KARL MARX A Critical analysis by Raymond Aron.

I

It is really no more difficult to present Marx's leading ideas than those of Montesquieu or Comte; if only there were not so many millions of Marxists, there would be no question at all about what Marx's leading ideas are or what is central to his thought.

Marx was, first and foremost, the sociologist and economist of the capitalist regime. He had a certain conception of that regime, of the destiny it imposed upon men, and of the evolution it would undergo. As sociologist-economist of the regime he called capitalist, he had no precise image of what the socialist regime would be, and he repeatedly said that man cannot know the future in advance. It is of no great interest, therefore, to wonder whether, if Marx were alive, he would be a Stalinist, a Trotskyite, a Khrushchevian, a Maoist, or something else. Marx had the fortune, or misfortune, to live a century ago. He gave no answers to the questions we are asking today. We can give those answers for him, but they are our answers and not his. To wonder what Marx would have thought, had he lived in another century, is like wondering what another Marx would have thought, instead of the real Marx. An answer is possible, but it is problematical and of questionable interest.

Nevertheless, it is certainly a complicating fact that today almost a billion human beings are taught a doctrine which, rightly or wrongly, is labeled Marxist. A certain interpretation of Marx's doctrine has become the official ideology first of the Russian state, next of the states of Eastern Europe, and finally of the Chinese state. This official doctrine claims to give the true interpretation of Marx's thought, it is enough for a sociologist or, more modestly, a teacher to present a certain interpretation of Marx's thought for him to become, in the eyes of supporters of the official doctrine, a mouthpiece of the bourgeoisie, of capitalism, and of imperialism.

The official doctrine presents qualities of oversimplification and exaggeration inseparable from the fact of its being taught as a catechism to
mentalities of various sorts. However, there are also—outside the dominion of official Marxism—self-proclaimed Marxist thinkers who provide us with a series of interpretations, each more intelligent and ingenious than the last, of Marx’s innermost, ultimate thought. These interpretations have given rise to passionate debates, interesting publications, and learned controversies—all of which, however, belong more to cafe philosophy than to world history.

I shall not strive for a supremely ingenious interpretation of Marx. I believe that Marx's central ideas are simpler than many Marxists would have us think and that they are to be found, not in his youthful or marginal writings, but in those which he published and which he himself always regarded as the chief expression of his thought.

Not that there are no intrinsic difficulties. These difficulties have to do, first, with the fact that Marx was a prolific writer and that, as is sometimes the case with sociologists, he wrote both journalism and immense books of several hundred pages. Since he wrote a great deal, he did not always say the same thing on the same subject. With a little ingenuity and erudition, one can find Marxist formulas on most subjects which do not seem to agree, or which at least lend themselves to various interpretations.

Moreover, Marx's canon includes works of sociological theory, economic theory, and history, and sometimes the explicit theory to be found in the scientific writings seems to be contradicted by the implicit theory employed in the books of history. For example, Marx offered a certain conception of class; but when he analyzed historically the class struggle in France between 1848 and 1850 or the coup d'etat of Napoleon III or the history of the Commune, the classes which he recognized and to which he assigned roles in the drama are not necessarily those implied by his theory.

Besides the diversity of works, we must take into consideration the diversity of periods. There has been a general agreement to distinguish two main divisions. The first, the so-called youthful period, comprises the writings between 1841 and 1847 or 1848. Among the writings of this stage, some were published during Marx's lifetime: short articles or essays like the Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law or the essay on The Jewish Question.
Among the more important works of this period which were known for some time are *The Holy Family* and a polemic against Proudhon entitled *The Poverty of Philosophy*, a reply to Proudhon’s book *The Philosophy of Poverty*. The other writings of this period were not published until long after Marx’s death, because publication of the whole body of his work dates from 1931. It is only after this date that there arose a whole literature reinterpreting Marx’s thought in the light of his youthful writings. Among these writings that have received considerable attention, there are fragments of a critique of Hegel’s philosophy of law, a text entitled *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and finally a very important work entitled *The German Ideology*.

