

Marxism, Science, and Class Struggle:

The Scientific Basis of the Concept of the Vanguard Party of the Proletariat

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The scientific character of Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history was based on their premise that a dialectical correspondence exists between the material processes of nature and the process of the historical development of human society. In other words, the epistemological foundation of historical materialism - that is, its claim to the scientific character of its concepts - is based on the argument that both nature and history obey the same dialectical laws of motion and change, and that they can be apprehended by the human mind. Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* in fact constitutes such an attempt to formulate the general epistemological foundation of historical materialism by demonstrating that the laws of dialectics are immanent in all objective reality, including natural, social, and cognitive processes.

The fact that our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws, and, hence, too, that in the final analysis they cannot contradict each other in their results, but must coincide, governs absolutely our whole theoretical thought. It is the unconscious and unconditional premise for theoretical thought. (1987b, 544)

In this manner, Marxist epistemology and the scientific status of the materialist conception of history presuppose the dialectical unity of all nature. The common structure of thought and nature guarantee the possibility of a science that leads to true knowledge of nature and history.

This dialectical conception of nature and the world, however, which in fact constitutes the real foundation of Marxist epistemology, later became a source of much controversy among various Marxists and led to the emergence of divisions within Marxism. The controversy began when Kautsky, Hilferding, Bernstein, and other leaders of the Second International used Engels's epistemological arguments about the dialectics of nature, and above all his *Anti-Dühring* (1987a), to transform Marxist philosophy and epistemology into a deterministic metaphysics that served to justify their reformist policies. Their reformism was based on the premise that the dialectical laws of nature will inevitably lead human society to socialism.

This fatalistic attitude is clearly reflected in the writings of both Kautsky and Hilferding. For instance, Kautsky saw the collapse of capitalist society as an inevitable natural phenomenon that did not require a revolutionary intervention on the part of the Marxists. Rather, for him the outcome of the class struggle was predetermined by the laws of history. His determinism can best be illustrated by the following passage, in which he actually absolves Marxists from the task of organizing a proletarian revolution against the already dying capitalist system. Capitalist society has failed; its dissolution is a question of time; irresistible economic development leads with natural necessity to the bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production. The erection of a new form of society in place of the existing one ... has become something inevitable. (quoted in Colletti 1972, 55-56)

Hilferding went even a step further than Kautsky. He argued that the scientific character of historical materialism has no intrinsic relationship to the class struggle and the attempt to establish a socialist society. In his view, it is ... incorrect ... to identify Marxism and socialism. Considered logically, as a scientific system alone ... Marxism is only a theory of the laws of motion of society To recognize the validity of Marxism ... is by no means a task for value judgments, let alone a pointer to practical line of conduct. It is one thing to recognize a necessity, but quite another to place

oneself at the service of that necessity. (quoted in Colletti 1972, 74)

Thus, the class struggle, which was in Marx and Engels's view an objective process based on the antagonistic social relations of production, was reduced at the hands of the leaders of the Second International to a purely subjective and ethical element of the superstructure. As a result, an economistic orthodoxy was developed based on the premise of the direct and immediate reflection of the contradictions of the economic relations onto the political and ideological superstructures. In this economistic orthodoxy, the role of human activity, which constituted the core of Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history, was eliminated in both theory and practice.

The bankruptcy and anti-Marxist nature of this conception of historical materialism, however, as well as the reformistic practice that it entailed, were exposed as a result of the crisis of 1914. Marxists were forced to choose between the policies of the Second International, which advocated the support of their capitalist states in their imperialistic wars, and the international workers movement.

The political crisis, however, involved a yet deeper philosophical crisis. The rejection of the mechanical interpretation of the relationship between Marxist science and class struggle gave rise to the necessity of a reinterpretation of Marxism along lines that could scientifically account for the role of the subjective - that is, political and ideological elements - in the course of the historical development of human society. In fact, it was in the course of the search for answers to the question of the relationship between Marxist science and its class practice that a division emerged between Leninism and Western Marxism, particularly Hegelian Marxism or the "praxis school."

Grasped in dialectical- and historical-materialist terms, the great fault of the Marxists of the Second International was that they confused the dialectical-materialist relationship between human beings and nature at the point of production, which involves a progressive development of the productive forces, and which is mediated through different modes of production, on the one hand, and the historical-material processes based on the antagonistic contradictions of the relations within a given mode of production, on the other. They conceived of history as a predetermined sequence of emergence of different modes of production in automatic response to the development of the productive forces.

From this standpoint, the role of the historical class struggle was changed into that of a mere execution of the laws of history. In other words, the Marxists of the Second International dissolved the level of social mediation into the level of historical mediation. As a result, the productive forces were endowed with an immanent power of self-development independent of, and separate from, the core component of this dialectical process - namely, living human labor. Living human labor thus lost its mediating role in history at the hands of the theorists of the Second International.

Knowledge developed in this manner was also assumed to reflect immediately the dialectical processes within nature and not as processes mediated through social contradictions. The task of Marxist scientists was changed to "prophesying" the inevitable emergence of the socialist society and demonstrating how the blind forces of nature operate in human society. A Feuerbachian immediacy was thus established between human beings and nature in the form of a passive conformity to natural laws. History was turned into a playground for natural laws, and humans were once again reduced to executors of their predetermined destiny.

