spurious; it also prevents emancipation. Only by demystifying social forms that obfuscate what the material is can true emancipation be achieved. The realization that material relations are true and refusing to endorse social relations is the only way people can be emancipated.

Only when real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man has become a species-being [*Gattungswesen*] in his empirical life, his individual work and his individual relationships,

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<sup>47</sup> “All emancipation is *reduction* of the human world and of relationships to *man himself*.” *EW* p. 234; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 162.

<sup>48</sup> *EW* p. 226; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 154.

only when man has recognized and organized his *forces propres* [own forces] as social forces so that social force [*gesellschaftliche Kraft*] is no longer separated from him in the form of political force [*politischen Kraft*], only then will human emancipation be completed.<sup>49</sup>

Discovering that the material is primary for human emancipation is to understand that emancipation is only possible when the real is realized. There has to be congruence between what is real and our realization of this reality for people to be emancipated. Since the real is the material world, one must realize that one is essentially material; as stated above, one being “a species-being in his empirical life”<sup>50</sup>, is to ‘recognize’ that oneself is a material being. Recognizing oneself as a material being is to realize that what is real and objective is the physical world and not the supersensible (the religious, and as we shall see, the political).

This realization of one as essentially material is to understand that the material world is ‘one’s individual work and individual relationships.’ Thus the material world includes interaction with others in work and organization. But, these material relationships are different from political relationships. Material relationships are objective items and actions. Political relationships are ones that are mediated by political relations<sup>51</sup>; this means that material relationships can

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<sup>49</sup> *EW* p. 234; *MEGA*, I/2, pp. 162-163.

<sup>50</sup> Species-being (*Gattungswesen*) will be addressed in more detail below in the section of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*.

<sup>51</sup> Political relationships or relations are social relations and distinct from material relations. For the time being I will not talk of political relations as social relations since Marx’s terminology in the above paragraph does not stress this distinction but, I think, does conform to it. Thus, social

acquire or have acquired a political relationship that is materially unnecessary but has political meaning. The division of a work crew according to different functions of a machine is a material relationship but that which identifies the work crew as part of the private world is a political relationship. In order to overcome the mystification of the real that occurs with political relationships people need to realize that the real is their own “social force” and that “political force” is an illusion. The recognition that material and political relationships are products of people is to emancipate oneself from the supersensible. The political, like the religious, obscures our understanding of our real societal forces, our material relations.<sup>52</sup>

People can be in communication with each other, in individual relationships, without needing to use the political as a bridge between themselves. This is an important point for Marx to convey since this means that the political is strictly additional to our human material relationships. Since Marx uses individual man and individual relationship to signify real material existence and real material relations, I think there is no reason why all individual relationships have to be strictly ‘individual;’ that is, all relationships, if real, need to be between

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forces are individual relationships and political relationships or political force is a social relationship and a social justification of force.

<sup>52</sup> But this is not to say the political is extraneous to the material. The political as a social activity of promotion may influence the material development in certain ways. Avineri comments on the relationship of the political to the economic in Marx’s writings as “...the political never appears as a mere mechanistic or automatic reflection of the economic.” *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. p. 41.

people directly with no larger community. Marx's use of individual here seems to be synonymous with real, empirical life, with the objective world of objects and actions. Individual relationships seem to be relationships that have been emancipated from political relationships and not strictly 'individual,' but individual as in real and material. Groups that are large enough to be composed of people who don't all know each other could be still be real relationships.<sup>53</sup> Marx finds the physical structure of our produced society not be the problem as much as our political and religious relations that we use to regulate ourselves.<sup>54</sup>

In *On the Jewish Question* we can see that Marx is developing toward a stronger and clearer delineation of the natural, the material, and the social. In this work he has tentatively enunciated a distinction between the material and the social as the distinction between species life and the political and the religious. The lack of an understanding of the natural limits Marx's critique because it underdetermines the distinctiveness of the material, since the material is the bringing of natural phenomena under the control of human action. The problem of an insufficient basis for critique that was Marx's problem in *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* is still found in *On the Jewish Question*. Marx is

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<sup>53</sup> The political for Marx is more of a set of false conceptions concerning what our interactions are supposed to be. Marx could agree with the governance but against the political if we use the above definitions of the political as false conceptions.

<sup>54</sup> Allen W. Wood states this point as, "It is plain that Marx blames capitalist social relations, and not the technical requirements of modern industry, for the fragmentation of human beings and the impoverishment of their individual powers." From, *Karl Marx*. Routledge, New York and London, 2004. p. 47.

beginning to overcome this problem by developing a stronger conception of actuality as material activity. Marx's critique of the religious and the political is only really negative. A strong understanding of actuality to be used as counterpoint to social illusions has not yet been arrived at. As we shall see in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx begins to definitively develop material activity as actuality in distinction to both the natural and the social.

#### **4. The First Development of the Distinction between the Natural and the Material**

Marx's designation of humans as natural beings is more explicit in the *1844 Manuscripts* than in his previous writings. Marx states, "*Man is directly a natural being.*"<sup>55</sup> In the previous writings, Marx has identified human actuality as something like the natural in order to critique conceptions of humans as social, political, or religious. His defining of humans as natural beings is direct in the manuscripts and this enables Marx to define what is real, what is inter-subjectivity (important in the contrast between the community and the political), and what is beneficial to humans.

The world of physical objects and physical processes is how Marx conceives of actuality.

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<sup>55</sup> "Der Mensch ist unmittelbar Naturwesen." *MEGA*, I/2, p. 408; *EW* p. 389.



When real, corporeal *man*, his feet firmly planted on the solid earth and breathing all the powers of nature, establishes his real, objective *essential powers* as alien object by externalization [*Entäusserung*], it is not the *establishing* [*Setzen*] which is subject; it is the subjectivity of *objective essential powers* whose action must therefore be an *objective* one. An objective being acts objectively, and it would not act objectively if objectivity were not an inherent part of its essential nature. It creates and establishes only objects because it is established by objects, because it is fundamentally *nature*. In the act of establishing it therefore does not descend from its ‘pure activity’ to the *creation of objects*; on the contrary, its *objective* product simply confirms its *objective* activity, its activity as the activity of an objective, natural being.<sup>56</sup>

Marx establishes humans as corporeal, natural-organic, and physically objective.

The real existence of humans is as objective natural beings. The activities of humans are objective because they exist in a world composed of objects. Human actions are physical; they use objects, effect objects, and are affected by objects. Causation is the interaction of physical objects and not merely concepts or merely perceptions: causation is not ‘pure activity’ it is ‘objective activity.’ The subjectivity of a person as volition and will, when externalized as activity, is an objective occurrence; the actualizing of a person’s intentions takes place as physical actions that effect objects. Humans should be understood as essentially natural beings because they are organic, which means they are interconnected with the processes of the natural world. To be corporeal is to be a physical object

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<sup>56</sup> *EW* p. 389; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 407-8. *Entäusserung* and *Setzen* are the translator’s additions.

and this means to be amongst other physical objects. Marx wants to stress the realism of human existence as objects in space. Actuality is accessed through the world of objects. Human existence and activity is of organic physical beings inextricably engaged in natural processes. To understand human actuality is to understand humans essentially and simply as being in the natural world. They cannot be reduced farther than this.<sup>57</sup> This is partly Marx's criticism of Idealism.

Marx's statements, though brief, tend towards two additional claims beyond stressing that humans are corporeal, natural-organic, and physically objective. First, Marx's comments find that we can understand humans abstracted from their existence as bodies that are part of a world of physical objects engaged in natural processes. Marx will stress later on how one cannot understand humans as separate from their social world (in particular is the first paragraphs of the *Grundrisse*). But here Marx takes humans as part of the natural world as given. This could be compared to the idealist claims of being unable to think of subjects apart from awareness. Marx finds that one cannot conceive of humans apart from natural process; it is impossible. If we think of humans and all of the places we have gone, the moon, the deep sea, the highest peaks, and into the earth, we obviously need to maintain

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<sup>57</sup> As we shall see in the section on the *German Ideology* Marx does not think of humans as essentially timeless natural beings. This is Feuerbach's position. Rather, Marx conceives of humans as historical material beings that progressively bring nature under their use and control for need satisfaction. Humans can be defined as natural beings but this should not be confused with human actuality which is historically specific.

our natural requirements no matter where we are. Even more important for Marx, as we shall see, is that we cannot achieve even mundane tasks without having access to the natural world. We cannot sustain ourselves if we cannot have access to nature in various forms: food, shelter, tool, etc. This inability to access nature is easily understood in the desert or in a place where we don't know which plants to eat or can't catch fish or beasts. But this inability also occurs when we are prevented from accessing nature due to social relations. If someone owns land that we could use to grow food on, but won't allow us use the land, what are we to do, especially if there is no more open land? In the modern industrialized world this denial of access is called production lockout. Land or machine both can be used over by humans through material action to produce subsistence. They are both simply, in very different forms, access to nature.

Second, Marx's claims are a denial of idealist skepticism. Marx takes as a given that we do access the physical world and are part of it. His refutation of skepticism at first blush may not seem very philosophic since he takes not our doubts about the world but our assurances of its existence as ground for not being skeptical of it. Marx, as he states in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, finds such doubts "scholastic."<sup>58</sup> Marx considers such questions about skepticism dead ends, and the

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<sup>58</sup> See Marx's second theses on Feuerbach.

wrong way to start an inquiry about how people live and why.<sup>59</sup> More than anything Marx questions the legitimacy of the idealist basis and assumptions for philosophy. Why start with the thinking subject, why not start with the physical organic human that is a part of the system of natural processes?

Returning to the above passage, we have to remember that it appears in Marx's criticism of Hegel's conception of humans as abstract self-consciousness. That is, Marx finds that Hegel considers humans as essentially thoughts in respect to other thoughts and not physical objects in respect to other physical objects. Hegel, in conceiving humans essentially as thought, "abstracts from nature and from real man." "Nature is external to it [thought], its loss of self; it grasps nature externally, as abstract thought, but as alienated abstract thought."<sup>60</sup> In short, Marx finds that Hegel understands that "*mind* [*Geist*] alone is the *true* essence of man."<sup>61</sup> To understand the full impact of Marx's statement of humans as natural beings, one needs to place them against the conception that for Hegel humans are essentially their thoughts.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> An account of Marx's method can be found in Bertell Ollman's book *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*.

<sup>60</sup> *EW* p. 383-4; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 402.

<sup>61</sup> *EW* p. 385; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 404.

<sup>62</sup> Here is an excellent quote representing Marx's criticism of Hegel's conception of self-consciousness in regard to humans' natural status: "Hegel Describes the process of *surmounting the object of consciousness* in the following way: The *object* does not only show itself as *returning into the self*, (according to Hegel that is a *one-sided* conception of the movement, a conception which grasps only one side). Man is equated with self. But the self is only *abstractly* conceived man, man produced by abstraction. Man *is* self. His eyes, his ears, etc., have the *quality of self*; each one of his essential powers has this quality of *self*. But therefore it is quite wrong to say that

As was presented above, Marx stresses that the natural activities of humans are objective activities. He argues for this by considering that as natural beings humans are objective, and since they are objective they are among other objects. This means that when humans act they act in an objective and natural world and their activities must be understood as also objective and natural. The subjectivity of intentions can be objectified; people's thoughts can be externalized via action in the objective natural world. Thoughts are realized in action and not realized in thought; this means that objectivity is only in the physical world, we can never achieve objectivity in thought alone. Humans realize the world through their actions, they discover the world through practice; the world is not discovered as thought via thought. Marx's description of humans as really natural and objective is in contrast to his understanding of actuality expressed by Hegel, the world as thought.

As was quoted previously, Marx conceives of humans as being *directly* natural.

*Man is directly a natural being. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand equipped with natural powers, with vital powers, he is an active natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as drives [als Triebe]. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a suffering [leidendes],*

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*self-consciousness* has eyes, ears, essential powers. *Self-consciousness* is rather a quality of human nature, or the human eye, etc.; human nature is not a quality of *self-consciousness*." *EW* p. 387; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 406.

conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his drives exist outside him as *objects* independent of him; but these objects are objects of his *need*, essential objects, indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his essential powers. To say man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being with natural powers means that he has *real, sensuous objects* as the object of his being and of his vital expression, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects.<sup>63</sup>

To be a directly natural being means that there are relations and chains of dependency between objects without certain other mediations being necessary. The drives and needs of humans and animals have natural objects that they are in organic relations with. This organic relation of drives and needs to external objects is listed in this passage as a necessary relation. Marx gives examples of hunger, described by Marx as a “natural *need*,” and the relation of plant to sun: “Hunger is the acknowledged need of my body for an *object* which exists outside itself and which is indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential nature. The sun is an *object* for the plant, an indispensable object which confirms its life, just as the plant is an object for the sun, an *expression* of its life-awakening power and its *objective* essential power.”<sup>64</sup>

The organic world is a series of interconnections and dependences. The organic relationship of objects exists without a relationship of thoughts to give humans or the organic world reality. The unity of self-consciousness proposed by

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<sup>63</sup> *EW* p. 389-90; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 408.

<sup>64</sup> *EW* p. 390; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 408.

Hegel is such a relationship of thoughts maintaining reality. As we saw previously in *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, Hegel listed social relations as aspects of the idea as opposed to being products of history. Marx's example of the organic relations of physical need and object of need is to be in contrast to the relation between shapes of self-consciousness and activities, such as religion as a shape of self-consciousness and the activities of religion. *Prima facie* this seems to be a poor contrast by Marx, but he is trying to stress the reality of the natural objective world to the chimeras produced by thought alone. In contrasting the corporeal drives and needs of humans with thoughts Marx is attempting to show how the natural is the real and the shapes of self-consciousness are abstractions. The actuality of human history is how humans have objectified themselves in physical action. Their use of the natural world to sustain themselves and improve themselves is real history. The religious and the political are abstract histories of humanity. The natural existence of humans without social relations or thought relationships is an understanding of what is essentially human.

Marx is developing a counter history of human production in contrast to an ideational history of thoughts. This real history is the history of human relationships with natural processes and humans' ability to use the forces of nature. In *Private Property and Communism*, Marx states,

It can be seen how the history of *industry* [*Industrie*] and the *objective* existence of industry as it has developed is the *open* book of the essential powers of man [*menschlichen Wesenskräfte*], man's psychology present in tangible form; up to now this history has not been grasped in its connection with the *nature* of man, but only in an external utilitarian aspect, for man, moving in the realm of estrangement, was only capable of conceiving the general existence of man – religion, or history in its abstract and universal form of politics, art, literature, etc. – as the reality of man's essential powers and as *man's species-activity*.<sup>65</sup>

Human history is not the series of events comprising politics, the interpretation of people's lives in religion, or the achievements of art; *but human history is the objectification of human activities*. Objectification of activities, also called industry, is the real connection of people from today to the past. Industry is the real history of human beings because they are, as was stated above, corporeal, natural and objective. The true domain of humans is the natural, objective and corporeal world; nature is where humans really exist and where human activity achieves objectivity. Other activities, religious, political or artistic, are not the *prime* activities that humans' 'essential powers' create. Of course, humans conceive of religious ideas and fabricate religious buildings and artifacts. But the history of man is not religion qua religion, or items as religious items. Rather, human history is the accumulation of the various uses of nature. These uses of nature are material activity and should be separated out from nature as such. But

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<sup>65</sup> *EW* p. 354; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 395.



Marx has not quite reached this distinction of the difference between natural process and material activity. Nonetheless, he is on the verge of discovering it.

Why is industry the true history of humans and not something else?

Marx's argument is trying to persuade us that the end that is best for people to strive toward is to increase people's ability to physically objectify.<sup>66</sup> It could be easily argued, except by feudal reactionaries, that our physical existence is better when we have a greater ability to control nature; *that, is to have the increased ability to objectively satisfy our needs*. This objectification includes the sustainability of satisfaction.<sup>67</sup>

But, increased ability to control nature, as the definition of *better*, does not mean that is all there is. So why does Marx find industry to be the true human history of the essential powers of man? Marx's justification is couched in a discussion of science's object. Marx finds that the achievement of natural science outpaces the achievements of "idealist" or "philosophic" science. Idealist science "*primly abstracts from this large area [industry] of human labour.*"<sup>68</sup> Whereas the "*natural sciences* have been prolifically active and have gathered together an ever growing mass of material." Marx even goes on to say that "natural science has intervened in and transformed human life all the more *practically* through

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<sup>66</sup> This is just another way of saying the same thing in Marx's mature terminology of 'increased development of the productive forces.'

<sup>67</sup> This possibility of certain productive modes' capabilities to sustainability satisfy needs, and to not just satisfy needs, is an intrinsic aspect to 'developing the productive forces.'

<sup>68</sup> *EW* p. 354; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 395.

industry and has prepared the conditions for human emancipation;” and, “*Industry* is the *real* historical relationship of nature, and hence of natural science, to man.”<sup>69</sup>

Marx’s justification that the true domain of human activity is the use of the natural world can be broken down into the following points: 1) the use of the natural world is the place where much of human activity occurs, 2) humans have been able to achieve greater access to the natural world through natural science as industry, as opposed to idealist/philosophic natural science, 3) human emancipation is possible because of the development of industry. Points 1 and 2 alone are not enough to substantiate the natural world is the true domain of human activity since combined they state only that much of human activity occurs in the natural world and natural science has increased the scope of that activity. Point 3, with 1 and 2 as precursors, excludes competing activities as being able to provide the best end for people to strive toward. Only the achievements of industry can provide the basis for human emancipation. If this is the case, then emancipation is something industry can offer and other activities (religious realizations/states, political accomplishments, artistic productions) cannot.

What does it mean that emancipation can only have its basis in industry? This would seem to entail that material objects – which are nature manipulated by

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<sup>69</sup> *EW* p. 355; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 395-6.

people - would be the ground, but not necessarily the entirety, of human emancipation. I find this to be a consideration of two conceptions on Marx's part: 1) the real history of humans is industry, and 2) the control of industry's potential is the basis of emancipation. The first consideration is a statement of what is real and the second is a statement of how the real possibilities can be achieved. Both these statements can be rephrased as: since humans are essentially corporeal, organic, and objective creatures they can *only* exist if they attend to these essential properties. If humans are unable to understand themselves as what they essentially are, and are unable to actively work towards meeting the needs that stem from these essential properties, then they will not be able to pursue effectively all other activities. I say effectively since other activities may be practiced in truncated form. Human emancipation is when humans' essential properties – corporeal, organic, and objective – are realized, and the needs stemming from these properties are met. This conception of emancipation is held by Marx throughout his career, as we shall see.

With this said, I think we need a more concrete description of these essential properties. Since humans are essentially corporeal, organic, and objective creatures this means that they humans are physical objects in an environment. As we know of Marx's description cited above, humans exist in a reciprocal relationship with the natural world, humans have needs that are

satisfied by natural environments. This satisfaction of need I think moves beyond the example of hunger Marx gives since industrial natural science is the means towards human emancipation. Humans not only rely on the natural environment for their biological needs, the natural environment through human manipulation is also the foundation for the increased satisfaction of needs and their expansion. One could say that the history of industry is the history of the increased satisfaction of needs and their expansion. Thus, humans are able to better meet their needs through the achievements of industry. The weight of this point is best conveyed by showing how much of our activities are dependent on the achievements of industry. Most important is understanding the achievements of industry in reducing the time needed to perform certain activities. Marx finds that the amount of time needed to perform the activities of necessary labour, the production of sustenance, is a major factor in the development human material activity. An example of this could be given with two activities, root harvesting (x) and daydreaming (y); both of these activities can be done during the sixteen hours one is awake. Now activity x must precede activity y since we are natural creatures that need to eat. But, since we like to daydream it would be nice to have less time doing x and more doing y. One day we learn a new method for root harvesting that enables us to harvest more roots in less time. This means that we can spend more time daydreaming and less time root harvesting.

With the above example in mind, we can see the necessity of certain activities due to the fact that we are natural beings. In respect to understanding how Marx conceives of human emancipation, we can see that the achievements of industry enable people to have more time for some activities than they would at a less productive stage. This flexibility of time is key to Marx's understanding of emancipation and can be seen as a critique of other conceptions of emancipation. Since industry increases our flexibility in how we use our time, the ability to practice certain pursuits is dependent on the capabilities of industry. Thus, if religious contemplation or artistic productions are the understood best ends, the amount of time to spend on these pursuits, or even the possibility of spending time on them, is dependent on industry's level of development. One can see that with this time ratio, Marx has shown that industry's productive capacity is a constant and necessary variable in determining activities. The possibility of all activities' performance is dependent of the capabilities of industry. The history of industry is what all other 'histories' ride upon. In short, industry is the basis for emancipation because humans are physical beings that exist in time, and emancipation can only truly be emancipation from the restricted use of one's time.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> As we shall see in Marx's later work, emancipation is not primarily unrestricted time, but emancipation from the restricted control over the means of production. Lacking control over the means of production is primary, while the restricted use of one's time and the inability to gain a level of subsistence are varieties of restricted control over the means of production. This point

The reduction in time for certain types of activities is for Marx an extension of his understanding of humans as essentially corporeal, organic, and objective, since the objectification of oneself is done in the natural world where physical processes are in effect. These physical processes shape humans, and human activities are also uses of these physical processes. In order for the outcome of a certain occurrence to be altered, the physical processes relevant for this activity must be manipulated. To shorten the amount of time it takes to perform a certain material activity, or change the amount of natural material used in an activity is dependent on manipulating the physical processes that compose this activity. Humans as objective creatures can alter objects by physical manipulation of the natural processes that affect these objects. Activities for humans are objective, corporeal, and natural activities in reality. The possibility of doing new or qualitatively different activities is dependent on our alteration of the *average labour time* for an activity. Reduction in the average labor time can alter how long it takes for an activity to be performed and how many people it takes to perform an activity in regard to a given output. These alterations to activities change the possibility of how much time people can have above and beyond necessary activity. In short, free time is dependent on the capacity to manipulate the objective and natural world.

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stated in the terminology of chapter 3 is: unrestricted control over the means of production is universal *self*-actualization; just unrestricted time is universal or possible actualization.

Before ending this section, we need to consider some final considerations of Marx's understanding of nature in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Is Marx's critique an effective critique of idealism, whether religious or philosophical? I agree with Wood's reading that Marx provides proofs against Hegelian or Christian ideational structures.<sup>71</sup> But, more importantly, Marx provides an alternate history other than a history of Spirit or providence. As was already noted, Marx provides a history of industry, and I would say by providing this history, shows that it is primary. Marx continues to do this throughout his career not only by noting how social ideas are dependent on material development, but also that *the division of labour is also dependent on material development*. The possibility of there being a division between mental and manual labour is because of alterations in the average labour time of necessary activities, reducing how many people it takes to perform an activity within a certain range of output levels. Why there can be stable groups of philosophers or religious personages in a society is because there is *surplus time* available for such activities to exist. Before one can write a history of providence or Spirit, one needs the time to do it. Thus the constant factor in regard to available time and certain activities is time freed from necessary labour. This is not to say that Marx finds that all activities beyond

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<sup>71</sup> See part four of Wood's *Karl Marx*, second edition.

necessary labour at a certain stage in the history of industry are unnecessary. Rather the ‘reality’ of an activity is dependent on what social form it appears in and if it enables the development of the productive forces or not.

In addition, Allen Wood, in his work *Karl Marx*, finds that in *Private Property and Communism* Marx understands the relationship of humans and nature as a nonobjective being; the existence of humans and nature form a “reciprocal dependence between humanity and nature;” “The human being is a part of nature and depends on nature for existence and power; nature depends on the human being for its fulfillment, its sense of meaning. Taken together, ‘humanity and nature’ thus form a self-sufficient or ‘essential’ totality.”<sup>72</sup> I think this characterization is correct and I also think this conception of humans and nature as a nonobjective being is not consistent with the rest of Marx’s early writings,<sup>73</sup> and he gave this position up in his later writings. In short, and using Wood’s characterization above, Marx’s long term position on the relationship of humans and nature is one where humans are a part of nature and depend on nature for existence and power, but nature does not depend of human beings for its fulfillment and meaning.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p. 177.

<sup>73</sup> Wood points this out in regard to Marx’s refutation of religion, *ibid*, p. 179.

<sup>74</sup> I must add that in Wood’s interpretation of Marx he states that Marx considers nature to exist without the realization of nature in our thought. Thus, Wood’s understanding of Marx’s long-term conception of humans and nature, I find, agrees with my statement this note is attached to. *Ibid.* p. 189-194.



## 5. The Completed Distinction between the Natural and the Material

As we have seen, Marx has established that humans are corporeal, organic, and objective; this is to say in condensed fashion that humans are natural creatures. This distinction may seem woefully obvious, but it is important to establish human beings as physically objective, acting natural creatures to defuse the idealist claims concerning the essence of Man as awareness alone. As was quoted in footnote above. “*Self-consciousness* is rather a quality of human nature, or the human eye, etc.; human nature is not a quality of *self-consciousness*.”<sup>75</sup> Marx’s writings before *The German Ideology* establish the natural existence of humans. A significant occurrence within *The German Ideology* is the introduction of the distinction between the natural and the material. This distinction was implicit in the early writings since Marx considered human activity to be something that is historically determined and not fixed. The natural capacities of humans are fixed; how those capacities are realized and developed is the result of material action. Our description of humans’ natural existence as corporeal, organic, and objective needs to be expanded to include history, where the history considered is material achievement. Marx has already acknowledged the real history of humans to be the history of industry in the *1844 Manuscripts*.

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<sup>75</sup> *EW* p. 387; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 406.

In *The German Ideology* Marx further elaborates how the accumulation of the material manipulations of nature is actual history.

Before moving into the specifics, Marx restates the idea that humans are natural beings and we must consider this when studying history.

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. Of course, we cannot here go either into the actual physical nature of man, or into the natural conditions in which man finds himself – geological, oro-hydrographical, climatic and so on. All historical writing must set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.<sup>76</sup>

Marx's statement is a clear break with idealist history, but as we have seen, he started to do this from his earliest writings. This passage moves beyond the consideration of humans as natural beings advanced in the *1844 Manuscripts*. The crux of this passage is the final sentence that lists two components of materialist historical inquiry: the natural bases of humans and the modification of these bases through human action. *This last sentence is the distinction between the natural and the material.* The natural bases humans find themselves in can be altered through activity which in turn opens up new avenues of activity.

Conceiving of humans as natural alone and not also as material creatures loses

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<sup>76</sup> *GI* pp. 36-37; *MEW(3)* pp. 20-21. Marx in the first volume *Capital* does consider the natural bases of humans in more detail and their effect on the value of labor power, productivity, and the capacity for surplus value production, see pages 637-8, 647-8, and 649-50 in *C-1*.

this developmental aspect of human existence: their capacity to adapt to the natural world and to also change it. As we shall see, this idea is very important for Marx and is the basis for his critique of Feuerbach. But, before we move into those considerations, some additional quotes on the distinction between the natural and the material:

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence [*ihre Lebensmittel zu produzieren*], a step which is conditioned by their physical organization [*durch ihre körperliche Organisation*]. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life [*materielles Leben selbst*].<sup>77</sup>

With these passages we can see the line Marx wants to draw between the natural and the material. His first distinction between humans and animals can be seen as distinguishing human material activity from natural process. This distinction between producing and not-producing one's subsistence is a fine line. The exact difference between gaining subsistence naturally and gaining it materially is quite inexact. I would gauge that the difference between the two is when the gaining of subsistence becomes the production of subsistence, as when there is the altering of the natural world beyond the mere taking of the items of nature for consumption. Thus the natural gaining of subsistence as picking fruit

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<sup>77</sup> *GI* p. 37; *MEW* (3) p. 21.

and digging for tubers becomes the material activity of materially producing subsistence when the natural items are gained through the alteration of nature not immediately involved in the gaining of the item. Some examples between these two distinctions are the picking of seeds from a plant, as opposed to the weeding of an area around a plant to encourage more growth and seed production; or, digging for tubers with one's hands, as opposed to digging for tubers that have been planted previously.<sup>78</sup> In these two examples, the former are natural gaining and the latter are material production. I would not qualify the distinction between natural gaining and material production simply as tool use, since using tools implies that alteration of nature has *already* occurred to craft the tool. One may consider that a tool found is natural gaining and a tool fashioned is material production, such as using a stone picked up-from the ground or using a stone that the user has crafted an edge on.

This distinction that Marx makes between the natural and the material appears to depend on the distinction between humans and animals, since we know of animals altering nature indirectly to gain subsistence: apes using tools to name a common instance. But, this is not a problem since the real distinction is not between humans and animals but between received and produced possibilities for

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<sup>78</sup> Jared Diamond in his wonderful book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* lists some great examples of the fine line between hunter-gathers and farmers. In particular see chapter 6 and pages 106-7 for the bases of my weeding example above, taken from the land management practices of New Guinea peoples.

living. If humans are as static as animals, and we are intrinsically the same as animals, then we have a set mode of living that can't, or shouldn't, be changed. If humans are not static, as animals, but still natural creatures, then we could live in different ways and perhaps we should live in different ways. By considering animals as not static but adaptable, this problem of having humans as natural creatures and changeable is no longer a problem. Nonetheless, Marx's distinction between natural capacities and material activity is clear.

Marx continues to elaborate this distinction between the natural and the material with the following.

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce.<sup>79</sup>

In this passage, Marx wants to illuminate the historical aspect of humans' material existence. In the previous passages, he established that humans have a material existence, in this passage, he wants to describe what is distinctive to material existence and why it bears on practical standards (this latter reason will be dealt with in greater detail below). Marx begins by describing the physical and historical situation that shapes the possibilities of production. In considering the production of subsistence, what objects of nature that are accessible has to be

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<sup>79</sup> *GI* p. 37; *MEW* (3) p. 21.

taken into consideration. What is accessible is not only identifying what foods gained in which clime. This distinction makes sense if we only take a certain historical period under consideration. Different types of subsistence could be had only during certain historical periods due to the ability to gain that subsistence. Foods that are inaccessible in one historical period are easily accessible in another; or how plentiful certain materials are depends on their accessibility, this being determined by the level of material advancement. This could be elaborated in the instances of farming, deep sea fishing, iron plows, and long distance sea vessels. All of these occurrences open up new possibilities of subsistence whether in a single area or between areas. Conversely, instances of soil depletion, over-fishing, and related *historical* instances could drastically affect subsistence amounts.<sup>80</sup>

The accessibility of subsistence is dependent on our historical ability to gain it; this means, in short, our material ability acquired over time.<sup>81</sup> Our ability to access subsistence of various types does affect, as Marx noted in the previously

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<sup>80</sup> Ernest Mandel in his work *Marxist Economic Theory* discusses the impact of the development of the productive forces on subsistence amounts and the rise of trade: the need for metals that are only found in certain areas. In particular see chapter 1. Marx discusses soil depletion in the first volume of *Capital* pages 637-8. On Marxian considerations of environmental problems see Paul Burkett's and John Bellamy Foster's articles in *Monthly Review* October 2005. One of the most interesting and sad cases of the environmental destruction caused by humans and affecting the accessibility of subsistence is that of the Easter Islanders. On the fate of the Easter Islanders see Jared Diamond's essay "Twilight at Easter." In *The New York Review of Books*, Volume LI, Number 5, March 25, 2004.

<sup>81</sup> For the time being I am leaving out social barriers to the gaining of subsistence, such as the social causes of famines: poverty, wars and other occurrences caused by people.

quoted passage, our ability to produce our material lives. Marx discusses this point,

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* [*eine bestimmte Lebensweise*] on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. Hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production [*den materiellen Bedingungen ihrer Produktion*].<sup>82</sup>

What our lives are, their “mode,” is dependent on our historically developed abilities of material production, “how” one produces. What humans are and the lives they lead are not determined by an authentic and essential Spirit or epistemological status. Rather, human lives are determined by how we can objectify our intentions in material activity, as Marx states above “express their life.” The knowing subject for Marx is not abstract or transcendental, but is rather a historical subject. As we saw above in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx described the knowing subject as natural, but as we see here with the addition of production/history the subject is understood as a material subject. New possibilities of material action alter what determines of the subject. Such as,

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<sup>82</sup> *GI* p. 37; *MEW* (3) p. 21.

This production only makes its appearance with the *increase of population*. In its turn this presupposes the *intercourse* [*Verkehr*] of individuals with one another. The form of this intercourse is again determined by production [*die Produktion bedingt*].<sup>83</sup>

The increase in population alters our capacity to produce our lives because it allows new material manipulations of nature. More people allow new activities to be done that require greater amounts of people. As we shall see later on, population increases are a requirement for the division of labour, which further widens the scope of humans' material abilities. New material realizations of nature make previously unknown modes of living possible. Humans as natural creatures discover themselves through their material activities of trying to explore nature. The natural world is not something that we have direct access to; it is only through our explorations of nature through activity that we learn about it. Nor as we shall see in chapter two can our existence be understood as only social.