This youthful period is thought to end with *The German Ideology*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and, above all, the famous little classic called *The Communist Manifesto*, a masterpiece of the sociological literature of propaganda in which Marx’s leading ideas are set forth for the first time, in a manner both lucid and impressive. It might be said that, from 1848 until the end of his life, Marx apparently ceased to be a philosopher and became a sociologist and, above all, an economist. The majority of those who now declare themselves to be more or less Marxists have the annoying peculiarity of being ignorant of the political economy of our age; Marx did not share this weakness. He had received an admirable economic education and knew the economic thinking of his time as few men did. He was, and wanted to be, an economist in the strict and scientific sense of the word.

In this second period of his life, his two most important works are an 1859 text entitled *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and, of course, Marx’s masterpiece, the heart of his thought, *Capital*.

Marx had a certain philosophical vision of the historical process. That he gave the contradictions of capitalism a philosophical significance is possible and even probable. But the essence of Marx’s scientific effort has been to demonstrate scientifically what was for him the inevitable evolution of the capitalist system. Any interpretation of Marx which finds no place for *Capital*, or is able to summarize it in a few pages, is a deviation from what Marx himself thought and desired.
It is always possible to say that the great thinker misunderstood himself and that the essential texts are those he scorned to publish. But one must be very sure of one's genius to be convinced of understanding a great writer so much better than he understood himself. When one is less sure of one's genius, it is better to begin by understanding the writer as he understood himself and thus to assign the central place in Marxism to *Capital*, and not to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* or *The German Ideology*, the incomplete (though perhaps highly original) rough drafts of a young man speculating on Hegel and capitalism at a time when he certainly knew Hegel better than he knew capitalism.

I shall therefore begin my own analysis of Marx with Marx's mature thought, i.e., with 1848, and it is in *The Communist Manifesto*, the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and *Capital* that I shall seek Marx's own thought; I shall reserve for later an inquiry into the philosophical background of his historic-sociological concepts.

One last remark, before beginning my exposition. For over a century, many schools shared a tendency to call themselves Marxist, although they offered different versions of his thought. In my exposition, I shall not attempt to judge their merit. Instead, I shall try to show why the themes of Marx's thought are simple and deceptively clear but lend themselves to interpretations among which it is impossible to choose with certainty. Any theory that becomes the ideology of a political movement or the official doctrine of a state must lend itself to simplification for the simple and to subtlety for the subtle. There is no question that Marx's thought presents these virtues in the highest degree.

As I have said, Marx's thought is an analysis and an interpretation of capitalist society in terms of its current functioning, its present structure, and its necessary evolution. Auguste Comte had developed a theory of what he called industrial society, that is, of the major characteristics of all modern societies. The essential antithesis in Comte's thinking is between the feudal, military, theological societies of the past and the industrial and scientific societies of the present. Unquestionably Marx, too, believed that modern societies are industrial and scientific in comparison with past
military and theological societies. But instead of assigning the central position in his interpretation to the antimony between the societies of the past and the societies of the present, Marx assigned it to the contradiction, in his eyes inherent in modern society, which he called capitalism.

While in positivism the conflicts between labor and management are marginal phenomena, imperfections of industrial society which are relatively easy to correct, in Marx's thought conflicts between labor and management—or, to use the Marxist vocabulary, between the proletariat and the capitalists—are the major fact of modern societies, the one that reveals the essential nature of these societies and thereby enables us to anticipate their historical development. Marx's thought is an interpretation of the contradictory or antagonistic character of capitalist society. In a certain sense, Marx's whole canon is an attempt to show that this antagonistic character is inseparable from the fundamental structure of the capitalist system and is, at the same time, the mechanism of the historic movement.

I shall present rapidly the major ideas first of *The Communist Manifesto*, next of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and finally of *Capital*. These three famous texts are three ways of explaining, establishing, and describing the antagonistic character of the capitalist system.

If it is clearly understood that the center of Marx's thought is his assertion of the antagonistic character of the capitalist system, then it is immediately apparent why it is impossible to separate the analyst of capitalism from the prophet of socialism or, again, the sociologist from the man of action; for to show the antagonistic character of the capitalist system irresistibly leads to predicting the self-destruction of capitalism and thence to urging men to contribute something to the fulfillment of this prearranged destiny.

*The Communist Manifesto* is a propaganda pamphlet in which Marx and Engels presented some of their scientific ideas in collective form. Its central theme is the class struggle. All history is the history of the class struggle: free men and slaves, patricians and plebeians, barons and serfs, master artisans and journeymen—in short, oppressors and oppressed—have
been in constant opposition to one another and have carried on an unceasing struggle, at times secret, at times open, which has always ended with a revolutionary transformation, of the whole society or with the mutual destruction of the warring classes.

