

## *The Paradox of Ideology*

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### I The Paradox<sup>1</sup>

Marx's social theory seems to involve a sharp case of a well-known paradox in sociology of knowledge. The puzzle arises when we discover on the basis of scientific inquiry that belief in scientific claims is produced and maintained by noncognitive social interest or positions. The worry is that belief so produced is for that reason suspect. A cognitive interest is an intrinsic interest in the truth or warrant, or more broadly in the epistemic properties, of some claim or belief. But according to Marx's theory of ideology,

The mode of production of material life conditions the ... intellectual life-processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

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1 My thanks for helpful comments on this paper are due to Linda Alcoff, Avner Cohen, Phil Gasper, Peter King, Michael Lowy, Janis Michael, Kurt Mosser, Calvin Normore, Peter Railton, James Scanlan, Marshall Swain, David Scarrow, and members of the philosophy faculties at Temple University and Denison University.

2 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers 1975-), vol. 29, 263. Hereafter, cited in text as CW followed by volume and page number. I generally follow the convention of attributing writings by Marx and Engels to Marx.

If the 'ruling ideas' of every epoch are 'nothing more than an expression of the dominant material relationships' (CW, 5, 59), what does that imply about these very ideas? Marx's have never been the 'ruling ideas' in capitalist societies.<sup>3</sup> But Marx would not exempt his own thought; it is one of the 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of conflict and fight it out' (CW, 29, 263).<sup>4</sup> If ideology is at least thought that is 'conditioned' by 'social being' (nongenerative social interest or positions), Marx *cannot* consistently exempt his own ideas. Does Marxist theory imply that Marxism is *mere* ideology, belief systematically distorted by such dependence? Does Marxism further imply that our 'intellectual life-processes in general,' including scientific inquiry, are ideological in this sense?

Of course, Marx thought not: 'Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science ... in contradistinction to ideology' (CW, 5, 37). From his 'standpoint,' Marx says, he can raise himself at least 'subjectively' above the relations 'whose creature he socially remains.'<sup>5</sup> But the paradox deepens. Are not the ideas of scientific objectivity and justification also expressions of the 'dominant material relationships'? After all, 'Modern industry ... makes science a productive force distinct from labor and presses it into the service of capital' (Ibid., 361). Marx's theory seems to threaten not only its own claim to be scientific but the credibility of science itself. Thus the twin paradox of ideology:

(A) *The Self-Reference Paradox.* If Marxism holds that Marxist claims or belief in them is causally generated by nongenerative social interest and that belief so generated is merely ideological, then Marxist theory appears to imply that Marxism, or at any rate belief in Marxism, is itself merely ideological.

3 One may doubt whether Marx's ideas were the 'ruling ideas' in 'formerly existing socialism' in anything more than name (see subsection VII.3, below).

4 The context here suggests that 'ideological' has a neutral, descriptive sense rather than Marx's usual pejorative one; see section II.

5 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, Frederick Engels, ed., Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, trans. (New York: International Publishers 1967), 10. All further references to *Capital* are to volume 1 of this edition.

(B) *The Global Paradox.* If Marxism says that scientific theories or beliefs are so produced and that theories or beliefs so produced are merely ideological, Marxist theory implies that all scientific theory or any belief in such theory is merely ideological.<sup>6</sup>

The paradox cannot be avoided by denying Marxian claims about the nature and salience of class. Any theory that explains beliefs and values in terms of their social circumstances raises the puzzle: general versions can be stated by substituting 'sociology of knowledge' for 'Marxism' throughout. The paradox arises as soon as we acknowledge that scientific belief and norms depend upon nongenerative social interests or positions which, as such, are *prima facie* suspect as sources of veridical belief and objective norms. If a theory we accept says that *some such* interest or positions underlie scientific belief, the theory and such belief take on the color of mere ideology. The force of the paradox is felt by non-Marxists like Mannheim or Foucault and by such conservative thinkers as Berger.<sup>7</sup> Its skeptical or relativistic consequences are embraced by Bloor and Barnes, advocates of the 'strong program in the sociology of science,' and perhaps by Kuhn.<sup>8</sup> Cognitive scientists, cultural anthropologists, feminist theorists, and social historians of ideas all face it, whatever their political philosophy.

I wish to clarify the paradox and to show how Marx supplies the tools with which it can be avoided, maintaining both that social interests or positions may promote ideology and that scientific inquiry, including his own, may be objective or belief in its results justified. I argue that Marx is a naturalizing epistemologist, a precursor of Quine, Goldman,

6 A theory might be nonideological in this sense, i.e. uncaused by nongenerative social interests or positions, while belief in it is nonetheless thus ideological. A lonely genius might produce an idea for sheer love of truth, which is later taken up when social interests make it convenient. But that there may be nonideological scientific theories is no help if we cannot be justified in accepting them. The distinction is therefore practically irrelevant and I will use 'belief in X' and 'X' interchangeably.

7 See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, Louis Wirth and Edward Shils, trans. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World 1936); Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power,' in *Power/Knowledge*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon 1980) 109-33; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Penguin 1966).

8 See David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagination* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1976); Barry Barnes, *Interest and the Growth of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1977); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970).

and Nozick.<sup>9</sup> For Marx, objective social interest and positions can be part of reliable processes that tend to produce veridical belief, explaining why some belief in some scientific theories is nonideological because of, not despite, its social origin.<sup>10</sup> Such interest or positions are noncognitive in the stipulated sense, i.e. they do not involve an intrinsic interest in truth or warrant. But they are not therefore nonepistemic, because they can provide agents and cognizers with instrumental interests in truth or warrant for the sake of practical ends.

The special interest of Marx's theory today is in his systematic attempt to explain the reliability or ideological character of beliefs in social terms. Even someone who rejects Marx's claims on behalf of class analysis or his view that workers' objective interests are best served by socialism may agree that some social groups have a special interest in the truth about a subject matter in virtue of their noncognitive interests or positions, and that reliable knowledge about that subject matter depends upon the interest-driven activity of that group in the world.

## II Ideology versus Science

'Ideology' is multiply ambiguous.<sup>11</sup> A descriptive sense refers to, but does not cognitively evaluate, sets of widely shared beliefs and values. A positive sense designates a conscious world view or set of coherent ideas. The sense invoked in framing the paradox is pejorative, designating false or unwarranted beliefs or distorted values, the defects and the holding of which are explained in part by the noncognitive interest or social position of some group. Any cognitive virtues, such as truth or warrant, that such beliefs or values may have are merely accidental. Marx regards (mere) ideology as pejorative partly because beliefs or

values thus explained are unlikely to be true or warranted, and partly because they might justify practices or institutions which Marx regards as objectionable.<sup>12</sup> The two concerns are connected.

Ideological belief is not merely unlikely to be true: it is likely to be systematically false in a special way. Ideology typically presents as universally and eternally valid local and transient practices or interests. For example, the political doctrine of the separation of powers merely serves, Marx thinks, the interests of the revolutionary bourgeoisie or its temporary outcome of struggle among new and old ruling classes (CW, 5, 59). Ideological belief involves inversion: '... in all ideology men and their consciousness appear upside down, as in a *camera obscura*' (Ibid., 36). Cause is presented as effect, the special as the universal, the transient as the eternal, the contingent as the necessary, values as facts. When ideology serves social interests in virtue of these inversions, it gives them the gloss of legitimacy or inevitability.

Are scientific beliefs and values ideological in this sense? For Marx, even natural science depends on noncognitive social interests: 'Where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this "pure" natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry ...' (Ibid., 40). The aims of science — 'the practical subjugation of nature' (*Capital*, 390n) — and the norms with which scientists pursue them are in part explained by economic interests. Political-military interests, e.g. in armaments, Marx might add, are no less important in explaining the noncognitive aims of science. State interests in power provide an interest in knowledge just as do economic interest in profit.<sup>13</sup>

9 See W. V. Quine, 'Epistemology Naturalized,' in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press 1969) 69-90; Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1986); Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1977).