Marx critiques Feuerbach for endorsing brute naturalism that ignores humans' historical material achievements. Marx finds that Feuerbach's attempts at materialism fall short because his considerations of humans are not of an historical period; that is, humans involved in the material production of their projects. Rather, Feuerbach considers humans as an abstract conception, "Man." Feuerbach falls into abstracting the human condition and human relations by

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*



understanding them through only ideas and historical idealizations; he does not attend to the physical historical conditions and relations of humans. Marx states,

Feuerbach's "conception" of the sensuous world is confined on the one hand to mere contemplation of it, and on the other to mere feeling; he posits "Man" instead of "real historical man". "Man" is really "the German". In the first case, the *contemplation* of the sensuous world, he necessarily lights on things which contradict his consciousness and feeling, which disturb the harmony he presupposes, the harmony of all parts of the sensuous world and especially of man and nature. To remove this disturbance, he must take refuge in a double perception, a profane one which perceives "only the flatly obvious" and a higher, philosophical, one which perceives the "true essence" of things. He does not see that the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society [*das Produkt der Industrie und des Gesellschaftszustandes*]; and, indeed, [a product]<sup>84</sup> in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, and modifying its social system according to the changed needs. Even the objects of the simplest "sensuous certainty" are only given him through social development, industry and commercial intercourse. The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by *commerce* into our zone, and therefore only *by* this action of a definite society in a definite age has it become "sensuous certainty" for Feuerbach.<sup>85</sup>

Feuerbach is making two mistakes: first, as previously mentioned, taking ideas as reality, and second, grasping humans' natural aspect as immediately perceived impressions. The first mistake is to conceive of the actuality of humans' natural condition in thought and not in the physical world. Conceiving

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<sup>84</sup> Bracketed words are not in the German text.

<sup>85</sup> *GI* pp. 44-45; *MEW* (3) pp. 42-43.

of the human condition in thought is “contemplation;” it is “philosophic” perception. Thus the harmony of man and nature is found as a categorical relationship of harmony that has no attachment to the empirical. Simply put, Feuerbach is ignoring reality and substituting actual relations with ones fabricated in thought. He is replacing the physical natural existence of humans with one that he has imagined. Feuerbach’s eternal “Man” exists nowhere except in thought.

Feuerbach’s second mistake is to miss the division between the natural and the material, which is to ignore history. The world in which Feuerbach finds himself in cannot be understood as only the natural one. It is a world that has been built by people over time in congress with other people, layer upon layer of productions that cannot be reduced to an abstract conception without losing its descriptive force. Marx’s example of the fruit-trees is poignant, since one could easily retreat from Marx’s description of productive history and say: ‘Fair enough, the societies of men have been made over the centuries. But, what of the productions of nature herself? These plants, animals and waterways are all *original* natural beings. We can rely on them to understand nature and its harmony with man.’ Definitely one can understand the processes of nature through scientific inquiry, and all natural processes are inroads of study. But, Marx’s point is not about criticizing the place of natural science; he is interested in criticizing the brute naturalism of Feuerbach. To point at a forest, a desert, a

pond, or a single animal, and declare that it is a point of entry into the *eternal status* of nature is to conceive of the natural world, and the world of men, as only existing, or gaining fulfillment, in a moment.<sup>86</sup> To ignore the cumulative effect not only of humans' material activity, but the eons of physical alteration, is to reduce the definition of humans and their possibilities to current history, to "the German," as Marx comments.

This is the same critique that Marx makes of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel takes the current social and political arrangements of his time and turns them into moments of the Idea. The state produced in history becomes turned around by Hegel as thought/Idea producing the state, and history following its lead. This reduction of history, human and natural, to what I see out my window, is to perform the common error of idealism, to put the cart before the horse. As Marx puts it, "As far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist. With him materialism and history diverge completely..."<sup>87</sup>

As was noted above, Marx wants to understand history as the cumulative effect of peoples' actions. He contrasts his understanding of history with ideas of

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<sup>86</sup> Marx states later on "So much is this activity, this unceasing sensuous labour and creation, this production, the foundation of the whole sensuous world as it now exists that, were it interrupted only for a year, Feuerbach would not only find an enormous change in the natural world, but would very soon find that the whole world of men and his own perceptive faculty, nay his own existence, were missing." In the translation, "existence" is misspelled as "esistence." *GI* p. 46; *MEW (3)* p.44.

<sup>87</sup> *GI* p. 47; *MEW (3)* p. 45.

the fulfillment or completion of history. Man's relation to nature is not one of "natural" fulfillment or realization in thought, but the exploration of nature through humans' material manipulations of it.

Incidentally, when things are seen in this way, as they really are and happened, every profound philosophical problem is resolved, ... quite simply into an empirical fact [*empirisches Faktum*]. For instance, the important question of the relation of man to nature (Bruno goes so far as to speak of "the antitheses in nature and history", as though these were two separate "things" and man did not always have before him an historical nature and a natural history) which gave rise to all the "unfathomably lofty works" on "substance" and "self-consciousness", crumbles of itself when we understand that the celebrated "unity of man with nature" has always existed in industry and has existed in varying forms in every epoch according to the lesser or greater development of industry, and so has the "struggle" of man with nature, right up to the development of his productive forces on a corresponding basis.<sup>88</sup>

Feuerbach misses the distinction between the natural and the material, and he misses that the material is nature manipulated through human activity. The passage is quite clear in explaining the distinction between the natural and the material. As we can see, humans are natural creatures and there is no antagonism between nature and humans as substances. But, thinking of nature and humans as two different metaphysical conceptions is to use a flawed evaluative framework. Rather than deducing or intuiting Man and Nature as conceptions and then trying to understand their possible co-existence or co-determination, Marx wants to

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<sup>88</sup> *GI* pp.45-46; *MEW* (3) p. 43.

begin with our point of learning about nature *in our attempts to understand nature through activity*. If we take our involvement with nature as the basis for understanding humans' relationship to nature, then we can see we have always had one. Humans are natural physical creatures who live in nature, not outside or opposed to it.

Conceiving of humans' relationship to nature as one of unity or not is to use an idealist standard of knowing and evaluate actual material activities, or the possibilities of activities, as conceptions that are organized and judged by an abstract subject. If we take the practical materialist standpoint that Marx endorses, then we are taking an immanently historical physical self as the organizer and judge of material activities. The standard that this physical self judges is material manipulations of nature: what we can do with the natural processes. Unity as perfection, fulfillment, or self-consciousness has no place in a practical materialist standpoint, because the means of knowing - material activity - is not *conforming* to a conception of Man and Nature but is *creating* conceptions of observed material manipulations of matter and forces. Marx notes the practical basis of scientific exploration: "...natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *GI* p. 46; *MEW* (3) p. 44.

The distinction between the natural and the material is also a demarcation between what we can control of nature and what we can't, and between what we know of the natural and what we don't. Material activities are what we can control of natural processes and what we can't control; similarly, material activities are how we know about natural processes, and what as of yet we do not know through material activities. Marx describes this demarcation as humans' struggle with nature. Nature is not the "antithesis" of humans, a logical opposite; rather, humans' current inability to control natural processes are the limits of possible projects' actualizations. This struggle becomes lessened by the increased development of the productive forces, which thereby bring more natural processes under the control of material activities. Humans' relationship with nature is one of learning about nature, and through this, lessening of people's inability to actualize their projects. Nature should not be personified in a quasi-religious manner of radically separate from, or the providential fulfillment of, the *quiddity* of Man. The history of the development of the productive forces is progressive concerning the increased ability of people to bring nature under material activity. The scope of human interaction with nature is neither opposition nor identity, but rather one of discovery. The completion of discovery is not pre-determined by the totally transcendental possibility of subject object agreement, or the Spiritual purity of Self-Consciousness.

In review, Marx distinguishes the difference between natural processes and material activities in the *German Ideology*. The difference between the natural and the material is based on the active control of natural processes. This line, in particular for humans more than other animals, is indeterminate. Human history, Marx finds, should be considered in the light of our accumulated abilities to actively bring natural process under control. As has been pointed out by Marx, attempts to reduce humans essentially to a specific point in time, is impossible. Humans are essential active manipulators of the natural world. This active manipulation is material activity. Practical considerations for people are only meaningfully determined by the possibilities for the material manipulation of nature.

Material activity is the determining factor for deliberating rational practical outcomes. But this means that rational deliberation has to take humans' natural existence into account. Material activities are performed to actualize our projects, which is direct need satisfaction or the reduction of necessary labour time. Humans' existence as corporeal, objective, and organic creatures is the ground that establishes what is rational deliberation concerning our material activities. Activity is rational if it allows for actualization of one's projects; this means that the natural existence of humans is brought under greater control. Only through the control of nature are humans able to live their lives free from

necessary labour with less time spent tending to their natural necessity. Material control over nature allows not only freedom from toil but also freedom from hierarchical social relationships. By not acknowledging the difference between humans as natural beings and as material active beings, one is unable to define human development and a rational material basis for betterment.

## **6. The Distinction Between the Natural and the Material in the Later**

### **Writings**

The final section of this part will be devoted to Marx's late works, basically from the *Grundrisse* onward. I will consider the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* together including asides to other works of this period; these works are more consistent in their content and position than the early works. Marx's position on the distinction between the natural and the material is developed in the *German Ideology* and additions to this idea are minor. The most conspicuous addition to the distinction is the tendency to overtly describe humans as natural beings while maintaining the distinction between the natural as unutilized nature and the material as nature utilized through practice, without conflating material utilization of nature as the unity of subject and object, as Marx alluded to in the *1844*



*Manuscripts*.<sup>90</sup> The natural limit of human experience and endeavor is not fixed; material development has greatly altered the optimal natural limit for human action. As we shall see in chapters 2 and 3 this limit is not isomorphic with the expectations of social forms, which have considerations of ends and limits that are not optimal with the current level of material development.

Marx's emphasis in the later works is the distinction between the material and the social, and not the distinction between the natural and the material. The reasons for this are twofold: first, Marx's distinction between the natural and the material is a basis for critiquing idealism and old materialism, which both relegated material activity, praxis, to a subordinate position in regard to practical matters concerning the use of nature as either idea or matter. Marx's critique of these matters is mostly contained within his early works. Second, Marx's later work, as a detailed critique of capitalism, relies on the previous distinction between the natural and the material by using the material activity of people as a way of showing the transitory nature of capitalism and the possibility of socialism; Marx uses a consideration of an optimal natural limit to demonstrate the irrationality of the ends of the social form of capitalism. Knowledge of the natural world is achieved thorough material activity, and not critical philosophy or the journey of Spirit/Idea. Marx seems to have settled this position with the

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<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of how Marx does not think a Hegelian unity of subject and object, as a unity of humans and nature, is possible, see chapter 4 in Alfred Schmidt's book *The Concept of Nature in Marx*.

*German Ideology*. Humans know reality, nature, through material action, industry and natural science. The thought experiments of the Idealists are erroneous.<sup>91</sup>

With this said, Marx nonetheless does have some elaboration of the distinction between the natural and the material in his later works. Marx uses this distinction in these works less to demonstrate the flaws and limits of previous systems but rather to present human material activity as a basis for evaluating the possibilities of self-actualization of one's projects. In these later works, Marx presents some of his most definitive statements concerning the material activities of people as a rational standard for practical judgments. The Marxian standard of practical action will be dealt with in the final chapter, but in order to understand the scope of this standard Marx's conception of the distinction between the natural and the material needs to be discussed. As we have seen, for there to be a practical standard that is both historical and regulative it must be grounded in the development of human civilization. This development cannot merely be biologically based since human physiology qua physiology is a constant in

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<sup>91</sup> Marx's critique of the idealism of the Young Hegelians is very similar to his critique of Hegel in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Here is a passage from *The Holy Family*: "Or does Critical Criticism believe that it has reached even the *beginning* of a knowledge of historical reality so long as it excludes *from* the historical movement the theoretical and practical relation of man to nature, i.e., natural science and industry? Or does it think that it actually knows any period without knowing, for example, the industry of that period, the immediate mode of production of life itself? Of course, spiritualistic, *theological* Critical Criticism only knows (at least it imagines it knows) the main political, literary and theological acts of history. Just as it separates thinking from the senses, the soul from the body and itself from the world, it separates history from natural science and industry and sees the origin of history not in vulgar *material* production on the earth but in vaporous clouds in the heavens. *MECW-4*, p.150.

recorded history; nor can it be solely social phenomena, since the moral standards of any social form are not commensurate to a developmental schema, regardless of Hegel's position. The material manipulation of nature should be understood as developmental; we can evaluate higher or lower levels of material development, especially in regard to output per labour hour.

A standard of practical judgment that is based on material development is not a replacement for anthropological or sociological study of societies. Its purpose is prescriptive not descriptive. Also, a practical materialist standard of judgment, due to its accommodations to the development of human activities and its departure from the social domain of the reconciliation of subjects, radically alters the categories of practical philosophy. In short, material development as the basis for practical judgment is not identically mapped onto other practical standards, whether empirical, ethical, or moral. The comments below need to be considered in light of the direction we are heading, since Marx's reasons for discussing humans' relationship to nature and their distance from the natural are for the purpose of explaining a materialist practical standard.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes the distinction between the natural and the material as,

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of

human participation in nature [*natürliches Material verwandelt in Organe des menschlichen Willens über die Natur oder seiner Bethätigung in der Natur*]. *They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified.*<sup>92</sup>

Marx clearly wants to delineate that such apparatuses as mentioned in the first sentence of the passage are not natural processes but are the results of the material activity of humans. This is at first blush a very obvious point; electric telegraph wires do not grow on trees. The distinction between natural processes and material activities are differentiated in regard to causation; if humans are actively causing the production of these machines and objects then this alteration of nature is a material activity and not *strictly* a natural process. People who are actively manipulating nature to produce items are materially using nature. This is different than the digestive process, but it is not different from the harvesting of roots, particularly when we have planted them. As was discussed above the exact line between the material activities and natural processes can be quite fine. But this is still a distinction between unknown or unharnessed natural processes and material activities that have discovered and use certain natural processes. Material activity is distinct in causal origin from natural processes but this does not mean it is distinct in content. Humans use nature for material activity and not something absolutely different from nature. Humans' use nature through their

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<sup>92</sup> *G* p. 706; *MEGA*, II/1.2, p. 582.

activity as if natural processes were an extension of them. Knowledge of the natural world is the knowledge of natural processes that have been effectively manipulated through practice.

As we have mentioned, Marx's consideration of material activity is to accurately explain why humans are natural beings; this explanation of humans as natural beings must accommodate our changing and developing abilities and social forms while not, on the one hand, completely divorcing ourselves from the natural world, and on the other hand, not reducing humans to natural processes in their immediacy, which is what, in the *German Ideology*, Marx critiqued Feuerbach for doing.<sup>93</sup> Humans have the ability to objectify nature in their activities, and this process can be developed over time, becoming the history of material activity, or also known as the history of industry. In *Capital*, Marx states,

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the

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<sup>93</sup> Schmidt and Márkus both identify the activity of humans as natural beings but not distinctly, they both have a tendency to conflate the natural and the material in their works, let alone not realizing the difference between material activity of production and social activities of promotion. See p. 14 in Márkus. *Marxism and Anthropology*. And p. 21 in Schmidt op. cit.

potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. We are not dealing here with those first instinctive forms of labour which remain on the animal level.<sup>94</sup>

Material activity is a *natural* capacity for humans, but it is neither immediate nor brute as instincts are. Instincts, understood in the terminology of this dissertation, are natural processes; they are not actively caused occurrences. Labour, as material activity, can manipulate natural processes in ways different than the tendency of these processes, or use the tendencies of nature for material ends. Humans can cause the instincts and bodily processes of animals to commence without the usual stimuli, or track the course of water beneath the earth with radioactive isotopes. The movement of humans is not beyond the control of our wills. The movement of the human body is a natural function determined by our capacities, just as the movements of a spider are determined by its capacities. But, human capacities include the possibility of changing our capacities through incorporation of nature via material activity.<sup>95</sup> The movement of humans is expansive and diverse compared with animals. We can, as Marx

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<sup>94</sup> *C (1)* p. 283; *MEW (23)* p. 192. Also of interest is Marx's note number 2 on page 323 of *Capital* volume 1: "Labour-power itself is, above all else, the material of nature transposed into a human organism."

<sup>95</sup> "A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials." *C (1)* p. 284; *MEW (23)* p. 193.

says above, change our “own nature.” The changing of our nature is not a matter of *quiddity* but the addition of new types of activity. This consideration of human nature is commensurate with how Marx conceives of knowledge; since all knowledge is achieved in practice, the knowledge we have of ourselves is also achieved in practice. Our being, so to speak, is deduced in action and not in logical demonstration.<sup>96</sup>

The development of people’s control over nature is the history that shapes the practical outcomes of humans. Humans are free in being able to attempt to objectify nature but are constrained in turn by the level of this development. Different levels of material development enable different types of material relationships between people and different types of social relationships. This, in a nutshell, is the theory of historical materialism, which in its definitive formulation in the preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx outlines how social forms change due to the development of the productive forces.<sup>97</sup> For now I don’t wish to dwell on the changing, or withering away, of social forms, rather my interest is in how the development of the productive forces causes changes in material work relations. Material work relations are

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<sup>96</sup> Márkus draws some similar conclusion concerning “human nature” in Marx. He describes the potential for humans to develop their capacities as understanding Man as a universal natural being, p. 12 op. cit. Márkus’ terminology is derived from the *1844 Manuscripts* and I find retains an idealist overtone that obscures more than it clarifies.

<sup>97</sup> “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.” *CCPE* p. 21; *MEGA*, II/2, pp. 100-101.

groups formed in order to use nature.<sup>98</sup> Their formation is determined by the level of material development and can be considered *irrespective* of the social form they develop within. The potential independence of material work relations from the social form is part of Marx's determination of the transitory nature of capitalism. Our consideration of the changing of material work relations is for now not part of a critique of capitalism but only to understand the how Marx conceives of their development.

The *Grundrisse* passage quoted at the beginning of this section, from page 706 of the *Grundrisse*, continues as such,

The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.<sup>99</sup>

Marx's loose use of the term "social" here makes it seem that the use of nature is a due to "social practice." But, the distinction can be made here again between material and social activities, since the activities Marx is discussing here is the *objective manipulation of nature*, and not activities to promote ends specific to certain social forms. With this established, and to maintain a consistency of

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<sup>98</sup> My use of the determination of material work relations is derived from G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, pp. 111 ff.

<sup>99</sup> G p. 706; *MEGA*, II/1.2, pp. 582-3



terms, I prefer to use the phrase *work relations*, or with the same meaning, *material work relations* (with the meaning discussed in the Introduction and just above) as opposed to social practice. Even without this caveat, it is easily understood that this passage is not concerned with activities of social promotion, such as ideological persuasion.

As we read earlier, this passage begins with a consideration of how human productions are distinct from nature that has not been “objectified” through practice. The manipulation of nature not only alters the form and use of nature, the manipulation of nature also alters *the practices of human groups* organized to manipulate nature. In short, the material use of nature alters nature and alters how we manipulate nature collectively.

In a wider sense we may include among the instrument of labour, in addition to things through which the impact of labour on its object is mediated, and which therefore, in one way or another, serve as conductors of activity, all the objective conditions necessary for carrying on the labour process. ... Instruments of this kind, which have already been mediated through past labour, include workshops, canals, roads, etc.<sup>100</sup>

[And,]

Not only do the objective conditions change in the act of reproduction, e.g. the village becomes a town, the wilderness a cleared field etc., but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new

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<sup>100</sup> *C-1* pp. 286-287; *MEW (23)* p. 195.

powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language.<sup>101</sup>

The development of the productive forces changes the interactions people have with each other. New modes of transport and communication bring larger groups of people into contact, thereby creating new communities. Since people are communal animals they are always part of a group.<sup>102</sup> Work relations are not separate from group activities. Groups are *not* intrinsically regulated by the social practices of class hierarchies. Only certain social forms have classes. Work relations involve the interactions of many people within a societal group. The material activities of these people engaged in work relations are separate from social relations, even within class societies. Humans don't exist in a timeless world. They live in built environments, where the landscape has been altered to satisfy our needs. Can we really conceive of our lives without our current level of transportation, communication, and commodity distribution? The labour-process, the aggregate of different types of specific labour to produce specific use-values, is imbedded in and dependent on our historically materially built environments. Modern automated manufacturing is impossible to conceive of without computers, electronic communication, and standardized tools and machines. The

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<sup>101</sup> *G* p. 494; *MEGA, II/1.2*, p. 398.

<sup>102</sup> For Marx's critique of the isolated individualism of social contract theory, "the Robinsonades," see *G* p. 83; *MEGA, II/1.1*, p.21. Also Márkus has a good discussion of how Marx understands humans as communal animals, *op. cit* chapter 2, even if Márkus conflates material groups of people with social relations.

satisfaction of our needs is dependent on the accumulated knowledge achieved through material activities stretching back thousands of years. The experiences and possibilities of activities that contemporary humans have available to them are distinct to our level of material development. We cannot seriously point to a time previous to ours, or an imagined situation, and say this is the natural existence of humans. We are natural by being corporeal, objective, and organic, but this doesn't tell us much about how the world works, or perhaps more importantly, how we should organize our lives and what we should strive for. Humans as biological beings are natural since they are composed of natural processes. But humans' practical lives can be understood only through the primary factor of material activities. As we shall see in the final part, material activities are the basis for developing a materialist practical standard of action.

Development of the productive forces enables the population to expand, as Marx discusses in the *German Ideology*, and communities of new sizes arise. Larger communities can specialize in certain productive activities, eventually giving rise to commodity production; that is, production of commodities *as* commodities, these use-values are made to be exchanged, as opposed to only the occasional surplus being exchanged. Exchange occurs first on the fringes of communities, as trade with other people, or forced exchange through piracy and pillage. Exchange itself brings people into contact, forming larger

communities.<sup>103</sup> These larger communities become engaged in material work relationships that cross natural, political, and cultural barriers, fostering global trade and production relationships. All of these changes in the work relations of people occur because the material world has been altered to permit new ways for humans to materially use nature as groups.

This process of altering material work relations, population growth, and specialization, produces surplus products which materially engage broader groups of people, changing the way they produce and the ways they live. My description of the way in which material development changes the ways people produce neglects the interaction between material actions of production and social actions of promotion. As the quotes above also mention, material development brings social changes too. This is not to discount social relations as a driver of material development (but not a physical driver); it is only to emphasize the place of material development in altering the *material* manner in which groups of people manipulate nature.

We can see that humans' natural existence is fixed only as the unknown and uncontrolled regularities of natural processes. Labour and attempts at discovery alter the demarcation between the natural processes and material activities. Humans' have no exclusive and timeless natural existence, whether the

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<sup>103</sup> On the advance of the productive forces, population growth, the arising of commodity exchange, and trade see Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory*, chapters 1 and 2.

idyllic dreams of Feuerbach's 'naturalism,' Enlightenment notions of contract theories, Locke's individual producer, the Idealist reverence for Greek Life, Kant's cosmopolitan future, or Hegel's reconciled community. Human's develop new ways to use natural processes and this in turn changes the ways we can live together: who does what and how many there are.

## 7. Schmidt's Understanding of Metabolism

Writers such as Schmidt have found the distinction between the natural and the material not to be divided as I have argued. Schmidt in his discussion of metabolism may lead one in the direction that Marx reduced the material to the natural in *Capital*. Schmidt states: "The content of this metabolic interaction [of labour and its object] is that nature is humanized while men are nature naturalized." "Nature attains self-consciousness in men, and amalgamates with itself by virtue of their theoretical-practical activity."<sup>104</sup> These passages are idealist in their explanation of humans' relationship to nature, and contradictory when considered with Schmidt's position of the impossibility of the identity of the subject and object as I previously mentioned. The use of nature to meet people's needs is not the humanizing of nature but just altering it for its intended use. Humanizing, it seems to me, means to become like a human, to express human

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<sup>104</sup> Schmidt op. cit. respectively pages 78 and 79.

abilities and attributes. Wood fashioned into a table is not the table becoming like a human being. The wood's form is changed to meet a need. Humans are always natural beings, they are never and have never been something else. There is no separation of humans from nature. So to naturalize something is to make it like nature. But, this notion only makes sense if there is some idealization of nature that people can become more like; such as we could say that chimps live in a natural manner and if we wish to become naturalized we should live like chimps. In contrast to Schmidt's statement I would say that that labour enables humans to meet their needs by altering nature. Humans' altering of nature and the amount of nature that has been altered are natural substances before and after the alteration. I would say that nature has been materially altered since the alteration is due to the activity of humans. Determining material alteration in the way Schmidt does confuses the difference between natural process and the material activity. This confusion leads in the direction of idealist mistakes that Marx found Feuerbach making.

Even though Schmidt critiques Hegel's conception of nature, his statement concerning the self-consciousness of nature being achieved in people's thoughts is odd. Schmidt seems to be trying to state that humans are natural beings and can use nature through their activity. But conflating the use of nature with its realization

in thought is to replace a materialist conception of human nature as determined in action with an idealist conception of human nature as determined in thought.

In contrast to Schmidt's reading of the material being reduced to the natural, I find that Marx does not reduce the material to the natural in *Capital*. To be clear, Schmidt does not claim that in *Capital* Marx reduces the material to the natural; Schmidt considers his position to be a general statement of Marx's understanding of nature and praxis. Since his position is based on Marx's conception of metabolism in *Capital*, it is fruitful to address his position. Even if Schmidt is extrapolating a position held by Marx only in *Capital* into a general one, his comments are still dependent upon an interpretation of *Capital* passages. But, I find the possibility of a reduction of the material to the natural only to be indicative of the *1844 Manuscripts*, and in the Manuscripts this is only explicitly stated in *Private Property and Communism*.<sup>105</sup> I do not find the metabolism conception by Marx in *Capital*, or Marx's discussion of the distinction between the natural and the material in *Capital* in general to be a reduction of the material to the natural. Rather, Marx's discussion of the distinction in *Capital* is done in order to express how the natural abilities of humans to use and learn about natural processes are neither static nor reducible to any social form. Marx shows this by explaining humans' relationship to nature as developmental in respect to their

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<sup>105</sup> Please see the section above on the *1844 Manuscripts* on this matter.

material appropriation of it. The natural condition of humans is a flexible limit that changes over time dependent on the degree of the material development. Nature and the material appropriation of nature are discussed in *Capital* to critique orthodox political economic conceptions of nature, and in particular, conceptions of capitalism as natural. This is most explicitly done by Marx in his discussion on wages, primitive accumulation, and justice in volume 1. But his analysis of the dual nature of the commodity form and the difference between the labour process and the valorization process are both also critiques of capitalist political economists' notions of the naturalness of material appropriation and exchange within capitalist production. In actuality, these are social relations. Marx points out how exchange and production are not isomorphic to the self-actualization of needs. Marx discusses the metabolism between nature and humans as such,

Labour, then, as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself.<sup>106</sup>

[And],

It [the labour process] is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every

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<sup>106</sup> *C-1* p. 133; *MEW (23)* p. 57.



form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.<sup>107</sup>

The first of these passages is from the section of the commodity form and the second is from the section on the labour process and the valorization process. In both sections Marx wants to distinguish what is indicative of the capitalist mode of production in regard to exchanging items and producing value. These activities, exchange and value production, are found not only in capitalism, they are also found in other societies too, but not in all societies. But, a historically relevant labour process and the fabrication of use-values are found in every society. Marx's intent is to distinguish material production from the social appropriation of labour for ends specific to the capitalist social form.

What is important for us to concentrate on in these passages is the distinction between the natural and the material. Is Marx stating that labour as natural necessity is reducing material activities to natural processes? He does say in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* that "Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use-values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power."<sup>108</sup> Human labour is natural as being a process of certain types of animals. Cats can implement the processes of staking

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<sup>107</sup> *C-1* p. 290; *MEW (23)* p. 198.

<sup>108</sup> *Marx and Engels: Basic Writing on Politics and Philosophy*. p. 112. The spelling of labour in this translation has been altered to conform to the usage of this work.

and killing of prey for sustenance. Apes implement sticks to harvest ants. But, the distinction between the implementation of the natural processes of animals and the material activities of humans is that the material activity is established through practice, which implies knowledge. Knowledge is the historical accumulation of practices that are communicable between humans. Natural processes are not known; if they were they would be material activity. Natural processes can become known as material activity. We discover natural processes through material activities. As Marx says above, labour is the mediation between man and nature of the necessary connection of humans to natural processes as part of these natural processes. It could be said that humans implement their natural processes to gather fruit. But can we say that humans “implement” their natural processes to make atomic reactors to produce electricity. Or, less extreme, to weed an area to help a plant grow that was not planted by humans.

In short, humans are in a metabolic interaction with nature. But, all natural processes are part of the totality of natural processes that comprise nature. Schmidt’s ideas concerning the naturalization of humans and the humanization of nature is out of place within a materialist framework. His terminology of nature achieving self-consciousness in humans is Hegel and not Marx. This position may be held by Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*, but there is no evidence that it is part of his later thought, or even of his thought within the *German Ideology*.

Nature for Marx is natural processes and we know nature by discovering its uses and regularities through material activities. There is no pre-determined unity between humans and nature for Marx. Humans use natural processes in order to satisfy their current needs and to develop new ones.

I would say definitively that Marx has not reduced the material to the natural in *Capital*. And, even the *Gotha* quote above about how labour is a “manifestation of a force of nature” is to rebut claims about what wealth is. Marx’s comments are to counter bourgeois claims that wealth is only due to what is considered labour within capitalism. If labour which produces wealth is only the labour appropriated by capitalists then one must be wary of saying that ‘only labour produces wealth.’ If we take capitalism as our reference point then only labour that produces surplus-value at a sufficient rate or aids in the reproduction of the capitalist social form is wealth producing; or labour that is only of a certain mass, and only of a certain amount of workers. But, most of all, labour identified as wealth producing within capitalism is only due to its profitability and not due to the satisfaction of people’s needs as people and not as wage-labourers. In other words, the distribution of products is dependent on the ends of the social form and not the material existence of individuals. Market transactions and decisions that conform to the social ends of capitalist profitability are not isomorphic with the self-actualization of one’s projects.

## **8. Márkus on Animals and Tool Use**

Márkus seeks to distinguish the difference between the natural and the material by relying too much on emphasizing humans as tool making animals.<sup>109</sup> But, other animals make tools. Tool making is not sufficient to distinguish the distinction between the natural and the material. Only the accumulation of repeatable activities is a sufficient distinction. This blurs the demarcation between animals and humans, but this can be considered a mistake by Marx, but one that does not detract from his determination of the distinction between the material and the natural. Marx maintains that the material is the natural brought under the control of human material activity.

## **9. Overview of the Distinction Between the Material and the Natural**

Marx's distinction between the natural and the material, developed from his earliest writings, attempts at identifying the actual developmental basis of human societies. Marx is seeking a basis for societal development that was empirical verifiable and caused by human action. In his early writings, before the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx was searching for the essential components of human existence, but this search is in response to the limits of Marx found in idealist

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<sup>109</sup> Márkus op. cit. p. 6.

thinking. So we find in *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* and *On the Jewish Question* Idealist notions of the state as product's of thought and the merely legal status of citizenship as natural and complete. As we have seen, Marx held these idealist notions to have no ground in the history of human actions. These positions are criticized by Marx but he offers little in the way of counterpoint. At most Marx offers, as we have seen in retrospect, skeletal outlines of his mature thinking of how human action affects societal development.

In the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx definitively develops an understanding of humans as natural beings. Humans in Marx's understanding can be described as corporeal, objective, and organic. Humans are natural creatures among other natural creatures and natural objects. They are part of the interchange of forces and matter between themselves, as discrete living beings, and natural processes in various forms. Marx establishes human existence, as physical beings in the physical world, as the necessary ontological and epistemic condition of human subjectivity, on the one hand, and on the other, Marx finds that human history is essentially the history of industry. These two conceptions are in a degree of tension since Marx is concerned with practical questions and not simply establishing humans as natural beings in regard to only traditional theoretical philosophy. Marx criticizes Hegel for both neglecting the natural-objective basis of human existence and the industrial history of humans. In the *1844*

*Manuscripts*, Marx introduces two key aspects of his thinking on practical standards: the division between natural processes and material activities, but he does not develop the distinction between the two. The bare introduction is a definitive advance from Marx's earlier writings where he offered only critique.

Beginning, in the main, with the *German Ideology* but tentatively alluded to in *The Holy Family*<sup>110</sup> Marx definitively develops the distinction between natural processes and material activities. Natural processes are the forces and matter that compose the universe. Material activities are the labour and activities of discovery by humans that bring natural processes under repeatable use. Labour is the accumulation of repeatable activities, which is in distinction to the natural. As Marx states in the passages about labour, “[it] mediates the metabolism between man and nature” and “is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man.” Additionally, we may add this illuminating quote: “The existing productivity of labour, from which it proceeds as its basis, is a gift, not of nature, but of a history embracing thousands of centuries.”<sup>111</sup> Labour is the manipulation of nature, but it is not reducible simply to natural processes. The ends determined for labour are determined by humans themselves in conjunction with nature. Humans can't do as they please at any level of material

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<sup>110</sup> See *MECW-4* pages 150 and 167.

<sup>111</sup> *C-1* p. 647; *MEW (23)* p. 535.

development. The possibilities of action are depended on how much of nature can be controlled and not the eternal natural status of humans as natural.

From the *German Ideology* onward, Marx finds that the essential component of human existence is human material activity. This activity is set apart from nature as a body of procedures, specific types of labour, and natural scientific knowledge that has been produced by humans through their centuries of exploring the possible uses of natural processes. Material activity has created a world for humans out of nature: roads laid, marshes drained, canals dug, forests cut, seas navigated, chemicals synthesized, atoms split, and plants altered. Humans have made a world out of the unknown possibilities of the natural one. Humans realize new ways of living by discovering nature's regularities.