Here, then, is the first decisive idea: human history is characterized by the struggle of human groups which will be called social classes, whose definition remains for a moment ambiguous, but which are characterized in the first place by an antagonism between oppressors and oppressed and in the second place by a tendency toward a polarization into two blocs, and only two.

All societies having been divided into warring classes, modern capitalist society does not differ from those that preceded it. But the ruling and exploiting class of modern society, namely the bourgeoisie, presents certain characteristics which are without precedent.

The bourgeoisie is incapable of maintaining its ascendancy without permanently revolutionizing the instruments of production. The bourgeoisie, said Marx, has developed the forces of production further in a few decades than previous societies have done in many centuries. Engaged in merciless competition, the capitalists are incapable of not revolutionizing the means of production. The bourgeoisie is creating a world market; it is destroying the remnants of the feudal system and the traditional communities. But just as the forces of production which gave rise to the capitalist regime had developed in the heart of feudal society, so the forces of production which will give rise to the socialist regime are ripening in the heart of modern society.

What is the basis of this antagonism characteristic of capitalist society? It is the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production. The bourgeoisie is constantly creating more powerful means of production. But the relations of production—that is, apparently, both the relations of ownership and the distribution of income—are not transformed at the same rate. The capitalist system is able to produce more and more, but in spite of this increase in wealth, poverty remains the lot of the majority. This contradiction will eventually produce a revolutionary crisis. The proletariat, which constitutes and will increasingly constitute the vast majority of the
population, will become a class, that is, a social entity aspiring to the seizure of power and the transformation of social relations. But the revolution of the proletariat will differ in kind from all past revolutions. All the revolutions of the past were accomplished by minorities for the benefit of minorities. The revolution of the proletariat will be accomplished by the vast majority for the benefit of all. The proletarian revolution will therefore mark the end of classes and of the antagonistic character of capitalist society.

Marx did not deny that between capitalists and proletarians there are today a number of intermediate groups—artisans, petite bourgeoisie, merchants, peasant landowners. But he made two statements. First, along with the evolution of the capitalist regime there will be a tendency toward crystallization of social relations into two groups, and only two: the capitalists on the one hand, and the proletarians on the other. Two classes, and only two, represent a possibility for a political regime and an idea of a social regime. On the day of the decisive conflict, every man will be obliged to join either the capitalists or the proletarians. On the day when the proletarian class seizes power, there will be a final break with the course of all previous history. In fact, the antagonistic character of all known societies will disappear.

We read at the end of the second chapter of The Communist Manifesto:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contact with the bourgeoisie is compelled by the force of circumstances to organize itself into a class; if by means of a revolution it makes itself into the ruling class and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.
In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

This passage is altogether characteristic of one of the essential themes of Marx's theory. We have seen from Comte's positivism that the writers of the early nineteenth century had a tendency to regard politics or the state as a phenomenon secondary to the essential, economic or social, phenomena. Marx belonged to this general trend, and he, too, regarded politics and the state as phenomena secondary to what is happening within the society itself.

As a consequence, he presented political power as the expression of social conflicts. Political power is the means by which the ruling class, the exploiting class, maintains its domination and its exploitation. According to this line of thought, the abolition of class contradictions must logically entail the disappearance of politics and of the state, because politics and the state are seemingly the by-products or the expressions of social conflicts.

Such are the themes of Marx's historical vision and of his political propaganda. The aim of his science is to provide a strict demonstration of the antagonistic character of capitalist society, the inevitable self-destruction of an antagonistic society, and the revolutionary explosion that will put an end to the antagonistic character of modern society.

II

I have suggested that the center of Marx's thought was his interpretation of the capitalist system as contradictory, i.e., as dominated by the class struggle. Auguste Comte thought that the society of his age lacked consensus because of the juxtaposition of institutions dating from theological and feudal societies and institutions belonging to industrial society. Observing the lack of consensus about him, he turned to the past for a demonstration of the principles of consensus in historical societies. Marx observed—or thought he of the forces of production, a stage in the course of a progressive history.