10 That is, I read Marx as a 'historical reliabilist' who grounds justification in a certain sort of causal etiology. I hasten to add that Marx does not offer, and is not interested in, an 'analysis' of knowledge or justified belief, in the sense of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for 'S knows that (or has justified belief in) P', the quest for which has motivated the development of much contemporary reliabilist epistemology.

11 See Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981), part 1.

12 Ideology need not arise because it is in some groups' interests that it prevail, but it may arise because of those interests. Jon Elster notes that just because a belief is caused by social interest is no reason to suppose that it necessarily serves those interests ('Belief, Bias, and Ideology,' in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1982] 123-48). Ideology may also derive from positional factors as well as interest.

13 Marx's failure to mention this here may be due to the assumption of his controversial thesis that state (including military) activities have an economic explanation, i.e. are 'superstructural' phenomena 'determined' (*bestimmt*) by the 'economic basis' (CW, 29, 263). On that thesis, the reliability of knowledge acquired due to capitalist state interests in military power then ultimately depends on capitalist interest in profit. This is a charitable reading. Most probably Marx failed to mention the connection here because *Capital* is primarily concerned with the economic basis; he was not thinking about the superstructure when he wrote these passages.

The claim that natural science and belief therein have noncognitive social causes seems plausible. To make the claim more than merely plausible we would need positive research on the links between science, the state, and industry.<sup>14</sup> To show that economics explains state interests, and is thus basic with respect to belief dependent on their operation, Marx needs a case that the state is 'superstructural,' although failing this, state interests could be an autonomous but no less noncognitive source of scientific belief.

Nonetheless, had natural science failed to promote the interests of capital, belief in its claims and values would not be so prevalent. The point comes out clearly in cases where natural science *impedes* the interests of powerful social groups. In Galileo's time the Church rejected Copernicanism in part because of its noncognitive interest in its social power, which was legitimated partly by its claim to astronomical authority. If natural science had subverted bourgeois interests, powerful actors likewise might have resisted — as they do, sometimes, when scientific results threaten business: consider corporate resistance to ecological claims.<sup>15</sup> Marx argues that this is so with social science (see section VI). That is a Marxist explanation of why Marxism is controversial in a way that astronomy no longer is.

We should avoid several natural misinterpretations of the dependency thesis that

- (1) All scientific theory and belief is ultimately caused by noncognitive social interests or positions.

The claim is not that scientific beliefs are merely 'ideological reflexes or echoes of [our] life process' that 'no longer retain the semblance of

independence' and 'have no history, no development' internal to their own logic, as Marx asserts in an implausible overstatement with regard to 'morality, religion, metaphysics' (CW, 5, 36).<sup>16</sup> The dependency thesis does not mean, for instance, that Mayer and Joule's formulation of the law of conservation of energy was directly caused by capitalist interests in the development of steam power. It would be absurd to deny that they arrived at the law on the basis of something like the reasoning presented in their papers, guided by evidence about the behavior of gases in pistons and liquids falling over paddle wheels and by evolving norms of inference governing such reasoning.<sup>17</sup>

Nor is the dependency thesis merely that without social interests in potentially useful results of scientific inquiry for practical purposes of profit and power, science would be deprived of the material and institutional support — funds, university or laboratory facilities — necessary for producing results. This is true, but may be insufficient to create systematic worries about whether the results themselves are merely ideological.<sup>18</sup>

The idea is rather that the 'strong network of commitments — conceptual, theoretical, instrumental, and methodological' (Kuhn, 42) — which produces specific scientific beliefs in particular circumstances itself depends on the social location of scientists in capitalism in something like the way (whatever that is) that the 'strong network of commitments' implicated in seventeenth-century theology was dependent on the interests of the Church. The worry is then that people with such commitments are in either case systematically unlikely to believe truths.

14 See J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1967). Two case studies are Frank J. Swetz, *Capitalism and Arithmetic: The New Math of the 15th Century* (La Salle, IL: Open Court 1987), on the development and spread of new mathematical techniques to serve merchant purposes in the fifteenth century, and Yehuda Elkana, *The Discovery of the Conservation of Energy* (London: Hutchinson Educational 1974), on the relation between the discovery of the conservation of energy and the development of the steam engine.

15 One need not be a Marxist to see the point. Thomas Hobbes, to take someone at the furthest remove from Marx in everything but genius, says, 'For I doubt not, but if it had been contrary to any man's right of dominion, or to the interest of men that have dominion, that the three angles of a triangle, should have been equal to the two angles of a square; that this doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of geometry suppressed, as far as he whom it concerned was able' (*Leviathan*, Michael Oakeshott, ed. [New York: Collier 1962], 84).

16 Marx excludes science from this catalogue of ideology, which he contrasts with 'real positive science' (CW, 5, 37). Why he thinks he can do this is the subject of this paper.

17 The same is true of Galileo's prosecutor Cardinal Bellarmine, whose rejection of Copernicanism cannot be attributed either to mere cynicism or self-deception caused, in any simple way, by his interests as a high Church functionary.

18 The dependence of science on funding and institutional support provided by capitalists and the state for their own interests may be sufficient to raise the worry. If we accept Mill's idea that, given human fallibility, vigorous competition among competing views is necessary for reliability, the influence of practical ends exerted through funding agencies and the like may sometimes reduce competition in the marketplace of ideas below the minimum required for confidence in the outcome. See John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Elizabeth Rapaport, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett 1978). This may be right, but it is not Marx's concern. In the case of natural science Marx's reply to the different worry he addresses suggests a way to handle this problem as well.

If scientific beliefs and values do have the sort of causal etiology Marx claims, are they any more likely to be true or warranted than a similarly produced belief in the astronomical authority of the Church? That science helps trade is not in itself any reason to suppose that it reliably produces truth or warrant. After all, *advertising* also helps trade, but that does not improve its epistemic status. The force of the paradox of ideology is that science may be no better off, cognitively, than advertising. Thus the strong ideology thesis:

- (2) If a theory or belief is ultimately caused by noncognitive social interests or positions, it is probably false or unjustified (ideological).

It would have been said, not long ago, that unlike advertising, scientific claims are (a) value-neutral, (b) testable against theory-independent observations or facts, and (c) capable of ultimate consensus among all rational inquirers whatever their interests or positions. These characteristics, in some combination, were regarded as the differentia of science, the criteria of objectivity, and the ground of justification. But since Quine and Kuhn, such a defense is untenable.<sup>19</sup> Criteria of theory choice are themselves values, and no one has shown how to insulate them from nonscientific (e.g. moral or political) values. What is observed or counted as a fact depends on our theories; preconception is unavoidable. This undermines prospects for disinterested consensus; and even against a background theory, observations and facts underdetermine theory choice. Much more could be said, but here I accept these criticisms as among the main results of recent philosophy of science. Given these, the notions of objectivity and warrant associated with traditional conceptions of science seem themselves to be candidates for ideology, accepted partly because of their legitimating role for scientific inquiry.

Thus the twin paradox. Scientific belief and values appear — so far — ideological, yet this claim is based on a scientific theory. The theory would appear to undermine its own credibility and that of science itself. Is there a way out?

First, one might deny that Marx's theory is scientific. But Marx clearly and rightly regards it as such. He welcomes 'every opinion based on scientific criticism' (*Capital*, 11). True or false, the theory is to be evalu-

ated by normal scientific standards. In any case, the paradox arises with any theory that takes seriously the social explanation of knowledge.

Second, one might deny that science is interested, thus a candidate for ideological distortion. But Marx plausibly rejects the autonomy of science from society. Even natural science is 'pressed] into the service of capital' (*Ibid.*, 361), only through which it is 'provided with an aim' (CW, 5, 40), at least under capitalism. Scientific belief, and belief in science and its authority, are imbued through and through with noncognitive social interests.