The distinction between the natural existence and industrial history of the *1844 Manuscripts* has been ordered by Marx in the *German Ideology* and afterwards. Humans are natural creatures but their active dimension is found within their use of nature. Marx has found an empirically verifiable basis for societal development subject to human action that he was seeking in his early works in material activities that use nature. The alteration of nature and its cumulative effects on the reduction of necessary labour time explains societal development in macro terms and the existence of class differences. But material activities as the prime force for societal development is also the key to

human emancipation, understood by Marx as the overcoming of alienation, particularly as the division of control of the means of production. Humans satisfy their current needs and create new needs by materially altering nature. If humans are separated from nature, or its historically developed form, the means of production, they cannot satisfy their current needs or create new ones, at worst, or minimally, they do not have a secure assurance of need satisfaction (due to unemployment, uneven development, maldistribution, or productive fluctuations due to the demands of profitability). As we shall see in the remaining parts, material activity serves as a ground for Marx to critique capitalism as an irrational social form because it cannot provide secure and universal need satisfaction. This need satisfaction is materially possible but not achievable within the social dynamics of capitalism.

Overall Marx establishes the following in his consideration of nature and humans:

1. Humans are natural beings defined as corporeal, objective, and organic.
2. Humans have natural capacities to satisfy their needs.
3. Humans' natural capacities are developmental; that is, humans can develop abilities that accumulate over time from generation to generation.
4. There is no essential 'natural' human existence; human beings are always natural, only their ability to control nature changes over time.



5. An analytical distinction can be made between nature as natural processes and humans' historically accumulated abilities to control these processes.
6. Humans' historically accumulated abilities are material abilities, often called the history of industry by Marx.
7. Humans as natural beings cannot be neglected when considering the societal existence of humans.
8. Natural processes can be used by humans through material action.
9. Nature is never completed by humans. Humans only know how they can use nature in production and experiment. Humans' use of nature is not a pre-determined totality.
10. Humans and nature change over time. Humans can also change nature depending on their level of material development, such as: digging canals, domesticating animals, draining swamps, splitting atoms, and synthesizing new elements.

## **Part II: The Materialist Critique of Social Forms**

### **10. General Remarks**

As we have seen, Marx's understanding of materiality depends on defining humans as natural. This definition is indeterminate since it only states what humans are, but not the relationship to spurious understandings of human essence. This chapter will be devoted to developing how Marx grapples with this problem of the spurious, which he determines through the relationship of the material and the social. The relationship between the material and the social is complex since this is the classic historical materialist divide between productive force and relations of production. With this said, one can see that the social is not simply spurious but a historically useful, and in some respects necessary, relation. In dealing with this divide we will need to understand that in Marx's work before the *German Ideology* his understanding of humans as natural is too limited and not historically accurate. In the *German Ideology* and after, Marx's development of historical materialism is an accommodation of the appearance of social relations, and an attempt to understand the limits of their usefulness. This chapter, then, will be a consideration of the development of the relationship of the material and the social in Marx's work.

The mature conceptions that Marx develops for understanding the division between the material and the social are the different objects material actions and

social actions are concerned with. Material actions are activities that manipulate nature for various uses. Specific forms of labour and scientific experiment are material activities. Social activities do not manipulate nature for various uses but promote which uses material activities are supposed to satisfy; and social activities also promote the division of material products and promote the relations of control over the means of production. Class designations and ideological conceptions are due to the promotion of social activities. Class designations have no real material grounding; they are only due to entrenched control over the productive forces by certain people. Social activities are only the validation of specific people controlling specific means of production. They are not rooted in labour expended by a certain person. A person may control a specific set of means of production but this in no way entails that their labour has produced any of these items. Social ideas of ownership promoted by social activities of persuasions and argumentation determine certain means of production as under the control of certain people. Positions of control are grounded in accepted social designations of ownership; material alterations of nature do not confirm the social status of ownership. This is why labour power can be separated from a worker and owned by another person other than the worker herself. The natural necessity of labour only occurring within a working subject does not inhibit social conceptions separating the worker from their labour in regard to its social aspect

as labour power. Of course it is impossible to have labour power without a material origin, since every value is also a use-value. But, this does not mean that the material origin of labour power is acknowledged within the social form of capitalism, only the social determination of objects is acknowledged. This is why we can have “just” outcomes within capitalism that entail physical deprivations of malnutrition and homelessness, let alone the material deprivations of underemployment, overwork, under training, and general economic insecurity. Marx may not consider the rectifications of these problems just but he may consider their rectification desirable and better.<sup>112</sup>

## **11. Early Critiques of Social Activities Based on “the human”**

### *Critique of Hegel’s Doctrine of the State*

Marx, throughout his writings, tries to establish what is really natural for humans. This investigation into the natural Marx begins to answer, as we saw above, with his early attempts at establishing human essence, or understood in his later work as the parameters and reality of human activity. Marx uses the determination of the natural to critique certain social relations that he finds to be spurious. This is common throughout the entirety of his corpus, but is perhaps best known as his criticism of the orthodox political economic theories of his day.

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<sup>112</sup> Allen W. Wood has written about Marx’s understanding of justice in his essay “The Marxian Critique of Justice.”

His criticism runs along the lines of showing how these theories take the present as natural, and how these theories use this conception to evaluate all of social history. Marx finds this line of reasoning to ignore the actual events of history and to obscure the achievements of material production beneath the appearance of the production relations and other social relations.

In *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* Marx identifies several of these pseudo-natural conceptions. In the previous chapter we explored the ramifications for an understanding of human essence when the state is conceived as the result of the idea, and not the result of history. By showing how these conceptions were the result of history, Marx was able to illuminate the details of what is essential to human existence. Another conception I would like to explore is the birthright for rulers and landlords as *natural*. This type of conception I term as pseudo-natural since these are historically specific social conceptions that are mistaken for actual natural phenomena. Specifically for the text we are considering, the conception that a birthright is natural is incorrect since it is actually a social conception. This is the case because there are no natural characteristics that can be attributed to a birthright.

In various passages Marx discusses the conceived birthright of rulers and landlords,

Birth only provides a man with his *individual* existence and constitutes him in the first instance only as a *natural* [*natürliches*] individual, while political determination such as the legislature etc. are *social products* [*soziale Produkte*], born of society and not of the natural individual.<sup>113</sup>

Only this [social] agreement can convert the birth of a man into the birth of a king: hence kings are made not by birth but by agreement.<sup>114</sup>

The *political qualifications* of the hereditary landowner are the political qualification of his estate, qualifications inherent in the estate itself. Thus political qualifications appear here as the *property of landed property*, as something directly arising from the *purely physical earth* (nature).<sup>115</sup>

In these passages we can see that Marx finds a mistake in judgment when one assumes that qualities of a certain political office stem *naturally* from one's parentage or the hereditary ownership of land. Today, over 150 years since Marx wrote the above passages, this criticism might seem obvious. But, the important thrust of Marx's claim is his distinction between the natural and the social. There is no necessity in attributing rights according to one's birth. The attributing of rights is a social activity. The only natural quality one acquires through birth is a *natural* individual existence, the existence of oneself as a discrete organism.

Hereditary office or ownership is a social relation between members of a community.<sup>116</sup> These hereditary social relations are pointed out by Marx to be

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<sup>113</sup> *EW* p. 174; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 115.

<sup>114</sup> *EW* p. 174; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 115.

<sup>115</sup> *EW* p. 175; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 116.

<sup>116</sup> This is the case whether members of a community accept this social relation or it is forced upon them. But acceptance of a social relation is to take this social relation as "natural." If social

due to social history; and they appear natural because these social relations are the manner in which society is organized for a period of time, thus these relations appear to be the “natural” activities of a society.<sup>117</sup>

Notable in the above passages is that Marx critiques pseudo-natural conceptions with what he finds to be the truly natural. Thus, the false natural conception of birthright is critiqued by what is truly natural: humans as natural individuals. This process of critique is common for Marx. He criticizes certain understandings by contrasting them with what is the real understanding. This type of critique by contrast sets Marx apart, I find, from Hegel’s method of internal critique (determinate negation). Hegel explores the limits of a conceptual structure and locates where the predictions of such a structure fall short. Whether or not one understands Spirit’s actual determination as the moving force for the sublation of conceptual structures or just the result of the determinate negation of the conceptual structures themselves (regardless of Spirit’s essence), Hegel’s critique differs from Marx’s by not having what is truly real always on hand for

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relations were seen as changeable in all points of history this would alter these determination. See the following note.

<sup>117</sup> This description of how social relations appear as natural is only of one type of historical situation. Other historical situations could render the appearance of a social relation as natural or not in various ways. Forced social relations could be seen as natural even if people wish to resist them, i.e., slaves may rebel even if they think it is natural to keep slaves. Certain occurrences may cause people to find current social relations as unnatural or other social relations as natural; this could be a description of the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Or, certain occurrences may cause social relations *in general* to be seen as spurious; this final possibility could be understood as the transition to socialism. This last view concerning socialism is held by G.A. Cohen in *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, chapter IV.

contrast.<sup>118</sup> Marx's theory of history always has the productive forces as the cause of the jettisoning of production relations.

Marx proposes humans material existence as truly real, whether from his early work, understood as the natural individual, in *Capital*, understood in the distinction between the labour process and the valorization process. Material existence underlies all relations, *social and material*. This material existence could be understood, with full validity in Marx's work from the *1844 Manuscripts* on, as humans' continual improvement in objectifying themselves, which manifests itself as the development of the productive forces. This continual improvement in objectification is in other words the history of industry, as humans' ability to manipulate natural processes. The capability of one's ability to manipulate natural processes shapes material relations, such as the determining of work relations of all types. An example of this is the necessity of a number of people to build something of use, such as a building or a machine. Certain buildings cannot be built with only a few people, or certain machines need several operators. Also, since work produces use values and use values satisfy needs of the stomach or imagination,<sup>119</sup> work relations are not only the fabrication of physical items but also the organizing of people and the exploration of the natural universe. Work relations are thus not only a two-person garbage pickup crew, but

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<sup>118</sup> Concerning the problems of determinate negation and Spirit's essence see p. 256 in *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, by Robert B. Pippin.

<sup>119</sup> This is Marx's terminology in *Capital*. *C(1)* p. 125.



also a scientific community. Natural processes shape the possibility of producing food and knowledge, and depending on the level of the productive forces, the number of people necessary to carry out such activities.

Social relations are also shaped by the capabilities of industry, but as I will show, not directly shaped. Social activities can promote the speed and paths of development of the capabilities of industry. Social relations that inhibit improvement of the industry are degenerate social relations. Marx is able to criticize social relations by contrasting them with the history of industry. Marx's criticisms are dependent on demystifying pseudo-natural conceptions of what is natural or "innate" with the true basis for determining human action, industry. This critique is complicated since, according to Marx, at certain stages in the development of the productive forces, certain social forms best develop these forces. Thus, Marx's critique of social forms as spurious comes with the caveat that the social cannot be cast off at any time, but only when it has worn out its welcome.

In respect to *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, this basis of critique is not annunciated. Marx critiques social relations as merely social and as masquerading as natural but other than a barely elaborated notion of real democracy<sup>120</sup> there is little positive critique. Humans' material existence and

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<sup>120</sup> *EW* p. 87ff; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 31ff.

especially people's ability to manipulate the physical world is not fully developed, as we have seen, until Marx's later writings as an annunciated basis for critique.

### *On the Jewish Question*

The establishment of what is truly human is done by Marx by critiquing what is illusory. This same procedure is also used to critique social relations in general. As was noted above in the consideration of *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, social relations that are grasped as real or natural, are in actuality, when scrutinized, false or pseudo-natural conceptions. Marx's criticism in the first part of *On the Jewish Question* is more political than religious; accordingly, his demystification of social relations as false is focused on political conceptions.

Other than his critique of the division of the interactions of people into public and private spheres, Marx has a criticism of the rights of man as pseudo-natural:

In the rights of man it is not man who appears as species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself, society, appears as a framework extraneous to the individuals, as a limitation of their original independence.<sup>121</sup>

...it is man as *bourgeois*, i.e. as a member of civil society, and not man as citizen who is taken as the *real* and *authentic* man.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *EW* p. 230; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 159.

<sup>122</sup> *EW* p. 231; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 159.

But man, as member of civil society, inevitable appears as *unpolitical* man, as *natural* man. The rights of man appear as natural rights,...<sup>123</sup>

In these passages, Marx finds that in his critique of various documents<sup>124</sup> on the discourse of the rights of man that there is a tendency to understand social conceptions as natural and objective states. Social relations such as private property, and people as property holders, *bourgeois*, are taken as material relations. Such false understandings take social conceptions as natural, since conceptions of property and the holding of property have been different throughout human history. One can see how such conceptions, when mistaken as natural states and relationships, can be obfuscating. Marx's critique of these pseudo-natural conceptions is to enable people to recognize what is truly natural and understand that social and political relations are not fixed; they can be altered. Marx considers the language of the rights of men and citizens as the political, which he contrasts with the human. In this particular usage, the political are social ideas and the human are conceptions of our real material existence. Marx develops this distinction further, and with more detail, in the *1844 Manuscripts*.

## **12. Species-Being and Development of the Notion of Industry History**

*The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

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<sup>123</sup> *EW* p. 233; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 162.

<sup>124</sup> Marx reviews: *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, 1791; *Constitution of Pennsylvania*; *Constitution of New Hampshire*; The French Constitutions of 1793 and 1795.

Marx's critique of social conceptions as pseudo-natural up to this point has been basically negative. In these previous critiques Marx only shows how these social conceptions are pseudo-natural. They have little or no basis in actual history, but he doesn't provide a detailed basis for critique. As we saw in part 1, from the *1844 Manuscripts* forward, Marx develops a fuller conception of humans as natural than in his early work and uses this conception to critique social relations. My term pseudo-natural is apt for Marx's work before and after the *1844 Manuscripts*. But, from the *1844 Manuscripts* forward, Marx uses a more developed consideration of humans as natural to perform his critiques. Adopting this more detailed basis of critique not only strengthens his criticism, it also provides the possibility of prescribing action. I find the roots for Marx's mature practical materialism present within the *1844 Manuscripts*. A materialism that not only critiques the shortcomings of the current activities but also situates these activities and their rectification historically. Marx's criterion of what constitutes a materialist standard of practical action is becoming more developed.

In addressing *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, I will consider the *Estranged Labour* essay as an early but detailed understanding of the distinction between the material and the social. Marx's ideas about estrangement and alienation are developed around a conception of humans as natural beings. The production relations of capitalism impair humans' natural existence and

ability to objectify themselves. This impairment occurs because humans do not have direct access to the means of production. The means of production are natural processes that are unaltered, such as streams, wind, and fruits, or have been manipulated for use, such as chopped wood, processed uranium, tilled earth, and refined petroleum. Humans cannot survive or develop new abilities without access to nature/means of production. This conception of alienation from the means of production provides Marx with a way to critique social forms as insufficient. Marx understands humans as natural in the essay *Estranged Labour* as such,

Nature is man's *inorganic body*, that is to say nature is so far as it is not the human body. Man *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature [*der Mensch ist ein Theil der Natur*].<sup>125</sup>

This passage, I find, is in agreement with previous quotes in regard to Marx's understanding of humans as natural. It emphasizes that humans are objective, corporeal, and organic, that humans are in a necessary relationship with the natural processes of the universe, and that human activity is natural activity. Humans' bodies are dependent on the physical world for survival; they need to be

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<sup>125</sup> *EW* p. 328; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 368-9.

in a continuous “dialogue” with the physical world. Marx keeps this conception of necessary connection of humans with the physical world in mind when he develops his critique of capitalist social relations. It is from the standpoint of humans as natural that Marx conducts this critique.

With this said, I would like to emphasize another facet to Marx’s critique I noted above: Marx’s criticism of theories as pseudo-natural. Marx realizes that human beings’ requirement of a necessary and continuous connection with nature is obscured by the theories of some political economist of his day. These political economists find conditions that are spurious and detrimental to the material requirements of humans to be a “natural” state. Marx describes this obfuscation as such,

We must avoid repeating the mistake of the political economist, who bases his explanations on some imaginary primordial condition. Such a primordial condition explains nothing. It simply pushes the question into the grey and nebulous distance. It assumes as facts and events what it is supposed to deduce, namely the necessary relationship between two things, between, for example, the division of labour and exchange. Similarly, theology explains the origin of evil by the fall of man, i.e. it assumes as a fact in the form of history what it should explain.<sup>126</sup>

We can take Marx’s comments as pointing us in a direction of inquiring *why* certain social relations are the way they are, and not just taking the world as we

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<sup>126</sup> *EW* p. 323; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 364.

see it as final and actual. Previous to the just quoted passage, Marx says that many political economists assume that private property, the division of labour, capital, wages, interest, and profit as laws and not the result of historical development.<sup>127</sup> Marx's critique of capitalist social relations as spurious is dependent on the acknowledgment that he finds the prevailing scientific analysis of the current economic form to be flawed. In trying to understand Marx's conception of estrangement we must keep in mind that Marx is showing how the orthodox economic categories of his day are insufficient explanations of the social world.

Marx begins his critique by noting that the advances in output of commodities are co-existent with the physical deprivation of the worker and the worker's loss of control over his existence: "the realization of labour appears as loss of reality."<sup>128</sup> Since workers are humans they are natural beings that require access to the natural world to survive and to objectify their needs; capitalist production is detrimental to them because it cuts people off from the natural world.

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<sup>127</sup> "Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property. It does not explain it. It grasps the *material* process of private property, the process through which it actually passes, in general and abstract formulae which it then takes as *laws*. It does not *comprehend* these laws, i.e. it does not show how they arise from the nature of private property." *EW* p. 322; *MEGA*, I/2. p. 363.

<sup>128</sup> "*Die Verwirklichung der Arbeit erscheint so sehr als Entwirklichung, ...*". *EW* p. 324; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 365.

The worker can create nothing without *nature*, without the *sensuous external world*. It is the material in which his labour realizes itself, in which it is active and from which and by means of which it produces.

The more the worker *appropriates* [in capitalist production] the external world, sensuous nature, through his labour, the more he deprives himself of the *means of life* in two respects: firstly, the sensuous external world becomes less and less an object belonging to his labour, a *means of life* of his labour; and secondly, it becomes less and less a *means of life* in the immediate sense, a means for the physical subsistence of the worker.<sup>129</sup>

We can see that Marx has developed a critique of capitalist production from the standpoint of humans as natural. There can be developed a distinction of material activities and social activities and their relationship from these passages. We can state the following from the above:

1) Humans provide for their subsistence by appropriating the external natural world.

2) Humans appropriate the external natural world to objectify their “means of life,” that is, humans need the external world to objectify their needs and desires.

3) Capitalist production is a form of appropriating the external world.

4) 3 inhibits 1 and 2. That is, capitalist production’s form of appropriating the external world inhibits humans from appropriating the external world for subsistence and objectifying their needs and desires.

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<sup>129</sup> *EW* p. 325; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 365-6.



These four points develop a schematic for judging the material and the social. The material is humans as natural beings appropriating the external world (1 and 2). The social is the capitalist form of appropriating the external world (3). There is some type of relationship between the material and the social, and the material and the social in appropriating the external world can be compared in their results. This is why we can say that a form of appropriating inhibits certain ends from being appropriated (4). These points lead one to understand the material and the social relationship to be one of asymmetrical influence. This influence can be seen as: all appropriations of the external world are material appropriations in some sense, since appropriating the external world is manipulating physical forces. The social can alter the result of these appropriations in how the results and the activity of appropriation are controlled. In short, material appropriation occurs with all social forms of appropriation *riding upon* the material. This means that the material appropriation of type x that occurs in one social form can be compared to the material appropriation of type x in another social form.<sup>130</sup>

Comparing material appropriations of the same type is the history of industry that was discussed in part 1. As has already been stated, industry is the

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<sup>130</sup> Types of appropriation of the same type would be farming of a certain crop (but different yields), construction of a certain structure with the same material (stone and steel structures would be different types), or manufacture of an item that performs a comparable function (transport: cars, trains, bicycles, storage: refrigerators, storages basements, caned food, to name a few).

ability of humans to manipulate natural forces. This manipulation can be compared throughout history and is a bridge between social forms. We can understand the history of industry to be the material that the social rides upon. But the social obviously influences appropriation since it affects people's ability to sufficiently objectify themselves.

We can see that up to this point in examining Marx's conception of estrangement as a manifestation of the relationship of the material and the social, there is a certain foreshadowing of his more developed theory of historical materialism and his mature theory of value. I find Marx's theories of historical materialism and value are part of the overarching relationship of the material and the social. In short, the theories of alienation, historical materialism, and value are all part of the more encompassing theory of the relationship of the material and the social. Why one can develop these sub-theories is due to the above described relationship of the material and the social. Without an understanding of material appropriation of natural processes being inhibited by certain social forms, standards of effective appropriation are trapped within a certain social form. This ability to critique a social form is possible because the material's existence is not dependent on the social.<sup>131</sup> The distinction between material

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<sup>131</sup> These comments are influenced by G.A. Cohen's elaboration of historical materialism in *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. See my introduction for how I find his understanding of the material and the social to fit with my reading.

activities and social activities allows one to critique current social forms with standards other than the ones used by the social form.

Marx describes social activities inhibiting material activities as estranging “nature from man,” man “from his own active function,” his labour, his product of labour, and his species-being, this final kind estrangement includes estranging people from each other.<sup>132</sup> The first two of these we have gone over already; the second two, one’s labour and one’s product of labour, are specific expansions of the first two, since one’s subsistence and the objectification of desires are actualized in and through labour and its products (such as the labour of farming and the produce that results).

The final kind of estrangement, species-being, is an attempt by Marx to codify the inhibiting of the material by the social in a succinct way along with a standard of action. We can see that this is the case because species-being has a conception of human existence as natural, this conception can be inhibited by the social, and these understandings can be used for judging social forms. This is not new for Marx, as I mentioned before, but the relationship between the material and the social is beginning to take greater shape in these manuscripts, and a standard for action is becoming more pronounced, enabling Marx to develop sophisticated prescriptions for action.

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<sup>132</sup> *EW* p. 328ff; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 369ff.

It is therefore in his fashioning of the objective that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*. Such production is his active species-life. Through it nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labour is therefore the *objectification of the species life of man*: for man reproduces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created. In tearing away the object of his production from man, estranged labour therefore tears away from him his *species-life*, his true species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.<sup>133</sup>

We can see that species-being is a conception of humans as natural beings who use the natural world to objectify themselves. Estrangement or inhibited access to the natural world prevents this objectification. But, Marx's understanding of species-being is more than this. It additionally means that people can be *aware* of themselves as natural beings that objectify themselves in their productions.<sup>134</sup> This awareness can be more clearly stated *as the ability to judge which activities are rational*, which means considering as a standard of rationality *humans as natural beings with the ability to objectify their needs*. Species-being is not a thoroughly developed standard of action in Marx's early writings, and the continual reappearance of the component parts of species-being are more alluded to than explicit. As we shall see the use of the term species-being drops out for Marx but the components that compose it, humans as natural,

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<sup>133</sup> *EW* p. 329; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 370.

<sup>134</sup> Bertell Ollman expresses a similar view of species-being in his book *Alienation: Marx's conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. Second Edition, pages 82-84.

the possibility of the material being inhibited by the social, and the capacity for rational judgment composed of the previous two components, are retained. In his economic writings, Marx develops the specificity of humans' natural existence within the social form of capitalism and how this natural existence is obscured. The species-being of the early writings is replaced with a detailed and determinant understanding of not only how people are separated (alienated) from the means of production, but also how capitalist relations are harmful to and obscure the objectification and well-being of humans. Species-being is the first positive standard of action developed by Marx.

Marx also notes that estranged species-being is also “the *estrangement of man from man.*” He continues,

When man conforms himself, he also confronts *other* men. What is true of man's relationship to his labour, to the product of his labour and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men, and to the labour and the object of the labour of other men.

In the relationship of estranged labour each man therefore regards the other in accordance with the standard and the situation in which he as a worker finds himself.<sup>135</sup>

Marx finds that the relationships people have to their labor and their productions are isomorphic with the relationships they have with other people. The social

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<sup>135</sup> *EW* p. 330; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 370-1.

form of capitalism inhibits humans appropriating the external world to objectify their needs and interests, and it inhibits the appropriation of other people in a manner that allows objective relationships that are not antagonistic. Marx describes how labour and the products of labour appear as alien to the worker under capitalism;<sup>136</sup> this is because the worker activities of appropriation are actually detrimental to the worker. This has been previously discussed as how capitalist appropriation is a loss of reality for the worker. This loss is the cutting off of the means of living and objectification from the worker. The tools, spaces, and raw materials of production that are people's inorganic body are, in the capitalist social form, actually alien and hostile to the worker. Marx wants to add that other people also inhibit appropriating reality, since the real world is natural and objective, the activities of people form the world, materially and socially, through and along with physical forces. This means that people who inhibit need and desire satisfying appropriation are also alien to workers: "If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, and if it confronts him as an alien power, this is only possible because it belongs to *a man other than the worker.*"<sup>137</sup>

Marx's inclusion of other people in his conception of species-being is necessary when the understanding of humans as natural is explored. As we know, humans are objective, organic, and corporeal. Not to repeat what has already

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<sup>136</sup> *EW* p. 324; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 364-5.

<sup>137</sup> *EW* p. 330; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 371.

been said in the previous part regarding humans as natural beings, this aspect of humans as natural beings in regard to other humans is in many respects obvious. Humans as natural creatures exist as a group for sexual reproduction and sustenance. Beyond sexual reproduction, sustenance has been developed to produce high yields due to specialization of labour and hierarchical organization of sustenance production. The grouping of humans' labour together has been required for increased production of subsistence. This increased production through the use of group labour has been facilitated, according to Marx, by social forms. As has been briefly discussed early in this part, the material grouping of a community of people can be differentiated from social grouping. Marx's critique of the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right* is the placing of social reasons before material ones: that is, a social explanation of landlords as a moment of the idea, as opposed to a material explanation of landlords as the result of the development of the productive forces.<sup>138</sup> We can understand the consideration of humans in groups as a way of appropriating natural processes in terms similar to how we phrased general appropriation earlier.

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<sup>138</sup> I would like to state that this definition of a material reason is provisional. The explanation of landlords as the result of the development of the productive forces is not only a functional explanation; it is also a rational explanation. This definition is provisional because it has not been argued yet that functional explanations are rational explanations; and it has not yet been argued what are rational developments of the productive forces.

5) Humans provide their subsistence and objectify their needs and interests by appropriating the natural processes (this is a combination of points 1 and 2 from above).

6) Humans *in groups* can appropriate the external natural world *with increased productivity* to provide for their subsistence and to objectify their needs and interests.

7) 5 and 6 are material ways of appropriating natural processes.

8) Humans in groups can appropriate the external world *by means of* a social form of organization.

9) A social form of the kind described in 8 *may* inhibit 5 and 6. That is, social forms that organize humans in groups for appropriating natural processes may inhibit humans from appropriating the external world for subsistence and objectifying their needs and desires.

10) Marx definitely finds that the social form of capitalist group organization does inhibit 5 and 6.

Marx's consideration of humans in groups as corresponding to the distinction between material activities and social activities enables him to group human organization into two histories: industrial organization of humans and social organization of humans. Since industrial history is real and continuous



history, this enables one to understand social history as temporary. The grouping of humans as species-beings can be interrupted by grouping people according to social activities. Organizing people to satisfy the class interests of capitalists, according to the demands of capital accumulation, may prevent humans' natural relationships between people, their species-being, to exist. As we know from part 1, humans are not simply natural beings conceived in a static sense. They are natural beings that can accumulate knowledge about using the natural world, this means they are material beings too. Marx's understanding of humans as species-beings takes this history of material appropriation into account in understanding humans. We can see Marx introducing the idea of humans as materially active beings with the description of species-being. Humans are not only natural they are natural-historical. Marx fully develops the distinction between natural process, material activities, and social activities in the *German Ideology*. But as we have seen in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx begins to develop a positive standard of critique.

### *Theses on Feuerbach*

Marx outlines his understanding of the divide between the material and the social in the *Theses on Feuerbach* in regard to epistemological claims. We have already established how Marx critiques social claims through a comparison with

material claims. Material claims are claims about the history of industry. Marx has demonstrated that real history is composed of people's objectifying achievements as opposed to the manifestation of ideas throughout time. In the *Theses*, Marx again critiques spurious social claims about the world, but the object of his critique is not only idealism but also old materialism. In this section, I will reference Wal Suchting's translation and commentary.<sup>139</sup>

The first thesis is,

The chief deficiency of all materialism up till now (Feuerbach's included) is that objectivity, reality, the sensible world is conceived only in the form of the *object or of observation*; not however as *sensible human activity, practice*, not from the aspect of the subject. Hence, in opposition to materialism, the *active* side [was] developed in abstract fashion by idealism which naturally does not know of real sensible activity as such. Feuerbach appeals to sensible objects – ones really distinct from thought-objects: but he does not conceive human activity itself as activity *which belongs to the objective world*. Hence in the "Essence of Christianity" he considers only the theoretical stance as the genuinely human one, whilst practice is conceived and set off only in its grubby Jewish form. Hence he does not grasp the meaning of 'revolutionary', of 'practical-critical' activity.<sup>140</sup>

Suchting's analysis of the first thesis identifies a distinction between old and new materialism, with a correlation of similar traits between old materialism and

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<sup>139</sup> Suchting, Wal. "Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*: Notes Towards a Commentary (with a New Translation)." From *Issues in Marxist Philosophy: Volume II Materialism*. Edited by John Mepham and D.H. Ruben.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7-8. The addition of 'was' in brackets is Suchting's.

idealism. Old materialism is “an entirely passive awareness;”<sup>141</sup> it is a conceptual stance that is of observation and not practice (not production). The world cognized by old materialism is similar to idealism since is a passive and abstract grasping of things. This is in contrast to new materialism that understands human activity as part of our cognizing of the world. Suchting finds that Marx “is rejecting views which ignore the role of practice in bringing about knowledge of the world, views which fail to see, for example, scientific ‘facts’ as being products of quite specific practices.”<sup>142</sup>

Suchting identifies in the first thesis the idea that there is a divide between the findings of various sciences. He focuses on “specific practices” being the source of different facts. This corresponds to Marx’s conception of the ideological superstructure of a social form reflecting the interests of the dominant production relation. But, more important is the continued critique of basing knowledge upon something that Marx finds to be spurious. In examining the *1844 Manuscripts*, we saw that Marx criticized idealism’s findings as skewed since the vision of human knowing that idealism embraced was an abstract one that did not correspond to humans as natural, objective, and corporeal. In short, idealism considers the process of knowing to be separate from our physical activity and not achieved through practice, or, I would say, experiments. The

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

problem of the idealist epistemological vision, as seen by Marx, has knowledge as the outcome of thought qua thought and not the product of thought qua activity. Marx's practical-critical materialism has our attempts at understanding the world checked in their practice. This means that physical reality is what corroborates conceptions of the world through practice, as opposed to the unity of ideas as understood in idealism. Marx critiques old materialism as a mirror image of the idealist stance; both positions hold knowledge to be fixed separately from human activity.

Human knowledge is not subjective in the sense of old materialism/idealism; but the subjectivity of knowing that Marx is developing is the human subject as an objective physical historical being that explores and discovers her world through manipulating it. Suchting describes this point: "What he [Marx] is in fact pointing towards is human productive activity of various sorts, different types of transformation of pre-existing materials. But this not only does not require, it positively excludes, a theorization in terms of the traditional notion of the 'subject' in any of its many forms."<sup>143</sup> The Marxian knowing subject is one that is explained as "ways in which labour-power is related to a set of objectively structured raw materials and instruments of labour, the way such power puts these into connection in accordance with the objective laws of the

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

processes in question.”<sup>144</sup> Suchting wants to emphasize how the knowing subject is a subject involved in a particular historical *material* setting. This setting is composed of certain productive capabilities for subjects. In short, the historical setting for the knowing subject is industrial history, neither the passive “natural” history (old materialism) nor the abstracted history of idealism. The history the knowing subject draws upon to understand the world is based on the achievements of human objectification and not the structure of the world that is discovered whole, whether through old materialist observation or idealist deduction.

I find that Marx is endorsing a radical break with philosophic history. Marx wants to lose the traditional bracketing of the knowing subject, whether this bracketing is divine knowledge, the limits of the analytic *a priori*, or brut empiricist (old materialist) receptivity. Marx hints at his reasons for a radical break in the second thesis.

The question whether truth about the objective world is attained by human thinking – is not a question of theory, but a *practical* question. In practice man must prove the truth, that is reality and power, this-worldliness of his thinking. The dispute over the reality or not-reality of thinking – that is isolated from practice – is a purely *scholastic* question.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10-11.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

This break with a traditional conception of the knowing subject is based on Marx's understanding of humans as natural beings. As has been previously stated, the history that Marx is describing is one of industry; considering this history in light of what it means for the bracketing of the knowing subject is to set our expectations of how and what can be known with respect to the possible epistemological horizon of an organic, objective, and corporeal being. Marx finds that the possibilities of what can be known are established by practice, and how we know as through practice. What we are able to know and how we know it is dependent on how developed the productive forces are. Our technical abilities can allow new possibilities of discovery, and due to discoveries, new theories of the universe. Marx's vision of knowing is not only developmental but it is also physical, as in the physical practice of trying to know. As we see in the second thesis, truth is proved in its "reality and power." The "this-worldliness of thinking" is physical practice, the knowledge developed through the practice of manipulating the world.

The fullness of Marx's position can be brought out by examining the last sentence of the second thesis statement about the reality of thought. Marx's view of the knowing subject is inferred in this sentence, by establishing that questions that understand thought as having no connection with practice are "*scholastic*." By this he means the rhetorical or purely speculative – as in the dialectical

argument of the scholastics. Marx's argument for humans as organisms has provided the horizon for understanding questions concerning human abilities including thought. Thought must be understood as a trait of a certain type of organism that achieves progress thorough increased manipulation of its environment. Questions regarding thought, that consider thought outside and apart from the *thoughts of an organism*, are questions that are not about the reality of thought but rhetorical questions. Thesis five is indicative of this position: "Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking*, appeals to *observation*, but he does not conceive the sensible world as *practical* human activity involving the senses."<sup>146</sup>

Marx's bracketing of what can be known and how it can be known is done by considering the correct epistemological horizon for the knowing subject. Since the knowing subject is an organism, a discussion of its thoughts is moot when this is forgotten. Considering this we can see that Marx has provided a critique of other epistemological theories as a form of the relationship of the material and the social. We can see this through the following outline.