In response to this mechanical interpretation of history, with its reduction of the dialectical

process of double-mediation into one blind process, the revolutionary Marxists issued a call to return to Hegel. The aim of this new tendency was to reestablish the dialectical integrity of Marxism. The call was based on the realization of the need for a correct formulation of the relationship between the two mediational processes in history and in society.¹ More specifically, the question became one of determining the relationship between Marxist science (dialectical materialism), on the one hand, and its political class practice, on the other.

The praxis school and the "historicist" interpretation of Marxism

The victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917 gave rise to a new theoretical current among Marxists against the "orthodox," metaphysical Marxism of the Second International. For the proponents of this theoretical current, with which the names of Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Karl Korsch are associated, the victory of Bolsheviks "represented the triumph of consciousness, action, and organization over the iron laws of history" (Callinicos 1976, 70). The Bolshevik victory, for them, proved the inadequacy of the mechanical materialism of the theorists of the Second International, and thus established the need for a reformulation of the principles of historical materialism in a dialectical, nonevolutionist manner. The key element in the arguments of these theorists was a firm rejection of the natural determinism that characterized both the theoretical and political premises of "orthodoxy," and a "return to the Hegelian dialectics."

The Hegelian Marxists did not aim their criticism, however, so much at the leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky, as at Engels's dialectical philosophy of nature. Unlike Lenin, who defended Engels's dialectical conception of nature as the epistemological foundation of Marxist science and political class practice, the Hegelian Marxists considered the very notion of dialectics of nature as the source of all determinism and reformism of the leaders of the Second International. In essence, the Hegelian Marxists attempted to reinterpret historical materialism along antinaturalist lines (Callinicos 1983, 72).²

Basic to the antinaturalists' arguments was the denial of the "reflection theory of knowledge" advocated by Engels in his *Anti-Dühring* and adopted by Lenin in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1972a). The "reflection theory of knowledge" is based on Engels's argument that it is "self-evident that the products of the human brain, being in the last analysis also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature's interconnections but are in correspondence with them" (1987a, 34). On this account, Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* has been heavily criticized by the Hegelian Marxists and praxis theorists, who have labeled the dialectical assertion by Engels and Lenin that the theory of reflection constitutes the core of Marxist philosophy, as well as the source of its internal consistency, as "mechanistic," "dogmatic," "metaphysical," and, in the words of Petrovic, "incompatible with Marx's conception of man as a creative being of praxis."³

Lukács, for his part, was convinced that "mechanical fatalism" is a logical consequence of the theory of reflection, and that this theory leads to a "deeply abhorrent" passivity in the face of external events. According to him, the view that ideas reflect the processes of reality undermines "the dialectical unity of thought and being upon which Marxist theory is based; the priority of being to consciousness which reflection theory presupposes robs man of the creative, activist role which is surely the essence of Marxism" (Hoffman 1975, 74).

Gramsci's rejection of the theory of reflection goes even a step further. He denies the existence of a reality independent of human consciousness and activity. Scientific theories,

according to him, do not have any truth-value independent of the circumstances of their formulation (Gramsci 1976, 367-68, 440-48). This is based on Gramsci's conviction, which he shared with the rest of the praxis theorists, that social and cultural phenomena cannot be explained by universal causal laws. Like the other Hegelian Marxists, he insisted that social and cultural phenomena are unique and historically specific experiences that cannot be included in the deductive systems of the natural sciences. Natural science, according to him, cannot be extended to the study of human beings and their social and cultural world, because we are confronted in the latter with humankind's own creations and not with natural phenomena (Callinicos 1983, 71-72).

In this manner, dialectics, as the "general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought" (1976a, 131) was rejected by the praxis theorists. It could not serve as the epistemological foundation of Marxist science. For Lukács and the other theorists of the praxis school, dialectics was reduced to a method that applied only to human society and practice. Thus, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács stated that the dialectical method must be limited to the realm of history and society: "The misunderstandings that arise from Engels' account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels - following Hegel's mistaken lead - extended the method to apply also to nature" (1971, 24).

"Return to Hegel": The proletariat and the identity of subject and object

Because the praxis theorists had rejected the dialectics of nature as the epistemological foundation of Marxist science, the issue of the scientific character of historical materialism became the central problem for which they had to find a resolution. Denied a dialectical foundation in nature, Marxist science had to find a new epistemological base. This was achieved through a return to Hegel. The Hegelian Marxists revived Hegel's concept of the identity of the subject and object as the basis of all social reality. They used this concept as a lens through which to view the two main problems that constituted the core problems of Marxist philosophy after the collapse of the Second International: the relation between theory and practice, and the relation between Marxist science and the reality that it seeks to explain. In other words, they raised the question of the justification for Marxism to call itself scientific socialism (Callinicos 1976, 17). It is this latter question with which we are concerned here.

Following Hegel, Lukács and other praxis theorists argued that an object that is completely separate from the subject is incomprehensible. For knowledge to be real, then, an underlying unity must exist between the subject and the object, when the subject can see the object as its own creation. As Korsch put it, true knowledge requires that there exist the "coincidence of consciousness and reality" (1970, 77).