Third, one might deny that science and ideology are incompatible. Given Marx's association of ideology with systematic error and his insistence that science has a special epistemic status, this would require reconstrual of the nature of ideology, allowing that some ideology be veridical. Unfortunately, the problem would re-emerge on the level of distinguishing veridical scientific ideologies from the pernicious sort.

Fourth and finally, one might urge that the interested character of science need not impugn its epistemic standing. This, I take it, is Marx's route. His solution is as follows.

### III Proving the Truth of Our Thinking in Practice

While some beliefs and values tend to be systematically distorted because they are driven by particular interests, others tend to be systematically *corrected* because they are driven by other interests. Ideological beliefs and values are suspect not because they are interested or positional, but because they are informed by suspect, truth-distorting interests or partial positions. Beliefs and values informed by truth-promoting interests or positions may be thereby justified even though the connection between these interests or positions and truth is contingent and causal. Marx denies (2), the strong ideology thesis, and asserts instead the general reliability thesis:

- (3) Some noncognitive social interests or positions are reliable producers of true belief, so that beliefs and theory ultimately produced by them tend to be justified,

and the weak ideology thesis:

- (4) Some noncognitive social interests or positions are systematically distorting of truth or warrant, so that beliefs and theory ultimately produced by them tend to be ideological.

<sup>19</sup> See W. V. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1961) 20-46; T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

It all depends on which beliefs and which interests.<sup>20</sup>

As Quine, Kuhn, and Hegel insist, we have no epistemic access to reality in the raw, unmediated by values and biases. But *given certain practical interests*, reality has a way of reacting back upon our beliefs, affecting our presuppositions and even our norms. Which causal connections obtain are independent of our beliefs or desires; Marx agrees with Feuerbach that 'the priority of external nature remains unassailed' (CW, 5, 40). The interests of social classes are likewise objective: the circumstances under which people make their own history include relations 'independent of their will' (CW, 29, 263). We will suffer failure and frustration in our practical enterprises unless we grasp the way the world is. But if the 'actual movement be adequately described [so that] ... the life of the subject matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror' (*Capital*, 19), we satisfy a necessary condition for sustained successful action. External causal feedback mechanisms exist that, in certain circumstances, operate in favor of more adequate description as we revise our views in the pursuit of our aims.

That is how I read Marx's Second Thesis on Feuerbach:

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question. (CW, 5, 3)

Marx rejects Feuerbach's merely 'contemplative materialism' (we would say realism) as a metaphysical assertion rather than a belief grounded in practical interaction with the world. Marx regards 'human activity itself as objective activity' (*Ibid.*), as part of the causal network and subject to causally driven revision of its explanatory principles, e.g. scientific beliefs and norms that guide their adoption, given certain aims. Thus the Eleventh Thesis: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the

world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (*Ibid.*, 5). To interpret the world correctly, that is, we must systematically attempt to change it.<sup>21</sup> The Second Thesis, then, combines the following pragmatic claims about justification:

- (5) If some belief or theory promotes sustained practical success in satisfying the noncognitive social interests that ultimately produce it, that is evidence that it is probably true or that acceptance of it is justified, and
- (6) If some belief or theory frustrates sustained practical success in satisfying the noncognitive social interests that ultimately produce it, that is evidence that it is probably false or that acceptance of it is unjustified, i.e. that it is ideological.

Some, like Kolakowski, take the Second Thesis to be a 'pragmatist' claim that reality has no independent character apart from the way we conceive it, or that truth collapses into utility or 'power' to attain our ends.<sup>22</sup> This sits unhappily with Marx's talk of 'adequate description' as 'ideal reflection' or with Marx's insistence, with Feuerbach, on 'sensual objects, really distinct from conceptual objects' (CW, 5, 3).<sup>23</sup> The Second Thesis itself does not deny that 'objective truth' can be attributed to

21 The Eleventh Thesis has other, more obvious meanings as well, including an implicit criticism of the political quietism urged by Hegel (*Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, T.M. Knox, trans. [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1952], 12-13). But given the epistemological content of the other Theses, the proposed reading is a reasonable if incomplete gloss.

22 Leszek Kolakowski, 'Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth,' in *Towards a Marxist Humanism*, Jane Z. Peel, trans. (New York: Grove 1968) 38-66. Calling (5)-(7) 'pragmatic' will seem misleading if, like Kolakowski, we suppose that pragmatists run things the other way, making practical success constitutive of truth rather than evidence for it. But they need not do so. That is part of the point of this paper. My reading is pragmatist in giving epistemic priority to practical action; Kolakowski's picks up on the collapse of truth into practical success found in some classical pragmatists, such as James.

20 Marx may have been influenced by Hegel's discussion of work. Hegel says that the servant is forced to labor and thus to confront 'the independence of the thing,' the external object on which he works. The master merely 'consumes the products of this labor and is thus not forced to confront the world; he needs to learn neither what the servant learns about the world nor about himself in transforming it' (G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller, trans. [Oxford: Clarendon 1977], 115-19). As I read Hegel, this story incorporates relativism about knowledge and the idea that the servant's standpoint is epistemically privileged with regard to the external world and the self.

23 I take the talk of 'mirroring' and 'reflection' as metaphorical ways of asserting some version of a classical correspondence theory of truth and not as committing Marx to a 'reflection theory' as articulated, for example, by Lenin (*Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Abraham Fineberg, trans. [Moscow: Progress Publishers 1962]). Unlike Lenin, Marx shows no signs of interest in working out a theory of truth. On the principle of imposing minimal constructions on his statements, he is best read as operating with the prereflective idea that true statements correspond to reality.

human thought but merely says that whether it can is a practical question, not one that can be answered from a philosopher's armchair.

Addressing the question, 'Is our thinking capable of cognition of the real world?' Engels answers in a passage that might be a gloss on the Second Thesis:

If we are able to prove the correctness of our conception of a natural phenomenon by bringing it about ourselves, producing it ... [by experimentation and industry] and making it serve our purposes in the bargain, then the ungraspable Kantian "thing-in-itself" is finished. The chemical substances produced in ... plants and animals remained just such "things-in-themselves" until organic chemistry began to produce them, whereupon the "thing-in-itself" became a thing for us, as for instance, alizarin, the coloring matter of the madder, which we no longer trouble to grow ... in the field, but produce much more simply and cheaply from coal-tar. (CW, 26, 367-8)

That is, only through practical activity for noncognitive ends (making natural phenomena 'serve our purposes') can we know the objective world. Engels does not come close to establishing this here, but insofar as his views are evidence for Marx's, that Engels maintains this supports my interpretation of Marx.<sup>24</sup>

Marx might be inconsistent in holding both the epistemic priority of practice and a strong realism. But his view may be made consistent in terms of a reliabilist conception of self-correction through practical activity. This process can be best explained by our causal interaction, in the attempt to realize our aims, with the independent natural and social world we manipulate in those attempts. A sustained tendency to maintain a theory by ad hoc modifications in the face of anomaly or frustration or a sustained downgrading of ends to the limits of theory indicates theoretical inadequacy. Conversely, success in handling anomalies and a theory's encouragement of larger practical ends is evidence of its

<sup>24</sup> Lukács criticizes Engels for misreading Kant and more deeply for claiming that noncognitively driven scientific practice reveals anything about the world. Lukács maintains that natural science is not 'praxis in the dialectical, philosophical sense,' which means something like the self-conscious activity of which, Lukács supposes, the proletariat alone is capable. Rather it is a sort of Feuerbachian pure contemplation, doubly inadequate to discovery of truths because of scientific use of abstraction, experimental controls, and abstract mathematics, and because this use occurs, in capitalism, under the blind incentive of the market (*History and Class Consciousness*, Rodney Livingstone, trans. [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1971], 131-3). He says nothing about natural science under socialism. I mention his view here only to indicate that whatever it amounts to it is not what Engels or I take Marx to mean.

accuracy. The theory's (approximate) truth may be taken as the 'best explanation' of its success in practice, if it is understood that we have no theory-independent criteria for what counts as the best explanation. It is the best explanation by our lights. (Why ours? Well, if you have better lights, turn them on!) Practice for Marx is the test, not the constitutive criterion, of objective truth.