Fifth, this dialectic of the forces and relations of production also implies a theory of revolution. For in this vision of history, revolutions are not political accidents, but the expression of a historical necessity. Revolutions perform necessary functions. Revolutions occur when the conditions for
them are given. Remember the key sentence: "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed; and the new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society."

Capitalist relations of production were first developed in the womb of feudal society. The French Revolution occurred when the new, capitalist relations of production had attained a certain degree of maturity. And, at least in this passage, Marx foresaw an analogous process for the transition from capitalism to socialism. The forces of production must be developed in the womb of capitalist society; socialist relations of production must mature in the womb of the present society before the revolution which will mark the end of "prehistory" is to occur. It is because of this theory of revolution that the Second International, social democracy, tended toward a relatively passive attitude; the forces and relations of production of the future had to be allowed to mature before a revolution could be accomplished. Mankind, said Marx, always takes up only such problems as it can solve: social democracy was afraid of bringing about the revolution too soon, which explains why it never did; but that is another matter.

Sixth, in this historical interpretation, Marx not only distinguished infrastructure and superstructure; he also opposed social reality to consciousness. It is not men's consciousness that determines reality; on the contrary, it is the social reality that determines their consciousness. This results in an over-all conception in which men's ways of thinking must be explained in terms of the social relations of which they are a part. Statements of this land may provide a basis for what is referred to today as the sociology of knowledge.

Finally, a last theme contained in this passage: Marx sketched the stages of human history. Just as Auguste Comte differentiated moments of human evolution on the basis of ways of thinking, so Marx differentiated stages of human history on the basis of their economic regimes; and he distinguished four of these or, in his terminology, four modes of production which he called the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the bourgeois.
These four modes may be divided into two groups. The ancient, feudal, and bourgeois modes of production have been realized in the history of the West. They are the three stages of Western history, and each is characterized by the type of relationship among the men who work. The ancient mode of production is characterized by slavery, the feudal mode of production by serfdom, and the bourgeois mode of production by wage earning. They constitute three distinct modes of man's exploitation by man. The bourgeois mode of production constitutes the last antagonistic social formation because, or rather to the extent that, the socialist mode of production, i.e., the association of producers, no longer involves man's exploitation by man or the subordination of manual laborers to a class wielding both ownership of the means of production and political power.

On the other hand, the Asiatic mode of production does not seem to constitute a stage in Western history. Hence Marx's interpreters have endlessly debated the unity or non-unity of the historical process. For if the Asiatic mode of production characterizes a civilization distinct from the West, it is probable that several lines of historical evolution are possible, depending on the human group in question. Moreover, the Asiatic mode of production does not seem to be distinguished by the subordination of slaves, serfs, or wage earners to a class possessing the instruments of production, but by the subordination of all the workers to the state. If this interpretation of the Asiatic mode of production is correct, the social structure would be characterized not by class struggle in the Western sense of the term, but by the exploitation of the whole society by the state or the bureaucratic class.

You see what use can be made of the notion of the Asiatic mode of production. Indeed, it is conceivable that in the event of the socialization of the means of production, capitalism might result, not in the end of all exploitation, but in the spread of the Asiatic mode of production to all mankind. These sociologists who dislike Soviet society have commented at length on these passing remarks on the Asiatic mode of production. They have even found in Lenin certain passages expressing the fear that a socialist revolution might result, not in the end of man's exploitation by
man, but in the Asiatic mode of production, and from the passages they have drawn conclusions whose political nature may be readily divined.²

But for the moment we are not concerned with these political conclusions. Rather, we must recognize the fact that Marx, considering that each society is characterized by its infrastructure or mode of production, distinguished four modes of production, or four stages in the history of mankind, prior to the socialist mode of production, which is situated beyond "prehistory."

Such, in my opinion, are the leading ideas of Marx's economic interpretation of history. We have not been concerned with such a complex philosophical problem as: To what extent is this economic interpretation separable or inseparable from a materialist metaphysic? For the moment, let us confine ourselves to the leading ideas which are obviously those Marx expounded and which, moreover, admit of a certain degree of obscurity or ambiguity, inasmuch as the exact definitions of infrastructure and superstructure may constitute—and have constituted—the subject of endless debate.