For Lukács, however, a mere identity of the subject and object in itself was not enough for a scientific comprehension of the world. Rather, such comprehension resulted when reality was perceived as a totality. As he himself put it, to leave the immediate appearances and the "empirical reality behind can only mean that the objects of the empirical world are to be understood as aspects of a totality, i.e., as the aspects of a total social situation caught up in the process of historical change" (Lukács 1971, 162). The truth of knowledge derives from the fact that it looks at phenomena as parts of a social whole, and this applies also to Marxism. It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality.... The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science. (27)

Advocating the "primacy of the category of totality" does not in itself constitute a Hegelian bias in Lukács. Marx, Engels, and Lenin agreed that the starting point of historical

materialism must be the totality of the relations of a mode of production. What makes Lukács's concept of totality Hegelian is the fact that it is conceived as the "creation" of a "total subject," and not as the product of a historical process of mediation between humans and nature through productive labor.

Reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration. It was not for nothing that the young Hegel erected his philosophy on the principle that "truth must be understood and expressed not only as substance but also as subject." (39)

This immediate identity of the subject and object constitutes the foundation of Lukács's and all Hegelian Marxists' epistemology. True knowledge is the knowledge of the "total subject-object" of its own being. According to Lukács, "historical materialism ... means the self-knowledge of capitalist society" obtained by the proletariat (229). Only the proletariat, as "the identical subject-object of the social and historical processes of evolution," is capable of such knowledge (149).

Bourgeois philosophy and consciousness, on the other hand, are, according to Lukács, incapable of comprehending reality as a social whole. This is because the bourgeois perception of the capitalist social system is a contradictory and reified one. It can only see society as an aggregation of discrete things, bound together by the relations of the market, rather than by any sort of conscious control. This reified structure masks the real social relations from bourgeois consciousness. The best bourgeois thought and philosophy can do is to grasp portions of reality in a purely formal manner.

This rationalisation of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depth of man's physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalisation of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of - formal - laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general 'laws'. But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws ... makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact. (101)

This reification, which transforms the objective relations between men into formal relations between discrete things, makes it impossible for bourgeois philosophy to comprehend society as a social whole, as a totality. The same reification process, however, has the opposite effect on the proletariat. While it plays a "masking role" for the former, it has a revealing effect for the latter. This reification leads the proletariat into a comprehension of society as a historically evolved totality. This is because, as Callinicos has put it, for Lukács the heart of reification lies in the transformation of worker into a thing - that is, of labor power into a commodity. The working class, in other words, is the identical subject-object of bourgeois society, both an absolute object, deprived of any human status, and at the same time the core of the mediations constitutive of the totality (1983, 77).

In this manner, for Lukács, the alienated position of the proletariat in capitalist social relations enables it to obtain a true knowledge, not only of the capitalist system, but also of the nature of class society in general. It makes it a universal class, a total subject, that is incapable of liberating itself as a class unless it simultaneously abolishes class society as such (1971, 70). It is for this reason that the consciousness of the proletariat, which Lukács refers to as "the last class consciousness in the history of mankind,"

must both lay bare the nature of society and achieve an increasingly inward fusion of theory and practice. 'Ideology' for the proletariat is no banner to follow into battle, nor is it a cover for its true objectives: it is the objective and the weapon itself. (70)

Lukács's identification of subject and object, of alienation and consciousness, is a clear return to Hegel's concept of the absolute subject.⁴ As he stated in *History and Class Consciousness*, "it appears as if the logico-metaphysical construction of the *Phenomenology of Mind* had

found its authentic realisation in the existence and the consciousness of the proletariat" (xxiii).

Historicism and the scientific character of Marxism

The praxis theorists' absolute rejection of the naturalism of the Second International and their "return to Hegel" was in fact a return to a concept of dialectics that had as its core a "universal subject;" only here the "universal subject" was the proletariat, whose being and alienation was the source of both historical transformation and scientific knowledge. In other words, the proletariat, as the total subject-object of history, became the one element that unified science with history. A scientific understanding of reality could only be possible through the identity of the subject and object in the being of the proletariat.

This identification of the epistemological foundation of science with the process of class struggle, which was achieved through the mediation of a Hegelian concept of class as the "total subject" of history, is what has been called "historicism." According to the historicist conception of science, a theory acquires scientific validity to the degree to which it reflects the reality of the being of a particular class in a particular epoch. In other words, a theory is scientific to the extent that it reflects the consciousness of a class and makes explicit what is implicit in the practice of that class. Sciences do not derive their epistemological status from the construction of theories by means of scientific methods, but from their role in the formation of the worldviews of social classes. In this manner, for historicists, the sciences are transformed into ideologies or superstructures (Gramsci 1976, 368) whose validity depends on the changing course of history and the outcome of the class struggle.

The Hegelian Marxists understood Marxism in the same historicist manner. For them, Marxism is scientific because it reflects the consciousness of the proletariat. Its scientific validity consists in the historical function it performs in articulating the consciousness and political aspirations of the proletariat. The scientific character of Marxism is not based on the development of theories through the utilization of its scientific method, but on the consciousness of the proletariat as the historical subject (see Callinicos 1976, 17-18). This is true not only for Lukács, but also for Gramsci.

Like Lukács and Korsch, Gramsci believes in the identity of subject and object as the source of historical reality. Knowledge as a product of this identity only reflects the needs and interests of the knowing subject. As he emphasized, "our knowledge of things is nothing other than ourselves, our needs and our interests" (1976, 368). By the same token, Marxism is a theory that renders explicit the needs and interests of the proletariat.