The reliabilism derives from the idea that practical success requires us to form and revise our beliefs and norms about certain subject matters in reliable ways, so our interest in the ends of these practices is truth-conducive with respect to those subject matters. This is the argument for the Second Thesis, and it depends on the controversial pragmatic proposition that

(7) Sustained practical success is better promoted by true beliefs than false beliefs.

In subsections VI.1 and VI.2 we see that this raises difficulties for Marx in view of his claim that the bourgeoisie need ideology in social science to succeed in their own practical goals.

For the moment, though, we can state Marx's solution to the paradox of ideology.

(B) *Solution to the Global Paradox.* Granting the reliability thesis, the strong ideology thesis is false and it does not follow from the dependency thesis that all scientific belief and theory is ideological. If some such belief and theory is produced by truth-conducive noncognitive social interests and positions, that belief or theory is nonideological.

(A) *Solution to the Self-Reference Paradox.* If Marxism promotes sustained practical success in pursuing the noncognitive social interests that ultimately give rise to it, then, given B, that is evidence that those interests and positions are truth-conducive, and that Marxism is self-supporting, not ideological on its own terms.

The conclusion is not that Marxism or any given sociology of knowledge is true — that could be defended only by assessment of the main claims of the theory in question. It is that the dependence of Marxism and all scientific belief or theory on noncognitive social interests does not make them merely ideological. Marxism might be false, but not because it refutes itself, nor does it threaten all scientific belief.

#### IV A Purely Scholastic Question

How we can tell whether we are responding correctly, 'mirroring' reality accurately? If the question is whether we can have some *guarantee* that we are on the right track, on this view we cannot. The best we can do is to monitor our success or failure in achieving our ends and extending our theories and note our tendency to increase or reduce our theoretical and practical ambitions in response to that success or failure. At the end of the day, even at the hypothetical end of inquiry, we might be wrong. Marx has not exorcised Descartes's evil demon.

This will not satisfy the skeptic, a worry Marx would dismiss as 'scholastic.' Marx's worry is different: that his own theory, and all scientific inquiry, undermines its own claim to objectivity and justification by revealing itself as ideological. The problem of skepticism and the paradox of ideology are distinct. Marx addresses the second but not the first. The Cartesian skepticism that motivates the objection here asks whether one can establish the objectivity of scientific knowledge a priori, without assuming any such knowledge to begin with. Like modern naturalizing epistemologists, Marx helps himself to the scientific knowledge we accept in practice. For Marx, we are inescapably on Neurath's boat. The paradox of ideology arises *within* science, and within particular sociologies of knowledge like Marx's theory of ideology, when we notice that these say that scientific belief is interested and that interested belief is often ideological. Marx's question is whether Neurath's boat has an irreparable leak.

Marx's contribution to naturalized epistemology derives from his empirical claims about how objective social interests promote or distort self-corrective feedback in interactions with particular subject matters. What is distinctive about his approach, as opposed to most recent forms of reliabilism, is his theory of the social character of the process of forming beliefs and norms, which is reliable or ideological in virtue of the influence of sets of class interests.

Marx does *not* suggest that beliefs or values are to be assessed solely on the basis of their class origin, a vulgarization too many Marxists commit.<sup>25</sup> His criteria of theory choice are the usual ones: empirical

adequacy, explanatory power, simplicity, and so forth.<sup>26</sup> Marx never says this outright, but these are the ones he uses to evaluate theories. Social interest enters at the metalevel to explain the adoption of such criteria (Kuhn's 'strong network of commitments') and their reliability in promoting true beliefs about certain subject matters, not to explain why particular scientific beliefs are justified. The operation of interests accounts for why the 'strong network of commitments' — to seek simple, empirically adequate, explanatorily powerful theories — tends to produce truths; and it explains, in part, why scientists adopt such criteria. This explanation is itself subject to ordinary criteria of confirmation. The reliability thesis that some social interests are more reliable than others with regard to some subject matters is to be tested just like any scientific claim (see subsection VI.3).

For both natural and social science, Marx thinks, capitalism creates the circumstances in which interested activity by people in certain social positions promotes 'adequate reflection' of the world. In providing natural science with aims pertaining to the prediction and control of nature for the purposes of trade and industry (and perhaps political-military power), capitalism gives scientists an incentive to systematically modify their beliefs about nature and the epistemic norms that guide them in response to the causal feedback they receive in their interactions with nature. Marx thinks that capitalism provides social science with more mixed incentives, both for self-correction and ideological mystification, which I consider shortly.

#### V Capitalism and Natural Science

How do capitalist interests in particular promote the desirable sort of feedback in natural science? Unlike previous ruling classes, 'the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production,' says Marx. Driven by competition,

the bourgeoisie ... has created more massive and colossal productive forces than have all previous generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man,

<sup>25</sup> This vulgarization found a murderous apogee in the Stalinist thesis of the 'two

world views,' promulgated by Stalin's ideological henchman Andrei Zhdanov in the late 1940s (see Michael Löwy, 'Stalinist Ideology and Science,' in Tariq Ali, ed., *The Stalinist Legacy* [Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1984] 168-94; Gustav Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism*, Peter Heath, trans. [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1958]). For this crude and preposterous theory, all beliefs, including scientific beliefs, are either 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian'; the former are to be proscribed and

the latter promoted by state authority, which replaced scientific norms in several fields, notably biology. See Loren R. Graham, *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union* (New York: Columbia University Press 1987). The catastrophic consequences of Lysenkoism for Soviet agriculture are further support for Marx's views as I read them.

<sup>26</sup> W.V.O. Quine and Joseph Ullian, *The Web of Belief*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House 1978)



machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs.... What earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor? (CW, 6, 487; 489)

Marx's thought is that awakening these forces, an aim which competitive success presses on individual capitalists, requires accurate knowledge of the natural world.<sup>27</sup> The goal of 'subjugating nature' under the lash of capital accumulation involves intensive interaction with nature under just the sorts of conditions that produce systematic modification of beliefs and norms in response to anomalies and inadequacies in understanding nature. Capitalists need not have this knowledge in their heads, but they must have it to hand, typically in the heads of scientists whom they hire or support through taxes and charitable contributions.

Engels suggests a historical instance: competition to synthesize aniline dyes forced industrial chemists to adapt their practices and revise their beliefs to suit the recalcitrant nature of alizarin. If British firms did not get it right, then German firms would.<sup>28</sup> Or Marx might say that militarized competition driven by imperialist aims pushes capitalist states to seek accurate knowledge of, say, atomic physics to acquire or retain military superiority.

In contrast, speculative forms of inquiry promoted by earlier modes of production, say by the Scholastics into the nature of God or by alchemists into the transmutation of metals, are not driven by such ruthless incentives nor subject to corrective causal feedback. The world did not put unsuccessful Scholastics or alchemists out of business, and, Marx would say, there is neither any God nor any alchemical properties about which to be right or wrong.<sup>29</sup> It is *because* natural science serves the interests of capital that it is nonideological.<sup>30</sup>

27 Peter Railton, 'Marx and Scientific Objectivity,' in Richard Boyd, Philip Gasper, and J.D. Trout, eds., *The Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1991)

28 See Aaron Ialhe, *The Development of Modern Chemistry* (New York: Harper and Row 1964), 454-61.

29 Alchemy and scholasticism had selection criteria for practitioners and standards for forming beliefs and norms. But since (Marx would say) there was literally nothing to their subject matters, they lacked real objects which could provide corrective causal feedback. Their selection criteria and epistemic standards were therefore insulated from the sort of correction Marx has in mind for science.