11) Humans are organisms and when considering their thought it must be understood as the thoughts of an organism.

12) New materialism considers thought as the thoughts of organisms.

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.

13) Old materialism and idealism consider thought as thought alone.

14) 13 inhibits the proper consideration of thought as defined in 11 since it does not consider thought as the thoughts of organisms.

15) 12 is a proper consideration of thought as described in 11 since it considers thought as the thoughts of organisms.

Marx's consideration of epistemology is based on his schematic of the material and the social. He holds that new materialism is an accurate conception of humans since it holds them to be organisms. Basing an epistemology on the *a priori* or divine knowing to bracket the horizon of the knowing subject is spurious. Marx uses his developed consideration of epistemology to critique the foundations of the political economists of his day, as we shall see below.

Marx's definition of material activity is defining humans as historical-natural beings. The actuality of humans is as natural creatures that have built their world materially. Humans can only be known, in truth, at a certain level of material development. The social ideas that correspond to a certain developmental level have bearing on the social life of this period directly, but only indirectly to the material life of this period. The reality of humans' natural/material existence is achieved by their material activities. Social activities only promote development of material abilities towards certain social ends to



satisfy class interests. They only satisfy human needs indirectly as a byproduct of capital accumulation.

### **13. The Developed Materialist Critique of Social Activities**

#### *The German Ideology*

In the “Feuerbach” section of *The German Ideology*, Marx, with Engels, restates his understanding of actual history as material history (the history of industry), the distinction between the material and the social, and he also discusses human liberation as communism. These different topics are interrelated. Marx’s and Engels’ interest in human liberation is dependent upon liberation being understood as material; in order for Marx to effectively convey this, he needs to defend why the actual is material activity and its products and how the material is obscured by social ideas and social activities.

Early in the “Feuerbach” section, Marx and Engels state:

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.

The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. Of course, we cannot here go either into the actual physical

nature of man, or into the natural conditions in which man finds himself – geological, oro-hydrographical, climatic and so on. All historical writing must set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.<sup>147</sup>

In the first lines of these passages, we can see Marx and Engels identifying what they consider to be actually history. The real subject of history is the material human and not the ideational “I”. Material humans are “real individuals” living in an “already existing” and “produced” world, their “activity” can affect “the material conditions of their life.” Marx and Engels stress the “natural bases” as a starting point to understanding human history. In short, we find again that the subjects of history are humans that are corporeal, objective and organic.

A point of importance is that Marx and Engels note the organization of people can be considered as “physical.” The physical organization of people along with their “relation to the rest of nature” are the “natural bases” that “all historical writing must set out from.” In this passage, and the rest of the “Feuerbach” section, the distinction between the material and the social is not clearly delineated, even if the distinction between the natural and the material is, as we have seen in the previous part, developed more fully. Marx’s terminology here is an early formulation of Marx’s mature theory of history laid out in the *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*. In the “Feuerbach” section,

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<sup>147</sup> *GI* pp. 36-37; *MEW(3)* pp. 20-21. The second passage was quoted in part one also.

Marx identifies that the productive forces condition social ideas. But, the more nuanced analytical divide between the material and the social is not present. One can then see the consideration of the organization of people as “physical” as a true formulation of Marx’s theory of history, since social ideas are conditioned by the productive forces (the organization of people is due to productive necessity); but, the division between an organization being considered as a material work relation and a social/production relation is not a fully developed consideration.

Before considering Marx’s and Engels’ notions on the relationship of the material and the social, I wish to review two passages in which Marx describes the relationship between humans and nature. Since Marx and Engels find that real history is the history of humans’ manipulating nature, he criticizes Bruno Bauer and idealists in general for considering humans and nature as antitheses. As Marx noted in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Hegel, as an idealist, considers history to be the history of self-consciousness. In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels criticize the idealism of Feuerbach, Bauer, and Steiner as also considering history as formulated around ideational subjects, whether “substance,” “species,” “man,” or again “self-consciousness.” This type of history ignores the relationship of humans and nature whose unity “has always existed in industry.”<sup>148</sup> Marx and Engels describe idealist history exclusion of nature as,

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<sup>148</sup> *GI* p. 45; *MEW* (3) p. 43. See chapter 1 for a fuller discussion of this section of *The German Ideology*.

In the whole conception of history up to the present this real basis of history<sup>149</sup> has either been totally disregarded or else considered as a minor matter quite irrelevant to the course of history. History must, therefore, always be written according to an extraneous standard; the real production of life appears as non-historical, while the historical appears as something separated from ordinary life, something extra-superterrestrial. With this the relation of man to nature is excluded from history and hence the antithesis of nature and history is created.<sup>150</sup>

As we have seen previously, Marx and Engels find that previous conceptions of the subject of history have been based not on real individuals and “ordinary life” but on an “extraneous standard” of idealist anxiety, whether we understand the idealist historical subject as the eventual product of determinate negation or the hidden engine of history, Marx retains some modicum of this latter conception, but in a materialist and de-mystified form.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel finds consciousness to push itself onward to find its own true existence by losing spurious shapes of consciousness.

In pressing forward to its true existence, consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of ‘other’, at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Marx and Engels identify “this real basis of history” in the preceding paragraph as the “sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and every generation finds in existence as something given.”

<sup>150</sup> *GI* pp. 62-63. *MEW* (3) p. 39.

<sup>151</sup> *PS* pp. 56-57; *HW* (3) pp. 80-81.

This passage lends itself to the interpretation that consciousness itself is present in all its shapes even if it does not realize that it is present. That consciousness has reached its true existence is signified by it realizing what it is; that is self-knowledge. Marx also maintains that the true subject of history, corporeal, objective, and organic humans, is always present at all points in *its* history. But, Marx also realizes that the natural world *without* humans exists on its own and accordingly has its own historical record. Our ability to learn what that record may be, dependent on experimental technique and equipment, is part of humans' material activity. The Marxian historical subject is not complete at any known point in history. But this subject may learn about its part of natural history. As was stated above this basic fact has been ignored by other historiographies. I find that it is not clear in Marx's writings how the real basis of history is realized. One explanation forwarded by Marx is that capitalism's speed in remaking the material and social world helped lay bare the real bases of history:

It [capitalist competition] destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality, etc., and, where it could not do this, made them into a palpable lie.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *GI* p. 81; *MEW* (3), p. 60. This has not held out to be true. Lenin realized part of the problem and discussed it in his essay *What is to be Done?* as the limits to trade union consciousness. See page 125 in *Essential Works of Lenin*. Marx realized the obscuring power of capitalism in his latter writings; see *Grundrisse* pp. 690-4 and *Capital* volume 1, chapter 1 section 4. I find that the fetishism of commodities and of capital can be seen as the amorphousness of the social form of capitalism, which may help us understand the resilience of pre-capitalist social ideas within

Marx has an idea that as we develop our material abilities we also overcome our ignorance of our place in the natural world. Our material abilities enable us not only to bring natural processes under the control of material activity, but also, Marx finds, dispel irrational explanations of natural phenomena.

Both Hegel's and Marx's historical theories are dependent on the development of their historical subject. But for Marx the realization of what are the real bases of history is dependent on the development of our abilities to manipulate natural processes; that is, the development of the productive forces. Marx intends to show how social ideas have a certain degree of correspondence with the level of development of the productive forces. This is a central component of historical materialism, and in the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels presents us with an early formation of it. This is important for Marx because in order for him to criticize social ideas he needs to develop an understanding of how social ideas are related to the material. This will enable Marx to demonstrate that social ideas can be spurious at certain levels in the development of the productive forces. In our examination of the relationship of the material and the social and the production of ideas, I will quote some of

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capitalism. Bertell Ollman has some interesting insights on class-consciousness in his book *Social and Sexual Revoultion: Essays on Marx and Reich*.

Marx's and Engels' general understandings of the relationship first, and will then move on to his consideration of the production of ideas.

The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation – social in the sense that it denotes the co-operation [*Zusammenwirkens*] of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production [*Produktionsweise*], or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a “productive force”. Further, that the aggregate of productive forces accessible to men determines the condition of society, hence, the “history of humanity” must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange.

[and,]

Thus it is quite obvious from the start that there exists a materialist connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production, and which is as old as men themselves. This connection is ever taking on new forms, and thus presents a “history” irrespective of the existence of any political or religious nonsense which would especially hold men together.<sup>153</sup>

This is a wonderfully concise passage on the relationship of the material and the social. We can break it down in to these points: a) the production of life *appears* as a relation of the material and the social (from Marx's and Engel's comment I think we can say that the material, in this passage, is synonymous with

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<sup>153</sup> *GI* pp. 48-49; *MEW* (3) pp. 29-30.

the industrial); b) certain material and social stages occur together; c) the social is an organization, co-operation, of people; d) industrial productive forces determine the type of social organization; e) social organization is a “productive force”; f) there is a materialist connection between people; g) the materialist connection is determined by needs and the mode in which they are produced;<sup>154</sup> h) the materialist connection between people is different than social co-operation; and i) the materialist connection is different than politics and religion.

We can see from these passages and the above analysis that Marx and Engels want to maintain a separation between the material and the social with the material as the primary determinant, but also a degree of reciprocity between the material and the social. Humans producing their lives, whether subsistence or otherwise, “appears” “twofold” as material and social. But, the dominant determination is the material determining the social. Marx and Engels express *the dominance of the material* concerning determinations in his remarks about the study of history. The social history of people, “the history of humanity,” is determined by “the aggregate of productive forces.” Any historical phase of humanity cannot be properly understood unless the level of industrial development is taken into account.

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<sup>154</sup> As we see, Marx associates “mode of production” with “industrial stage” in these passages. Marx’s association of these two terms here signifies that he wants to consider “mode of production” as material. This is in contrast to his later writings where “mode of production” is a designation of social relations. Such as the capitalist mode of production.



These considerations of history have been discussed before, but what must be addressed here is the extent of reciprocity that takes place between the material and the social when the material is the primary determinant. Here, Marx discusses how the social as a certain co-operation is “combined” with a certain industrial stage, and this certain co-operation is a “productive force.” This means that certain types of co-operation can promote production at certain industrial stages.<sup>155</sup> The social may be a “productive force” in promoting production, but the “aggregate of productive forces” determine “the condition of society.” This use by Marx and Engels is at first sight confusing but he apparently does it to contrast the degrees of influence the material and the social have on their determination of social forms and production. Strictly productive forces are humans and the means of production, but they are undoubtedly encouraged to develop at certain speeds due to social promotion by dominant class interests.

This contrasting influence of the determination of social form (co-operation) and the promotion of production appears to be a relationship where the reciprocity is *necessary*. But Marx and Engels note that the materialist connection of humans is based on needs and the mode of production (industrial stage). This connection is different than political or religious relationships. We can understand co-operation as different from the materialist connection between

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<sup>155</sup> Cohen discusses the issue of social relations promoting the development of the productive forces in chapter VI of *Karl Marx's Theory of History*.

people, because what determines the materialist connection, needs and the mode of production, are not strictly social phenomena. The mode of production can be considered strictly in material terms. Some needs are developed due to the social form and other needs are also natural and material. Marx identifies some differences in needs in the *Grundrisse*.<sup>156</sup> But, even if needs are considered partially social in Marx's and Engels' use here, they still lean in a direction of conceiving the materialist connection of people as without social determinations of the sort that places causation outside of the material. The religious and the political are conceptions for Marx and Engels that are too removed from the material appropriation of nature to be good bases for understanding real human, materialist, connections. Since the actual is material human relationships, needs have to be based on the material if there are to be rational expectations for activity.

Marx's understanding of the centrality of the material as the primary determinant of the material/social relationship is demonstrated in his considerations of how "consciousness" is determined by the material. To quote Marx,

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse

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<sup>156</sup> See pp. 527-528 in *Grundrisse*. See also Agnes Heller's book *The Theory of Need in Marx*.

of men – the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men at this stage still appear as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of the politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, 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 being, and the being of men is their actual life process. If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of object on the retina does from their physical life-process.

[and]

That is to say, not of setting 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; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of the life-process. The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises [*empirisch konstatierbaren und an materielle Voraussetzungen geknüpften Lebensprozesses*]. ... It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.<sup>157</sup>

The general trends in Marx's ideas of the material as the basis for consciousness are laid out in these passages. Marx understands consciousness to be determined by the material activities of humans. The development of the productive forces not only enables people to produce varied items and use nature in new ways, it also enables people to produce new and varied social structures via the division of labour. The development of new social roles due to the

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<sup>157</sup> *GI* p. 42; *MEW* (3) pp. 26-27.

division of labour will be dealt with later on, but here we will focus on the arising of conceptions and ideas due to humans' material activity. As we see above, the material determines consciousness. Ideas of morality, politics, religion, and law are produced by people; ideas do not produce people. Consciousness is a part of people; people are not a part of consciousness.

This understanding of the origin of forms of consciousness originating from our material life is not a radical view if we consider where else they could come from. If people do not produce law then where does it come from? And, if people have consciousness and are not essentially consciousness then where do our ideas come from? Marx has taken real humans as material beings as the basis of history. It is only from human material activity that ideas can come. We have established the existence of humans in the previous chapter as organic, corporeal, and objective. Objects for humans are not the productions of consciousness; objects exist along with humans, and humans use their practical ability to manipulate the world to find ways of using nature. Our consciousness of objects is the empirical reception of our practical attempts at using objects and not the conformity of objects to consciousness. To base an understanding of consciousness upon the structure of consciousness is really just to base consciousness on our material abilities and to describe consciousness in a manner that disregards the accumulation of knowledge through material activity.

Conceptions of consciousness that want to determine people's activities as aspects of law or aspects of religion are only adding terminology. The legal ownership of a machine is actually the socially accepted control over the machine, or a religion's dictated distribution of grain is only the socially accepted control over the produced grain. These social forms of ownership or distribution correspond to a certain stage of the development of the productive forces. People may understand social forms as the application of rational law or living in accordance with divine dictate, but in actuality the consciousness of these social forms are corresponding to the certain historically specific material activities of a group of humans.

Not only do Marx and Engels find that we should conceive of consciousness as only being the consciousness of a materially active and natural creature, but that consciousness is isomorphic with language and that language is practical in the sense that consciousness is the consciousness of experiences with other people.

The "mind" ["*Geist*"] is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being "burdened" with matter [*mit der Materie "behaftet" zu sein*], which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old a consciousness, language *is* practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship [*Verhältnis*], it exists for me; the animal does not "*relate*" ["*verhält*"] itself to anything, it does not "*relate*" ["*verhält*"] itself at all.

For the animal its relation [*Verhältnis*] to other does not exist as a relation [*als Verhältnis*]. Consciousness is therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.<sup>158</sup>

Marx and Engels find there to be a consciousness floor that takes people existing together and communicating with one another as irreducible. This means that the historical circumstances someone lives in are the parameters we should understand as composing consciousness. Also, our consciousness is physical, as being part of matter, effected by and affecting other types of matter – energy transmitted through the medium of air, or as light. Consciousness for Marx is to be understood as situated in an environment of objects, in which these objects are contributing elements of consciousness. Marx and Engels conceive of consciousness as inseparable from the objects of consciousness. These objects of consciousness are physical objects we exist with, and not ideas or self-awareness without matter. To establish ideas *alone* as objects of consciousness would be to maintain for Marx and Engels that our mental existence is producing the form and content of objects. This would be in violation of the material world as the origin of what we think of in consciousness. Marx and Engels think there is little reason to opt for an idealist conception of consciousness, since idealist theories of history and mind are stylized and dependent on cultural mores for their structure. Hegel's

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<sup>158</sup> *GI* pp. 49-50; *MEW* (3) pp. 30-31.

attempt to reconcile the classical Greek life with the Christian community is a wonderful example of this.

Marx and Engels find enough evidence that our consciousness is produced in our social and material activities to override an idealist conception of consciousness. The ideas we embrace have their origin in our actual lives. We have ideas of how our society operates because we experience society operating in a such a manner. Marx and Engels do not embrace any theory of correspondence for how we develop ideas of the world. As he noted above we easily turn ideas into the cause of societal activities (the *camera obscura*), or conflate ideas of activities with entirely new notions (nothing prevents us from thinking inconsistently or without rigor except being attentive). On this matter Marx says,

Incidentally, it is quite immaterial what consciousness starts to do on its own: out of all this trash we get only the one inference that these three moments, the productive forces, the state of society [a social relation - JPH] and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another, because the *division of labour* implies the possibility, nay the fact, that intellectual and material activity, the enjoyment and labour, production and consumption, devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in negating in its turn the division of labour. It is self-evident, moreover, that “specters”, “bonds”, “the higher being”, “concept”, “scruple”, are merely idealist, speculative, mental expressions, the concepts apparently of the isolated individual, the mere images of very empirical fetters and limitation, within which move the mode of production of life, and the form of intercourse coupled with it. (The idealist expression of actually present economic limitation exist not only purely theoretically but also in the practical consciousness, i.e., consciousness which emancipates itself and come into

contradiction with the existing mode of production devises not only religions and philosophies but also states.)<sup>159</sup>

The human brain can conjure up all sorts of fabrications, but trying to figure out all the spurious flights of fancy that we have come up with, for all sorts of reasons, good, bad, or no reason at all, is a Sisyphean task.<sup>160</sup>

But, Marx and Engels do think we can establish a judgment of who benefits from the activities of a certain social form. Establishing division of labour relationships and who benefits from this division can be done empirically and enables us not to untangle, but rather cut, the knot of ideas that supposedly explain the activities of a social form, and consider ideas not as sources of meaning but instead as means of promoting and maintaining social forms. We observe the activities of society and see who benefits from them without having recourse to idealist categories of human action. As we shall see, the division of labour has played a large roll in the development of consciousness.

Since, consciousness cannot be truly conceived as existing on its own outside of a physical and historical group of people (people in historical groups are the most simple type of consciousness), this means that Marx is not only breaking with Cartesian subjectivity but also Hegelian inter-subjectivity. The

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<sup>159</sup> *GI* p. 51; *MEW (3)* p. 32. The parenthetical sentence was crossed out in the manuscript and does not appear in the German text used here.

<sup>160</sup> It is fitting that attempts to understand the human brain's ability to develop myths and Chimeras is best described with a term derived from a myth.



source of movement from one type (“shape”) of consciousness to the next is not due to self-consciousness’ desire for self-knowing, but is rather due to the development of the productive forces. Development of the productive forces enables people to manipulate natural processes with increasing control. This increased control develops new possibilities and also new needs. This developing control over natural processes is associated with various types consciousness; and Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology* clearly associate types of consciousness with certain levels of productive forces’ development.

Marx and Engels begin their discussion of consciousness as corresponding to the development of the productive forces with this comment,

Consciousness is at first, of course, merely consciousness concerning the immediate sensuous environment and consciousness of the limited connection with other person and things outside the individual who is growing self-conscious. At the same time it is consciousness of nature, which first confronts men as a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force, with which men’s relations are purely animal and by which they are overawed like beasts; it is thus a purely animal consciousness of nature (natural religion) precisely because nature is as yet hardly altered by history – on the other hand, it is man’s consciousness of the necessity of associating with the individuals around him, the beginning of the consciousness the he is living in society at all. ... It is mere herd-consciousness.<sup>161</sup>

Marx and Engels understand the first type of consciousness as produced from a situation where nature is uncontrollable and undiscovered processes. The

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<sup>161</sup> *GI* p. 50; *MEW* (3) p. 31.

developed productive forces are unable to bring nature under human control. We can see that Marx finds that low productive power coincides with little comprehension, since human comprehension is developed along with practical power (as Marx stated in the *Theses on Feuerbach*). Being subject to forces beyond one's control lends itself to poor understanding, "overawed like beasts."

But the development of productive power brings with it not only social differentiation beyond the herd/tribal stage, brought on with the division of labor, but a separation of consciousness from actuality. Explanations are not of material activities and relationships, but self-enclosed idealistic understandings. Theory is theory of itself and its own rules of operation, and not theoretical conjectures of the natural world and its testing in material activities.

This sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increase productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then the division of labour which develops spontaneously or "naturally" by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g., physical strength), need, accidents, etc., etc. Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. (The first form of ideologists, *priests*, is coincident.)<sup>162</sup> From this moment [of development of the productive forces] onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real [*ohne etwas Wirkliches vorzustellen*]; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate

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<sup>162</sup> This sentence in parenthesis is a remark by Marx in the manuscripts margin.

itself form the world and to proceed to the formation of “pure” theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc.<sup>163</sup>

The causation of events in this passage is:

a) Increase of population. b) Increase of productivity coinciding with an increase in needs. c) Development of the division of labour. d) Appearance of the division of mental and material labour. This coincides with the appearance of ideologists/priests. f) Separation of consciousness from the world. As we can see, the arising of consciousness that has little attachment with material activity is *because* certain positions arise in the division of labour that produce these “pure” forms of consciousness. The occurrence of theology and morality happens because there is a sufficient division of labour that enables members of society to produce such notions.

It may seem to be the case that explanation of the unknown or validation of activities is done by people at any stage of development (such as the hunter gathers of Australia). But, what Marx and Engels want to stress here is that this development of pure consciousness *has very little direct attachment to actual material activities*. Pure consciousness is separate from material activities. Of course, humans have developed theological and moral explanations and

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<sup>163</sup> *GI* p. 50-51; *MEW* (3) pp. 31-32.

justifications for their actions for quite a while, but what is important is the arising of specialist ideologists and abstract self-referencing theory.

Along with the development of the productive forces enabling such specialists as ideologists, it also enables the distinction in rulership. The development of a separate ruling group is possible only upon the development of surplus product, in particular food. Without this material pre-condition the appearance of non-producing group is impossible. As we shall see, the conditions that produce a surplus are not only the ultimate causes of stratified society but also the overcoming of stratified society.<sup>164</sup>

Before we move into considerations of new possible social arrangements, Marx's critique of ideology is dependent on his description of the material causation for the appearance of specialist-ideologist. Ideology can only make an entrenched appearance in society when there are sufficient material conditions for its maintenance. Marx's criticism of the abstract nature of ideology combined with this dependence on certain material conditions moves us in the direction of considering ideology not as a description of the human condition, but of only a particular social condition. Marx understands this to be the case, as he states in this famous passage:

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<sup>164</sup> Mandel has an excellent discussion of surplus production and the division of labour in his work *Marxist Economic Theory*, see chapter 1.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas [*die herrschenden Gedanken*]: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and bourgeoisie are contending for domination and where, therefore, domination is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant ideas and is expressed as an “eternal law”.<sup>165</sup>

The process of learning and the dissemination of information are activities, which means that when and where they occur can be controlled. Information retention and organization can be, like any activity, the domain of a specialist. Specialization means there can be an uneven distribution of who has information skills. Lopsided control over the productive apparatus lends itself to the lopsided production and distribution of information by those who control the

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<sup>165</sup> *GI* p. 67; *MEW* (3) p. 46. In these quotes, Marx’s discussion of “dominant material relations” is indicative of his not fully developed historical materialism. These relations in his mature and nuanced terminology should be described as production relations; that is social relations. Marx reiterates similar ideas in *The Poverty of Philosophy*: “The same men who establish their social relation in conformity with their material productivity, produce also principles, ideas and categories, in conformity with their social relations.” p. 109.

apparatus. Information production is an activity that can be greatly facilitated by material production due to the surplus production.

The line between information that is about the material or about the social is dependent upon whether that information is about material activities or social activities. Information about the manipulation of nature or the organization of people materially necessarily to manipulate nature is information about the material. Information about the promoting the manipulation of nature or the organization of manipulation for a specific end *other* than material manipulation is information about the social. Since the manipulation of nature is for self-actualization of one's projects, current and future, information that promotes the use of the productive apparatus for purposes other than self-actualization are social purposes.

This distinction between social and material purposes as determined by the possibility of self-actualization implies a judgment between better or worse use of the productive apparatus. Judgments are carried out on the degree of self-actualization structures. Self-actualization structures are activities and material objects that fulfill and help promote further self-actualization of one's projects, such as basic needs and free time (to name a few structures). Uses of the productive apparatus that increase the meeting of basic needs and free time for more people is a high degree of self-actualization, than a use of the productive

apparatus that increases the meeting of basic needs and free time for fewer people.<sup>166</sup> In considering greater degrees of self-actualization for society, there is also the benefit of stabilization. If people are guaranteed a certain amount of self-actualization (say necessary calories and adequate housing) in a particular social arrangement, then self-actualization could be considered stable; and we can consider a society that guarantees amounts of self-actualization structures versus a society that does not guarantee a similar or greater amount as enabling a higher degree of self-actualization.<sup>167</sup>

As we can see, social information is of a type that promotes uses of the productive apparatus that are engaged in degrees of self-actualization that are not optimal for the current capabilities of the apparatus. Ideology, which is always social information, is justification of uses of the productive apparatus that are non-optimal for self-actualization. Social information is information that is used to obscure the optimal material use of the productive apparatus.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Basic needs are an amorphous collection depending on the current capabilities of the productive apparatus. Basic needs could be easily considered necessary calories and appropriate shelter. But, if the productive apparatus can supply these products, then education to a certain level can become a basic need, and easily many other activities: levels of health care, old age pensions, improvements in shelter, transportation vehicles etc. As we can see the upper limits are not easily seen. But, important in gauging basic needs are the *current* capabilities of the productive apparatus and the satisfaction of needs based on *hierarchical* necessity, food before transports, etc. For a discussion of a need hierarchy see pp. 205-210 in E. Mandel's book *Power and Money*.

<sup>167</sup> This section hints at the idea of socialism to be presented in part 3 as a social arrangement that guarantees a certain amount of self-actualization structures, which I discuss in part 3 as universal self-actualization.

<sup>168</sup> Ideology can also be an explanation of phenomena due to the lack of development of the productive forces, such as in pre-industrial stages. Religions and myths are this type of ideology.

An additional problem Marx and Engels identify with ideologies is that they take on a life of their own; because the ideas of a certain age can exist independently of those who thought them up, this enables one to consider ideas prior to those who created them.

Once the ruling ideas have been separated from the ruling individuals and, above all, from the relations which result from a given stage of the mode of production, and in this way the conclusion has been reached that history is always under the sway of ideas, it is very easy to abstract from these various ideas “the idea”, the thought, etc., as the dominant force in history, and thus to consider all these separate ideas and concepts as “forms of self-determination” of the Concept developing in history. It follows then naturally, too, that all the relations of men can be derived from the concept of man, man as conceived, the essence of man, Man. This has been done by speculative philosophy. Hegel himself confesses at the end of the *Geschichtsphilosophie* that he “has considered the progress of *the concept* only” and has represented in history the “true *theodicy*”. Now one can go back again to the producers of “the concept”, to the theorists, ideologists and philosophers, and one comes then to the conclusion that the philosophers, the thinkers as such, have at all times been dominant in history: a conclusion, as we see, already expressed by Hegel.<sup>169</sup>

We have encountered these critiques of idealism previously, but in addition to the epistemological problem of idealism, thought before practice, we also have ideology obscuring the material and the independent existence of ideas beyond their time of concoction. It is reasonable to understand myths as explanations of

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But ideology of this type, explanation of uncontrollable nature, is different than ideology that is meant to obscure alternative social arrangements. Religious ideology can be understood as superstructural ideology; political economic ideology can be understood as social ideology.

<sup>169</sup> *GI* pp. 69-70; *MEW* (3) pp.48-49.



phenomena previous to modern scientific conceptions; these ideas are easily dispelled through logical critique and scientific discovery. But, when ideational conceptions start generating other ideational conceptions, or worst still, ideational conceptions become the standard for truth, we then become locked into an idealist framework. If idealism has to be refuted on the grounds and suppositions of idealism this just produces more types of idealism. There has to be a radical departure from idealism, one where the standards of idealism are given up and one is freed from the “Idea.”

Marx and Engels consider the solution to these problems is to go to the root of their material possibility, which is the emergence of ideologists as a specialist group. The conditions that produce specialist ideologists have to be overcome. Marx and Engels sidestep the problems and conditions of idealist philosophy, taking not *a priori* subjectivity as the basis for certainty, but the material activity results. This is a deeply radical shift that Marx makes; it is not the logical agreement of ideas, but the performance of activities by a certain portion of people within a society that will free humans from spurious ideas.

This radical departure from the standards of idealist philosophy is described by Alan Wood as, “...like some more recent philosophers such as Wittgenstein, [Marx] thinks that many philosophical problems should not be solved by arguments and theories but rather dissolved by abandoning the false

view of things which generates them. For Marx, however, this abandoning of a false perspective is not just a matter of philosophical conversion or ‘seeing the world aright’; it involves a change in our everyday life, fundamentally an alteration of our social relationships.”<sup>170</sup>

Material development of the productive forces is a major cause in eliminating spurious explanations. Ideologists are possible, as we have discussed, due to material development; there has to be a certain minimum of surplus to maintain full-time specialists not engaged in subsistence production. Additionally, Marx and Engels find that sufficient material conditions for the existence of specialist ideologists is also limited in time. The arising of these specialists as well as their obsolescence is caused ultimately, but not proximately, by material productive development. If all members of society can learn the mysteries because they have the surplus time to do so, the monopoly on ruling ideas is threatened, but not eliminated. Material development may bring the pseudo-natural ideas of ruling ideologists and their masters into doubt. The proximate cause that will eliminate their control over the production of information and their control over the productive apparatus that supports them is communism.

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<sup>170</sup> Alan W. Wood. *Karl Marx*, Second Edition. p. 189.

Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse, and for the first time consciously treats all naturally evolved premises as the creations of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals. Its organization is, therefore, essentially economic, the material production of the conditions of this unity; it turns existing conditions into conditions of unity. The reality which communism creates is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible that anything should exist independently of individuals, insofar as reality is nevertheless only a product of the preceding intercourse of individuals. Thus the communists in practice treat the conditions created up to now by production and intercourse as inorganic conditions [*Bedingungen als unorganische*], without, however, imagining that it was the plan or the destiny of previous generations to give them material, and without believing that these conditions were inorganic for the individuals creating them.<sup>171</sup>

Communism is a social arrangement that takes material explanations of social circumstances and parameters for activity as means of organization. It is the absence of social ideas and ideology that shapes how communism is organized; freeing people from social illusions leaves material cooperation as their societal structure. The judgments of individuals liberated from produced obfuscations enables them to realize that history is material history: the aggregate of material activities producing human existence.

Understanding one's conditions as "inorganic" means that they can be shaped as one likes and is capable of so doing. The 'materials' that we build our lives out of are nature and our congress with other people; it is subject to the

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<sup>171</sup> *GI* pp. 89-90; *MEW* (3) pp. 70-71.

forces of our activity. This is in contrast to understanding our lives as based on “organic” conditions. These “organic” conditions are thus two-fold: on the one hand, they are pseudo-natural social ideas, and on the other, they are the underdeveloped material abilities of people. The “organic” is the uncontrollable, both unexamined ideas and untamed nature. Overcoming the dominance of the “organic” is done through development of the productive forces, because this development provides control over the natural world and makes the unity of individuals possible. Being able to control the natural world (to a sufficient extent) enables ideological explanations to be dispelled by scientific explanation; and, the increased control over the natural world increases free time, making the specialization of ideologist unnecessary, since the unity of individuals can ‘police’ themselves. In short, communism removes the material limit, insufficient development of the productive forces, which maintains the possibility of an ideologist specialty.

To state Marx’s understanding of the arising and obsolescence of ideologists and the endurance of the conception of ideas determining reality in a more formal fashion:

16) Non-subsistence producing specialists, such as ideologists, can occur in a society when there is a sufficient productive surplus to maintain them.

17) Ideologists appear as due to ideas instead of being the creators of ideas.

18) Ideologists appear in this way due to the level of development of the productive forces.

19) Ideologists' strict association with dominant class positions will no longer be materially possible when the development of the productive forces is beyond a certain point.

Ideologists are possible if productive forces  $p$  are greater than  $1$  but less than  $2$ ; where  $1$  and  $2$  are the minimum and maximum levels of development of the productive forces that are sufficient to maintain amounts of, respectively, scarcity and surplus of product for specialist ideologists to exist. Below  $p$  there is too little product to maintain specialists and above  $p$  there is enough product for everyone to acquire the sufficient information to make the conditions of a monopoly of information that maintains specialists impossible. Simply put, specialists of the ideologists  $i$  obtains when  $p$  is  $> 1$  and  $< 2$ .

The removal of authoritarian ideas is achieved by removing the possibility of authoritarian positions in the structure of society. In comparison, Hegel understands Spirit's drive for certainty leads it to attempt to ground cognition upon an absolute that is separate from the immanent subject. Since the structure of Spirit is based on recognition of immanent subjects, Spirit's attempts to ground

cognition in this way are doomed to failure. The freedom and authority of the subject is achieved when Spirit realizes that all knowledge is self-knowledge and knowing is based within a community. Marx finds that Hegel's position is abstractly true but Hegel perceives the problem incorrectly. To arrive at knowing based within a community, one needs the material conditions necessary to have this as a possibility. The tension between Hegel's idea of the ethical community, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the idea in the *Philosophy of Right* belies the lacuna in Hegel's thinking concerning material development; the version of the ethical community in the *Philosophy of Right* maintains solidified class divisions, whereas in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* the ethical community appears to overcome such problems.