Let us now turn to the second task on our agenda, namely, Capital. Capital has been the subject of two kinds of interpretation. For some—Schumpeter most recently—it is essentially a book of scientific, economics without philosophical implications. For others, it is a kind of phenomenological or existential analysis of economics, and a few passages which lend themselves to a philosophical interpretation—for example, the chapter on commodity fetishism—supposedly provide the key to Marx's thought. Without entering into these controversies, I shall offer my own personal interpretation.

In my opinion, Marx regarded himself as a scientific economist. In the manner of the English economists on whom he was raised, he thought of himself as both heir to and critic of English political economy. He was convinced that he retained whatever is best in this economics, at the same time correcting its errors and transcending those limitations which may be imputed to the capitalist or bourgeois point of view. When Marx analyzed value, exchange, exploitation, surplus value, and profit, he wanted to be a pure economist, and he would not have dreamed of justifying some scientifically inaccurate or questionable statement by invoking a
philosophical Intent. Marx took science seriously, and I think we must do likewise.

But Marx was not an English economist, of strict observance for a couple of very specific reasons which he has, in fact, indicated, and we need only recognize these in order to understand how to classify his work.

Marx reproached the classical economists for having considered the laws of capitalist economy universally valid. According to him, each economic regime has its own economic laws. The economic laws of the classical economists are, in the circumstances in which they are true, merely the laws of the capitalist regime. Hence the first important modification: we shift from the idea of an economic theory which is universally valid to the idea of the specificity of the economic laws of each regime.

Second, a given economic regime cannot be understood apart from its social structure. There are economic laws characteristic of each regime, because economic laws are, observed—a class struggle in capitalist society, and he rediscovered in the different societies of history the equivalent of the class struggle.

According to Marx, the class struggle tends toward a simplification. The different social groups will be polarized; some around the bourgeoisie, others around the proletariat, and it is the development of the forces of production that will be the mechanism of the historical movement. This movement will result, through proletarization and pauperization, in a revolutionary explosion and the advent, for the first time in history, of a society without conflict.

Starting with these general themes of Marx's historical interpretation, we have two questions to answer. First, what is Marx's general theory of society which accounts both for the contradictions of present society and for the antagonistic character of all known societies? Second, what are the structure, the mode of operation, and the specific evolution of capitalist society which explain the modern class struggle and the revolutionary outcome of the capitalist system?

In other words, beginning with the Marxist themes we find in *The Communist Manifesto*, we must explain: (1) the general theory of society commonly called *historical materialism* or, more recently, *dialectical*
materialism and (2) Marx's essential economic ideas as they are found in *Capital*. To simplify the exposition, I shall quote a famous passage—probably the most famous in Marx—which occurs in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in which Marx summarized his sociological conception as a whole:

The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once obtained, served, to guide me in my studies, may be summarized as follows. In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work. From forms of development of the forces of production, these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformation the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we cannot judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the
contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and the new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. Therefore, mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the modern bourgeois methods of production as so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production—antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from conditions surrounding the life of individuals in society; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation constitutes, therefore, the closing chapter of the prehistoric stage of human society.

This passage contains all the essential ideas of Marx's economic interpretation of history— with the sole reservation, to which I call attention that neither the concept of class nor the concept of class struggle figures in it explicitly.

The first and essential idea is that men enter into definite relations that are independent of their will. In other words, we can follow the movement of history by analyzing the structure of societies, the forces of production, and the relations of production, and not by basing our interpretation on men's ways of thinking about themselves. There are social relations which, impose themselves on individuals exclusive of their preferences, and an understanding of the historical process depends on our awareness of these supra-individual social relations.
Second, in every society there can be distinguished the economic base, or infrastructure, as it has come to be called, and the superstructure. The infrastructure consists essentially of the forces and relations of production, while within the superstructure figure the legal and political institutions as well as ways of thinking, ideologies, and philosophies.

Third, the mechanism of the historical movement is the contradiction, at certain moments in evolution, between the forces and the relations of production. The forces of production seem to be essentially a given society's capacity to produce, a capacity which is a function of scientific knowledge, technological equipment, and the organization of collective labor. The relations of production, which are not too precisely defined in the passage I have quoted, seem to be essentially distinguished by relations of property. Indeed, we have the formula, "existing relations of production, or —what is but a legal expression for the same thing— . . . the property relations within which they had been at work." However, relations of production need not be identified with relations of property; or at any rate relations of production may include, in addition, to property relations, distribution of national income (which is itself more or less strictly determined by property relations).