30 This claim must be modified (see section II) where uncomfortable results, e.g., environmental consequences, of the capitalist subjection of nature cause ideological beliefs. Some feminist writers argue, more generally, that an interest in subjugating

## VI Capitalism and Social Science

Social science is more complex. Capitalist interests here provide incentives for partial objectivity *and* mystification. Only proletarian interests, Marx thinks, can 'track the truth' (see Nozick's *Philosophical Explanations*) about society as effectively as capitalist interests can about nature. (Such interests do not guarantee correctness: nothing does.) First, capitalist tendencies towards social scientific objectivity. Bourgeois society is positionally superior to previous social forms:

Bourgeois society is the most developed and complex historical organization of production [and thus provides the possibility of] insight into the structure and the relations of production of all previous forms of society.... The bourgeois economy supplies a key to that of antiquity, etc. (CW, 28, 42)

In addition, capitalists to some extent benefit by a correct understanding of society: hence the scientific advances, which Marx honors, of Ricardo and Smith. The categories of bourgeois economics, for all their limitations, 'express ... with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically conditioned mode of production' (*Capital*, 76).

But for capitalists, unlike for workers, the benefit is not unalloyed. Thus capitalism creates tendencies towards social scientific mystification. Bourgeois society is 'only a contradictory form of development' (CW, 28, 42), riven by class antagonisms and ruled by a class that needs to present a partial interest as general and a transient social form as 'solid crystal' (*Capital*, 10). Social science informed by capitalist interests thus has severe limitations. 'The categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society,' but 'this is to be taken *cum grano salis*' (CW, 28, 42). They express this truth only in a partial and fetishized way, and as if they were universal and a priori.

Marx's main example is the way bourgeois economics denies the reality of exploitation in making capitalist markets appear to involve a series of voluntary exchanges between agents of equal power. Smith and Ricardo (or their modern successors) are not simply wrong. Their theories do apply to capitalism and offer insights into noncapitalist econo-

nature is patriarchal and distorting of aspects of nature which are best revealed by another approach (see Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986]).

ries. But they leave out much that is important, such as exploitation, and not as an oversight but as a result of the social scientists directing their inquiries to furthering the aims of capital.

### 1. Does practical success depend on true belief?

The noncognitive source of systematic bias and error in bourgeois social science should be carefully noted. It is the same as the noncognitive source of partial veridicality: namely, background capitalist interests in maintaining and managing a social system torn by class conflict and so plagued with tendencies towards instability and illegitimacy. Capitalism is not 'reflectively acceptable' (Geuss, 61ff.); were what Marx takes to be the truths about capitalism as a regime of exploitation and domination to be widely accepted, it would endanger continued class rule.<sup>31</sup> These truths are therefore 'inaccessible' from the standpoint of social scientists who accept the legitimacy of the system. The bourgeoisie, however, needs to be able to describe and explain society for purposes of prediction and control insofar as that is possible without admitting, either to itself or to other classes, anything that might delegitimize its rule. That is why there is bourgeois social science and not just mere ideology.

In contrast, Marx holds, proletarian interests in emancipation are reflectively acceptable: 'The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. 'In bringing[ing] to the front, as the leading question in each [revolutionary movement] the property question, 'the workers, unlike the bourgeoisie, not only have nothing to lose but nothing to hide (CW, 6, 519).

Marx's explanation of the limitations of bourgeois social science is distinct from a crude triumphalist cousin formerly advocated by some Soviet philosophers.<sup>32</sup> The source of systematic error in bourgeois social thought, in this view, is that the interests and ideology of the capitalist class fail to correspond to 'the objective course of history,' which guarantees the ultimate triumph of the proletariat. Because the proletariat is destined to win, some of these writers maintained, its point of view on matters social is correct. But the bourgeoisie 'dread ... looking into what is, for them, a bleak future' (Wetter, 269).

This is both a logical disaster, an epistemological version of 'might makes right,' and a vulgarization of Marx's view, which is rather that

looking at the full truth about capitalist society might help *make* the future bleak for the bourgeoisie, and so is not in its interests. Marx thinks both that the proletarian point of view is superior on social subjects and (sometimes) that the triumph of the proletariat is 'inevitable' (CW, 6, 496),<sup>33</sup> but he does not connect these propositions. For all it matters to his theory of ideology, the proletariat might be doomed to lose its contest with capital. In that case, Marx's view implies that the best social theory would be a permanently subordinate critical viewpoint — but it would still be the best theory.

Scanlan maintains that the two propositions *are* connected. If the future is unwritten, why should capitalist interests taint bourgeois social science rather than underwriting its reliability for the same reason that Marx maintains proletarian interests back Marxism's reliability — that true belief promotes success? If Marx is right, though, with capitalist interests this is not so, because capitalism is reflectively unacceptable. Win or lose, Marxism is based on more reliable interests if, as Marx thinks, proletarian interests are reflectively acceptable.

A much deeper worry arises when we note that Marx's solution to the paradox depends on the pragmatic thesis (7), that true beliefs promote practical success, and that it is nonetheless essential to his explanation of the ideological character of bourgeois social science that the bourgeoisie cannot (easily) pursue its ends of self-perpetuation if it admits certain deep truths about capitalism. It has an interest, based in practical success, in partial mystification.

This claim emerges from the deep structure of his theory and seems to threaten either Marx's reliabilist solution to the paradox of ideology or his *Ideologiekritik* of bourgeois belief and his defense of the reliability of proletarian interests. Combining both objections, Scanlan says that error might better promote some ends than truth. Ill-grounded optimism of the will might better promote socialism than a dispiritingly honest pessimism of the intellect (*Marxism in the USSR*, 51). Workers too might have an interest in mystification about social matters.

If error serves some ends in particular cases, notably that of bourgeois mystification, can Marx maintain that, in general, workers' practical success is best served by hard truths? He might say, first, that knowledge

31 Justin Schwartz, 'Revolution and Justice,' *Against the Current* 42 (1993) 37-41

32 See James Scanlan, *Marxism in the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1985), 48-52.

33 But elsewhere Marx writes, e.g., that class conflict ends 'either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in the common ruin of the contending classes' (CW, 6, 482, emphasis added). This seems more consistent with the Marx who thinks that 'Men make their own history' if not just as they please (CW, 11, 103). See Justin Schwartz, 'How Not To Refute Marxism' (unpublished MS) for a defense of the nondeterminist view.

of the social realities puts workers in a better position to survive probable defeats and to improve their chances of ultimate success; and second, that bourgeois aims in the long run will tend to be undercut by ideology because capitalism is unlikely to survive widespread acknowledgement of the truth; mystification is a permanent source of instability and its exposure a constant threat. In the one case, success would tend to be sustained, and in the other frustrated because of knowledge or ignorance of the truth.

I cannot pursue the matter here, but I note three things. First, Marx's solution to the global paradox depends on the pragmatic thesis, (7), that true beliefs promote sustained practical success better than do false ones. Second, his solution to the self-reference paradox depends on the claim that for whatever reason (e.g. reflective acceptability), the truth threatens bourgeois success and promotes proletarian success. The two points are distinct: (7) might be true and yet the claim Marx needs might be false. Third, (7) and Marx's claim about whose interests are served by the truth are empirical issues, although very difficult ones.

## 2. *The standpoint of the proletariat.*

Capitalism also creates the epistemic conditions for objectivity and warrant in social science. It 'compels' man 'to face with sober sense his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind' (CW, 6, 487). Marx means not 'man' in the abstract, but a particular group with an objective interest in accurate knowledge — the proletariat. Just as objectivity and justification in natural science depend initially on capitalist interests in profit, that in social science thus depends on worker interests in struggling against capitalism.