But, one can understand Hegel's conception of the ethical community in the *Philosophy of Right* as a better representation of his idea of the conditions for a free subject due to the limits of his thinking in regard to material development. If Hegel wants to have a viable vision of the community that has overcome the problems of separable absolutes on his own objectivist idealist terms, then the version from the *Philosophy of Right* appears to be the more realistic system. Marx's vision of communism is an advancement over Hegel's ethical community since Marx is able to overcome class divisions by showing how ideas are the products of ideologists. Simply, and accurately, the overcoming of class divisions

is an extension of freedom since the variety and scope of peoples' activities seems to increase with the absence of class distinctions.

Authoritarian societies are because of authoritarian relationships not because of authoritarian ideas. Any one can hold an authoritarian idea but a society is only authoritarian when people have relationships that are authoritarian: that is, hierarchical relations between people where commands can only be sent in one direction in the chain of increasing amounts of people.<sup>172</sup> Strangely, for all the critique that Hegel heaps upon Stoicism, he effectively endorses a Stoic answer: the rectification of thought will produce the rectification of reality. Marx finds, rather, that removing the possibility of authoritarian relationships will remove the possibility of authoritarian society. His position avoids a dangerous problem we have faced too much in the past and still do, demagoguery. Demagogues exist due to ignorance and the division of labour/rulership. Ignorance and unequal rule is caused by low development of the productive forces. Only greater learning can dispel the enduring myth of the divine king. Any idea can be called 'free' or 'true,' but the reality of freedom and truth is established in objective circumstances not in thought. Having the ability to critique ideas and living in a society that can support the relationships needed for

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<sup>172</sup> Seemingly one can have hierarchical relationships where commands can move in three ways: up, down, and up and down (disregarding horizontal movement of commands on the various hierarchical levels). The second, as described in the text, is authoritarian. The third is representative relationship with a degree of reciprocity. The first is representative without a degree of reciprocity.

self-rule prevents the objective circumstances that allow demagogues to manipulate language and information. The practical standard that I find Marx to endorse is consistent with the conditions of self-rule; and most importantly, the practical standard of the self-actualization of one's projects is optimal under the conditions of self-rule. The objective circumstances of self-rule and the Marxian practical standard will be explored further in the third part. But, now we will consider Marx's and Engels' idea of communism as an objective means of alleviating social illusions and falsely perceived limits to action as they discuss them in the *Communist Manifesto*.

### *Communist Manifesto*

Before writing the *Communist Manifesto* with Engels, Marx discusses revolutionary change in *The Poverty of Philosophy* as follows:

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society. For the oppressed class to be able to emancipate itself it is necessary that the productive powers already acquired and the existing social relations should no longer be capable of existing side by side. Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself. The organization of revolutionary elements as a class supposes the existence of all the productive forces which could be engendered in the bosom of the old society.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> *The Poverty of Philosophy* pp. 173-4.



In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels develop positions similar to the one described by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and are reminiscent of Marx's mature positions in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* in regards to practical standards of action. Analytically I have stated that Marx's standard of practical judgment is based upon the ability to self-actualize one's projects. Here in the *Manifesto* Marx formulates this practical standard by presenting mis-actualizations that occur within the social form of capitalism, and then proposing communism as the means to alleviating the conditions that prevent actualization.

The mis-actualization that occurs under capitalism can be understood as potential actualizations not being met. In general, there is one main mis-actualization that Marx and Engels discuss: lack of control. This problem is not necessary given the productive forces' level of development; lack of control is the result of the social form of capitalism. Capitalist social relations of production prevent control over one's activities. Since this problem can be alleviated by another social form (or the removal of all social forms), one can understand this problem as mis-actualization since the possibility of its rectification is available. Stated in a more traditional Marxian format, people within capitalism are alienated from possible activities and improved conditions. To be in a state where

one's activities are mis-actualized is be in a state where *they can be actualized according to material possibility*.<sup>174</sup>

I would like to stress that the availability of rectifications does not mean it must be actual; it can be possible. This is important to note since the rectification of the mis-actualizations of capitalism is socialism, but socialism is not actual but a real possibility. People are alienated from greater control over their projects not because the means of control exists somewhere right now, but rather the means of control can exist with our current material abilities; it can be created with the current level of productive development. Additionally, this does not mean that people are not in a state of mis-actualization if the rectification does exist somewhere right now, such as the treatment for malaria existing in a warehouse, but it is not usable by those who need it.

Marx's and Engels' descriptions of the mis-actualization that people suffer under capitalism are, as I said above, due to lack of control over one's life. In the *Manifesto*, Marx's and Engels' discussion of the lack of control proletarians have falls into three main categories: absence of economic security, absence of control of the production process, and the impossibility or difficulty of developing one's abilities. Marx states this as,

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<sup>174</sup> Being in a state where certain needs or activities are not a material possibility is discussed by Ernest Mandel in *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*.

These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.<sup>175</sup>

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal mater into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overseer, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself.<sup>176</sup>

The average price of wage-labour is the minimum wage, *i.e.*, that quantum of the means of subsistence, which is absolutely requisite to keep the labourer in bare existence as a labourer. What, therefore, the wage-labourer appropriates by means of his labour, merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence.<sup>177</sup>

Marx's and Engels' criticisms of the capitalist social form can be understood as lack of control of one's material production. This lack of control of material production can be broken down into three parts: investment, labour process, and surplus/product.<sup>178</sup> We can see these analytic considerations are reflected in the quotes above. People are in a state of mis-actualization because they do not have control over material production in its entirety.

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<sup>175</sup> *MESW* p. 41; *MEW (4)* p. 468.

<sup>176</sup> *MESW* p. 41-42; *MEW (4)* p. 469.

<sup>177</sup> *MESW* p. 47-48; *MEW (4)* p. 476.

<sup>178</sup> Included with these parts of material production it is also inferred that one controls the means of production also: land, tools, machines, buildings, fuels and raw materials; since to control investment is to be able to control the means of production as inputs and to control the surplus/product is to control the means of production as outputs. Control over the labour process means control of the organization of work relations and supervision. See Cohen's *Marx's Theory of History* pages 111 to 114 on work relations.

Marx and Engels find that people can have control over material production due to the development of the productive forces. Distinctly, in the *Manifesto*, this means control by all members of society (*sans*, perhaps, children) as opposed to production being controlled by a small number of people.<sup>179</sup> This diversification of control due to the development of the productive forces is stated by Marx as,

The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products.<sup>180</sup>

The possibility of all members of society controlling production arises concurrently with the productive mode of capitalism. Capitalism, in the meeting of its social goals, continuous valorization (*Verwertung*), also develops the productive forces to such an extent to reduce the time required for necessary

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<sup>179</sup> There may be reason to think that at the point of societal takeover by proletarians there would be an exclusion of capitalists from controlling production. But, we can also consider the matter as such, the point of takeover, T1, would be the culmination of proletarian political power, thus proletarians would have majority *political* control. At T2 there would no longer exist any capitalists or proletarians, there would only be members of an association. At T2 there would be control over *production* by all, where as T1 there would be *capitalist control of production*. As we see, at T1 there are asymmetric distributions of political and production control, and at T2 there are symmetrical distributions. But all control distributions have to be judged according to their propensity to facilitate self-actualization.

<sup>180</sup> *MESW* p. 46; *MEW (4)* pp. 473-4.

production, thus opening up the possibility of self-management. Capitalism produces its “own grave diggers” as Marx and Engels like to say.<sup>181</sup>

This result of the capitalist mode of production developing increased possibility for association while seeking after increased surplus value is identified by Mandel as the “supreme contradiction of capitalism system.” On the one hand in capitalism we have, “The private form of appropriation makes profit the only and driving force of production. It causes the development of the productive forces to be uneven and spasmodic. Production develops by leaps and bounds, not in the sectors where the most urgent real needs are to be found, but rather in those where the highest profits can be achieved.” On the other hand, capitalism “implies a no less immense development of human needs, a first awareness of the possibility of an all-round development of every man.”<sup>182</sup> This contradiction is a supreme one because it is the process of creating the possibilities of activities and human relations that will be incommensurate with the social form of capitalism. The solutions to the problems of capitalism are being laid within capitalism itself.

The solution to the mis-actualizations of capitalism is the association of communism. But why is communism the solution and what are its specific aspects? Here are some of the most succinct passages from the *Manifesto*

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<sup>181</sup> “What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers.” *MESW* p. 46; *MEW (4)* p. 474.

<sup>182</sup> Mandel, Ernest. *Marxist Economic Theory*. pp.170-1.

describing why communism is a solution to the mis-actualizations of capitalism and the particular features of this solution:

The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.<sup>183</sup>

All that we want to do away with, is the miserable character of this [capitalist] appropriation, under which the labourer lives merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it.<sup>184</sup>

In bourgeois society, living labour is but a means to increase accumulated labour. In Communist society, accumulated labour is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer.<sup>185</sup>

In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality.<sup>186</sup>

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all [*worin die freie Entwicklung eines jeden die freie Entwicklung aller ist*].<sup>187</sup>

These statements all find that eliminating capitalist control of the political and economic apparatus will alleviate the problems faced by proletarians.

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<sup>183</sup> *MESW* p. 46; *MEW (4)* p. 474.

<sup>184</sup> *MESW* p. 48; *MEW (4)* p. 476.

<sup>185</sup> *MESW* p. 48; *MEW (4)* p. 476.

<sup>186</sup> *MESW* p. 48; *MEW (4)* p. 476.

<sup>187</sup> *MESW* p. 53; *MEW (4)* p. 482.

Communism's solution to the mis-actualizations of capitalism is to change the control over investment, the labor process, and surplus/product from a small group of people to all people. Marx and Engels stress how the priorities of capitalist accumulation do not correspond with the meeting of human needs and the self-actualization of projects.

Is communism a society that no longer has a social form that dominates the material possibilities of action? I say yes for the following reason: the developing of one's activities is based upon the decisions of individuals and not conformity with entrenched authority. This distinction between the control by individuals against entrenched authority is a distinction between actions determined according to material standards alone, as opposed to social standards. One's activity in the former is *not conducted* in respect to an additional person who is guiding the result of the subject's action. Whereas with actions determined according to the standards of a social form, one's activity *is conducted* in respect to an additional person who is guiding the result of the subject's action. In other words, the material is without the veil of *imposed* decisions. This is not an epistemological gap between the subject and the world, but a practical gap between the actor and the actualization of his projects. Considering this distinction in my terminology: the actualization of one's projects is not a sufficient satisfaction of an attempt to fulfill one's desired project unless the

attempt at actualization is under the optimal control of the actor. That is, all actualizations to be really considered the actualization of one's projects have to be *self*-actualizations. Self-actualization is control over one's projects without the interference of *social* hierarchies. Socialism/communism is described in this terminology as the universal self-actualization of one's projects, since all members of a societal group are in control of the productive apparatus.

In the quotes above, Marx and Engels emphasize the distinction of control over production between capitalist and workers. Workers assuming effective control over the productive apparatus<sup>188</sup> entails that there are no imposed social relations between actor and apparatus. Since social relations are class relations, and communism is the elimination of class relations, the corresponding social relations are also eliminated. This can be understood as the case if we realize that class/social relations are descriptions of control of the productive apparatus. The removal of control in its entirety is correspondingly the removal of social relations as the veil between oneself and use of the means of production. Marx and Engels state,

When, in the course of development [of communism], class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of

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<sup>188</sup> Effective control of the productive apparatus is also political control, i.e. the state and its appendages, legislation, executive, taxation, decommodified goods, etc. Thinking of the state as separate from civil society in regard to the control over actualizing one's projects is a chimera of liberalism.



a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.<sup>189</sup>

Marx's use of the political can easily be seen as isomorphic with the use of social in the terminology used in this dissertation. Class/social relations are maintained due to low development or insufficient application of the productive forces. Once these problems have been overcome, social relations will no longer have the right "conditions" for their existence.

The conditions for the maintenance of social relations have been discussed in the *German Ideology* section above in regard to ideologists. Here in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels discuss the overcoming of the conditions that maintain social relations as the past dominating the present and individuals being controlled by the demands of capital accumulation. The past dominating the present is social relations promoting specific ends that are not necessary for need satisfaction. Capitalist social relations are entrenched authority that came into power in the past. This entrenched authority of class dominance promotes

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<sup>189</sup> *MESW* p. 53. *MEW (4)* p. 482.

specific uses of the parts of production according to its own capitalist class interests. Investment is allotted based on profitability; the labour process is structured - in the speed of work, policing, and work place decision-making – for optimal surplus-value extraction; and the use of the product/surplus is based upon the judgments of the entrenched few. All of these uses are decided not upon the basis of promoting self-actualization but upon the optimal conditions for capital accumulation. The social relations of capitalism are thus obscuring the development of peoples' material abilities. Capitalist social relations, as with all social relations, are spurious because they promote ends that are not isomorphic with material development. Capitalism may be an “involuntary promoter” of material development but this promotion is not sufficient for creating the optimal conditions for the self-actualization of one's projects.

We can break up Marx's and Engels' condemnation of capitalism into the following statements:

20) The self-actualization of one's projects is a desirable situation; and if there are different situations the most desirable will be the one that creates the optimal conditions for self-actualization.

21) Capitalist social relations are not a situation that is optimal for the creation of the conditions for self-actualization because capitalist social relations promote ends other than the self-actualization of one's projects.

22) Communism is an optimal situation for the creation of the conditions of self-actualization because there are no social relations promoting ends other than the self-actualization of one's projects.

Communism is the removal of social forms that enables human individuality to act without imposed intermediaries. The people of the present are able to use the past, as individuals; inherited social ideas have no more bearing due to elimination of the lopsided control over the means of production. Social ideas may linger, but there is no longer the imposed small group control over the production and transmission of information. Marx's comments about communism tend towards the freeing of human personality from strictures that would prevent individuals from developing their own standards of success. If people can truly develop as individuals, this means that standards of achievement are their own.

Ideas such as this will be pursued in more detail in part 3, but for now I wish to stress that the replacement of oligarchic control over the means of production by universal control is the giving up of social history. The development of the productive forces, that is, material history, produces the

possibility of being able to let go of social history, which is the ideas that validate or support social relations, whether existing ones or ideas from previous social forms that have lingered on, although transformed to fit in, if awkwardly, the new age. There is a clear division developed by Marx between the imposition of social ideas to promote certain ends, and use of the productive forces free from, at least, the instituted dominance of ideas by a ruling class. Eventual freedom from all social ideas that have been reproduced just by culture alone without any support by oligarchs is a distant dream, equitable to the overcoming of superstition, which still grips us strongly even deep into our scientific age. Communism is the objective liberation of people from social forms; the subjective liberation of social ideas is not a necessary outcome of communism. Put in a rather vulgar way, communism may protect us from idiots but it can't stop the production of them.

Now we need to consider how Marx's dictum "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" corresponds to the distinction between the material and the social. Marx's dictum poses a distinction between two conceptions of control over the productive forces: the social form of capitalism, and communism that is free of social relations as entrenched class power. The dictum states this distinction on its own, but we will consider the

immediately preceding passages to further justify this point shortly. So, first, on its own the dictum implies that the development of one person is dependent on the development of all people. What type of human organization would entail such a pattern of development? The type of organization that entails this pattern of development acknowledges the *material* inter-dependence of all members of a community; this is socialism/communism, where there is universal control of the means of production. Other types of organization may entail inter-dependence, indeed social democratic or corporatist capitalism does entail this. But, the inter-dependence of these other organizations is social in nature. The development of members of these organizations is based on the social form that characterizes these societies.

A social democratic country (even if it still embraced the position of socialism by increment) may implement measures to ameliorate the mis-actualization of capitalist economies, but this country is still characterized by a capitalist social form; this means that development of each by developing all is not assured. Rather the dictum of capitalism is the development of each is conditional upon each person's respective control of what part of the productive forces. Who is in a better position to develop their abilities: a person who controls a substantial amount of machinery, buildings, raw materials, and money, or someone who controls only their labour-power? As we see, the inter-

dependence of members of a capitalist society is a *social* inter-dependence, where the dictates of development are due to inherited social history.

Material inter-dependence is characterized by the material existence of humans. The development of people's abilities determined only by humans' material existence means that development is dependent on the physical and mental capacities of people and not their social position (the oligarchic patterns of control over the means of production).<sup>190</sup> Access to development is not restricted by what you own but to your ability to develop. The limit of who can develop, and who cannot develop their abilities, can be understood as encompassing the entirety of a communist community, which would be no limit if there were a communist world. Whereas, the limit of who can develop their abilities in a capitalist society is determined by who controls how much of the productive forces, simply, and in an expanded sense those who are bourgeois and privileged (i.e. highly paid) petit bourgeois and the elite of the 'middle class'.<sup>191</sup> In short, when the productive forces have reached a certain level of development the inter-dependence of people can be considered strictly based on their material

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<sup>190</sup> My explanation of the development of abilities as dependent on mental and physical capacities could be mis-construed to mean that only "normal" people can develop their abilities. But, this conclusion would require specifying a certain *level* of mental and physical capacities. This conclusion is avoided since I state only the existence of capacities not a certain level as the standard for development. I think this would include all people who are alive and, perhaps, consciousness.

<sup>191</sup> For excellent considerations of the contemporary petit bourgeoisie and 'middle class' see Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory* p. 165-6 and Wright's essay "What is middle about the middle class?" in *Analytical Marxism*, ed. John Roemer.

development. There is no longer any reason to restrict development of people's abilities due to scarcity.<sup>192</sup> Surpluses sufficient for a transition to communism would imply a reduction in labour time for necessary subsistence production. This would free up time for self-governance.<sup>193</sup>

It is interesting to add that the development of the productive forces includes developing the skills and abilities of people. If communism is an organizational form that is free from the social activities of promotion, having only material expectations for development, at least objectively, then the direction for the development of the productive forces would be such that would optimize the development of people's skills and abilities; in short, communism is the best theoretically known human organization for the self-actualization of one's projects. But, as I mentioned a moment ago, communism is only *objectively* the optimal organization. Individuals' *subjective* preferences may override optimal material development, for example, increasing production of entertainment as opposed to reducing necessary labour time. We can say the entertainment choice is subjective since the realization of the preferred state, being entertained, is dependent on the requisite subjective awareness: feeling entertained; but

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<sup>192</sup> See Mandel's essay *Defense of Socialist Planning* for a consideration of scarcity.

<sup>193</sup> "The intensity and productivity of labour being given, the part of the social working day necessarily taken up with material production is shorter and, as a consequence, the time at society's disposal for the free intellectual and social activity of the individual is greater, ... In capitalist society, free time is produced from one class by the conversion of the whole lifetime of the masses into labour-time." *C-1* p. 667; *MEW* (23) p. 552.

additional free time is objective since the realization of the state of free time is not dependent on a requisite subjective awareness. One has a certain amount of free time regardless of one's feelings about the free time.

I think consideration of Marx's dictum on its own substantiates the claim that it corresponds to the distinction between the material and the social. But, to beat a dead horse, the passages preceding the dictum also lend to this conclusion. As was quoted above, Marx characterizes capitalism, and all societies, as subject to political power, where this power is "merely" one class dominating another.<sup>194</sup> But, development will ameliorate these conditions that cause class distinctions, and along with these conditions the imposition of social relations in the development of people's abilities. The disappearing of class distinctions is also the disappearing of social relations and political power. Political power is a social relation and political action is a social action. Since social actions only promote ends to production that are not materially necessary, the end of political action is an end, at least formally, of promoting ends not necessary for material production.<sup>195</sup> The disappearance of political/social action implies that only "public power" remains, the power of an association of people who develop their abilities freely.

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<sup>194</sup> The discussed passages are in *MESW* p. 53. See these quotations above.

<sup>195</sup> Political action is only one aspect of the social; we could say that policing production and the valorization process are others.



As we can see, Marx contrasts distinctions between the existence and non-existence of classes between political and public power. These distinctions are determined on the one hand as inhibiting and on the other as free from this inhibiting. This determination of relations is of the material/social distinction I have described with the material action (public power) being inhibited by a social action (class/political power). The material/social distinction is one not of symmetry or necessary co-existence; but, rather, a distinction where one component covers and obscures the other component. Social relations obscure material relations. This obscuring causes the mis-actualization of one's projects.

The distinction between the material and the social is an intrinsic component to Marx's understanding of a materialist standard of practical action. Without the material/social distinction there is no way to compare the potential of various organizational forms' capacities for projects' self-actualization, since self-actualization is dependent on material development. Actualizations, and increased degrees of actualization, are impossible without material development due its prime result: the reduction of necessary labour time. Without the distinction between the material and the social, one cannot acknowledge the independence of material activity in increasing the capacity for self-actualization, and the limits that social activity's promotion imposes on the development of the productive forces in different social forms. Being able to free oneself from social

relations - class distinctions, undemocratic distributions of control over production and information, ideological specialists – is possible only if the social (or at least these mentioned aspects) is *separate from the material*. Self-actualization as the Marxian standard of practical judgment, and as the basis for communism, necessitates the distinction between the material and the social, since an increase in the capacity for self-actualization, and co-extensively the conditions for communism, is to progressively free oneself from the inhibiting existence of social activities.

Capital, as is well known, is regarded as a social relation by Marx:

To be a capitalist, is to have not only a purely personal, but a social *status* in production. Capital is a collective product, and only by the united action of many members, nay, in the last resort, only by the united action of all members of society, can it be set in motion. Capital is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power. When therefore, capital is converted into common property, into the property of all members of society, personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character.<sup>196</sup>

Here again we can contrast common property with private property, and understand the common as the material and the private as the social. Also, the social character of capital is considered synonymous with class character, and accordingly in opposition to the common/material. Capital as a social relation is

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<sup>196</sup> *MESW* p. 47; *MEW (4)* pp. 475-6.

determined by the types of control people in society have over the productive forces. If some people control the means of production and others control only their labour power then this is a capitalist social relation.

The reason I want to stress the specifics of capitalist property is to note that even if capitalist control of the means of production is overcome, the new control of the means of production as common property will be material since it is possible that it will not necessarily be used for capitalist accumulation according to the standards of average profit, but rather it *could* be used for need satisfaction and the actualization of one's projects. I stress the latter arrangement as possible because we cannot predict peoples' decisions; such as, commodity production could be retained as the desired outcome of a post-capitalist society, even if the means of production is 'nationalized' and subject to democratic control. The elimination of capitalist property relations eliminates a social barrier to self-actualization. Objectively the conditions are present to optimize the capacities for self-actualization, but whether these conditions will be fully utilized is another matter dependent on societal decisions. Property losing its class character, its capitalist character, is at least the removal of the objective conditions that maintain social relations. Using the means of production to meet people's needs would be a material use only of the means of production.

Marx not only critiques the capitalist form of property as an inhibitor to material action, he also criticizes capitalist property along with other capitalist notions, freedom and individuality, as mistakenly determined only by their place within the capitalist social order. This mistake of taking the determination specific to a social form as the only way to understand a notion, action, or relation is to turn this determination into one that is pseudo-natural. That is, taking social relations as natural relations is to mistakenly identify them as intrinsic to human existence.

As we discussed before, capitalists mistakenly identify the capitalist's social form specific notion of private property as the only form of property, not distinguishing this type of property from personal, communal, or public/common property, since these forms of property are not specifically<sup>197</sup> the "kind of property which exploits wage-labour, and which cannot increase except upon condition of begetting a new supply of wage-labour for fresh exploitation. Property, in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital to wage-

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<sup>197</sup> I would say specifically, since the public property within capitalism is used for capital accumulation. Public corporations may be created to facilitate private gain. In the former Soviet Union bureaucratic control of public property was used to help exploit workers to further accumulation. I would say that both of these examples are rather forms of state property, either a capitalist state property or bureaucratic state property, since the control over the property is mediated through an inequitable political structure. On capitalism's use of 'public' property for capitalist accumulations see Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory* pp. 501-511; and on accumulation and bureaucracy in the Soviet Union see also chapter fifteen in *Marxist Economic Theory* and Mandel's book *Power and Money*.

labour.”<sup>198</sup> All forms of property, as enforceable control over the productive forces, do not entail the exploitation of wage-labour. Marx’s expanded understanding of exploitation and surplus value extraction are not yet present in the *Manifesto*, but we can see that a rudimentary form of his later theory is present here. Since we will deal with surplus value extraction later on I won’t dwell on the finer points for now. Exploitation due to capitalist property relations does entail conflict between classes; Marx finds capitalist property relations are not the only type of property relations we could have; he points out personal and public property as examples of this. To take the current social relations as eternal is to ignore historically different societies.

Marx and Engels also discuss the pseudo-natural understandings by capitalists in regard to freedom and individuality:

And the abolition of this state of things [capitalist] is called by the bourgeois, abolition of individuality and freedom!  
By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying.<sup>199</sup>  
From the moment when labour can no longer be converted into capital, money, or rent, into a social power capable of being monopolized, *i.e.*, from the moment when individual property can no longer be transformed into bourgeois property, into capital, from that moment, you say, individuality vanishes.  
You must, therefore confess that by “individual” you mean no other person than the bourgeois, than the middle-class owner of property.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> *MESW* p. 47; *MEW (4)* p. 475.

<sup>199</sup> *MESW* p. 48; *MEW (4)* p. 476

<sup>200</sup> *MESW* pp. 48-49; *MEW (4)* p. 477.

Marx's rebuttal to these claims is:

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation.<sup>201</sup>

The determinations that Marx finds the bourgeoisie defending are the capitalist social form's determinations of these notions. All these determinations are attached to a specific social form of property relations, so of course the abolition of capitalist property would also be the abolition of freedom and individuality if these notions could be defined only in the above manner. As Marx's rebuttal and other comments we have quoted state, human action being inhibited is not the goal of communism; rather communism is the expansion of human action. Marx finds capitalism to be a limitation of human action since freedom in capitalism is limited by property ownership. Freedom is formally unrestricted in capitalist society, but the full scope of human activity is diminutive when one has no control over the productive apparatus. Without control over the productive apparatus, human activity is limited to idleness, as we see with poor homeless wretches. Freedom is meaningless without access to the means to manipulate the material world.

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<sup>201</sup> *MESW* p. 49. *MEW (4)* p. 477.

## **14. The Critique of Orthodox Political Economy as the Critique of Social Activities**

In this section, we will consider the material social divide in Marx's late works, in particular *Capital* and *Grundrisse*. This section will be broken up into the following topics: the commodity, exchange, money, commodity fetishism, the valorization process, wages, justice, and capital fetishism. Each of these topics can be understood as critiques by Marx of capitalist political economic positions. The critiques show how the appearance or accepted conception of the phenomena does not accurately portray the reality of it. Marx's critique is done by showing how the ends promoted by the social appearances are not isomorphic with the material self-actualization of one's projects.

### The Commodity, Exchange, and Money

Marx's analysis of the commodity is central to his practical critique of capitalism. Understanding the commodity's parts, these parts' various functions, and, most importantly, how these functions are promoted or retarded within capitalism is a key vantage point to explain capitalism's limits and tendencies. *Prima facie*, commodities appear as an "immense collection" of the wealth of capitalist countries,<sup>202</sup> while the "individual commodity appears as its elementary

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<sup>202</sup> *C-1* p. 126; *MEW (23)* p. 49. Marx is quoting himself here from *CCPE*.

form.”<sup>203</sup> But, under examination one finds that individual commodities are further reducible into two parts: a use-value and an exchange-value. These parts of the commodity serve different functions; a use-value satisfies a need and an exchange value is “the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind.”<sup>204</sup> Exchange- value is determined by its value: “the labour-time socially necessary for its production.”<sup>205</sup> The relationship of these parts to each other is not symmetrical, since use-values are the material bearers of exchange-values,<sup>206</sup> but exchange-values “do not contain an atom of use-value.”<sup>207</sup> It is apparent that exchange-values require use-values to exist, but use-values can exist without bearing an exchange-value.<sup>208</sup>

G.A. Cohen outlines how the parts of the commodity can be distinguished as being comprised of a material part and a social part: “The sum total of use-values is the concrete or material wealth of society, whereas the ensemble of

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<sup>203</sup> *C-1* p. 126; *MEW (23)* p. 49.

<sup>204</sup> *C-1* pp. 125-6; *MEW (23)* pp. 49-50.

<sup>205</sup> *C-1* p. 129; *MEW (23)* p. 54.

<sup>206</sup> *C-1* p. 126; *MEW (23)* p. 50.

<sup>207</sup> *C-1* p. 128; *MEW (23)* p. 52,

<sup>208</sup> G.A. Cohen makes great use of this distinction, pp. 105-108 in *Marx's Theory of History*, for the possibility of socialism. Use-values distributed based upon their need satisfying functions are indicative of not only a socialist economy, but also primitive communal societies. But, even without these grand examples, people produce and consume their own use-values quite regularly, preparing their own food, or distribute use-values with others that involves no exchange, such as fixing your friend's car or radio. Marx finds that “Commodities come into the world in the form of use-values of material goods, such as iron, linen, corn, etc. This is their plain, homely, natural form. However, they are only commodities because they have a dual character, because they are at the same time objects of utility and bearers of value. Therefore they only appear as commodities, or have the form of commodities, in so far as they possess a double form, i.e. natural form and value form.” *C* p. 138; *MEW (23)* p. 62.



exchange values – the same totality socially viewed – is its abstract or social wealth.”<sup>209</sup> The distinction between the material and the social of the respective parts of the commodity has similar characteristics of the distinction in general.

First, the social relation of exchange obscures the material satisfaction of needs: “From the moment the distinction between the usefulness of things for direct consumption and their usefulness in exchange becomes firmly established. Their use-value becomes distinguished from their exchange-value.”<sup>210</sup> Exchange can occur regardless of need satisfaction. People exchanging use-values do not have to have the need that these use-values would satisfy. To exchange a use-value only requires that one have an exchangeable equivalent. The operation of exchange may take place entirely between people who have no need for the use-values they are exchanging: “The first way in which an object of utility attains the possibility of becoming an exchange-value is to exist as a non-use-value, as a quantum of use-value superfluous to the immediate needs of its owner.”<sup>211</sup> It is important to point out that exchange regardless of the needs of the people exchanging is not the only outcome of exchange. It may very well be the case (and the reason for exchange arising in the first place) that the satisfaction of needs is the reason for exchanging *the specific use-values*. Here is where the

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<sup>209</sup> Cohen *Marx's Theory of History*, p. 101.

<sup>210</sup> *C-1* p. 182; *MEW (23)* p. 103.

<sup>211</sup> *C-1* pp. 181-2; *MEW (23)* p.102. In the *Grundrisse* Marx describes use-value's relationship to exchange as such, "...the commodity becomes a commodity, only realizes itself as exchange value, in so far as its owner does not relate to it as use value." *G* p881; *MEGA II/1.2* p. 740

obscuring capacity of exchange-value as a social form becomes very apparent. If exchange is seen as only the possibility of exchange for need satisfaction, and not the other possibility of exchange without need satisfaction, then the exchange relation itself cannot be identified as the cause of needs not being satisfied. The social relation of exchange appearing as only exchange for need satisfaction obscures the actual causes of needs not being satisfied, and distracts people from potential problems intrinsic to the two parts of the commodity.

The actual cause of needs not being satisfied is disproportional control over the productive apparatus and its products.<sup>212</sup> But, this reality is obscured if the prevailing interpretation of exchange assumes that need satisfaction and exchange are isomorphic. This interpretation is correct only if the situation of exchange is between people in a group where each person has direct control over an amount of the means of production that is equivalent to every other person of the group, and no change can occur in the amount of the means of production each person controls without an equivalent change in the amount of the means of production every other person controls. This equivalence must be rather strict,

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<sup>212</sup> Natural disasters are not a major cause of people's needs not being satisfied due simply to the development of the productive forces. People's abilities to prepare for and survive most natural disasters are quite advanced, this being easily seen in those cases where natural disasters do cause major problems in need satisfaction are in areas of the world where there is a low development of the productive forces, or the potential for productive development is poorly distributed. In the contemporary world, starvation, malnutrition, exposure, and sanitation problems are due to potential underdevelopment of the productive forces and not the current worldwide limits for controlling natural processes. Underdevelopment is a social problem due to exchange being the basis for development of the means of production and not need satisfaction.

such that no person or persons has an inordinate amount of control over essential raw materials or productive instruments, examples being control of the majority of the water, arable land, essential minerals, etc. in the region. This is necessary to prevent the possibility of a breakdown in equal exchange, which may occur even if there is abstract equality in the value amount of the means of production that each person controls. The exclusive control of most of an essential item in the region may enable the holder(s) to exchange unequally with others in the area due to this item being essential and in high demand.

If all the conditions hold above, we would have a social form where all persons in the society would have equal control over the means of production and they could never be alienated from the means of production. If we wish, we could imagine that this social form is one composed of either only individual producers or only co-operatives, since a combination of the two would imply economic units of unequal sizes. Whether or not we imagine what this social form looks like, what is important to note is that no one is a wage labourer; this would imply that someone does not have equal control over an equivalent amount of the means of production, since being a wage labourer means that one must sell one's labour-power because one does not control a sufficient amount of the means of production to satisfy one's needs (at least minimally) without selling one's labour-power.