If [Marx] has analysed reality exactly then he has done nothing other than systematise rationally and coherently what the historical agents of this reality felt and still feel in a confused and instinctive way, and of which they have a clearer consciousness as result of the hostile critique. (392)

While for Lukács, however, the consciousness of the proletariat was a direct result of the latter's alienation in the contradictory capitalist relations, for Gramsci these contradictions actually hindered the objectivity of the proletariat's knowledge. Only through an elimination of the contradictions of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society could such objective knowledge be attained.

Man knows objectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race historically unified in a single unitary cultural system. But this process of historical unification takes place through the disappearance of the internal contradictions which tear apart human society, while these contradictions themselves are the condition for the formation of groups and for the birth of ideologies which are not concretely universal but are immediately rendered transient by the practical origin of their substance. There exists therefore a struggle for objectivity (to free

oneself from partial and fallacious ideologies) and this struggle is the same as the struggle for the cultural unification of the human race. (445)

Thus the process of scientific production is reduced to the process of unification of the subject in history.

Objective always means "humanly objective" which can be held to correspond exactly to "historically subjective": in other words, objective would mean universally subjective.... What the idealists call "spirit" is not a point of departure but a point of arrival, it is the ensemble of superstructures moving towards concrete and objectively universal unification. (445-46)

By making "universal unification" of the subject the condition of objective knowledge, Gramsci is actually going against Marx's premise that the task of science is to reveal the hidden structures and relations of objective reality by penetrating beyond mere appearances. For Gramsci, no such objective structures lie beyond the subject waiting to be discovered by the scientific method.

The idea of "objective" in metaphysical materialism would appear to mean an objectivity that exists even apart from man; but when one affirms that a reality would exist even if man did not, one is either speaking metaphysically or one is falling into a form of mysticism. (446)

Ideologies and fallacious appearances are only a result of the internal division of the subject itself and can only be eliminated through a proletarian revolution. Marxism is thus, for Gramsci, a science to the degree to which it is able to unify the human race. The measure of its scientific character is not its "method," but its appeal to the revolutionary classes. The more it is able to mobilize the masses behind it, the more an ideology is proven to be "objective." This is because such a mass mobilization cannot just happen "arbitrarily," or as a result of "the formally constructive will of a personality or a group which puts it forward solely on the basis of its own fanatical philosophical or religious convictions," but rather takes place when an ideology is able to "respond to the demands of a complex organic period of history" (341). "Mass adhesion or non-adhesion," argues Gramsci, "is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity" of Marxism as an ideology (341).

In this manner, Gramsci's denial of the existence of any reality beyond the immediate needs and activities of the proletariat leaves him with no choice but to ground the objectivity of science upon a historical teleology. The objectively real thus becomes a historical goal for the subject to be attained only in communist society.

It is necessary to clarify one additional point with regard to the works of Lukács and Gramsci - the issue of the role of the vanguard party. By now it must be quite clear that the historicist interpretations of Marxism by Lukács and Gramsci do not leave room for any scientific function for the vanguard party of the proletariat. In rejecting this scientific role, however, each of these thinkers adopted a slightly different approach.

For Gramsci, who sees objectivity in the universal unification of the subject, the role of the party is defined in terms of facilitating this unification. In this sense, the political role of the party extends into its scientific role. So far as the party's theoretical activity is concerned, it is reduced to a "clearer" and "more coherent" articulation of the potentials of the proletariat. If the problem of the identification of theory and practice is to be raised, it can be done in this sense, that one can construct, on a specific practice, a theory which, by coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the practice itself, can accelerate the historical process that is going on, rendering practice more homogeneous, more coherent, more efficient in all its elements, and thus, in other words, developing its potential to the maximum. (1976, 365)

In this manner, for Gramsci the party becomes a rationalizing element, the historical task of

which is to justify the actions of "practical forces" in order that they might become "more efficient and expansive." Hence, "the identification of theory and practice is a critical act, through which practice is demonstrated rational and necessary" (365).

Lukács's case is somewhat different. While Gramsci emphasized the relation between theory and practice more along political lines, Lukács defined the issue more in philosophical terms. For the latter, scientific knowledge can be attained only through the identity of subject and object that is achieved in the being of the proletariat. In this sense, the proletariat is already the carrier of scientific consciousness due to its position within the capitalist relations of production. Thus, for Lukács, the historical task of the party becomes that of "spreading" this consciousness among those sections of the proletariat that may not reach the consciousness appropriate to their position. The role of the party, therefore, is an ideological one aimed at compensating for the contingent failures of the proletariat to arrive at full consciousness. Thus Lukács transforms the political class struggle into an ideological one, a struggle that is fought at the level of class consciousness. Consciousness, in fact, becomes the only weapon at the hands of the proletariat in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. In his view, the only effective superiority of the proletariat, its only decisive weapon, is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete historical totality; to see the reified forms as processes between men, to see the immanent meaning of history that only appears negatively in the contradictions of abstract forms, to raise its positive side to consciousness and to put it into practice. (197)

It is in its attempt to put its consciousness into practice that the proletariat forms its vanguard party. This party is solely a creation of the proletariat's free and conscious act and cannot be imposed upon it from outside. As Arato and Breins have put it, for Lukács the party "is an independent Gestalt of proletarian class consciousness in its most advanced form, or more precisely, of the objectively highest possible level of class consciousness at any given moment" (1979, 157) Thus, it is the "total subject" - that is, consciousness that, as the driving force of history, both changes the objective reality and, at the same time, creates the vehicles and means by which these changes are brought about. "'Ideology' for the proletariat is no banner to follow into battle. Nor is it a cover for its true objectives: it is the objective and the weapon itself." (Lukács 1971, 70) For Lukács, the return to Hegel is complete.