Natural science may be cut loose from its capitalist historical origins insofar as other groups have an interest in the truth about nature: Marx envisages socialism as freeing the forces of production from capitalist fetters. This is true in principle for social science — that is, nonproletarian interests may come to reliably produce social knowledge — but Marx denies that every group has an interest in the truth about society. In particular the bourgeoisie does not.

The notion of interests invoked here is objective: people who occupy certain social positions have interests which affect their beliefs and behavior whatever they think or want.<sup>34</sup> Marx maintains, quite contro-

versally, that the interests of workers and capitalists are ultimately antagonistic. The defensibility of this claim depends on the adequacy of his account of capitalism, which cannot be considered here. In that account capitalists have an interest in exploitation which underlies the ideological character of even the best bourgeois social science. Workers have an interest in emancipation which sustains the reliability of proletarian beliefs and of social science oriented towards proletarian interests. The 'standpoint of the proletariat' (Lukács, 149ff.), or of 'human society, or social humanity' (CW, 5, 5), is the set of interests workers have in virtue of their social position as wage laborers. The general reliability thesis, (3), says only that some interests are truth-conducive. The Marxist reliability thesis identifies *which* those interests are:

- (8) The proletarian standpoint is privileged with respect to social knowledge, at least of the economic structure of society, because the distorting factors which make bourgeois social science partly ideological do not operate from that standpoint.

Unlike capitalists, workers have no interest in seeing capitalism as eternal, inevitable, and in the common interest; quite the contrary, if Marx is right. With respect at least to the subject matter of economics, Marx thinks, the social position and class interests of the workers promote a perspective which is not partial or distorted:

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. (CW, 6, 495)

Sharing the ends of this movement gives workers an incentive to attain accurate social knowledge. It also provides social scientists who adopt the workers' standpoint, identify with their interests, and participate in their struggles, with an incentive bourgeois theorists do not have to correct their social theories. Social scientific theories developed with a view to furthering workers' interests, and as part of their struggle, Marx thinks, will be explanatorily and predictively more adequate than theories developed at least from the bourgeois standpoint. Thus Marx's explanation of his own activity.

It would be an understatement to say these claims are controversial, and they *must* be on their own terms. This suggests a different explanation for the lack of consensus in social science than the usual positivist one of 'immaturity': namely, that conflicting social interests will produce conflicting theories. The 'immaturity' thesis is not very plausible. Modern economics, dated from Smith (1776), is eighty-some years older than modern biology, dated from Darwin (1859), a fully consensual science. If Marx

<sup>34</sup> See Geuss, part 2, and Milton Fisk, *Ethics and Society* (Brighton: Harvester 1980), part 3, for a discussion of this problematic notion.

is right, social sciences are doomed to 'immaturity' as long as society is torn by antagonistic conflicts of interest. In these circumstances they will never 'grow up.' If so, we might replace talk of 'mature' and 'immature' sciences with terms like 'cold' and 'hot' sciences, where the latter but not the former systematically impinge upon the social conflicts that they in their lack of consensus reflect.

### 3. Testing the reliability thesis.

The Marxist reliability thesis must be controversial. Nonetheless it is testable: workers who accept bourgeois ideology, Marx predicts, will find their interests frustrated because the antagonism between labor and capital identified by Marxist theory is real. Whether or not they frame their conclusions in explicitly Marxist language, workers who recognize this antagonism and act accordingly, or who come to recognize the antagonism through their actions, will be better able to pursue what they themselves conceive to be their interests, such as better wages and working conditions, more leisure time, and more fulfilling work.

These aims are derived from their life situations and may expand (e.g., from reformist to revolutionary) as workers form new ideas and norms in their struggle. The test depends on the fulfillment of their actual goals, self-consciously held, and not on goals merely imputed to them, first, because for Marx 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves' (CW, 20, 14), and, second, because if the workers do not adopt views that at least coincide with Marxism, it is not tested by practical application.

The issue of an empirical test of an interest-dependent theory validated by its practical consequences raises a worry about a kind of circularity. Is it objectionable that the theory is tested relative to its success in promoting the interests which produce it? Can we accept the results of such a test if we do not share these interests? The theoretical claim at issue is the Marxist reliability thesis: that a given standpoint, based on a specific set of class interests, is more reliable than another as a source of social belief. (First order claims, like the labor theory of value, are tested by reference to ordinary scientific criteria such as simplicity.) Marx holds that Marxism is more reliable than bourgeois social science because it is informed by truth-conducive interests. How can this thesis be tested? That is, assuming Marxism is informed by proletarian interests, why think that these interests are truth-conducive?

The test is practical. Will accepting (beliefs that coincide with) Marxism help workers attain goals that they independently have better than accepting liberal capitalist views? If so, the thesis is confirmed; the standpoint of the proletariat, expressed in Marxism or views that coin-

cide with it, is probably more reliable as a source of social scientific belief. If not, the thesis tends to be disconfirmed. To show that the bourgeois standpoint is more reliable, it would have to be shown that were workers to adopt and act on Marxist beliefs they would be frustrated and that were they to adopt and act on liberal capitalist beliefs they would not be. *Both* standpoints could prove unreliable in the face of practical test.

The problem is this. We test the reliability of the proletarian standpoint against the success of theories reflecting that standpoint. Success is a matter of realizing interests springing from that standpoint. It does not involve realizing any interests the proletariat shares with the bourgeoisie, but precisely interests that, according to Marx, conflict with bourgeois interests. The success that tests the reliability of the proletarian standpoint is proletarian success. The question is whether this is a viciously circular test.

Marxist beliefs will not further bourgeois interests; on the contrary, it would *harm* bourgeois interests to accept Marxist views about the nature of capitalism. That is why, for Marx, the bourgeois standpoint is partly ideological with respect to social science. To attain bourgeois aims, those who have or adopt that standpoint must accept perhaps liberal capitalist views. So for the bourgeoisie, but not for the proletariat, Marxism is what Parfit calls a 'self-effacing' theory that tells us not to believe it if it is true.<sup>35</sup> This is different from a 'directly self-defeating' theory that fails on its own terms. The paradox of ideology is just the worry that Marxism or any sociology of knowledge is directly self-defeating.

But liberal capitalist theories are similarly self-effacing for the proletariat. If Marxist beliefs will not promote bourgeois interests, neither will liberal capitalist beliefs promote proletarian interests, at least if Marxism is right about those interests. Workers who adopt such beliefs will be frustrated. Each set of beliefs is tailored to the promotion of the interests to which are its causal basis. Suppose each is tested successfully relative to those interests. Liberal capitalist beliefs help keep the bourgeoisie in power; Marxist beliefs help workers to attain higher wages, and so forth. Each theory seems self-confirming from its own standpoint. How then can Marx claim that by his own criterion of practical success that the proletarian standpoint is superior?

The answer lies not in a theoretical argument but in a practical test — the empirical outcome of class conflicts. I do not mean that the reliability of the proletarian standpoint on which Marxism is (we suppose) based is strongly confirmed if and only if capitalism is overthrown by the

35 Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon 1984)

workers for something like the reasons that Marx predicts. That would be sufficient, but is not necessary. The Marxist reliability thesis need not be threatened by the survival of capitalism, which Marxism has the internal resources to explain (see subsection VII.1). If workers do not become revolutionary, they will not subject the reliability of the proletarian standpoint to practical test.

It would threaten the Marxist reliability thesis, however, if workers subjected it to that test *and it failed*. Were Marxist, or at least revolutionary, beliefs to become widespread among workers as the result of their practical activity, but were workers to persistently fail to attain their revolutionary and other ends by acting on those beliefs, that would tend to strongly disconfirm the thesis that the proletarian standpoint is more reliable than the bourgeois alternative. Such failure might take several forms. For example, revolutionary action might not only consistently fail to overthrow capitalism, but consistently damage workers' reformist aims. Or every proletarian revolution might produce an unstable Stalinist disaster rather than the stable worker's democracy Marx advocates. Either result would disconfirm the reliability thesis.