Fourth, into this contradiction between forces and relations of production it is easy to introduce the class struggle, although, again, the passage I have quoted does not refer to it. Indeed, we need merely suppose that in revolutionary periods—that is, periods of contradiction between the forces and relations of production—one class is attached to the old relations of production which are becoming an obstacle to the development of the forces of production, and another class, on the contrary, is progressive and represents new relations of production which, instead of being an obstacle in the way of the development of the forces of production, will favor the maximum growth of those forces.

If we turn from these abstract formulas to the interpretation of capitalism, the result is as follows: In capitalist society, the bourgeoisie is attached to private ownership of the means of production and therefore to a certain distribution of national income. On the other hand, the proletariat, which constitutes the opposite pole of society and represents another organization
of the collectivity, becomes, at a certain moment in history, the representative of a new social organization which will be more progressive than the capitalist organization. This new organization will mark a later phase of the historical process, a further development so to speak, the abstract expression of the social relations that define a certain mode of production. For example, in the capitalist regime, as we shall see, it is the social structure which explains the essential economic phenomenon of exploitation, and similarly it is the social structure which determines the inevitable self-destruction of the capitalist regime.

In other words, *Capital* represents an impressive attempt—and an attempt of genius, in the strict sense of the word—to account simultaneously for the mode of functioning of capitalism, the social structure of the capitalist regime, and the history of capitalism. Marx was an economist who wanted to be a sociologist at the same time: beginning with the understanding of how capitalism functions, we see why men are exploited in the regime of private ownership and why this regime is doomed by its contradictions to evolve toward a revolution which will destroy it.

The analysis of the functioning and evolution of capitalism also provides a sort of history of mankind in terms of modes of production. *Capital* is a book of economics which is at the same time a sociology of capitalism and also a philosophical history of man, caught up in his own conflicts until the end of prehistory.

I have said that this attempt is impressive, but I hasten to add that I do not think *it* is successful. No attempt of this kind has succeeded to date. By this I mean that today's economic or sociological knowledge makes use of valid partial analyses of capitalism's mode of functioning, of valid sociological analyses of the destiny of men or of classes in a capitalist regime, of certain historical analyses which account for the transformation of the capitalist regime—but there is no over-all theory uniting in a necessary way social structure, mode of functioning, the destiny of men in the regime, and the evolution of the regime. Why is there no theory that succeeds in encompassing the whole? Perhaps because this whole does not exist; that is, perhaps because history is not rational and "necessary" to this degree.
However this may be, to understand *Capital* is to understand how Marx sought to analyze simultaneously the functioning and the evolution of the regime and to describe the destiny of mankind within the regime.

As you know, *Capital* consists of three volumes. Only the first volume was published by Marx himself; Volumes II and III are posthumous. They were culled by Engels from Marx's many manuscripts and are far from being complete. The interpretations to be found in Volumes II and III are open to question because certain passages seem contradictory. I have no intention of summarizing here the whole of *Capital*, but it does not seem impossible to select the essential themes which are those Marx emphasized and are also those that have had the most influence in history.

The first theme, present from the beginning of *Capital*, is that the essence of capitalism is above all the pursuit of profit. Capitalism, insofar as it is based on private ownership of the *means* of production, is also based on the pursuit of profit by the entrepreneurs or producers.

When, in his last work, Stalin wrote that the fundamental law of capitalism was pursuit of maximum profit, while the fundamental law of socialism was satisfaction of the needs of the masses and the raising of their cultural level, he of course vulgarized Marx's theory from the level of higher education down to the level of elementary education, but he did retain the initial theme of Marxist analysis which is found in the first pages of *Capital*.³ These pages contrast the two modes of exchange. There is one type of exchange which proceeds from commodity to commodity by way of money. You possess goods for which you have no use, and you exchange them for goods which you need, giving the goods you had to someone who wants them. This exchange may operate in a direct manner, in which case it is barter; or it may operate in an indirect manner, by way of money, which is the universal equivalent for merchandise.