Marxism vs. historicism

In the hands of the Hegelian Marxists, what started as a rejection of Engels's dialectics of nature and the reflection theory of knowledge resulted in a complete reversal of the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels and a complete return to the subjectivist dialectics of Hegel. The historicists' identification of the problem of the relation between science and its object, on the one hand, and the relation between theory and practice, which is centered around the category of the "total subject," on the other, was possible only through a complete return to the Hegelian dialectics, because, for Hegel, reality was based only on an immediate identity (as opposed to a mediated unity) of subject and object. In other words, the question of the epistemological foundation of science could be reduced to the level of subjective practice only when the subject was taken in a Hegelian sense: as a subject that had the object as a part of its own being, as an absolute subject.

As a result of such Hegelian interpretations, the field of class struggle - that is, the level of social mediation - was expanded to include also the process of the historical mediation between humans and nature. In other words, the whole process of the historical development of productive forces was collapsed into the field of class antagonisms. The proletariat, as an agent of class struggle in capitalist society, was transformed into the grand "subject" of all

history. In the same way, science, which Marx considered to be a product of the mutual interaction between human beings and nature through productive labor, was transformed into the ideology of various classes in struggle. Such a move, of course, was not simply a rejection of Engels's and Lenin's interpretations of Marx, but of Marx's own dialectical concepts as well; a rejection that is not without its own contradictions.

First, it is a well-established fact that for Marx the proletariat is not a creator of capitalism, but rather a creation, a result, of the historical mediation process that had culminated in the capitalist relations of production. For him, capitalist production relations, as a whole, are beyond the proletariat's immediate existence and are therefore external to it.

Thus, the proletariat's consciousness of the capitalist relations cannot be the immediate consciousness that the Hegelian subject requires, but an acquired one.⁵ Moreover, even if we accept Lukács's argument that the proletariat is the subject-object of capitalism, there is still no explanation as to how it can transcend its own being and develop something other than a capitalist consciousness. Even for Hegel, the subject through its alienation becomes conscious of what it is, and not what it prefers to be. In order to determine its place in the capitalist relations of production within a historical perspective, the proletariat must be able not only to transcend its own immediate being, but to transcend the capitalist social relations as well, and see them as a product of the process of the historical mediation between man and nature. This, of course, is not possible for the proletariat even within a Hegelian scheme, because the Hegelian subject is also limited by its own being. Thus, even within such a scheme, the conception of the proletariat as the subject-object of history is self-contradictory. Lukács's attempt to resolve the contradictions of bourgeois philosophy "from within the problematic of the bourgeois society itself," is thus contradictory and unacceptable (Callinicos 1976, 26).

Gramsci, however, avoided this contradiction by arguing that the proletariat's consciousness is the result not of its alienation, but of the negation of its alienation - that is, a result of what he calls its "unification." However, this leads him only one step beyond Lukács. By identifying "objectivity" with "unanimity," Gramsci is in effect saying that science is only possible under communism. But he is unable to demonstrate how the proletariat, or at least its vanguard party, is capable of developing any socialist consciousness - and even fight for socialism - under the contradictory capitalist relations of production. In other words, he is unable to account for Marxism itself. The best he can do is to attribute the communist consciousness of the vanguard to its being "ahead of its time."⁶

Thus with Gramsci the proletariat is trapped in a vicious circle. It cannot achieve objectivity until it is unified through the establishment of communism, and it cannot establish communism unless it objectively fights for it through its political class struggle.

Such a dichotomous conception of objectivity, which divides history into objective (communist) and nonobjective (precommunist) stages, is a result of Gramsci's rejection of the existence of any objective reality outside of the unity of the subject itself. This, of course, is contrary to Marx's conception of science. For Marx, the objectivity of science is based both on the separation and the dialectical unity of subject and object. In fact, the very possibility of science is based on this separation. According to him "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (1998, 804).

Thus for Marx, the objectivity of science is not based on the success of the proletarian revolution, but on the ability of the scientist to penetrate behind the appearances of things and to grasp the real mechanism at work in objective reality. Such a conception of science is developmental and not dichotomous. It is based on the recognition of the dialectical

interaction between humans and nature through the process of production.

In this manner, the praxis theorists' "return to Hegel" was only possible through a rejection of the scientific character of Marxism itself. The theoretical and practical contradictions they faced proved that a mechanical rejection of the dialectical reality of nature - like the mechanical application of the dialectics of nature to human history by the leaders of the Second International - cannot but violate the principles of dialectical and historical materialism that were developed by Marx and Engels, and were further elaborated by Lenin in his theory of the vanguard party of the proletariat.

Leninism and the relation between Marxist science and class struggle

Unlike the Hegelian Marxists who blamed Engels's views on the dialectics of nature as the source of the reformism of the leaders of the Second International, Lenin actually took it upon himself to demonstrate that Engels's concepts were correct, and that the problem resided in these leaders' undialectical interpretation of Engels's dialectical concepts. Both his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks* are clear reflections of Lenin's attempt to prove the dialectical nature of the natural, historical, and cognitive processes. This concern is evident in the following passage from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*:

The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts....is the essence...of dialectics. That is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter....