A bourgeois can agree and no doubt would say that such disconfirmation is what we see in the collapse of Soviet Communism. In section VII.3 and elsewhere I indicate why I disagree, but a test is available to both standpoints.<sup>36</sup> Whether revolutionary ends are attained, e.g. whether a revolutionary working class replaces capitalism with a stable socialist alternative, is a fact that can emerge only from practical activity and on which all could in principle agree.

They need not agree: a defeated bourgeoisie might attempt to explain away a successful revolution; a defeated proletariat might refuse to admit persistent failure. The availability of an empirical test does not ensure that its results will be regarded as conclusive. This is so with any science. It reflects the underdetermination of theory by data and the possibility of holding any belief true if we are willing to make sufficient changes elsewhere in the web of belief (Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'). In social science, where conflicting interests play a large role, it is even less likely that any given test will be accepted as decisive. But whether the consequences relevant here occur in the right circumstances neither class must drop its own interests and aims to determine.

The test of the reliability of the proletarian standpoint is proletarian success, but capitalists can recognize this success in their own defeat, and workers their own failure in capitalist victory. The ultimate test of the Marxist reliability thesis is the outcome of the 'final conflict.' Social systems do face such final judgments: capitalism permanently replaced feudalism and may thus replace Stalinism. Socialism may replace capitalism, and many argue that capitalism has so replaced socialism. Less sweeping successes or failures for either set of aims, given the interest-driven adoption of the appropriate views, are less decisive evidence for the relative reliability of one or the other standpoint. But in either case the circle is broken.

## VII Qualifications to the Reliability Thesis

Marx's solution to the paradox for social science is here rather baldly put and needs qualification in a number of respects. Full consideration of the issues is impossible, but I will sketch them programmatically to indicate what Marx said or should have said about them and to show how they enhance the plausibility of the proposal under consideration.

### 1. Commodity Fetishism.

Class struggle offers workers and sympathetic social scientists an incentive to 'face with sober senses' their 'real conditions of life,' but that they will do so is not inevitable. The connection between proletarian interests and social truth is causal, contingent, and may be interrupted by countervailing forces. Emancipatory interests no more guarantee true beliefs about society than do commercial interests guarantee true beliefs about nature.

Marx acknowledges this in his treatment of commodity fetishism, a significant qualification of his earlier optimistic reliability. In the *Manifesto*, he says that 'for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, [the bourgeoisie] has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation' (CW, 6, 487). The key term is 'naked': in 1848 Marx thought that the nature of capitalism would be obvious to the emerging proletariat. He expected the destabilizing effects to follow in short order. By the time he wrote *Capital* vol 1, Marx had come to believe that capitalist society commodifies and atomizes human relations, so that

<sup>36</sup> See Justin Schwartz, 'A Future for Socialism in the USSR?' in Leo Panitch and Ralph Miliband, eds., *Communist Regimes: The Aftermath* (Socialist Register 1991) (London: Merlin Press 1991) 67-94

a definite social relation between men ... assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things ... appear[ing] as independent beings endowed with life and entering into relations both with one another and with the human race. (72)

Very roughly the idea is that under capitalism, the social world seems to be ordered by the properties of commodities acting independently of the human activities which produce them and of the social relations that make them commodities at all. So a positional tendency operates to make social relations appear 'opaque' even to workers. If so, workers and social scientists sympathetic to their interests are not 'compelled' to face anything. The tendency towards a better understanding does not vanish. Its effect, however, is diminished. Not only is there no guarantee that Marxist social science is correct, there is no guarantee that the correct social science will be accepted by the people with the strongest interest in accepting it.

Commodity fetishism is not a refutation of the claim that working class interests tend to promote more reliable knowledge of economics than do bourgeois interests. It just means that the workers and their social scientific allies can err despite their truth-conducive interests. The workers may not become revolutionary and if not, they will not subject the Marxist reliability thesis to its strongest test. Weaker tests remain: if workers subject to commodity fetishism are frustrated in striving for their fetishized goals, that counts against their fetishized beliefs and is warrant for calling them ideological. Insofar as workers and their allies do struggle for working class interests, Marx thinks that they will be in a better epistemic position than bourgeois social scientists. At least the former have no positive interest in mystification.

## 2. *Need workers accept Marxism?*

A gap exists between the beliefs workers form in their struggles and the social theories of even the social scientists most committed to workers' ends. This illuminates the central problem of Western Marxism in most of the twentieth century: why aren't workers Marxist revolutionaries if, as Marxism seems to suggest, it is in their interest to accept Marxism and act accordingly?<sup>37</sup> This problem is often taken as an *ad hominem* refutation of Marxism. But Marx's theory does not imply that workers will embrace Marxism as an ideology in the positive sense or use the language of self-identified Marxists even if they become revolutionary. It implies only that, if commodity fetishism can be overcome, their interest-driven actions will promote accurate social knowledge which they

can use to guide their struggles. Insofar as Marxism is correct, their beliefs will tend to coincide with the results of Marxist social science.

Class consciousness, for Marx, is not the acceptance of an antecedently established 'correct theory' or the adoption of a particular vocabulary, but a matter of the solidaristic commitments and norms that emerge in political organization from collective struggle for class interests. Explaining why French peasants of the 1850s did not constitute a class but only an aggregate of families, 'much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes,' Marx writes:

Insofar as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not form a class. (CW, 11, 187)

Class consciousness depends on many complex factors — Marx mentions seven in this dense passage — but belief in some theory or use of a favored terminology are not among them. Indeed, Marx does not here mention beliefs of any sort, except insofar as beliefs are involved in a solidaristic culture. A revolutionary class, he says,

finds the content and material for its own revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: toes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggles to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on. It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task. (CW, 10, 56, emphasis added)

To give the claim a Lukácsian gloss, insofar as Marxist theory is right, workers will tend to act as if they accepted it. Commodity fetishism and other factors militate against their doing even this much, which is why, Marx would say, workers are so often not only not Marxist but not even revolutionary. But even if they can defeat commodity fetishism and become revolutionary, workers need not accept Marxism — at least under that description.

## 3. *Marxist theory and state interest.*

Even if workers come to hold beliefs and norms that coincide with Marxism, Marxist theorists do not, merely in virtue of their self-identification as Marxists, share in the reliability of the proletarian standpoint. To do so they must promote proletarian interests and participate in workers' struggles — and not merely say or think that they do. This is the other side of the gap between the beliefs of workers and those of

37 In Marx's day, and for several generations following, many European workers did become Marxist and sometimes revolutionary.

Marxist social scientists. The petrification of Marxism into a sterile dogma under Communist regimes and among their defenders makes the point unpleasantly clear. Only a hack would regard official Marxism-Leninism as better social science than the economics of Paul Samuelson or Milton Friedman.

Such petrification might seem to count against Marx's claim to epistemic superiority vis-à-vis bourgeois social science. Official Marxism-Leninism is not science at all because it substitutes norms of acceptability to political authority for ordinary scientific norms such as logical consistency or empirical adequacy. The objection is that such proletarian 'social science' fails to be scientific; the proletarian standpoint is therefore less reliable than its bourgeois rival.

This is distinct from the objection that even nondogmatic Marxism done in a scientific spirit is inferior to other social science according to ordinary scientific norms. Assessing the latter would require detailed comparative examination of particular theoretical claims, which is beyond my scope here, but the possibility that it *might be right* underwrites Marxism's claim to count as science at all. One need not accept falsificationism as an account of science generally to agree that an unfalsifiable theory cannot be scientific. But, as noted, Marxism can be tested.

From within the framework outlined here, however, the unscientific character of official Marxism-Leninism is evidence that the standpoint of state interest (Communist or other) is not that of the working class. Official Marxism-Leninism depends not on proletarian interests but on state interests which conflict with proletarian interests — although party hacks say the contrary and may believe it. Given Marx's independently motivated view of the state as an organ of class domination (CW, 6, 505), the reply is not ad hoc if we view Communist states as dominated by a noncapitalist class of bureaucratic exploiters.