This example illustrates what would be the required social relations of production in order for exchanges to be strictly isomorphic with need satisfaction. All exchanges would be isomorphic with need satisfaction not only because of the strict equivalence of each persons' control over the total amount of the means of production initially, but also because this strict equivalence could never be violated. This means that no one can be alienated from the means of production and that no one can acquire an additional amount of the means of production that would upset strict equality. Advantages accruing to only some people from activities such as great demand for their produced commodity, or due to a new invention, would either have to be either prevented or ameliorated in order to maintain strict equivalence. It appears that it is much more likely that any situation where exchange is isomorphic with need satisfaction would not be sustainable without ridiculous measures.<sup>213</sup>

The commodity as a means for need satisfaction is an imperfect medium. What must be stressed is that there is no sufficient relationship between exchange and need satisfaction in any reasonable social form. It is not sufficient because the relationship of exchange and need satisfaction is not isomorphic. Also, exchange is not necessary for need satisfaction at all levels of development but it is necessary for optimal continual development of the productive forces between

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<sup>213</sup> As we can see, people could exchange with each other in this example for reasons other than need satisfaction, but the small size of the firms would seem to imply that little accumulation would occur beyond depreciation.

certain development levels. These development levels can be understood as simple commodity production and industrial capitalism.

The second characteristic of the commodity that is similar to what we have already established for the material/social divide is that the material relation of need and the useful object is historically congruent with the material production between social forms, whereas the exchangeability of commodities corresponds to a historically specific social form. This means, as the Cohen quote points out above, that there are two activities occurring side by side in human communities. On the one hand, there are social activities where material production is promoted to meet certain social ends. And on the other hand, there are material activities that develop the productive forces. These two activities are co-determinant, material activities make certain social activities possible at a certain level of productive development; and social activities promote the pace of development of the productive forces. As capitalism acquires social wealth in the form of exchange values, this accrual of social wealth requires that along side it there develops a mass of material wealth composed of use-values. This distinctive co-development is only within the strictures of the capitalist social form due to the asymmetrical character of the commodity we have already discussed.<sup>214</sup> That is,

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<sup>214</sup> In a transitional economy this occurs only to the extent when remaining commodity production is still large enough to affect the rate of accumulation. The influence of the law of value is dependent not only on the size of the commodity producing sector within a transitional economy but also on the degree of trade a transitional society engages in with capitalist nations. Mandel

exchange-values ride upon use-values, but exchange-values themselves do not contain any amount or portion of use-values. Accordingly, use-values can exist alone without an accompanying exchange value, but only at certain levels of productive development. It would be ridiculous to consider a type of capitalism where no exchange values are produced, since capitalism is the continuous accrual of value (via surplus-value) and not use-values.

The commodity is an object stretching across two historical worlds. It can accomplish two tasks simultaneously, if the conditions are right. But, in actuality and in respect to material history, the commodity as a useful object loses all social meaning when it no longer exists within the social form that assigned the corresponding meaning to it. When a social form passes, all that remains of the commodity is its capacity to satisfy a need; its social significance has disappeared. A wonderful pre-capitalist distinction between the usefulness of an item and its social meaning is the fate of the stone that used to cover the pyramids of Egypt. The pyramids when originally constructed were covered with smooth polished limestone, enabling the pyramids to reflect light. After the old religion died away in Egypt the social significance of the pyramids was lost. At this point, and before they became useful tourist attractions, the polished limestone which

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discusses the influence of the law of value in a transitional economy in his book *Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy*, in particular see chapter 1.

covered their exterior was removed and reused to build Cairo. Without social meaning, the pyramids are effectively useful piles of cut stone.

Commodities' require that there exists a material substratum of a use-value for the social meaning to ride upon, or a material "matter" for a social "form" as Cohen puts it.<sup>215</sup> This social meaning and material substratum is explored by Marx beyond just the dual character of the commodity as use-value and exchange value. The distinction between abstract labour and useful labour and the fetishism of commodities are both further determinations made by Marx. Marx describes the difference in types of labour as,

On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values.<sup>216</sup>

The distinction between abstract and useful labour is of special importance because the evaluation of production by capitalists for expansion of the productive apparatus or even the use of existing capacity is dependent on the value content of capital. This means that decisions of how to produce, what to produce, what amount, and even just to produce, are determined by their abstract

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<sup>215</sup> G.A. Cohen *Marx's Theory of History* pp. 98-102.

<sup>216</sup> *C-1* p. 137; *MEW (23)* p. 61.

labour composition.<sup>217</sup> Items are produced in a capitalist enterprise because of their value composition, because they are produced with a profitable amount of abstract labour. What these items are useful for is inconsequential to why they are produced in a capitalist enterprise. Harmful and poorly made products are produced because they are profitable products.<sup>218</sup> If investments are made because of their abstract labour character then employment levels and wage rates are a secondary effect of capitalist accumulation. If the rate of surplus-value can be increased by a reduction in variable capital then this is a rational decision for a capitalist firm. The rationality of this decision does not extend throughout the entirety of society. If all firms made such a decision, the results would be irrational for society as a whole, since a general reduction in variable capital would result in a drop off in demand, if there were not also a corresponding drop in the price of consumer goods. Without this corresponding price drop, rational

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<sup>217</sup> The question of how, what, what amount, and just to produce have important repercussions for us today concerning decisions about the viability of environmental restrictions on profitability, public transport or individual cars, several versions of products identical in use, and starvation due to crop reduction to maintain target prices.

<sup>218</sup> Useless activities – advertising, stock trading, weapons manufacture – that use resources unproductively to further promote and increase consumption or reproduce the capitalist social mode, are beneficial and necessary activities if they help in the realization of surplus-value. But this is really a question of what constitutes productive labour and not the logic of abstract labour. On productive and unproductive labour see in particular pp. 191-2 in Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory* and chapter 12 in his *Late Capitalism* and Anwar M. Shaikh's and E. Ahmet Tonak's book *Measuring the Wealth of Nations*.



decisions at the firm level may result in reductions in employment and wages for workers across society.<sup>219</sup>

Abstract labour, as a basis for decisions, only takes into account the ends and rationale of the capitalist social form. The logic of a social form takes only the social meanings of its objects and activities as variables for possible and desirable outcomes. Marx finds that “commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that it can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity.”<sup>220</sup> If labour is only understood as abstract labour then decisions can be made that have negative effect on the material outcomes of people. Abstract labour is a commodity and it is only exchanged against other commodities. Abstract labour has no real relationship to useful labour and use-values. “When they thus assume the shape of values, commodities strip off every trace of their natural and original use-value, and of the particular kind of useful labour to which they owe their creation, in order to pupate into the

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<sup>219</sup> In *Late Capitalism* Mandel describes micro-rationality and macro-irrationality as such: “The opposition between partial rationality and overall irrationality is anchored in the contradiction between two types of calculation – of the maximum economy of means and the achievement of optimum ends. The reified autonomy of the means – of exchange values – is triumphant today. Partial rationality always consists of the best combination of paid-up economic resources for the profitability of the individual firm. Hence it excludes anything that has ‘no (or only a very low) price’.” pp. 509-510.

<sup>220</sup> *C-1* p. 138-9; *MEW (23)* p. 62.

homogeneous social materialization of undifferentiated human labour.”<sup>221</sup> A worker can produce a value amount x which exchanges for its equivalent and the worker receives amount y as his wage. The amount x may be equal to several times the amount y, which means the abstract labour produced by this one worker may be exchanged against the wages of several other workers. There is no one-to-one relationship between the value output of a worker and another worker. This incongruence in output and possible consumption signifies simply that beneficial social outcomes for capitalism are not beneficial material outcomes for humans as a whole. Marx states this as,

There is an antithesis, immanent in the commodity, between use-value and value, between private labour which must simultaneously manifest itself as directly social labour, and a particular concrete kind of labour which simultaneously counts as merely abstract universal labour, between the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things; the antithetical phases of the metamorphosis of the commodity are the developed forms of motion of this immanent contradiction.<sup>222</sup>

The separation of exchange-values from use-values and abstract labour from useful labour is possible because decisions about production can be made based on the social component of the commodity. This separation is further exacerbated by the money form, which enables the social component of

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<sup>221</sup> *C-1* p. 204; *MEW (23)* pp. 123-4.

<sup>222</sup> *C-1* p. 209; *MEW (23)* p. 128.

commodities to take on an existence that appears to be completely removed from their material base of use-values.

Commodities first enter into the process of exchange unadorned and unadorned, retaining their original home-grown shape. Exchange, however, produces a differentiation of the commodity into two elements, commodity and money, an external opposition which expresses the opposition between use-value and value which is inherent in it. In this opposition, commodities as use-values confront money as exchange-value. On the other hand, both sides of this opposition are commodities, hence themselves unities of use-value and value. But this unity of differences is expressed at two opposite poles, and at each pole in an opposite way. This is the alternating relation between the two poles: the commodity is in reality a use-value; its existence as value appears only ideally, in its price, through which it is related to the real embodiment of its value, the gold which confronts it as its opposite. Inversely, the material of gold ranks only as the materialization of value, as money. It is therefore in reality exchange-value. Its use-value appears only ideally in the series of expressions of relative value within which it confronts all the other commodities as the totality of real embodiments of its utility. These antagonistic forms of the commodities are the real forms of motion of the process of exchange.<sup>223</sup>

As we can see, Marx finds that the money form when analyzed is not simply the equality of two types of commodities, they are a composite of use-value and value. The tentative relationship values have to the use-values they ride upon becomes radically separated with money. As we discussed above the separation of use-value from value permits one to exchange commodities with little or no

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<sup>223</sup> *C-1* p. 199; *MEW (23)* p. 119.

need for the usefulness of them. Money is just the development of the separation to greater degree.<sup>224</sup>

Money is fundamental for the development of capitalism. A quantitative increase of money as the purpose of exchange allows capitalists to arise, from the usurer and the merchant. The usurer and the merchant do extract a surplus-value from exchange but it is only “a simple *transfer of values* from one person to another.”<sup>225</sup> If they do not purchase labour-power no new value is produced.<sup>226</sup> But, the transfer of values that takes place can allow accumulation to take place in the form of money, which enables the usurer and the merchant to purchase labour-power. With the alienation of people from the means of production, the commodity as the separation of use-value and exchange-value, and the general use of money for exchange, the foundation is set for capitalist relations to commence.

Money is only the development of the dual nature of the commodity form. The possibility of exchange becoming separated from need satisfaction is only a more likely occurrence with money: “It can be said about it [money], on the other hand, that it is now *merely* a commodity (general commodity), the commodity in

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<sup>224</sup> I am hesitant to say the highest degree of separation of the use of an item from its exchangeability with developments such as: consumer credit, bank money, fictitious capital, unconvertible paper money, and government deficit spending. All this may add money to circulation without an increase in use-values. On debt, speculation, and finance see the articles by Fred Magdoff “The Explosion of Debt and Speculation” in *Monthly Review* Vol. 58 No. 6; and by John Bellamy Foster “Monopoly-Finance Capital” in *Monthly Review* Vol. 58 No. 7.

<sup>225</sup> Ernest Mandel. *Marxist Economic Theory* p. 86.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

its pure form, indifferent to its natural particularity and hence indifferent to all direct needs, without natural relation to a particular need as such.”<sup>227</sup> The social activity of accumulation in the social form of capitalism can take place divorced from the material reality of use-values and need satisfaction, until, that is, the law of value makes capitalist accumulation unprofitable. But, the limit imposed on accumulation by the law of value is really only the stricture of the social form of capitalism. The accumulation limits of capitalism are not the material limits of accumulation. What are the reasons for confusing the development of a social form with the possibilities of material development? This question brings us to fetishism.

### Commodity Fetishism

In previous sections I have dealt mostly with reification and less with fetishism, calling the former pseudo-natural due to the propensity for capitalist political economists to mistakenly label social activities as natural processes. I find that the reification of something in political economy is to mistakenly understand a social activity as natural, and often to wrongly find it thus indicative

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<sup>227</sup> *G* pp. 213-214; *MEGA, II/1.1*, p. 141.

of all levels of material development. Whereas in reality, material activities are not indicative of all levels of material development. They are dependent on a certain level of material development to exist, but material activities are progressively comparable with one another unlike social activities.<sup>228</sup> Fetishism is similar to reification in that social meanings are taken as real/natural.

Marx states that in religion fetishism is as such:

There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race.<sup>229</sup>

Marx finds that religious fetishism is analogous to commodity fetishism where the exchange-value of commodities appears as intrinsic and naturally occurring regardless of the particular labour expended in their production. Cohen finds that in commodity fetishism "...exchange-value appears to transcend its material basis in labour and to derive from the substance of the commodity itself. The commodity really has exchange-value, but it seems to emanate from it, not from the labour which produces it."<sup>230</sup> The reason why exchange-value appears as an independent part of the commodity is due to the dual nature of the commodity

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<sup>228</sup> Mandel puts the point as such, "The criterion of the productivity of labour, related to the satisfaction of rational human needs and the optimal self-development of individuals, provides a perfectly adequate yardstick for comparing different social systems; without it, indeed, the notion of human progress loses any material basis." *Late Capitalism* p. 509.

<sup>229</sup> *C-1* p. 165; *MEW (23)* p. 86.

<sup>230</sup> Cohen *Marx's Theory of History* p. 116.

form. Since decisions concerning production can be made regardless need satisfaction, the part of the commodity decisions are based upon, exchange-value, seems to exist without a material basis.

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the social-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supersensible or social. In the same way, the impression made by a thing on the optic nerve is perceived not as a subjective excitation of the nerve but as the objective form of a thing outside the eye. In the act of seeing, of course, light is really transmitted from one thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye. It is a physical relation between physical things. As against this, the commodity form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [dinglich] relations arising out of this.<sup>231</sup>

The perceived intrinsic value of a fetishized commodity is a conflation of usefulness and exchangeability, with usefulness subordinated to exchangeability.<sup>232</sup> Thus the natural existence of an object is considered as identical with the social existence of that object. This mistake takes the

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<sup>231</sup> *C-1* pp. 164-5; *MEW (23)* p. 86. See also *C-1* pp. 163-4; *MEW (23)* p. 85. And, *MECW* 32 p. 317

<sup>232</sup> The usefulness of an object not produced by labour is only a use-value: "A thing can be a use-value without being a value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labour. Air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forest, etc. fall into this category." *C-1* p. 131; *MEW (23)* p. 55.

immediacy of the object's relations in its social form as its natural relations.

Considered on its own, the fetishized commodity appears to the uncritical observer as a natural object.<sup>233</sup>

This perception of the social relations of an object as its natural relations is not a problem within a social form, since the fetishized perception of an object corresponds to the dominant production relations and superstructural notions of a given social form. In respect to critique, and against a materialist standard of action, taking the social as the natural obscures the material development of human civilization. First and foremost, fetishism precludes an analysis of societies as being composed of material and social activities. If this is the case then social conceptions of phenomena are the only kind of conceptions. Marx's critique of orthodox political economy theory is to show that these theories misunderstand the material development of human societies. This mistake becomes a terrible problem in regard to the optimal self-actualization of one's projects, which is dependent on one's access to the productive forces. The fetishism of commodities is once again the consideration of exchange-value as being isomorphic with need satisfaction. If this is the case then capitalist economic and social categories are the correct evaluation of human activity.

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<sup>233</sup> For a fetishized apprehension to obtain, both the commodity and the observer have to be from the same social form. This seems to be a problem only where there are two observers from two different social forms. The observed object could be to one a religious item, whereas for the other it is a pile of stones.



Considerations of human action subordinated to capitalist social form analysis privileges profitable accumulation at a certain rate over material accumulation. We see this subordination forcefully today in ways such as inflation, fighting over full-employment, “efficiency” over anti-poverty measures, and monopoly super-profits over environmental concerns.

Fetishism is the social obscuring the material as Cohen points out: “Exchange-value is a *social* relational property of a thing, and fetishism veils its source in *material* relations between persons.”<sup>234</sup> It may seem that the obscuring of reality is indicative of any social form other than the most primitive, or at least the point in capitalism where there is an incongruence between capitalist relations of production and the level of productive force development. But, Marx’s comments on feudalism in the fetishism chapter seem to be in conflict with this general understanding of the social obscuring reality. Marx finds that in feudalism:

The natural form of labour, its particularity – and not, as in a society based on commodity production, its universality – is here its immediate social form. The *corvée* can be measured by time just as well as the labour which produces commodities, but every serf knows what he expends in the service of his lord is a specific quantity of his own personal labour-power. The tithe owed to the priest is more clearly apparent than his blessing. Whatever we may think, then, of the different roles in which men confront each other in such a society, the social relations between individuals in the

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<sup>234</sup> Cohen *Marx’s Theory of History* p. 116

performance of their labour appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between products of labour.<sup>235</sup>

Within feudal social relations it is not the superstructural notions that support the unequal control over surplus product, the traditions of *corvée* or tithe, which are not obscured; rather, it is labour, as the source of wealth within feudalism, which is not obscured. But just because the unequal control over surplus product within the capitalist mode of production is seen as unjust, in regard to merit, that does not mean that it is unjust with the feudal mode of production. The un-obscured origin of wealth within feudalism does not mean that all social mystifications are penetrated at the level of feudal material development.

Since the unequal control of surplus product within capitalism is unjust if the control is based on unequal labour expended, the obscuring of the source of wealth hides an inconsistency between the production relations and legal notions of capitalism. Marx makes great use of this inconsistency in his criticism of the myth of capitalist primitive accumulation. In his analysis of commodity fetishism Marx wants to present how labour as the origin of wealth is obscured beneath exchange, where the commodities themselves and only the surface appearance of the social relations of capitalism are understood as true. By presenting other

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<sup>235</sup> *C-1* p. 170; *MEW (23)* pp. 91-92.

social forms, such as feudalism, Marx tries to demonstrate labour as the real origin of wealth, and, accordingly, the source of value. Marx states,

It is however precisely this finished form of the world of commodities – the money form - which conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly. If I state that coats or boots stand in relation to linen because the latter is the universal incarnation of abstract human labour, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident. Nevertheless, when the producers of coats and boots bring these commodities into a relation with linen, or with gold or silver (and this makes no difference here), as the universal equivalent, the relation between their own private labour and the collective labour of society appears to them in exactly this absurd form. The categories of bourgeois economics consist precisely of forms of this kind. They are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of social production, i.e. commodity production. The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production, vanishes therefore as soon as we come to other forms of production.<sup>236</sup>

Commodity production obscures labour as the origin of wealth because commodities are exchanged, not distributed directly, as in feudalism. Exchange is only possible because of the dual form of the commodity; the separation of particular labour from abstract labour allows use-values to be exchanged not due to their utility but due to their value. The surface appearance of capitalism is commodities that are exchanged against one another because they can be

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<sup>236</sup> *C-1* pp.168-9; *MEW* (23) p.

exchanged against a universal equivalent, the money form. Capitalist political economists observe that commodities are exchangeable because they are all priced according to a single commodity, money, and stop their analysis of exchange at this point. Penetration beneath the appearance of exchange is not performed, or not completed, leaving the question of why there is equality between all commodities and money unanswered.

Commodity fetishism occurs for Marx because the commodity has two parts that are able to operate within capitalism according to different factors. The social existence of commodities, exchange-value, departs from its material base in a distinctive way due to exchange. Not only can commodities be considered regardless of their use-value, but commodities can be considered regardless of the labour which has produced them, making their exchangeability and the social system of capitalism appear as a “natural” phenomena. Cohen considers the role of commodity exchange in generating fetishism as such: “The social form is thus alienated from the productive content, and it dominates it. Social relations between things assert themselves against material relations between persons who lack *direct* social relations [direct social relations occur in feudalism and not in capitalism – JPH]. It appears that men labour because their products have value, whereas in fact they have value because labour has been bestowed on them. Men do not recognize their own authorship of the value through which alone they

relate, and which therefore regulates their lives as producers. They are thus in a quite specific sense alienated from their own power, which has passed into things.”<sup>237</sup>

The reason why capitalism obscures reality whereas in feudalism the reality of production is apparent is not only the absence of exchange but also a low level of material development. On one hand, this low level of material development increases the effect of superstructure ideology and superstition as ways of mythically explaining the world. Marx describes this situation as such, “In reality, this barrier [feudal religion as ideology – JPH] to consciousness corresponds to a *definite degree of development of the forces of material production* and hence of wealth.”<sup>238</sup>

On the other hand, a low level of material development makes democratic regulation of society difficult if not impossible due to insufficient surplus-time. This means that self-governance at a pre- to proto-industrial level of material development (where co-operation is perhaps the highest level of socialized labour) is not optimal due to the effect it would have on specialization; it would jeopardize the surplus product that supports the physiological needs of these specialists. Without specialist ideologists can a feudal social order control the surplus product consistently? Recourse to direct physical threat without the aura

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<sup>237</sup> Cohen *Marx's Theory of History* p. 120.

<sup>238</sup> *G* p. 543; *MEGA II/1.2* p. 439

of legitimacy produced though ideology would seemingly not be able to maintain consistent control over the surplus product.

The obviousness of labour as the source of wealth in feudalism does not mean that it has no social form. The relations of production of feudalism and its social activities of promotion are necessary for the continual reproduction of feudalism. The overarching reason for this is the low level of development of the productive forces shaping feudalism. Whereas in a transitional society and socialism proper the productive forces are sufficiently developed so there can be self-governance without jeopardizing necessary production. Accordingly, this level of material development makes ideology and fetishistic conceptions of commodities unnecessary. Mandel describes this level of development as such, “This is why Marx always describes socialist society as a society of *associated producers*; ... if the producers henceforth organize, plan, discuss and realize their process of labour in common, in *voluntary* association, then naturally the mystery of the *social* force of production disappears, and the latter no longer seems to adhere to things, as a collective force ‘external’ to the producers, but is seen to be the result of the common, commonly planned and commonly organized labour capacity of all workers.”<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Ernest Mandel. *Late Capitalism* pp. 567-8.

In review, we can establish that the commodity's two parts of use-value and exchange value correspond to the division between the material and the social. Material activities of a particular labour - weaving, welding, chemical synthesis – produce use-values, whereas social activities recognize and encourage reproduction of exchange-values. The abstract labour, which is used to calculate the value of an item, is only recognized by the social activity of commodity production. The productive apparatus composed of the instruments of labour and the objects of labour and combined with the particular living labour of people is a historically continuous progression of material development. The productive apparatus and products will be the same in the time before and after the change of social forms. But social production relations will be different before and after the change of social forms, at least in regard to the dominant ones. The idea of a developed socialist society is to lose the social covering of commodity production, where need satisfaction is not isomorphic with exchange, and have use-value distributed based on need. The removal of social activities from their position of dominance corresponds with the claim I have forwarded in this work that material activities free from social mystification intrinsically promote and/or enable the actualization of one's projects.

#### The Valorization Process and Wages

Now that we have established the commodity as a phenomenon composed of a social covering with a material base, we can demonstrate how capitalist production is also a phenomenon with the same determination. We will concentrate on value production to understand how capitalist production is composed of social activities promoting specific ends for the material alteration of nature that are not isomorphic with need satisfaction. As with the commodity division of use-value and exchange-value as being respectively produced or recognized by either material or social activities, capitalist production can also be divided into material and social components: the valorization process is the social component and the labour process is the material component. Simply, in the course of the labour process the application of a particular labour produces a particular use-value (such as the application of labour upon the correct materials with the correct devices by a chemical technician produces fluoride). As we know, use-value production considered from the standpoint of the capitalist social form can abstract away the particular labour that makes a use-value, and determine the production according to only the time spent laboring. This abstracted amount of time spent making a use-value can be equally compared to any other time spent labouring, rendering all particular types of labour comparable with one another as abstract labour amounts, or exchange-values.



The socially necessary average of abstract labour spent producing a use-value is the value of that commodity.

Along with the labour process one can, in a commodity producing society, also be considered as producing values along with the production of use-values. The valorization process is value production with one important caveat: the valorization process produces more value, surplus value, at its end than at its beginning. Or, specifically, the valorization process has to produce more value at its end than when it initially started for it to be advantageous to capitalists.<sup>240</sup> If there is no additional value produced at the end of the process then the valorization process is for nothing, it is a superfluous and inconsequential occurrence that is not meaningfully distinguished from the labour process. Since at the end of the labour process one has a useful object, whereas a valorization process that has no increase in value is just an accounting curiosity.

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<sup>240</sup> Surplus value production is advantageous to capitalists since they control its use. But in a market socialist economy, such as the models described by Nove, Schweickard, or Romer, in firms or co-operatives, surplus value production is advantageous to them since they control it. See Alec Nove, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism, Revisited*; David Schweickart, *Against Capitalism and After Capitalism*; John E. Roemer, *A Future for Socialism*; and Frank Roosevelt and David Belkin editors, *Why Market Socialism*. All of these books have interesting arguments. But Schweickart's books are the most philosophically inclined, with arguments indented to bring socialist positions into dialogue with liberal and libertarian philosophy (especially Rawls and Nozick).

Because surplus value production produces the problem of micro-rationality, maximizing a firm's surplus value, and macro-irrationality, advantageous actions for individual firms can result in societal or global problems, such as over-production, unemployment, income inequality, unequal political power, pollution, to name a few. This problem of macro-irrationality due to surplus value production (and alongside it commodity production) has led some critics of market socialism to consider use of the market as only a transitional tool, see Mandel article *Defense of Socialist Planning*. An excellent essay on the problems of market transactions is Ollman's in his edited book *Market Socialism The Debate Among Socialists*.

Surplus-value is a form of surplus product, indicative of a society that has generalized commodity production and exchanges based on the money form. Surplus product is produced in any society that has the ability to produce more than the necessary subsistent amount. In capitalism the surplus product occurs as value, in particular the money form, whereas in societies not producing commodities the surplus product occurs as use-values.<sup>241</sup>

The valorization process' production of surplus-value is a social activity that conceals the reality of how the surplus product is produced. The surface appearance of capitalist production seems to be that capitalist production *itself* is what generates value. A certain aspect or aspects of the production process leads to the understanding that capitalist social relations *themselves* are value producing.

Proceeding from itself as the active subject, the subject of the process – and, in the turnover, the direct production process indeed appear determined by its movement as capital, independent of its relation to labour – capital relates to itself as self-increasing value; i.e. it relates to surplus value as something posited and founded by it; it relates as well-spring of production, to itself as production, to itself as product; it relates as producing value to itself as produced value.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> See *Marxist Economic Theory* p 90.

<sup>242</sup> *G* p. 746; *MEGA II/1.2* pp. 619-620.

Capital production conceals not only labour as the source of all value, but also the exploitation of labour as the source of surplus-value.<sup>243</sup> Why this concealment is possible is due to the difference between the social recognition of labour, labour-power, and the material activity of labour as the preserver and producer of value, living-labour. The difference between the two results in surplus-labour because the necessary product of subsistence is gained by workers through exchange. That is, workers do not directly receive their subsistence via production; workers are paid money wages that have to be exchanged for subsistence. Here is another way exchange conceals the material due to the situation that workers are paid not for how much value they produce but how much it costs for their subsistence to be maintained.<sup>244</sup> The difference between the value needed to purchase workers' subsistence and the amount they produce in production is the origin of surplus-value. The occurrence of workers not being in control of the total product (or in value terms, total value) produces exploitation. Accordingly, a worker who is not in control of the total product they produce is exploited.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> In particular circulation is identified by Marx as a significant factor in how the reproduction of the capitalist social form obscures the reality of value production. See *G* p. 745 ff.

<sup>244</sup> In *Wages, Price, and Profit* Marx states "...that the *value of labouring power*, or in more popular parlance, the *value of labour*, is determined by the value of necessaries, or the quantity of labour required to produce them." *MESW* p. 217.

<sup>245</sup> This is a classic formulation of Marxian exploitation, which is dependent on the labour theory of value. For a criticism of this notion see Romer's essay in *Analytical Marxism* titled "Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?" And for an interesting reinterpretation of exploitation not dependent on the labour theory of value see chapter 16 in Wood's *Karl Marx*, second edition.

The social appearance of production and compensation is that workers are paid for what they produce, but the reality of capitalist production is that workers are only paid an amount equivalent to their subsistence needs. But this level of subsistence is not entirely absolute. There is of course a physiological minimum that must be met for people to not become exhausted. But, wages are also composed of a 'relative' part.

The value of labouring power is formed by two elements – the one merely physical, the other historical or social. Its *ultimate limit* is determined by the *physical* element, that is to say to maintain and reproduce itself, to perpetuate its physical existence, the working class must receive the necessaries absolutely indispensable for living and multiplying. The *value* of those indispensable necessaries forms, therefore, the ultimate limit of the *value of labour*

Besides this mere physical element, the value of labour is in every country determined by a *traditional standard of life*. It is not mere physical life, but it is the satisfaction of certain wants springing from the social conditions in which people are placed and reared up.

By comparing the standard wages or values of labour in different countries, and by comparing them in different historical epochs of the same country, you will find that the *value of labour* itself is not a fixed but a variable magnitude, even supposing the values of all other commodities to remain constant.<sup>246</sup>

A worker's wages are not a fixed amount but dependent on historical factors such as: the level of unemployment, productivity, culture level, and

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<sup>246</sup> *MESW* pp. 222-223.

worker militancy. Unemployment can put pressure on wages to rise or lower depending on how low or high the reserve army of labour is. Productivity could lower the share of wages as part of the total value produced due to a decrease in the value of items. The general level of culture for a society can increase wages. Cultural increases are things such as: education for a technically complex labour process, health care, pensions, vacation time, etc. If worker militancy, whether union activity or not, is high, this can raise wages, and if low, will not be able to prevent wages from falling.<sup>247</sup> All of these conditions are of course also dependent on the mass of total value produced, which is divided into surplus-value and wages (variable capital). Periods with an increasing rate of surplus-value could be correlated with increasing wages, and vice versa. But, the rate of surplus value does not in itself determine wage levels. Any of the above listed factors in different combinations with a rising or declining rate of surplus value may lead to various outcomes.

With this said, worker militancy is perhaps the most decisive factor for preventing wages to fluctuate in accordance with surplus value or unemployment. High unemployment may lower the relative wages, with education and health care costs being borne increasingly by the worker. But, high levels of worker militancy may preserve wages even if unemployment is high or productivity is

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<sup>247</sup> Robert Brenner in his book *The Economics of Global Turbulence* has an interesting history of worker militancy and wages in the post-World War II economies of the U.S., Germany, and Japan that illustrates this point.

low. Organized worker action has been the only real counterbalance to capitalist economic fluctuations.

But, even if worker militancy is successful, workers' assured security and potential for self-actualization of their projects is still vulnerable because the production relations of capitalism are unchanged. As long as capital flight is possible work militancy can never be assured of greater benefits beyond wage increases in periods of economic prosperity. For Marx, only the overthrow of capitalism can alter the control relationship of the means of production so that workers have direct control over the labour process, distribution, and the ratio of productive output to free time.

...the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles [to raise wages – JPH]. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the cause of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. ... They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the *material conditions* and the *social forms* necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the *conservative* motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the *revolutionary* watchword, "Abolition of the wages system!"<sup>248</sup>

Marx's analysis of wages shows that wages are social norms and are not representative of workers' material output. I find that wages are only

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<sup>248</sup> *MESW* pp. 225-226.

superstructural rights of distribution and not actual social relationships of control of the means of production. As Marx discusses in the quote above, wage struggles are ideological struggles within the boundaries of capitalism and are not revolutionary in scope. Only the alteration of production relations of control can ensure that the actualization of one's projects is not mediated through a social form where need satisfaction is not isomorphic with the social ends. With a critique of this sort we can see the implied practical standard that Marx uses to evaluate activities and situations. In the above quote Marx evaluates wage increase and wage abolition, via socialism, respectively for their propensity for self-actualization of one's projects. Socialization in Marx's analysis yields a higher propensity for self-actualization than wage increase within capitalism, because socialism overcomes the mediation between need satisfaction and social ends. In short, social ends no longer have any durable existence within socialist society because need satisfaction is the purpose of production and distribution directly without the medium of exchange. Or, within a transitional society, where the dominant sector is production directed according to need satisfaction.

We can easily understand wages as a social phenomenon that are in no way co-determinant with material need satisfaction. A wage's level has no direct correspondence with distribution of the total product of society in accordance with necessary amounts to enjoy the benefits of material advancement. A

person's wage could be enough to feed, clothe, and shelter oneself and dependents, meeting the physical limit of wages; but is the wage high enough to pay for school tuition, medical costs, and retirement? Wages, like exchange value, obscure the material reality of people's historically developed need requirements. Also, like exchange value, wages are understood by some political economists as 'naturally' fixed amounts, and accordingly not in any way indicative only of the capitalist mode of production. Marx calls this fictitious notion of a fixed wage the labour fund.

It [the labour fund – JPH] was used by Bentham himself, as well as by Malthus, James Mill, MacCulloch, etc., for apologetic purposes, and in particular so as to represent one part of capital, namely variable capital, or that part convertible into labour-power, as being of fixed size. Variable capital in its material existence, i.e. the mass of the means of subsistence it represents for the worker, or the so-called labour fund, was turned by this fable into a separate part of social wealth, confined by natural chains and unable to cross the boundary to the other parts. To set in motion the part of social wealth which is to function as constant capital, or to, express it in a material form, as means of production, a definite mass of living labour is required. This mass is given by technology. But the number of workers required to put this mass of labour-power in a fluid state is not given, for it changes with the degree of exploitation of the individual labour-power. Nor is the price of this labour-power given, but only its minimum limit, which is moreover very elastic. The facts on which the dogma is based are these: on the one hand, the worker has no right to interfere in the division of social wealth into mean of enjoyment for the non-worker and means of production. On the other hand, it is only in favourable and exceptional cases that he can enlarge the so-called 'labour fund' at the expense of the 'revenue' of the rich.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> *C-1* pp. 759-760; *MEW 23* pp. 637-638.