The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their "unity" ...) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, mutually exclusive and opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature (including mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their "self-movement," in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the "struggle" of opposites. (1972b, 359-60)

It is important to note here that Lenin is describing in dialectical terms both the ontological process of development in nature and history through the unity and struggle of opposites, and the epistemological process of apprehending of this developmental process. By recognizing the unity of dialectical and historical materialism in this manner, Lenin agrees with Engels that dialectical materialism "no longer needs any philosophy standing above the other sciences," and that as a result of the unity of dialectical and historical materialism, what remains from the previous philosophy is "the science of thought and its laws" (Engels 1987a 26) 7 Thus, in addition to a process of development through the struggle of opposites, which "proceeds in spirals,"

dialectics, as understood by Marx, and also in conformity with Hegel, includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, which too, must regard its subject matter historically, studying and generalizing the origin and development of knowledge, the transition from non-knowledge to knowledge. (Lenin 1974b, 54)

In this sense, then, dialectics includes two distinct processes at once: an objective and a subjective process. While the first process involves the development of the productive forces through class struggle, the second involves the development of the scientific knowledge of the laws of this objective process through dialectical thought. In the latter process, the reflection of the dialectical processes of nature and history in thought leads to the development of the scientific concepts of historical materialism.

Lenin's contribution in this regard, however, is not so much a result of his recognition of this double mediation process itself, as it is of his dialectical conception of the relationship between the process of class struggle, on the one hand, and that of scientific production as an aspect of the historical development of the productive forces, on the other.

Unlike the theoreticians of the Second International, who reduced social into historical mediation, Lenin maintained the distinction between the two levels, and attempted to conceptualize them in a dialectical fashion. And the key element in this dialectical relationship is Lenin's concept of the "vanguard party" of the proletariat.

Lenin's break with the evolutionist approach of the Second International was based on his return to Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," which stressed the centrality of human social practice and labor as the means for the historical development of human society (1976). On the basis of this dialectical premise, Lenin rejected any argument that advocated the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism and the emergence of socialism independently of the process of class struggle. For Lenin, neither the presence of favorable objective conditions alone, nor the mere existence of subjective will on the part of the oppressed classes, would automatically lead to a revolution. As he himself emphasized, "To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution" (1974a, 213).

For a revolution to occur, a combination of both objective and subjective conditions must be present. In his article "The Collapse of the Second International," Lenin describes the objective conditions that are necessary for the existence of a "revolutionary situation."

What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the "upper classes," a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes bursts forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for "the lower classes not to want" to live in the old way; it is also necessary that "the upper classes should be unable" to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in "peace time," but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the "upper classes" themselves into independent historical action. (1974a, 213-14)

In the absence of these objective circumstances, which, according to Lenin, "are independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties, but even of individual classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible" (214) At the same time, a mere presence of these conditions is not sufficient to produce a revolution:

It is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, "falls," if it is not toppled over. (214)

The mediating role of the party in the process of class struggle

The historical task of bringing about the subjective changes that are necessary for transforming an objective "revolutionary situation" into an actual revolutionary process, Lenin maintains, falls on the shoulder of revolutionary Marxists and their political party. According to him,

no socialist has ever guaranteed that this war (and not the next one), that today's revolutionary situation (and not tomorrow's) will produce a revolution. What we are discussing is the indisputable and fundamental duty of all socialists - that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, arousing the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming, for that purpose, organizations suited to the revolutionary

situation.

No influential or responsible socialist has ever dared to feel doubt that this is the duty of the socialist parties. (1974, 216-17)

According to Lenin, the Social-Democratic parties of the Second International, as a result of their "failure to perform" this important duty, guaranteed "their treachery, political death, renunciation of their own role and desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie" (217).

However, in Lenin's view, active intervention of the "vanguard party of the proletariat" was necessary for the revolutionary process to succeed. This active intervention involved two main levels of organization and political consciousness. At the level of organization, the vanguard was charged with the task of bringing together and organizing the revolutionary class in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. He defined as the "most imperative" task of the Social-Democrats and the party that of establishing "an organisation of revolutionaries capable of lending energy, stability, and continuity to the political struggle." (1973b, 446)

According to him, "In our time, only a party that will organise really nation-wide exposures can become the vanguard of the revolutionary forces" (431).

When, in the pursuit of a single aim and animated by a single will, millions alter the forms of their communication and their behaviour, change the place and the mode of their activities, change their tools and weapons in accordance with the changing conditions and the requirements of the struggle - all this is genuine organisation. (1974a, 253)

Without such a genuine organization, "masses lack" the "unity of will" that is necessary for a successful revolution (240).⁸ It is one of the historical tasks of the vanguard party of the proletariat to guarantee that such an organization is developed among the revolutionary classes.

The other failure of the theoreticians of the Second International, according to Lenin, was a result of their mechanical belief that the development of productive forces would automatically translate itself into a spontaneous revolutionary consciousness among the proletariat as a condition for the overthrow the capitalist system. Such an assumption was totally rejected by him as incorrect and nondialectical.