This suggests an explanation of the ideological character of official Marxism-Leninism parallel to that of bourgeois social science. Both are produced by reflectively unacceptable interests in exploitation and domination which cannot be admitted if the dominant group is to survive.<sup>38</sup> With the necessary qualifications that the state has other functions than class domination, some of them class-neutral, such a reply

is not obviously wrong-headed. One need not be a Marxist to acknowledge the salience of class for state power and few would argue, today, that Communist dictatorships represent the interests of the working class. In sum, Marx might say that social scientists who take the standpoint of a state bureaucracy will be influenced by its interests, and if these are partial their beliefs and norms will tend to be ideological.

Western and Latin American Marxism have not become instruments of state legitimization and retain their critical edge; whether they 'track the truth' better than their bourgeois rivals is of course contested. The contrast with official Marxism-Leninism gives Marxists an epistemic as well as a moral reason not to want Marxism to be an official ideology. The interests of even a workers' state would still be those of the *state*, not necessarily those of the workers, just as a capitalist state has interests sometimes opposed to those of the capitalists.

#### 4. *Totality or pluralism?*

Whatever interests workers have in the truth about economics (or natural science, insofar as unfettering the productive forces is in their interest) they may not have an interest in the truth about every subject matter. It is not evident that workers *qua* workers have any special interest in the truth about, for instance, the family and gender relations. Subgroups of workers — male or white workers — may even have interest in mystification about subject matters where they enjoy social privileges over women or minorities: thus working class sexism and racism.

Marx does not usually claim that the standpoint of the proletariat is that of 'totality,' the unique 'point of view from which understanding becomes possible' (Lukács, 145), or the only epistemically privileged standpoint on everything whatsoever. Where Marx does, for example, in the claim that the standpoint of the new 'materialism' is that of 'socialized humanity' (CW, 5, 5), the claim is detachable from the more modest thesis about reliability or privilege with respect to a subject matter.<sup>39</sup> Nothing is lost if the grandiose claim is abandoned.

38 Real scholars working under incredibly difficult conditions in the ex-Bloc countries did much first rate work, especially on the problems of a planned economy. This is consistent with Marx's qualified praise of the best bourgeois economists. The bourgeois counterparts of the party hacks include those whom Marx stigmatizes as 'vulgar political economists' such as (he thinks) Malthus, who let their commitment to the existing order dictate their conclusions.

39 It should not be necessary to say that the interests of a group in some position have no greater moral weight merely because they are the most reliable sources for belief about a subject matter. Thus even if the standpoint of the proletariat is privileged with respect to economics, worker interests do not therefore merit greater moral consideration than those of women or Blacks.

Such modesty is wise. Any group with a noncognitive interest in understanding some aspect of reality will have a privileged position with respect to that subject matter, but only to that subject matter. The reliability of the processes producing beliefs and norms pertaining to a subject matter in which some group has a special interest is not automatically transmitted to other subject matters where the group may not have an interest in the truth or be in a special position to find it. This does not presuppose that inquiry divides conveniently into mutually insulated presubject matters, but only that rough divisions are possible.

The logic of Marx's argument suggests a conclusion he does not explicitly draw — that many privileged positions exist which are differentially reliable with respect to subject matters. If Marx is right, the bourgeois standpoint is privileged with respect to natural science; the proletarian one with respect to economics. Some feminists argue for a 'feminist standpoint' based on 'women's ways of knowing,' privileged with respect to gender and the family.<sup>40</sup> Such standpoints could be proliferated.

That the bourgeois standpoint is initially privileged with respect to natural science highlights an important consequence of the present qualification. Marx is not committed to holding that the standpoint of the oppressed is privileged merely by virtue of their oppression. Rather, oppression gives them a noncognitive interest in a subject matter, viz., its causes. But dominant groups may have such an interest about some subject matters, if not those connected to social subordination. Profit or power can also be the basis of a noncognitive interest in truth.

Sometimes the rejection of the idea of epistemically privileged standpoints derives from the diversity of positions and interests within any group nominated for such a standpoint. How can we speak of 'the standpoint of the proletariat' when the proletariat is not a homogeneous group, but includes women, minorities, various nationalities and religions, and so forth? Harding argues this way against a feminist standpoint epistemology in *The Science Question in Feminism* (163-96).

While it is an important further question how the perspectives from various standpoints relate to one another, it does not follow from there being several such perspectives that they are inconsistent or incommensu-

table. They may be commensurable and mutually consistent even if the nature of the positions in question is such that a given person cannot occupy a particular one or set of them, and no one, perhaps, can hold all of them. If, though, the objection is that the heterogeneity means that the group in question does not exist, this claim must be evaluated in the light of the theoretical payoff of abstracting from the differences among its members.

The heterogeneity of the proletariat, and the fact that it includes groups, such as males and whites, which dominate others, such as women and Blacks, raises the concern that its standpoint may be ideological with respect to some subject matters. Marx might reply that the interests of white male workers are not those of the whole proletariat, which includes many Blacks and women. The standpoint of the *white* proletariat imparts reliability to social scientific beliefs. It is not thereby privileged with respect to any social subject matter, but it need not be ideological with respect to those about which the standpoints of subgroups (whites, males) may be ideological. Moreover, a standpoint, e.g. that of the bourgeoisie, might be privileged with respect to one subject matter but ideological with respect to another.

## VIII Conclusion

Doubts about privileged standpoints may derive, more deeply, from worries about epistemological privilege in principle rather than from denial of 'totality,' which then is set aside as an extreme case of privilege. If such doubts are due to concerns that science is interested, positional, theory-laden, evaluative, or nonconsensual, my argument has been that Marx's notion of the noncognitive interests of various groups in the truth about particular subject matters provides a reply. Marx's solution involves a naturalized reliabilist epistemology for which some interests or positions can be the basis of justified beliefs and norms oriented towards the truth. Beliefs and norms so produced will be the result of reliable processes.

Which such processes we consider reliable will depend on our theory. Marx's, of course, is what we call Marxism. This is not viciously circular (*pace* Scanlan, 50). We must start where we are, from beliefs and norms we provisionally accept, and Marx accepts his own beliefs and norms. I have discussed whether he can do so on his own terms or whether his theory undermines its own credibility and that of all science by taking the process of belief formation as an object of explanation and critique. Some theories of science do thus subvert themselves and science generally by insisting on an impossible insulation from noncognitive social influence or by providing no basis for distinguishing distorting from

40 See Nancy Rule Goldberger, et al., 'Women's Ways of Knowing,' in Phillip Shaver and Clyde Hendrick, eds., *Sex and Gender* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications 1987) 201-28; Nancy Hartsock, 'The Feminist Standpoint,' in Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality* (Dordrecht: Reidel 1983) 283-310; Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982).



nondistorting influences. Logical empiricism, arguably, is thus subversive in the first way; some relativist alternatives are so in the second. Marx's theory of ideology avoids these pitfalls.

Marx's solution offers a general strategy for dealing with the paradox which is useful to those who reject Marxism and to those who, like some feminists, seek to complement it. First, accept the general reliability thesis, (3), allowing a distinction between truth-promoting and truth-distorting noncognitive interests. Second, locate some social group which, on one's favored theory, have truth-promoting interests with respect to a subject matter. This will give a special reliability thesis, analogous to (8), with respect to that group. Third, devise an empirical (practical) test for the special reliability thesis for that group, like those discussed in VI.3. Non-Marxists can learn from Marx how such a strategy can be worked out in detail. The story is scattered through Marx's writings, but when put together, it sets what seems to me a very high standard, in detail, depth, and comprehensiveness, for any potential competitors.

*Received: April, 1992*