Since it can be demonstrated that wages are not determined by a fixed portion of total invested capital the labour fund has no explanatory power. But, as with commodity fetishism, wages' surface appearance seem to be a natural amount that is set in capitalist production. Exchange makes commodities appear as naturally exchangeable, where as production makes wages appear as naturally set. Both types of fetishism occur because in general the representative phenomena are understood as being what really is. But, why these surface appearances are accepted as real is because they are in conformity with the dominant production relations of the current social form. The notion of a labour fund supports the current distribution of total product between workers and capitalists as *a necessary component of the labour process*, and not as it is in actuality, only as one possible way of distribution. Fetishistic conceptions are due to understandings that are contained within the social parameters of a given mode of production.

The bourgeois economist, whose limited mentality is unable to separate the form of appearance from the thing which appears within that form, shuts his eyes to the fact that even at the present time the labour-fund only crops up exceptionally on the face of the globe in the form of capital.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> C-1 p. 714; MEW 23 p. 594.

## Wages and Justice

Wages, from an orthodox political economic standpoint, can be validated as being at an appropriate level not only with notions of a ‘natural’ labour fund, but also with moral notions of justice.<sup>251</sup> Orthodox economic analysis of wages that takes appearances as reality generates the notion of the wage fund. A similar empiricism with blinders, or rather finding what one wants regardless of what one sees, is indicative of moral evaluations of wages. The notion of just wages has its origin in the obscured reality of payment for work. As we know, every commodity price is its production cost including labour-power. The bourgeois notion of justice in regard to wages, as understood by Marx, is in its appearance remuneration for the expenditure of labour. But what is the just amount that should be paid for the expenditure of labour? Formally, the worker is paid for her contribution in production. But, this contribution is calculated on the cost of employing the worker, the portion of the worker’s wages in respect to total cost of production, which implies that the level of remuneration has already been decided. The problem of determining wages is the same problem of determining prices in general. The idea of a just wage boils down to the same conception as the labour fund. *What one is paid is a just wage regardless of its amount.*

Accordingly, the just price of a commodity is the same as its production price. So

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<sup>251</sup> Justice and Marx’s critique of capitalism have been covered extensively by many authors. Some interesting works on the subject are *Karl Marx* by Allen Wood; *Marx, Justice, and History* edited by Marshall Cohen.

with labour-power the price of its production is the cost of a worker's subsistence. If a worker is paid the cost of his subsistence needs then a worker has been paid a just wage. But, the subsistence level is quite variable and in no way perfectly corresponds to the optimal historically allowable level of need satisfaction.

In wage-labour, on the contrary, even surplus labour, or unpaid labour, appears as paid. ... We may therefore understand the decisive importance of the transformation of the value and price of labour-power into the form of wages, or into the value and price of labour itself. All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, all capitalism's illusions about freedom, all the apologetic tricks of vulgar economics, have as their basis the form of appearance discussed above [the difference between the value of labour-power and the amount of value produced by living labour – JPH], which makes the actual relation invisible, and indeed presents to the eye the precise opposite of that relation.<sup>252</sup>

Wages as a just amount correspond to superstructural notions of what is a just wage; but any level of wages is just. The rising or lowering of wages occurs not due to the conformity of notions of justice, they occur due to the before mentioned factors of unemployment, productivity, culture level, and worker militancy. Simply put, just wages are the amount workers are paid. To suggest otherwise is to state that market clearing does not automatically remunerate workers properly. One needs a standard other than market exchange itself in order to criticize distributional outcomes. Alternative standards are various but

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<sup>252</sup> *C-1* p. 680; *MEW 23* p. 562.

Marx would find they are all too often trapped within the limits of capitalist social relations.

The principle of utility was no discovery made by Bentham. He simply reproduced in his dull way what Helvétius and other Frenchmen had said with wit and ingenuity in the eighteenth century. To know what is useful for a dog, one must investigate the nature of dogs. This nature is not itself deducible from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would judge all human acts, movements, relations, etc. according to the principle of utility would first have to deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as historically modified in each epoch. Bentham does not trouble himself with this. With the driest naïveté he assumes that the modern petty bourgeois, especially the English petty bourgeois, is the normal man. Whatever is useful to this peculiar kind of normal man, and to his world, is useful in and for itself. He applies this yardstick to the past, the present and the future. The Christian religion, for example, is 'useful', 'because it forbids in the name of religion the same faults that the penal code condemns in the name of the law'.<sup>253</sup>

Just wages are nothing more than the possible range of acceptable distribution of a portion of total produced value to workers. This range corresponds from the ultimate physiological minimum to the largest possible portion that can be gained through worker militancy without upsetting capitalist production relations. This range corresponds to no definite amount of the total product due to productivity and the historically determined strength of capitalists internationally. A just wage corresponds to what workers can be allotted within capitalism. In times of social conflict, notions of what is a just wage can be various; there is the possibility of various capitalist and worker groups embracing

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<sup>253</sup> *C-1* pp. 758-759 note 51; *MEW* 23 pp. 636-637 note 63.

wide ranging positions. The several types of ‘socialism’ listed by Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto* section III can be representative of wide ranging distributional positions, but not all of these representative positions are applicable to capitalist production relations. Movements to restore feudalism are beyond the limit of capitalist justice, where as notions of redistribution without altering capitalist production relations are still within the limit. Taking corvée feudalism as our feudal model we can see that according to capitalist standards such a situation is unjust because corvée work is understood as unpaid. Feudal corvée is exploitation to capitalists. Capitalist exploitation is also unpaid, or product that is uncontrolled by the produces of the product, but it is hidden within the production process, with necessary and surplus product being produced within the same work span, and not overtly divided on different days as is the case of corvée.

Whereas types of welfare capitalism, whether social democratic, corporatist, or liberal, fulfill different notions of justice.<sup>254</sup> Liberal welfare regimes prize high-incomes and high labour force participation as just outcomes to economic transactions. Corporatist regimes seek economic integration of people in society according to profession, community location, family relationship, and, until recently, church affiliation, as just outcomes. Social

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<sup>254</sup> These are Esping-Andersen’s categories that he develops in his book *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. An excellent book that uses long-term panel studies to consider Esping-Andersen’s categories is the book by Goodin, Headey, Muggels, and Dirven *The Real Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

democratic regimes in general find equality in incomes, full-employment, and decommodification of services to be a just outcome. Even though liberal regimes consider work a precondition for subsistence, corporatists think that some members of society should receive subsistence without work (women, children, and especially retirees), and social democracies consider that subsistence should be met regardless of time spent working (even if employment is considered as the mean of social integration), all these different conceptions of just outcomes are still capitalist. No welfare capitalist nation has substantially and meaningfully altered capitalist production relations.<sup>255</sup> Workers' wages whether in money or social benefits can fluctuate widely within these various welfare systems; but none of the systems step outside the limits of capitalist production relations which are the limits of capitalist justice. Redistribution of wealth may occur in welfare states but not socialization of control of the means of production. Redistribution may be just depending on the political climate, whereas socialization can never be a just situation within capitalism.

The outcome of conflicts between different versions of capitalist justice depends on the political victory of the various parties. Such a might makes right conception of justice does not mean that Marx thinks that all social arrangements

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<sup>255</sup> This is demonstrated in the essay by John D. Stephens "Scandinavian Welfare States: Achievements, Crisis, and Prospects" in *Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in Global Economies*, edited by Esping-Andersen. This article documents the limits of Swedish social democracy in curbing and controlling capitalist accumulation.

are good. They are all internally valid because they are internally self-validating. Socialism for Marx is based on conceptions of good outcomes that are impossible within the structure of capitalism. According to capitalist standards, socialism is unjust, because it alters production relations so that all people have control over the means of production. But this is obviously the case; any alteration in distribution from the current wage would be an unjust change.

In regard to the distinction between the material and the social we can see that Marx's critique of justice is consistent with his critique of ideology. Further, we can understand justice to be a type of ideology, since ideology in general, and justice specifically, is to validate and promote the dominant production relations of society. Justice can be understood as an idea that performs a social activity of promotion. As with all social activities of promotion their ends are based on the conceptions that benefit and maintain the dominant production relations. These social ends are in no way congruent with material need satisfaction.

### Capital Fetishism

In Marx's de-mystification of the valorization process he also critiques capital fetishism where capital and machines appear as producers of value and labour is identified as not the creator of value but as capital. Capital fetishism obscures the reality of the valorization process and promotes an understanding of

value production that supports capitalist production relations but does not explain how invested values, constant capital, is preserved and how surplus value is created. The social relations of capitalism have no effect on the material production of products, but according to the standards of the capitalist social form the interaction of living labour with the means of production are seen as only different portions of capital.

In general, Marx understands capital fetishism as:

The practical agents of capitalist production and their ideological word-spinners are as incapable of thinking of the means of production separately from the antagonistic social mask they wear at present as a slave-owner is of thinking of the worker himself as distinct from his character as a slave.<sup>256</sup>

Marx discusses the fetishist understanding of machinery as,

... since in itself it [machinery – JPH] is a victory of man over the forces of nature but in the hands of capital it makes man the slave of those forces; ... Any other utilization of machinery than the capitalist one is to him [the bourgeois economist – JPH] impossible.<sup>257</sup>

People who live within capitalism are trapped within the social expectations of capitalism as long as they adhere to the determinations of capitalism. A social form produces the limits to what are legitimate outcomes for its members. It is impossible for a person within capitalism to think of other societal arrangements

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<sup>256</sup> *C-1* p.757; *MEW (23)* p. 635.

<sup>257</sup> *C-1* p. 569; *MEW (23)* p. 465.



within the structure of the production relations of capitalism and its corresponding superstructural ideas. Machinery and workers appear as natural under capitalist understandings. This is of course the same as thinking that slavery is a natural institution.

Only a standard separate from the social determination of capitalism can pose alternatives beyond the limits of capitalist accumulation. Marx develops such a standard based on the natural and material existence of humans. The specifics of such a standard is where we now turn.

### **Part III: The Materialist Standard of Practical Action**

This final part will be a presentation and analysis of Marx's materialist standard of practical action. In the previous chapters I have discussed Marx's understanding of the natural, material and social determinations of the world in a manner that presents the distinctions between each of them as indicative of a practical standard of action. Since Marx's practical theory of a practical standard is implicit and fragmented in his writings, I will develop these fragments and implied standards into as consistent and complete a materialist standard of practical action as possible.

#### **15. The Material Basis of the Standard**

As I have discussed previously, Marx's materialist standard of practical action is based on a standard of whether or not certain actions are conducive to the self-actualization of one's projects, projects being defined as any activity that does not violate current or future self-actualizations. Simply stated, a project is self-actualized when one can perform one's desired action without being inhibited by another person's action. But, this implies that the some actions are not conducive to self-actualization. What we need is a basis or ground to help determine why some actions are not conducive to self-actualization. In order to have a standard of action we need to determine what is the limit of actions that do

not inhibit current or future self-actualizations. We need to inquire into the nature of human action and determine what is intrinsic to action so that one can set the boundaries of a practical standard in a manner that is materially based.

Human action can be divided into two broad categories: material action and social action. Material action is the manipulation of natural processes for use by humans. In Marxian terminology, material action is a particular type of labour that produces a specific use-value. What needs to be stressed here is that the manipulation of natural processes for human use is not simply the use of worked over nature for direct use. Material activity does produce items and services that are used for their material qualities: houses are used to live in, shoes are used to walk or run in, a physician's services treat physical ailments, etc. But, since all material activities take a certain amount of time to make what they make, this implies that according to the level of productive development certain outputs take a certain amount of time. This means that a productive worker's days are taken up with producing use-values for a certain period of time. *Prima facie*, this is an extremely mundane point, since I am not writing a history of humanity for extraterrestrials.

If we leave the workday behind and look at longer periods of time, the matter at hand becomes much more clear. At different levels of material development the working lives of people differ. We all know that greater

amounts of people's lives are taken up with the phases of childhood, education/training, and retirement, than in previous generations. These phases have grown or newly emerged, as is the case with retirement for most people, not only because of our modern benevolent and civilized attitudes, but also, and mainly, due to productive development. What people can do with the time of their lives, at different ages and we would say at different parts of the week, has changed dramatically due to the advances of industry.

In short, material production is not only the direct use of items because of their material qualities, but it is also the production of free time. This amount of free time is a society's total amount of free time: the amount of time left free after allotting necessary subsistence production and rest. As we discussed in the section on wages in part 2, the amount of necessary subsistence production and rest can fluctuate according to historical occurrences (worker militancy, unemployment, etc.). Freed time can be used for production of a previously unproduced item, services, or activities that attempt to shorten and keep flexible the circulation time of capital (advertising, product differentiation development, and credit services, to name a few). Free time is not necessarily time that is under the control of all members of society. The newly produced free time of a society can

be turned into unemployment or new types of jobs.<sup>258</sup> Leisure is not the automatic result of productive development.

Marx makes great use of productive development to explain not only the development of societies through the division of labour, but to also base his critique of capitalism on productivity development.

The real wealth of society and the possibility of a constant expansion of its reproduction process does not depend on the length of surplus labour but rather on its productivity and on the more or less plentiful conditions of production in which it is performed. The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper. Just as the savage must wrestle with nature to satisfy his needs, to maintain and reproduce his life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all forms of society and under all possible modes of production. This realm of natural necessity expands with his development, because his needs do too; but the productive forces to satisfy these expand at the same time. Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, through it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Industrialized countries have dealt with the productive advancement, and the changing composition of the world's labour force, in different ways. Esping-Andersen explores how different welfare regimes have come up with different uses of the freed time in their societies. For example, the decline in industrial production employment has caused the growth of services in the United States and Sweden, but in Germany increased unemployment has been the result. See chapter 8 in his *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*.

<sup>259</sup> C-3 pp. 958-9. Other relevant sections are: *EW* p. 328; *EW* p. 324; *C-1* p. 647; *C-1* pp.637-8; *MESW* pp. 315-317; *C-3* p. 954; *G* p.542.

As we can see, Marx understands the basis for a practical standard, as he here discusses under his prized terminology of freedom, is the opening up of free time apart from necessary labour time. This freed time has to be actual free time for people not just the general occurrence of free time. This means that people need to control this freed time themselves through “collective control.” Otherwise, freed time will not be the means to new uses of time that fulfill a practical standard but will be subject to the vulgarities of social promotion that favor capitalist class interests.

We are getting ahead of ourselves here somewhat, since we can say that the misuses of freed time are such that they prevent the actualization of one’s projects. But, to say this is to hurry into the practical standard itself without attending to the material basis that provides its standard. We need to pursue the ratio of necessary labour time to freed time in regard to natural necessity before we can discuss practical standards. In order to do this we need to reconstruct an understanding of human activity as natural and material.

Humans are natural beings. They are objective, physical, and organic creatures. They exist in space as objects among other objects, and rely upon the lawful operation of themselves and other objects that surround them for their continuous existence. Human existence considered in a limited natural way is comprised of humans being part of the natural process of this conglomeration of

objects. Natural processes are the interactions of energy and forces, and the metabolic exchange that occurs between objects. Humans are part of these inorganic and organic processes in such a way that they are inseparable from them. Human existence is composed of natural processes and no matter where humans are - on the Earth, under the sea, in orbit, on the Moon, or perhaps soon beyond - these processes need to be addressed if humans are to continue as *living* creatures and not just matter and energy like a pile of rocks or a star. Human existence can be considered as the maintaining of its organic form throughout time as part of the order of natural processes. Humans, whether lying on Polynesian islands with fruit dropping from trees into their mouths or circling the Moon, have to be in continuous metabolic connection with natural processes to maintain themselves as living beings.<sup>260</sup>

This metabolic connection can be interrupted by human activity. Natural processes can be harnessed by humans and we can begin to change our metabolic connection with natural processes. The point where natural processes begin to be harnessed by human activity is a fine line for two reasons: one, some animals other than humans appear to harness nature through their activity; and, two, human material activity is the use of natural processes by other natural processes,

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<sup>260</sup> A previously quoted passage addresses this point, "Nature is man's *inorganic body*, that is to say nature is so far as it is not the human body. Man *lives* from nature, i.e. nature is his *body*, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature." *EW* p. 328; *MEGA*, I/2, p. 368-9.

and material activity only appears different from natural processes at a certain developed level. The first of these reasons is not endorsed by Marx in this fashion. I state it here since he finds animals to be different from humans since humans “*produce* their means of subsistence”<sup>261</sup> and humans can conceive of their activities before they do so.<sup>262</sup> I take Marx’s comment on producing one’s subsistence to imply that there is a qualitative difference between the ways animals gain subsistence and the way humans do. If we imagine early humans one hundred thousand years ago we can picture them unadorned, with neither coverings nor tools, only using tooth and nail to survive. But is this true? The evolutionary predecessors of *homo sapiens sapiens* used sharpened stones 2.5 million years ago and were heating their food with fire for easier digestion 1.5 million years ago.<sup>263</sup> *Homo sapiens sapiens*’ appearance is associated with tools more advanced than the simple stones for pounding and scraping that early hominids used. Apes use tools today so are they only engaging in natural processes or are they harnessing these processes as material activity? I say that animals other than ourselves are performing material activity. If this conclusion expands the status of personhood we should worry very little.

Natural processes are harnessed through other natural processes; such as the caloric content of fruit is harnessed by an animal foraging and digestive

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<sup>261</sup> *GI* p. 37; *MEW* (3) p. 21.

<sup>262</sup> *C-1* p. 284; *MEW* (23) p. 193.

<sup>263</sup> These dates are taken from the *Hammond Atlas of World History*, pp. 30-31.



processes. But, also the natural process of atomic fission is harnessed by the inherent natural processes of metals, water and electricity in a nuclear reactor. The fruit example could easily be understood as a natural process as an organic cycle of nature, including several species' generative courses. But, the nuclear reactor can also be understood as a natural process since the harnessing of nuclear fission to create steam that is used to turn an electrical turbine is in no way constructed of a force or matter that is not found in the known universe. We can see the harnessing of natural processes, fruit bearing trees or atomic reactions, is done with other natural process. But, how do we distinguish between natural processes and human material activity?

Human material activity is different from natural process because it is the historically accumulated ways of harnessing natural processes that *meaningfully alters our time spent extracting and the output extracted* from these natural processes, which are not attributable solely to climate or location.<sup>264</sup> If a group catches a lot of fish because of advantageous conditions, coral reefs, currents, etc., then the output extracted is not *meaningfully* due to material activity. But if the increased output is due to a new fishing technique, fishponds or the use of nets, then the output is *meaningfully* due to material activity.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> "Favourable natural conditions can provide in themselves only the possibility, never the reality of surplus labour, nor, accordingly, the reality of surplus-value and a surplus product." *C-1* p. 650

<sup>265</sup> "It is not the absolute fertility of the soil but its degree of differentiation, the variety of its natural products, which forms the natural basis for the social division of labour, and which, by

Time and output are good indicators for the arising of material activity considered as a basis for a practical standard of judgment, since this standard is concerned with determining whether or not certain situations or societal arrangements are advantageous to humans. Increased output and reduced necessary labour are the precursors to the very possibility of determining the advantage of different societal arrangements. Low output and/or long necessary labour times precludes the possibility of significantly different societal arrangements because there can be no specialization.

As we can see, material activity provides the groundwork for changing and various types of human organization ranging from clans and hordes to nations and empires and eventually worldwide groupings. We cannot understand human existence properly if we isolate human beings as static natural creatures. Material activity is humans' historically accumulated ways of manipulating of nature. Human material existence is composed of material history, the history of industry. Human natural existence is a chimera considered as an actual historical period of humanity. Nature is never known in-itself by humans. A human state of nature devoid of any subsistence producing labour has never existed except in people's imaginations. Nature can be known through human material activity, but this is

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changes in the natural surroundings, spurs man on to the multiplication of his needs, his capacities, and the instruments and modes of his labour. It is the necessity of bringing a natural force under the control of society, of economizing on its energy, of appropriating or subduing it on a large scale by the work of the human hand, that plays the most decisive role in the history of industry." *C-1* p. 649.

not an isomorphic relationship. The laws and regularities of material activity is a pale shadow of nature, not nature as it really is.<sup>266</sup>

The insurmountable divide between the world of natural processes and the historical world of human material activity in knowledge, does not mean that human action and life is detached from nature. Rather it is only through manipulations of nature that humans can alter and diversify their lives: diversity such as levels of learning, types of occupations, amounts of leisure, and types of governance. This diversification of living is a question of productive level and time. Different productive levels allow different activities. Time is of course directly affected by productive level; in regard to diversification of living this means freed time. Freed time is the actual time of human lives that is no longer devoted to necessary subsistence production. Time becomes freed via control over the natural processes that affect human subsistence production.

Freed time is a necessary condition for the division of labour. A division of labour is only possible when necessary subsistence production can produce a surplus that would allow some people to no longer engage in this necessary production. As we discussed in the previous section on the *German Ideology*, surplus product allows specialization and specialization implies a division of

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<sup>266</sup> Schmidt expresses a similar point: “However suitable the composition of the material of nature may be to its appropriation by man (all human aims are achieved through its laws), Marx and Hegel (here peculiarly materialist) still hold to the thesis that nature’s co-production with labour always includes the fact that what men have in mind always remains utterly foreign and external to it. Even under socialism.” op. cit. p. 162.

labour. The division of labour allows for greater production of surplus and further specialization and more refined divisions of labour. Diamond describes this phenomenon: “Intensified food production and societal complexity stimulate each other, by autocatalysis. That is, population growth leads to societal complexity, ... while societal complexity in turn leads to intensified food production and thereby to population growth. Complex centralized societies are uniquely capable of organizing public works (including irrigation systems), long-distance trade (including the importation of metals to make better agricultural tools), and activities of different groups of economic specialists (such as feeding herders with farmers’ cereal, and transferring the herders’ livestock to farmers for use as plow animals).”<sup>267</sup> Mandel also discusses the effects of productive surplus during the Neolithic revolution: “The formation of a permanent surplus of foodstuffs is the material basis for carrying through of the most important economic revolution man has known since his appearance on earth: the beginning of agriculture and of the domestication and rearing of animals.” “The Neolithic revolution also gives a powerful stimulus to the development of tools. By creating a *permanent surplus* it creates the possibility of a professional body of craftsman.”<sup>268</sup> Also, further division of society beyond material production is possible due to subsistence surplus, “Agriculture which can preserve and increase the fertility of the social

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<sup>267</sup> Diamond *Gems, Guns, and Steel* p 285.

<sup>268</sup> Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory* pp. 28 and 29 respectively.

creates a permanent surplus of foodstuffs, a substantial *social surplus*. This surplus is not only the basis for the social division of labour, for the separation of the crafts from agriculture, of town from country. It is also the basis of the division of society into classes.” “As soon as a considerable surplus has been formed, the possibility appears for a part of society to give up productive labour, obtaining leisure at the expense of the remainder of society.”<sup>269</sup>

Surplus product and the division of labour reduced the amount of time necessary for subsistence production. This reduction results in freed time that can be used to create the conditions for a diversification of human action beyond production and its attending activities. There are two types of divisions of labour: division of material work relations and the division of labour into the material and the social. The latter division encompasses the former but the former is not dependent on the latter for its existence in all social forms. Material relations have no need for social relations for a relationship between people and the means of production, or between people and other people, to occur. But social relations may be necessary to promote the speed of production and the specific uses of the product that the material relations are concerned with.

Leaving the independence of material relations aside for the moment, the division of labour results in further specialization of production activities,

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<sup>269</sup> Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory* p 39 both quotes.

including both the increased sophistication in current tasks or the development of new manipulations of nature and the specialization in social regulation activities. Activities of social regulation can have useful results. Mandel discusses how in early societies the creation and maintaining of food storage was due to promotion by religious leaders.<sup>270</sup> Food storage is, of course, a beneficial activity that is useful for all in a community, beyond the certain non-producers that promoted this end for a portion of production. A danger of such social promotion is that the material benefit, in this case food storage, becomes synonymous with a certain class' authority and the ideological appearance of the promotion. This would never be a problem if ruling class authority is always isomorphic with need satisfaction, let alone optimal community use and development of the material productive apparatus. The problem with this arrangement is that a ruling group that has effective control over the means of production and its product can promote ends that are not beneficial to the whole of society, because *class interests are not always isomorphic with optimal use of the productive apparatus and need satisfaction*. Class analysis is based on identifying the touted interests of society in general as really only the interests of a certain class.<sup>271</sup> That is, class analysis seeks to dispel the pseudo-natural determination of class interest.

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<sup>270</sup> Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory* pp. 40-41.

<sup>271</sup> "The technique of accumulation has been used to justify the appropriation of extensive material privileges." Mandel *Marxist Economic Theory* p. 41. Diamond also discusses the how class

In review, the division of labour has the following results.

1. Productivity increases due to the division of labour enable groups to develop new productive methods and products. 2. Increased output due to the division of labour permits the arising of classes, which means that a section of society can exist as the effective controllers of the means of production and its products. 3. The social division of labour into the producers and the controllers/promoters of production opens up the possibility that the controllers may promote ends for production that serve only, or mostly, the interests of a small segment of the population.

The division of labour's usefulness is increased control over natural processes enabling increased security in the gaining of subsistence, and, perhaps more important from a practical standpoint, the diversification of human activity. Both of these accomplishments are the direct results of increases in productive output and use of this output for the reduction of necessary subsistence labour time. But, an additional result of these productive developments is social activities of promotion becoming a specialized task. Non-scientific explanations, generally ideological or specifically religious, are ineluctably part of human

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interests become to be considered normal distributional patterns; he calls it "kleptocracy," in chapter 14 in *Germs, Guns, and Steel*.

historical development.<sup>272</sup> Why humans engage in such explanation is open to debate, and it is not our current task to understand why. What does concern us are the effects of such explanation being the domain of ruling class interests. The division of labour allows non-scientific explanation to become an activity of social promotion for the interests of a specific class.

Productive development's material results of freed time and specialization brings about the separation of humans from the productive apparatus due to the arising of social activities that promote the use and ends of material activities. Stated in a Marxian fashion, development of the productive forces has occurred within social relations that have resulted in *alienation* of humans from the means of production. Alienation is the *social* separation of humans from control of the productive apparatus; at least to the extent that they cannot provide sufficient historically determined levels of subsistence for themselves without selling their labour power. A historically determined subsistence minimum, as opposed to a biologically derived level, has to be maintained since need satisfaction beyond biological maintenance is needed to effectively use a productive apparatus: such as, training in how to use, build, and improve the productive apparatus, and education in the cultural development of one's community to fully participate in its life.

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<sup>272</sup> The Neanderthals buried their dead. Perhaps this could be a sign of abstract explanation in hominids other than *homo sapiens sapiens*. See *Hammond Atlas of World History*, fifth edition, edited by Richard Overy, page 32.



Marx maintains that the material is autonomous from the social in all phases of organization: “Labour, then, as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself.”<sup>273</sup> Whether material activity can exist without social activity to guide its direction, as Cohen maintains, needs to be correctly considered. Humans have developed scientific and rational explanations along side, and even within, irrational, religious, and ideological conceptions. It is reasonable to think that these non-scientific and sophistic understandings of the world will be with us for some time.<sup>274</sup> But, there is little reason to think that it is impossible that the class structure that uses such ideological explanations will have to be with us in the foreseeable human future.<sup>275</sup>

Marx does not consider the independence of the material from the social in these terms. Marx’s use of the term “social” sometimes refers to our use of the term material and sometime to our use of the term social. But we can evaluate

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<sup>273</sup> *C-1* p. 133; *MEW 23* p. 57.

<sup>274</sup> An interesting early quote on socialism: “But socialism as such no longer needs such mediation [of God]. Its starting-point is the theoretically and practically sensuous consciousness of man and of nature as essential beings.” *EW* p. 357. Marx’s opposition of God to human productive activity could be seen as a prelude to the not much later opposition of the social to material developed in *The German Ideology*. God as a mediation between people and the world is qualitatively the same as the social as a mediation between individuals and the means of production, since God is only a superstructural notion.

<sup>275</sup> The overcoming of class systems is a material possibility of production, and this is what I mean in the sentence this note is attached to. The *political* possibility of such an occurrence is a different but not unrelated matter.

Marx's uses of the term and provide reasons to interpret it one way or another, which we have done throughout this work. Regardless of the term, Marx does think that the ideological mechanism of promotion and control of information is a ruling class phenomenon. And class activities are social activities in our use of terms; these activities promote distributional ends regardless of the rational material use of the productive apparatus.<sup>276</sup>

Ruling class control of the productive apparatus is facilitated by a certain range of productive surplus; it is not feasible if the productive surplus is too low, but it can be jettisoned when the productive surplus reaches a sufficient level for society to transition to self-governance. The relationships of control and dominance distinctive to class societies are rendered obsolete when the productive surplus has reached a certain level. The obsolescence of class society due to productive advancement, stated in the terminology used here, is the obsolescence of social activities of promotion. These activities can be replaced with control of the productive apparatus by producers themselves since there is a sufficient surplus to meet the historically determined subsistence level. This general surplus means that necessary production and supervision of production can be done by the same people. As we see, this level of surplus means that time spent labouring can

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<sup>276</sup> If all class actions are social actions then this includes proletarian class actions. I am happy with this distinction since we can separate out actions that preserve or promote the continued existence of a class from actions that attempt to liberate people from the class system. Marx himself criticized actions that preserved the class system, see *MESW* p.226.

be reduced and this newly freed time can be taken up with direction of the production process. Productive surplus allows the division of labour and the creation of supervisors and directors of production. An increase in the productive surplus can allow producers to supervise and direct the production process themselves. (A classless society, of course, may be subject to the biases of its majority opinions, but this is different than the exclusive control over production and information transmission by a small group of entrenched and socially recognized power.<sup>277</sup>)

The division of labour between material production and social promotion creates a social barrier between humans and natural processes. This social barrier of class relations prevents human material activity from directly accessing the production apparatus. Class relations imply the possibility of accessing the productive apparatus, but access is dependent on social factors and not need. These social factors include the following but are not exhausted by: market transactions, unemployment, profitability, illegal workers, stateless people, and in pre-capitalist forms, unrecognized classes (the proto-proletariat of turned out serfs). In short, *the material basis for a practical standard of action is human beings' access to the means of production*. Access to the means of production is not only the use of land and resources, but also the use of any device, implement,

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<sup>277</sup> Mandel has some interesting ideas about democratic control of a socialized press and information transmission systems in his book *Power and Money*, pp. 199-205.

structure, or information that aids in making material activity an actuality. In order for human beings to be active in any meaningful sense they need to have access to natural processes and the devices commonly used in their society for manipulating nature. Without access to the means of production, subsistence existence and development is impossible.

We can understand the material basis for a practical standard as the natural necessity of humans. Humans as physical and organic beings cannot perform any activity unless they have access to the natural processes. The material basis as access to the means of production is just a historically current way of stating the humans need to have access to natural processes to maintain themselves and develop additional abilities.

## **16. The Materialist Standard of Practical Action**

A materialist standard of practical action is based on individuals having access to the historically current technological level of material activities' manipulations of natural processes. This is the micro level of the standard. The macro level of the standard is based on *all individuals* having access to the historically current technological level of material activities' manipulations of natural processes. Access by all individuals is how I simply define socialism. A

fuller discussion of socialism and what qualifies as access to the means of production for all individuals is dealt with below.

If these are the bases of a materialist standard then what is the standard? The material standard of practical judgment is: **the universal self-actualization of one's projects is achieved when one can reasonably access the historically current technological apparatus according to the minimum possibilities of production and distribution without infringing on others' self-actualizations of their projects according to the same reasonable access.** In a more succinct form, the materialist standard is reasonable universal self-actualization of one's projects.

This standard is derived from the natural determination of humans. Humans can provide for their subsistence and develop new abilities, which is to say self-actualize their projects, if and only if they have access to the natural world. To prevent people from having access to the natural world is to separate people from their actuality, since *it is meaningless to consider humans separate from their natural requirements of action and the means of their actions, natural processes.*

Satisfaction of the materialist practical standard is the overcoming of alienation from the historically current means of production. Separation of people from nature/the means of production is alienation. The materialist practical

standard is defined around rectifying alienation. Alienation, as described by Marx, is thus overcome by adherence to the materialist practical standard.<sup>278</sup>

This standard is practical, which means that the standard determines minimal achievement of project actualization, failures of project actualization, and can also be used to compare better or worse situations and outcomes of actions. The practical standard can evaluate various different production and distributional outcomes along these lines. The materialist practical standard is an ethical standard since it can be used to judge the desirability or “morality” of actions and societal patterns. I avoid calling the system ethical due to Marx’s critique of moral and ethical systems.<sup>279</sup> I prefer to call the standard simply practical, since it is concerned with traditional boundaries of practical topics: ethics, politics, society, and economy. Marx’s work can be understood as descriptions of why capitalism is failing to allow people to achieve the good life. Since Marx is concerned with practical topics his position can be considered practical because he wants to determine better and worse situations and not just description of the current state of things. But, due to the non-traditional tenets of his practical standard, describing Marx’s standard as ethical admits to holding Marx only weakly to a definition of ethics, a definition that understands ethics as

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<sup>278</sup> The well known early discussion of alienation is found in *EW* p. 325. See also *C-3* p.963.

<sup>279</sup> See Wood’s *Karl Marx* part three for a discussion of Marx’s critique of ethics. And Bertell Ollman’s work *Alienation: Marx’s conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. Second Edition. Chapter 4.

what we should do and not simply what we do. So we can call Marx's standard ethical only according to a weak definition of the ethical.

Leaving aside Marx's relation to philosophy's traditional ethical standards, we now need to analyze the different terms, conditions, and repercussions of the materialist practical standard.