The spontaneous working-class movement is by itself able to create (and inevitably does create) only trade-unionism, and working-class trade-unionist politics is precisely working-class bourgeois politics. The fact that the working class participates in the political struggle, and even in political revolution, does not make its politics Social-Democratic politics.⁹ (1973b, 437)

To nurture the idea of the possibility of a "spontaneous" socialist consciousness among the proletariat is tantamount to advocating the existence of an unmediated and direct relationship between the thinking and being of the working class. This, of course, is against the principles of materialist dialectics. Referring to the workers' strikes in Russia during the 1890s, Lenin argued that for workers' consciousness to be "Social-Democratic," it would have to be based on knowledge of the totality of the capitalist social relations. Left in their immediate place in the capitalist relations of production, the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of the interests in the whole of the modern political and social system.

Working-class consciousness cannot be genuinely political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected.... The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class-consciousness, unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all from topical, political facts and events to observe every other social class and all the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical, and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of all aspects of the life and activity of all classes, strata, and groups of the population. (412)

Such a comprehensive understanding of the totality of the relationships of the capitalist system can only be brought to the workers from outside their immediate position in the capitalist relations of production.

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of interrelations between all classes. (422)

Therefore it becomes the task of the vanguard party of the proletariat to bring revolutionary political consciousness - i.e., the Social-Democratic consciousness, which is immediately unavailable to the proletariat as a result of its being entangled in the capitalist relations of production - to the workers in order to facilitate the revolutionary process.

Social-Democracy leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. Social-Democracy represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force.... We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness. (400)

On the basis of this dialectical understanding of the mediating role of the vanguard party of the proletariat in the process of class struggle, Lenin calls upon all revolutionary Social-Democrats to "'go among all classes of population' as theoreticians, as propagandists, as agitators, and as organisers" (425) and "dispatch units of their army in all directions" in order to "bring political knowledge to the workers" (422). The strength and the weakness of the working-class movement, and the success of the revolutionary process for socialism depends, in Lenin's view, exactly on the degree to which the vanguard party of the proletariat succeeds in performing its historical task of organizing the proletariat and elevating its class struggle to the level of a revolutionary political struggle against the capitalist system as a whole.

According to him, "the strength of the present-day movement lies in the awakening of the masses (principally, the industrial proletariat), and that its weakness lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders" (373).

This shows ... that all worship of the spontaneity of the working-class movement, all belittling of the role of "the conscious element," of the role of Social-Democracy, means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers. All those who talk about "overrating the importance of ideology," about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself, if only the workers "wrest their fate from the hands of the leaders." But this is a profound mistake. (383)

The political-ideological intervention of the vanguard party of the proletariat in the objective process of class struggle thus constitutes the second integral aspect of Lenin's dialectical understanding of the social mediation process:

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is - either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course.... Hence to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. (384)

The scientific-theoretical role of the party

For Lenin, the mediating role of the party is not limited to its objective intervention in the actual process of the class struggle. For the party to be able to perform this revolutionary function successfully, it must also be equipped with the most advanced scientific theory of

historical development of human society. As Marx and Engels have emphasized, although people make their own history, they do not necessarily make it according to their wishes. Only a scientific understanding of the laws of nature and history will enable them to realize their objectives. The case of the proletariat is, of course, no exception from this general rule. It is for this reason that Lenin has emphasized in his most celebrated statement that, "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" (1973b, 369)¹⁰ For Lenin, "the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory." According to him, anybody "who realises how enormously the modern working-class movement has grown and branched out will understand what a reserve of theoretical forces and political (as well as revolutionary) experience is required to carry out this task"(370). In this manner, following Engels, Lenin maintains that theoretical class struggle is an integral part of a revolutionary struggle for socialism.

Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognizes, not two forms of the great struggle of Social-Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two. (370)¹¹

The significance of Lenin's argument, again, is not so much the recognition of the role of Marxist scientific theory - historical materialism - in the revolutionary processes within the present capitalist society, as is his dialectical recognition of the role of the vanguard party of the proletariat in the development of the scientific theory. This is directly related to his rejection of the "spontaneity" of socialist consciousness among the proletariat.

Lenin's theory about the centrality of the role of the party in the process of scientific-theoretical production is based on his correct recognition that socialism, as a doctrine, has historically developed independently of the working class. In this regard, he shares Kautsky's view that

socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one or the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia.... Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without ... and not something that arose within it spontaneously. (cited in Lenin 1973b, 383-84)

In his "The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism," Lenin demonstrates how in fact Marxist science is "the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism," all being the products of bourgeois culture and society (1973a, 23-24). The revolutionary character of Marxism, however, derives not only from its being the most advanced theory developed in the context of the bourgeois society, but also from its serving the interests of the proletariat as the most revolutionary class in that society - a class whose emancipation lies in the resolution of the contradictions of capitalist production relations.

The vanguard party of the proletariat thus becomes the historical means by which the proletariat appropriates the most advanced scientific achievements of bourgeois society and turns it into a powerful weapon for its own class struggle against its exploiters. Through this appropriation, such scientific achievements are placed at the service, not of maintaining the present relations and social relations of production of capitalism, but of furthering the development of the productive forces of society through revolutionary practice. In this manner, the vanguard party of the proletariat acts not only as a medium for liberation of the working class itself, but also as a medium of the liberation of science from the limitation of

the bourgeois relations of production.