The exchange which proceeds from commodity to commodity might be regarded as the immediately intelligible, immediately human exchange, but it is also the exchange which does not release any profit or surplus. As long as you proceed from commodity to commodity, you are in a relation of equality.
There is, however, a second type of exchange, one that proceeds from money to money by way of commodity and which has this peculiarity: that at the end of the process of exchange you have a greater sum of money than you had initially. Now, this type of exchange—proceeding from money to money by way of commodity—is the exchange characteristic of capitalism. In capitalism, the entrepreneur or producer does not proceed by way of money from a commodity he does not need to another commodity he does need; the essence of capitalist exchange is to proceed from money to money by way of commodity and to end up with more money than one had at the outset.

This type of exchange is in Marx's eyes the capitalist exchange par excellence and is also the most mysterious type of exchange. How is it that one can acquire something by exchange which one did not possess to begin with, or at least have more than one had to begin with? This leads to what is for Marx the central problem of capitalism, which might be stated as follows: Where does profit come from? How can there be a regime in which the essential impulse to activity is the pursuit of profit and in which producers and merchants are able, for the most part, to make a profit?

Marx is convinced that he has found a satisfactory answer to this question. By means of the theory of surplus value, he proves both that everything is exchanged at its value and that nevertheless there is a source of profit. The stages of this demonstration are these: theory of value, theory of wages, and finally surplus value.

First proposition: The value of any commodity is roughly proportional to the quantity of average human labor contained in it. This is what is called the theory of value.

Second proposition: The value of labor is measured in the same way as the value of any commodity. The wage the capitalist pays the wage earner in compensation for the labor power the latter rents to him is equal to the amount of human labor necessary to produce the merchandise indispensable for the existence of the worker and his family. Human labor is paid at its value, in conformity with the general law of value valid for all commodities.
Third proposition: The labor time necessary for the worker to produce a value equal to the one he receives in the form of wages is less than the actual duration of his work. Let us say that the worker produces in five hours a value equal to the one contained in his wage, and that he works ten hours. Thus he works half of his time for himself and the other half for the entrepreneur. Let us use the term "surplus value" to refer to the quantity of value produced by the worker beyond the necessary labor time, meaning \textit{by the latter the working time} required to produce a value equal to the one he has received in the form of wages.

Thus we understand the origin of profit and how an economic system in which everything is exchanged at its value is at the same time \textit{capable of} producing surplus value, i.e. —on the level of the entrepreneurs—profit. There is a commodity which has the peculiarity of being paid at its value and at the same time of producing more than its value: namely, human labor.

It is easy to see how delighted Marx was with an analysis of this kind which seemed absolutely scientific, because \textit{(a)} it explained profit in terms of an inevitable mechanism inherent in the capitalist regime, and \textit{(b)} this same analysis lent itself to a denunciation and vituperation of capitalism, since it showed that the worker was exploited, that he worked part of his time for himself and the other part of his time for the capitalist or the entrepreneur. Marx was a scientist, but he was also a political prophet.

III

The Propositions that constitute the Marxist theory of exploitation may be summed up as follows:

(1) The value of a commodity is roughly proportionate to the quantity of average human labor power crystallized in it.

(2) Labor power is rented at its value, and the value of labor power is determined by the value of those articles indispensable to the life of the worker and his family.
(3) The necessary quantity of work—i.e., the quantity of work needed to produce the value in the merchandise indispensable to the life of the worker and his family—is less than the total working day. As a consequence, the worker works part of the day for himself—that is, to produce a quantity of value equal to the one he receives in the form of wages—and another part of the day to produce the surplus value which will be appropriated by his employer.

(4) The part of the working day necessary to produce the value crystallized in his wage is called "necessary labor time"; the rest is called "surplus labor time." The value produced in surplus labor time is called "surplus value." And the rate of exploitation is defined by the relation between surplus value and the wages paid.

This theory of exploitation had a double virtue in Marx's eyes. First, according to him, it solves a problem inherent in the capitalist economy which may be formulated as follows: If there is equality of value in exchange, where does profit come from? Marx felt that, while solving a scientific enigma, he was also providing a logical basis for his protest against a certain kind of economic organization. Secondly, his theory of exploitation provided what we would call a sociological basis for the economic laws of the operation of the capitalist economy. Marx believed that economic laws are historical and that each economic regime has its own laws. His theory of exploitation is an example of such a historical law, because the mechanism of surplus value and exploitation presupposes the division of society into classes—of which one, that of the entrepreneurs or owners of the means of production, rents the labor power of the other, the workers—and the relation between these two classes is a social relation—a relation of power between two social categories.