What are actualization of projects, self-actualization of projects and reasonable self-actualization of projects? Actualization of a project is either a completed material activity or the actual use of leisure time for activities that are not strictly material activities. Some examples of project actualizations are building a bridge, synthesizing chemical compounds, cooking a meal, studying ancient Greek, conducting an experiment, climbing a mountain, taking a stroll, or transmitting or receiving information. As we can see, actualizing a project includes some activities that we could consider social activities. Social activities, as has been described in this work, are activities that promote ends for material activities that have no necessary part in the material activity themselves. But social activities of promotion are only effective in certain types of social forms, specifically class societies. Transmitting information may be an ideological social activity of promotion in a class society if there are the necessary supporting mechanisms of class control of the means of production and information systems. In a classless society, information transmission is not a social activity since it is

not supported by mechanisms of class control. This means that if there is direct and universal control over the means of production and information systems, the actualized project of information transmission is not a social activity. But, it may be called superstructural.

Self-actualization occurs when access to the means of production necessary for a material activity's actualization or the ability to allot time for and enjoy leisure is under the effective control of the individual performing these actions.<sup>280</sup> This means that people have direct access to the means of production and have control over decisions concerning the amount of time devoted to necessary production. The difference between actualization and self-actualization is control by the one who is actualizing a project. If access to the means of production is controlled by someone other than the person who wishes to actualize their project, then this is an arrangement where self-actualization is not occurring. (To step ahead somewhat, this arrangement does not meet the minimum determined by the practical standard.)

We can see that a sufficient meeting of the practical standard is not a subsistence minimum alone but effective control over the productive apparatus and political bodies that produce, distribute, redistribute, and manage the economy. Social democracy is not a sufficient meeting of the practical standard.

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<sup>280</sup> See the following sections for a discussion by Marx of activities people could partake in for the "development of individuals" when people have universal access to the means of production: *G* p. 706; *G* p. 708; *G* 749; *C-1* p.667; *MESW* p.48.



Even though these countries enjoy low poverty, high employment, and modern living standards, there is no effective control according to the demands of self-actualization by individuals over production and governance.

In another sense, self-actualization is a necessity of governance, since control over the means of production by an elite class enables this class to use the means of production as they see fit regardless of the actualization of people's projects. Self-actualization as effective self-governance is not a perfect protection against the tyranny of majorities, but it is a more effective protection against demagoguery and oligopoly. It seems that democratic control of political and economic bodies and socialized ownership of the means of production would help protect against the threat of mis-actualization, since, at least in theory, this arrangement would allow for self-actualization; this is, the direct access to the mean of production and its political accessories. An irrational choice of preventing some people from being able to self-actualize their projects seems possible, if less probable, within the socialism here described.<sup>281</sup>

An example of the threat of tyranny and demagoguery within a social form that does not have the self-actualization protections of socialism can be shown with a critique of Henry Shue's robust theory of redistribution that necessitates

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<sup>281</sup> Please see my comments on these matters in previous chapters on the *German Ideology* in part 2. It seems that demagoguery is less of a problem where the information apparatus is controlled democratically and not by an elite class.

subsistence rights along with civil rights.<sup>282</sup> Simply, he finds that one cannot meaningfully have either substance rights or civil rights without the other. Shue's theory is both an attack on Anglo-American rights theory that privileges civil rights over subsistence, and the notion that the development of subsistence takes precedence over civil rights. Shue goes a long way towards providing a more realistic consideration of the kinds of rights needed for a secure and varied existence.

The problem with Shue's theory is that his conception of self-actualization is not fully developed. Showing the necessity of political control for the assurance of subsistence rights advances Shue's position towards a notion similar to theory of self-actualization described in this paper. But without seriously questioning the limits of democracy within a capitalist social form Shue stops short of providing an effective theory of self-actualization. Minimally, Shue makes the case for subsistence and political freedom. The possibility of capital flight and capital strike threaten attempts that place subsistence assurances before profitability; and attempts at co-operative and worker management without socialized control over investment leave such attempts vulnerable to investment shutouts.<sup>283</sup> Shue provides convincing moral claims for the necessity of self-

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<sup>282</sup> Henry Shue's theory is located in his book *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Second Edition. Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>283</sup> This is demonstrated in the essay by John D. Stephens "Scandinavian Welfare States: Achievements, Crisis, and Prospects" in *Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in*

actualization, but he doesn't fully address the power of capitalist social structures, thus missing the necessity of universal access to the means of production.

A serious problem arises when people have legitimate claims on subsistence and political rights but they do not have direct control over the means of production. Shue's theory does acknowledge the need for control over product, but his consideration of control does not emphasize how the political process can easily be manipulated when the last word in the use of the means of production is determined by class interests and not need. Shue's theory of basic rights shows the necessity of socialization when his claims are tested. A right to subsistence and governance when confronted by capitalist class interests provokes one to move toward stronger assurances of guaranteed subsistence and governance, such as income minimums, decommodification, and checks on extra-democratic power (political funding reform, anti-cartel laws, advertising limits, etc.). Such attempts fail to confront the social barrier of class between humans and the means of production. Shue's moral call to action is moving in the right direction, but minimum self-actualization access has not been achieved by his basic rights standard.

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*Global Economies*, edited by Esping-Andersen. This article documents the limits of Swedish social democracy in curbing the logic of capitalist accumulation. The problems of capital flight and strike in response to worker attempts at control capital accumulation are considered in Adam Przeworski's essay "Material interests, class compromise, and the transition to socialism." in *Analytical Marxism*. Edited by John Roemer. Cambridge University Press, 1986.

With self-actualization described we can move on to what is reasonable self-actualization. Reasonable self-actualization is the self-actualization of one's projects that does not require unnecessary sacrifices and disproportional use of resources for one's self-actualizations. Unnecessary sacrifices are any exchange requirement that if not done would not diminish sustainable accumulation, consumption, and actualization. An example of an unnecessary sacrifice is requiring people to work hours beyond an amount necessary for production and reproduction. Requiring people to work for a distributed amount when their not working does not diminish accumulation and consumption can seriously affect the self-actualization of their projects due to encroachment on leisure time. Making workers labour too much limits leisure time, inhibits the expansion of their abilities, and precludes time for self-governance of workplace and society.<sup>284</sup> It is a violation of the materialist practical standard to endorse work amounts that adversely affect the self-actualization of one's projects. Work amounts beyond a necessary amount are a barrier to self-actualization. Since they have no reasonable bearing on necessary material production they are social promotions. But this designation only applies to work amounts that are endorsed by someone

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<sup>284</sup> Michael A. Lebowitz finds that a major problem in Yugoslav self-managed workplaces was insufficient time for workers to learn specialist and managerial techniques. The inability of workers to effectively understand other elements in production inhibited their ability to manage their workplaces effectively. See *Build it Now: Socialism for the Twenty First Century*, pp. 76-78.

other than the worker himself or herself. It is not a matter of mis-actualization to work time beyond a necessary amount under your own volition.

The disproportional use of resources for one's self-actualizations is the unequal use of sustainable product that inhibits other people's self-actualizations. If there are sufficient amounts of certain goods in society, for example's sake say food and housing, then a disproportional use of these goods would mean that someone receives an amount that prevents someone else from self-actualization of their projects. Let us say that every person in society can receive 6,000 calories of food a day and if any person receives 7,000 calories it means that someone else only receives 5,000 calories. This unequal distribution of food is only unreasonable if it impairs self-actualization. As we discussed before, the practical standard is the threshold for self-actualization of one's projects and is not a subsistence minimum. The unequal distribution of food would be legitimate according to the materialist standard if it did not prevent self-actualization of one's projects. The biological option of caloric intake is of course a necessary factor in determining self-actualization but it is not sufficient.

What is reasonable access to the historically current technological apparatus according to the minimum possibilities of production and distribution? And accordingly, is there a historically optimum possibility of production and distribution? The minimum possibility for production and distribution is societal

wide access to the productive apparatus, leisure time, self-governance time, and other necessary goods and services that facilitate self-actualization. All of these types of access we will simply call self-actualization access. The minimum level of self-actualization access is the lowest level of access that still assures consistent and secure self-actualization of one's projects. For example, minimum access to the productive apparatus would be an amount that is the lowest possible amount of effective control over the apparatus. Self-actualization access is not a fixed amount, access is minimally sufficient if self-actualization can take place. This simply means that one has control over the actualization of one's projects. If other people control access to the productive apparatus or make decisions regarding necessary production time, or goods and services necessary for self-actualization that can be reasonably produced or distributed but are not, then the minimum possibility of self-actualization access has not been met. Reasonable production and distribution would entail sustainable and safe production in regard to issues of pollution,<sup>285</sup> since self-actualization is unnecessarily jeopardized if one's health is threatened due to preventable causes.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Marx discusses capitalist accumulation as threat to the environment in *C-1* p. 638; *C-3* p. 216; *C-3* p. 949.

<sup>286</sup> Marx discusses unreasonable access to the means of production in chapter 10 of *Capital* volume 1. This citation and the following ones are of course about capitalism. But one of the goals of socialism has been to prevent unreasonable access, as overwork and underdevelopment for the sake of accumulation. See also *MESW* p. 41; *MESW* p. 48; *MESW* p. 51; *G*. pp. 749-750; *G* p. 422.

Now that we have established what is minimum reasonable access we need to next establish what is optimum access to possible production and distribution. Optimal self-actualization access is the historically determined level of production and distribution. This means that an optimal level of access would entail increased opportunities of self-actualization and self-governance due to increased possibility of freed time in comparison to the minimum amount. The minimum access amount is the threshold for self-actualization to take place. The optimum access amount is the historically determined amount that does not violate sustainable production and distribution and universal access to self-actualization.

Self-actualization is only universal self-actualization.<sup>287</sup> Self-actualization can only be maintained as a consistent practical standard if universal, if all individuals can self-actualize their own projects. Only with universal self-actualization can direct access to the productive apparatus be ensured without the occurrence of social activities of promotion. Self-actualization is dependent upon direct access to the productive apparatus and this direct access can only be assured when there is universal self-actualization. Less than direct access to the productive apparatus means there can be actualization of one's projects but not

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<sup>287</sup> Universality of self-actualization can be inferred from Marx's and Engels' statement "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." *MESW* p. 53. See also, *G* p.541; *MESW* pp. 320-321.

self-actualization. But even this best-case scenario (lesser cases are where even actualization is not accomplished) is not freedom, it is paternalism.

We can understand the various cases of actualization as follows:

- A) Universal actualization of one's projects
- B) Possible self-actualization of one's projects
- C) Possible actualization of one's projects
- D) Universal self-actualization of one's projects <sup>288</sup>

**A** may be impossible because as was stated above actualization cannot be universal except when it is self-actualization. Actualization without direct access to the means of production and its attendant organizations cannot assure secure actualization. Only when one is in effective control of the means of production is universal actualization reasonably assured and only because actualization is done by the actualizers themselves. **B** is class society when the dominant class is able

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<sup>288</sup> Actualization access of such a type as 'impossible actualization access' could never be seriously considered since such a type is incongruent with actualization. Not even slaves or prisoners actualizations would be of this type. Depending on the specific situation of the slaves and prisoners they may be type **C**. Since prisoners and slaves may be give subsistence, or may be give the means to produce their subsistence, such as a garden, this would be type **C**. But they are not in control of their actualization. This is why they are considered slaves or prisoners. They are not free to make decisions about their actualization. Type **B** actualization access seems impossible for slaves and prisoners since this implies they could have a say in how they actualize their projects, which would imply they are not property or incarcerated. Serfs would seem to fall under type **C** since they may have land they can farm for their own use but they cannot sell this land and they are not free to leave their bondage. In order to distinguish the difference between free labourers and serfs, slaves, and prisoners we would need to establish degrees for types **C**. But, they are of the same order. There is a similarity of condition for free labourers and serfs and slaves which is why Marx calls free labourers wage slaves; all of these classes are unable to effectively control the means of production, which is what designates their class position anyhow.



to self-actualize their projects. **C** is a class society when the subordinate class may be able to actualize their projects.

As we see, **A** is improbable and undesirable because of the insecurity due to the lack of self-governance. The recent attack upon social welfare systems can attest to the precarious state of universal actualization that is not self-actualization. (See the discussion of combination **B/A** below.)

**B** and **C** could both occur in the same social form (as in capitalism) since some people's actualization access is of type **B** and some of type **C**. In the capitalist social form capitalists have actualization access of type **B** and workers have actualization access of type **C**. Realistically **B** and **C** have to occur together. Since **B** alone could be seen as the dream of proto-capitalism composed of only independent producers, artisans or farmers. But, this was historically not the case. Also, what would happen to people who lost control over their means of production? If people did not try to actualize their projects as workers, type **C**, then what would happen to them? Would they die? This seems improbable since historically artisans were put out of business by little capitalists who were later put out of business by bigger capitalists. In this process these artisans and little capitalists became workers. So it seems that type **B** needs type **C** for these historical occurrences alone. But, we must not forget that capitalism can only accumulate due to the extraction of surplus-value. Surplus-value extraction is

only possible, according to Marx, due to differences in control over the productive forces between persons. Accordingly type **C** alone also seems impossible without type **B** because what is preventing self-actualization? Type **C** implies that self-actualization is impossible, which means someone other than actualizers of type **C** are in effective control over the means of production. Pre-class societies are in direct access to the means of production, they are primitive communists.<sup>289</sup> Types **B** and **C** are co-existent.

So we can see that type **B** and **C** have to occur together. But is the **B/C** situation desirable? That is to ask, are class societies desirable when there is the possibility of universal self-actualization? Marx's whole analysis of capitalism is to point out that even in the best conditions, that is where the rules of ideal capitalism are obeyed – no cheating or price gouging - class society is not desirable.<sup>290</sup> The case against capitalism has been restated by others recently in very succinct form. Two notable ones are David Schweickart's books *Against Capitalism* and *After Capitalism*. Also one of Harry Magdoff's last essays, which he wrote with his son Fred Magdoff, was a criticism of capitalism and an argument for socialism.<sup>291</sup> As the Magdoffs point out: "The wealthiest 691 people on earth have a net worth of \$2.2 trillion, equivalent to the combined

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<sup>289</sup> See page 472 in *Grundrisse* on the immediate and necessary connection of primitive community and land.

<sup>290</sup> W. Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell have a succinct presentation of this interpretation of Marx's critique of capitalism on pages 193 and 194 of their book *Towards a New Socialism*.

<sup>291</sup> "Approaching Socialism" in *Monthly Review*. Vol 57 No. 3.

annual GDP of 145 countries... The richest 7.7 million people (about 0.1 percent of world's population), with net financial worth of more than \$1 million, control approximately \$28.8 trillion – equivalent to 80 percent of the annual gross domestic product of all the countries of the world.” These numbers I think say it all. Particularly when the Magdoffs also add: “About half of humanity lives on less than what two dollars a day can purchase in the United States.”

Theoretically one could have another combination type **B/A**, which would be in reality a strong social welfare state. But this type suffers from the problems already stated that type **A** is not sustainable, and seems to become type **C**.<sup>292</sup> The forces of capital accumulation are too strong to protect a country from competition and the law of value.<sup>293</sup> Combination type **B/A** is not stable; the forces of capitalist accumulation push it to unravel and become type **B/C**.

We can understand universal self-actualization (type **D**) as objectively better (in regard to the chances of self-actualizing or actualizing one's projects) than type **B**; and type **B** as better than type **A**; and type **A** as better than type **C**. (We can use the greater than and less than symbols (> and <) to signify better or worse. So we have **D > B > A > C**.) Type **B** could be better than type **A** for individuals due to the reasons listed by Cohen that self-employment may be better

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<sup>292</sup> The first two parts of Robert Brenner's book *The Economics of Global Turbulence* are a short history of maintaining the post-war situation of full-employment in Germany, Japan, and the U.S.A. in the face of increasing international competition, the forces of capitalist accumulation.

<sup>293</sup> The first chapter in Mandel's book *Power and Money* discusses the affects of international capitalist accumulation and the law of value on planning in the Soviet Union.

then selling one's labour, even if one's income is still comparable to workers, due to being able to escape the policing of the workplace and other work hierarchies. This may imply more control over one's time in general and one's work-process. But, as Cohen also points out, socialism is better for workers as a whole than self-employment.<sup>294</sup>

If we take the ideas to heart, universal self-actualization, type **D**, is only possible at a certain level of productive development, level  $p$  or  $p+1$ . We then have to say, that **D** is greater than **B**, **A**, and **C** only if productive development is  $p$  or greater. If we consider that productive development would be too low,  $p-1$ , then the advantages of universal self-actualization would not be better. But, I would say that universal access to the means of production is sufficiently better on its own to outweigh the productive advantages of a class society when productive development is low, at  $p-1$  or less. If we wish to be more specific in regard to the possibility of socialism, we can say that socialism as described by Marx is universal self-actualization at level  $p$  at least. A socialism that does not fulfill Marx's ideas of free time and self-development would be universal self-actualization at level  $p-1$ . This arrangement still preserves the Marxian socialism as better than the possible low-productive development socialism. So we can say that **D**, $p$  is better than **D**, $p-1$  ( $\mathbf{D},p > \mathbf{D},p-1$ ).

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<sup>294</sup> G.A. Cohen. "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom." in *Analytical Marxism*. Edited by John Roemer.

The possibility of Marxian socialism is dependent on overcoming a particular division of mental and manual labour (the division of policing and the policed, which is different than the division of labour between skilled and unskilled production workers). Ideologists are no longer needed to promote exploitive class relationships. Low-productivity socialism may not be better in reality because of the productive gain achieved by a class society within the current level of development (such as feudalism). Such productive gains include the maintenance of protection specialists, soldiers. Living in a class society with protection specialists may be better than living in low-development socialism that is unable to support protection specialists. The change of actualizing one's projects may be more assured in a violent world filled with class societies. These class societies, with their productive advantages, could be more stable situations for actualization. These considerations may outweigh the benefits of universal self-actualization, especially if the inter-community political situation is violent and volatile.

But, deciding which situation is better is, I find, case specific. Overall, Marxian socialism is a better arrangement because it is a socialism of a productive level where ideologists and other class specialists are unnecessary and people no longer have to devote the entirety of their working day or week to a single profession. Low development socialism lacks this expansion of human activity,

but it may be better anyhow due to universal control over the means of production.

### **17. Socialism According to the Materialist Practical Standard**

We can call a society that satisfies minimal universal self-actualization access socialism. This means people have direct access to the means of production that will not be interrupted by social barriers. In order for there to be minimal universal self-actualization access the means of production and information distribution must be controlled by all members of society, and the reemergence of class relations and their corresponding social barriers must be prevented. Universal access implies that control over the means of production cannot be different for individual members of society. Thus people must be able to access the means of production at all times while they are members of this society. This means they cannot be alienated from the means of production. If people are all in control of the means of production and cannot be alienated from the means of production, this implies that people collectively control the means of production. Collective control over the means of production means that no person or persons can accumulate a significant amount of the means of production enabling them to live off of other workers' labour through exploitation.

Nozick's famous condemnation of socialism limiting freedom, "The socialist society would have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults"<sup>295</sup> has been rebutted by Schweickart effectively, "The basis would be the concern that "capitalist acts" could generate inequalities sufficient to be destabilizing, even if the vast majority were clear in their preference for worker self-management, and the economy as a whole remained far from capitalist. A few individuals with a lot of money can generate much mischief."<sup>296</sup> I would add two additions to Schweickart's critique.

First, why engage in capitalist acts if remuneration in socialized industries is sufficient for satisfying self-actualization? Self-actualization implies that people's biological and cultural requirements are met and that people have sufficient control over their lives in production and in leisure. The overcoming of scarcity (in some products) and reduction of necessary work time are prerequisites for socialism. Food, housing, education, leisure activities, art and entertainment distribution are currently in vast supply for wealthy nations. The problem being that market exchanges for labour-power and capitalist accumulation prevent their adequate distribution and/or production. So, if needs are satisfied by socialized industry why work elsewhere? There seems to be little reason to have side job, capitalist or individual producer, if one's needs are satisfied. But if one enjoys the

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<sup>295</sup> Robert Nozick *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, p. 163.

<sup>296</sup> David Schweickart *Against Capitalism*, p. 198.

activity of making money, which many do, then running a small business may be the only way to satisfy this desire. But the problem is not that people want to make money, the problem is that capitalist accumulation prevents self-actualization of one's projects. So capitalist accumulation may start with someone satisfying their need to make money, but in the end it leads to alienation and exploitation.

Second, we have to recall that capitalist accumulation did not occur because of thrift or hard work. People, that were in the process of becoming capitalists, were in advantageous positions of control over the means of production because other people were forcibly removed from the land, and the unequal exchange of goods, usury, or their property was stolen from them through plunder.<sup>297</sup> Accumulation can only occur through the mass alienation of people from the means of production. So capitalist acts on a small scale with a socialist society would not be able to achieve enough mass to cause the meaningful reemergence of class distinctions without the wholesale de-nationalization of the means of production. In short, a group of people who wish to become capitalists would have to convince society at large to make the means of production something that can be alienated. The arising of small capitalist workshops would in themselves not be able to turn into large capitalist enterprises.

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<sup>297</sup> See Ernst Mandel's *Marxist Economic Theory*, chapter 4.



In general, should capitalist acts be allowed within socialism? If the means of production cannot be alienated then they are not a problem. But if means of production can be alienated then this implies that minimal universal self-actualization access would be allowed to be violated. Such a violation would jeopardize people's security of project actualization. Why anyone would allow such a thing to happen is irrational, but no system of societal organization can prevent irrational actions.

Capitalist acts are not a problem if the means of production cannot be alienated, because: 1) a sufficient level of need satisfaction would make the demand for additional work unnecessary, 2) the mass of accumulation needed to make a transition to capitalism is improbable. Capitalist acts with the above limits would relegate them to repair services, low-development production (baking and simple hand crafts), and handy work (lawn mowing, house painting, etc). These enterprises should not bother us. Also, if the enterprises actually employ people could be nationalized by the action of the employees.

Socialism to satisfy the materialist practical standard would require: 1. Socialization of property so it cannot be alienated from the collective control by the members of society. 2. Democratic control of the workplace and society wide investment decisions. How society is managed economically, market or planning, is important as much as it may or may not affect the maintenance of minimal self-

actualization access or optimal self-actualization access. Violation of the practical standard will not bring down God's wrath. Rather the materialist practical standard is a guide for beneficial outcomes according to humans' natural existence. There may be many reasons to violate it that are irrational, but understood as 'good' or 'correct' by the actors. The economic organization of a socialist society has been discussed by several people. I will only here say that the economic organization of a socialist society in regard to the market and planning has to take the materialist practical standard into account if we wish to overcome the ills of capitalist social form and social relations in general.

### **18. Self-Actualization and Needs**

Self-actualization is only possible through socialized control of the means of production. Self-actualization is thus the ultimate need of any person since the reliable satisfaction of any other need is dependent on the extent of one's control over the means of production. What needs have to be satisfied by necessity and the designation of true and false needs are secondary matters. Necessary needs are biological and historical. Biological needs can be affected by the development of the productive forces, such as increased caloric necessity over the past two centuries. But, we can, I think, safely say that the maintenance of humans' natural requirements are our biological needs.

Historical needs fall into material needs and social needs. Material needs are what are required to properly operate the means of production at its contemporary level of development. Examples of material needs are education, communication devices and access to them, use of the means of production and its products, maintenance of a depreciation fund, and access to information of all kinds (scientific, technical, artistic, and political).

Social needs are the necessary requirements for reproducing a social form, such as for capitalism the maintaining of capitalist class relations by enforced division of total product and capital accumulation through violence or ideological information. Social needs are the totality of various class interests of a given social form. Capitalist class interests have their mirror image in worker class interests. Capitalist class interests are basically capital accumulation. Worker class interests are to achieve higher wages and better economic security *within the social form of capitalism*. Worker class interests are not revolutionary in scope. Revolutionary needs would be the need to transcend capitalism and fulfill universal self-actualization.<sup>298</sup>

Self-actualization is fulfilled by control over the means of production. People's primary need is control over the means of production. Only socialized control over the means of production can provide the secure and consistent

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<sup>298</sup> My ideas about needs and interests have been influenced by Agnes Heller's book *Karl Marx's Theory of Needs*.

satisfaction of biological and material needs. Self-actualization of one's projects depends on the satisfaction of the following essential needs: 1) socialized control of the means of production, 2) biological needs, 3) material needs. The ultimate needs of self-actualization can only be maintained by the satisfaction of the essential needs.

All other needs, that is other than social needs, such as consumption of various goods, is determined within the requirements of reasonable universal self-actualization. The level of consumption of certain goods, lets say televisions, would have to be determined in regard to maintaining the ultimate need of self-actualization in regard to the three essential needs. If the current level of television consumption interrupts the satisfaction of any of the three essential needs, the consumption level needs to be changed. This includes it being too low as well as too high. Also, the need to be in a position of power, if it interrupts satisfaction of the three essential needs, has to be curtailed. But, some power positions, say the guardian of children, may facilitate satisfaction of the essential three needs, perhaps by helping in the education of children.

Free time is necessary for socialized control over the means of production, rest, and time for training and education. Our overworked world is demonstrated by the case where gains for families in the United States have been achieved mainly by increased work hours by wives since husbands already work more than

40 hours a week for 52 weeks a year. Combined working hours of husbands and wives per year have increased from 3,069 in 1979 to 3,566 in 2002 for families in the middle fifth income quintile.<sup>299</sup>

Traditional socialist requirements such as distribution of housing, food, health care, education, leisure amenities, information, and entertainment universally, as opposed to according to income testing or desert, follows from the ultimate need of self-actualization and the three essential needs. Universal control of the means of production includes its products if this control is to be meaningful. Employment, as also universally received in regard to the distribution of other needs, could be diversely arranged. Such as, should people receive housing even if they are able bodied, mentally competent and do not work? Society needs people to work; it is an eternal natural necessity. Seemingly, people should receive education regardless of their or their family's work histories since labour skills are needed for society. Our own society requires almost all people to work to receive these goods. So is it a problem that a socialist society would require work also? I would like to spend all my days studying Hegel's *Science of Logic* and relaxing in Prospect Park, but papers need to be graded and Xeroxes have to be made. Non-professional artists could receive sabbaticals to work on their art, or a sabbatical could be used to travel extensively,

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<sup>299</sup> See pages 100-106 in *The State of Working America 2004/2005*, by Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Sylvia Allegretto.

or for any use; why should we care? This sabbatical provision could alleviate objections to work requirements. Also, workplace management could have the effect of people opting to work less.

## **19. Conclusion:**

### **The Materialist Practical Standard's Relationship to Historical Materialism and the Continuing Relevance of Marxism**

This work takes a position that is somewhat different than traditional historical materialist positions, but is commensurate with these positions. In general, the materialist practical standard is reliant upon a rational appraisal of possible project self-actualizations. Within this work this appraisal has been stated without explicit reference to Marxian crisis theories, whether declining profit rates, overproduction, rising organic constant capital, legitimation problems, stagnation, imperialism, or a combination of these. Crisis theories are an important part of historical materialism, but I find that the veracity of the materialist practical standard does not rely upon capitalism being crisis prone in these ways, although this is the case,<sup>300</sup> but I would like to defend the materialist practical standard from the position of a crisis free capitalism. This model of a crisis free capitalism is one not plagued by investment cycles, market failures,

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<sup>300</sup> Descriptions of capitalist crises abound, but a few good places to start would be Ernest Mandel's books *Late Capitalism*, *The Second Slump*, and *Long Waves of Capitalist Development*; and on debt and credit Fred Magdoff's "The Explosion of Debt and Speculation."

unemployment, overwork, and poverty. The people of this land can find a job whenever they want and these jobs pay sufficient wages. There is ample free time and economic mobility, including access to educational loans and business loans. Also, let's say that environmental degradation has been kept at bay. If this system is to be called capitalist, we shall maintain that the class structure of capitalist and wage-labourer has to exist to make our model relevant for comparison to socialism.

Now does our perfected capitalism conform to the materialist practical standard? Well, no it doesn't. Our perfected capitalism does not meet the standard of universal self-actualization. In this model only possible self-actualization and possible actualization are the case. Universal self-actualization requires that all people have access to the means of production in regard to decisions of investment, production, and distribution. This access can never be lost or given up by any person if universal self-actualization obtains. The model above, since it is capitalist, maintains class distinctions between those who have control over the means of production and those who do not. Even if economic mobility is easy, it is still the case that people may gain or lose access to the means of production. People within the perfected capitalism still do not have the same control over their lives that the people within the socialism that is described within this work do. Even if capitalism can overcome the problems that plague it,

it cannot overcome the fundamental source of alienation within capitalism: the separation of people from nature/the means of production. At best capitalism can become a benevolent despotism where people enjoy countless delights, but they have no choice about the social world they live in.

Returning to the comparison between the materialist practical standard and historical materialism, we can see that the prime historical materialist premise holds that a mode of production will be jettisoned when it no longer offers any further advantage, or diminished advantage, in comparison to a successor mode. This premise applies to the materialist practical standard. The materialist practical standard thus is in conformity with historical materialism generally. But, in regard to fettering of productive forces' development as the orthodox determinant for the limit of any mode of production, the materialist standard is an addition that attends to the more expansive vision Marx had of practical matters. Marx's position on increased wages as an inadequate standard for emancipation lends itself to an expansive reading of historical materialism.<sup>301</sup> Increased consumption is not sufficient satisfaction of the materialist practical standard, so any new productive mode that is embraced will have to offer more than increased consumption. Rectification of alienation from the means of production for all persons is necessary for satisfaction of the materialist practical standard. In short,

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<sup>301</sup> See *MESW* pp. 225-226.



the materialist practical standard is commensurate with a meaningful theory of historical materialism. This is, a theory that bases the movement towards socialism as not just towards some type of perfected welfare state.

Actual capitalism's shortcomings in regard to distribution and self-governance make such analytical comparisons unnecessary. The capitalism of our own time does have the problems of investment cycles, stagnation, market failures, unemployment, overwork, environmental degradation, income inequality, and poverty. All of these problems prevent reasonable and universal self-actualization. The materialist practical standard is applicable not only to the utopian model of perfected capitalism but also to the real world situation in which we live. The materialist practical standard adds the practical philosophic side to critiques of capitalism. The supposed universality – applicable within any mode of production at any point in history - of traditional practical philosophy is not founded. We have only to read Hegel's criticisms of Kant's moral system in regard to developing a moral maxim based on private property ownership to understand the "universality" of traditional practical philosophy.<sup>302</sup>

The materialist practical standard examined in light of these two cases, the perfected capitalist model and our contemporary situation, stress the continuing relevance not only of economic critique but also of Marxism in our own age. The

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<sup>302</sup> *PS* p. 259.

grand shortcoming of capitalism is the alienation of people from nature/means of production. This separation of people from nature/means of production cannot be rectified suitably by traditional practical theories of redistribution and justice. Theories such as Shue's or Rawls' try to rectify the problems of maldistribution without directly questioning the causes of alienation within capitalism.<sup>303</sup> Since Shue's theory has been discussed previously, we can turn to Rawls.

The center point for Rawls' theory of redistribution is the difference principle that maintains: "inequalities are just if and only if they are part of a larger system in which they work out to the advantage of the most unfortunate representative individual."<sup>304</sup> Advantage for this most unfortunate individual would be the reception of what Rawls calls "primary goods," which he defines as "things which rational persons may be presumed to want whatever else they want." His example and description of what these primary good things are: "liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, health and educated intelligence. Perhaps the most important primary good is self-respect, a confident conviction of the sense of one's own value, a firm assurance that what one does and plans to do is worth doing."<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> The authors describe their position in these works, Shue *Basic Rights* and Rawls *A Theory of Justice* and his essay "Distributive Justice."

<sup>304</sup> "Distributive Justice" p. 329.

<sup>305</sup> "Distributive Justice" p. 332.

Rawls' practical standard ameliorates the impact of many of capitalism's problems. With a combination of guaranteed subsistence provisions and social mobility, how it is provided is beside the point, the ills of poverty, unemployment, stagnation, and income inequalities are lessened. But, does Rawls' standard address capitalism's prime problem of the alienation of people from nature/means of production? In a roundabout manner it does. The most important primary good, self-respect, does demand the ending of alienation of people from the means of production. Self-respect can only be satisfied when there is "a firm assurance that what one does and plans to do is worth doing." This assurance can only exist if people have direct access to the means of production. Self-respect is assured when people's activities can only be prevented due to a lack of volition on the part of the actor. This level of assurance is only possible with universal self-actualization. The problem of unequal control over investment and production within capitalism, even if primary goods other than self-respect can be provided, means that the assurance of action that Rawls wants cannot possibly be achieved within capitalist class relations. Rawls' practical standard can only be satisfied if and only if the alienation of people from the means of production is ameliorated. Interestingly, Rawls' difference principle merits socialism if his definition of self-respect is adhered to.

The problems of capitalism and the demands of liberal practical theories merit the continued relevance of Marxism's emphasis of the natural basis of self-determination. Since this work is nearing its end, it is necessary to point out that the current climate of mainstream social theory has perhaps left this important finding aside to its own detriment. Attempts to rectify capitalism's many problems without correcting the division between humans and access to natural processes will be stopped by the process of capitalist accumulation. If the economic and social history of the post-war world has taught us anything, it is that the attempts by capitalist countries to control their economies have, on the one hand, run into problems of inflation, employment, distribution, and development. The Keynesian program of pump priming has certain objective limits within capitalist economies. But, on the other hand, the subjective conditions of capitalist class interests have prevented and derailed such attempts at control over the economy, in order to maintain and increase accumulation. Many political economists have developed projects that would fine-tune the Keynesian program in ways that have proven effective (decommodification, active employment policy, and a monetary policy aimed at employment rather than inflation fighting). But all of these projects will encounter stiff resistance from capitalist interests. The only way such problems will be overcome is if the inequitable control of the means of production is brought under scrutiny. A

renewed materialist critique of such matters can only help rectify the limits of our current discourse.

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