The most crucial point here is that it is only through the appropriation by the vanguard party of the proletariat that science - and, in particular, Marxism - becomes transformed into a material force for the liberation of humanity. Marxism is the most advanced theory precisely because it is "the theory of the proletarian movement for emancipation" (Lenin 1974a, 222).

12

At the hands of the vanguard party of the proletariat, Marxist science becomes capable of providing a clear theoretical understanding of "the relationships between all the various classes of modern society," not as "obtained from any book," but as obtained "from the living examples" of the political life of the most revolutionary class in modern human history (1973b, 413).

In this manner, the vanguard party of the proletariat constitutes for Lenin both the ontological and epistemological foundation of the proletarian struggle for emancipation and socialism. This dual mediational role of the vanguard party - class political organization and scientific production - is the cornerstone of Lenin's contribution to the Marxist science of historical materialism. Through the concept of the vanguard party of the proletariat, Lenin links the two distinct dialectical processes of social mediation (class struggle) and historical mediation (the development of the productive forces). The vanguard party, while leading the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat, is the medium of the development of Marxist science (historical materialism) through the application of the principles of dialectics (Marxist methodology) to the objective experiences of the proletariat in its global struggle against capitalism.¹³

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NOTES

1. Alex Callinicos has formulated the two levels of mediation in terms of "the relation between theory and practice," on the one hand, and the epistemological problem of "the relation between science and reality," on the other. See Callinicos (1976, 17).
2. For a discussion of this issue see: Mendelson (1979) and Jones (1977).
3. Cited in Hoffman (1975, 71). A few important points must be made clear here. First, the praxis theorists' claim that the theory of reflection originated with Engels is completely erroneous. This view was held also by Marx when he said that for him "the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought" (1996, 19). Moreover, the real originator of the theory of reflection was Hegel himself. In an idealist manner, he used this theory to demonstrate that the material world was a reflection, a "mirror image" of the Idea. Indeed, without the reflection theory, the whole of Hegel's epistemology would collapse. For Hegel, the essence of the Idea would not have been knowable without its reflection in the phenomenal world. As Hoffman put it, "Unless it is understood that consciousness reflects reality, there would be no way of understanding that there is any correspondence between mind and matter: the relation between them would remain simply unintelligible, a mere mystery." (1975, 73)
4. In this regard, Callinicos has characterized Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* as an "ambitious attempt to reintroduce the concept of a transcendental subject into Marxism." He maintains that Lukács "accorded to a collective subject, the proletariat, the status of the Hegelian Idea" (1983, 77). However he concedes that Lukács's last two essays, 'Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg's Critique of the Russian Revolution', and 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization' ... represent a marked shift away from the messianism of his early Marxism, and an acceptance of Lenin's 'revolutionary realpolitik'. Thus, the concept of the revolutionary party developed in these essays is that of an organization created by the interaction of theory and practice, vanguard and class, a view

much closer to those of Lenin and Gramsci than the Utopian sect embodying the class consciousness 'imputed' to the proletariat of Lukács's earlier writings. (1983, 78)

5. For Marx, it is the role of science to overcome this limitation of the proletariat. According to him,

the analysis of the actual intrinsic relations of the capitalist processes of production is a very complicated matter and a very extensive work.... it is a work of science to resolve the visible, merely external movement into the true intrinsic movement." This is because of the fact that the "conceptions that arise about the laws of production in the minds of the agents of capitalist production and circulation will diverge drastically from these real laws. (1998, 311)

6. "This implies that the founders of the new philosophy were a long way ahead of the necessities of their period, even of the period that followed, and that they created an arsenal stocked with weapons which were still not ready for use, because ahead of their time, and which were to be ready for service only some time later" (1976, 392). Here Gramsci is in fact contradicting his concept of knowledge as an articulation of the needs of a class in a particular epoch. Limited in this manner, it is not clear how Marx and Engels could have been ahead of their time without utilizing scientific methods that had applicability beyond the immediate consciousness of the proletariat and capitalism.

7. For a brilliant exposition of the principles of dialectical and historical materialism from a Marxist-Leninist perspective see Konstantinov et al.(1979). Also see, Boguslavski et. al. (1976).

8. For an in-depth account of Leninist concept of the vanguard party of the proletariat, see Basmanov and Leibson 1977.

9. Lenin's position is here based on his dialectical premise that the spontaneous consciousness of the proletariat as a class within the capitalist mode of production is limited by the contradictions of capitalism itself and is thus incapable of transcending its immediate ground without being mediated through the whole process of historical development of the productive forces in various modes of production. I return to this point when I deal with the scientific role of the party.

10. See also Basmanov (1977, 111-36).

11. Lenin here quotes from Engels's Prefatory Note to the Peasant War in Germany, where he emphasizes the necessity of theoretical struggle:

For the first time since the workers' movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides - the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists.... It is precisely in this, as it were, concentric attack, that the strength and invincibility of the German movement lies." (Lenin 1973b, 372)

12. See also Blackburn (1976, 3-36).

13. Lenin wrote:

The Social-Democratic movement is in its very essence an international movement. This means, not only that we must combat national chauvinism, but that an incipient movement in a young country can be successful only if it makes use of the experiences of other countries. In order to make use of these experiences it is not enough merely to be acquainted with them, or simply to copy out the latest resolutions. What is required is the ability to treat these experiences critically and to test them independently. (1973b, 370)

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