How did Marx try to prove the propositions necessary to his theory of exploitation? The first proposition to be proved was that commodities are exchanged according to the quantity of average social labor crystallized in each. Marx did not claim that the law of value is exactly respected in every exchange the price of a commodity fluctuates above and below its value according to the state of supply and demand. These fluctuations were not only not unknown to Marx; they were clearly stated by him. Further, Marx acknowledged that a commodity has value only to the extent that there is a
demand for it. In other words, if a certain quantity of labor were crystallized in a commodity but no purchasing power were brought to bear on it, this commodity would cease to have value. Stated differently, the proportionality between value and quantity of labor presupposes, as it were, a normal demand for the commodity in question (and this, in effect, amounts to brushing aside one of the factors responsible for the fluctuations in price of the commodity).

Let us assume a normal demand for the commodity in question. Now, according to Marx, there is certain proportionality between the value of this commodity, as expressed by its price, and the quantity of average social labor crystallized in the commodity.

Why is this case? The main argument Marx gave is that labor is the only quantifiable element to be found in merchandise. If you consider use value, you are in the presence of a strictly qualitative element: there is no way to compare the usefulness of a fountain pen and the usefulness of a bicycle. Since we are seeking a basis for the exchange value of merchandise, we must find an element that is quantifiable, like the value itself. And the only quantifiable element, according to Marx, is the amount of labor contained, incorporated, or crystallized in each commodity.

Naturally there are difficulties which Marx himself recognized. Thus, the labor of the unskilled worker does not have the same value or the same creative potential of value as the labor of the foreman or the engineer. Admitting these qualitative differences, Marx added that one need only reduce these different kinds of labor to a unity, which is average social labor.

The second proposition—namely, that the value of labor is equal to the quantity of goods indispensable to the life of the worker and his family—Marx gave as self-evident. (Ordinarily, when a proposition is given as self-evident, it is because it is open to debate.) Marx says that since the worker comes to the labor market in order to rent out his labor power, the latter must be exchanged at its own value. And, he says, this value must be measured in this case as it is in all cases, i.e., by the quantity of labor needed to produce it. Since Marx is interested in social rather than biological science, he interprets human reproduction as equivalent to human survival. Thus the quantity of labor which will measure the value of...
labor power is that of the commodities the worker and his family need to survive.

The trouble with this proposition is that, whereas the theory of labor value is based on the quantifiable character of labor as a basis of value, in the case of the goods necessary to the life of the worker and his family, we leave the realm of the quantifiable. The necessary minimum will vary from person to person, time to time, social circumstance to social circumstance. This has led Schumpeter to declare that the second proposition of the theory of exploitation is merely a play on words.

If we accept the first two propositions, the third follows on one condition: that the labor time necessary to produce the value embodied in the wage be lower than the total labor time; that is, that there be a discrepancy between the working day and necessary labor time. Marx took this discrepancy between the working day and necessary labor time for granted. He was convinced that the working day in his time, which was ten and sometimes twelve hours, was manifestly higher than the labor time necessary to create the value embodied in the wage itself.

From this, Marx developed a casuistry of the struggle over labor time. There are two fundamental methods of increasing the rate of exploitation: one consists in increasing labor time, which, in the Marxists' schema, results in greater surplus labor time; the other consists in reducing necessary labor time to a minimum. One of the ways of reducing necessary labor time is by increased productivity, that is, by producing a value equal to that, of the wage in fewer hours. Hence the mechanism that accounts for the tendency of a capitalist economy constantly to increase the productivity of labor; for an increase in the productivity of labor automatically reduces necessary labor time and, therefore, assuming the continuation of the level of nominal wages, increases the rate of surplus value.

Up to now I have discussed only the first volume of Capital, which is, you will remember, the only one published during Marx's lifetime. The two subsequent volumes consist of Marx's manuscripts, as published by Engels. The subject of Volume II is the circulation of capital; it was to have explained how the capitalist economic system operated as a whole. In modern terminology we might say that, beginning with this microeconomic
analysis of the structure and operation of capitalism in Volume II, Marx would have elaborated a macroeconomic theory comparable to Quesnay's Tableau Economique, with the addition of a theory of crisis. As a matter of fact, there are, scattered throughout Volume II of Capital, many elements of a theory of crises. But these elements do not themselves add up to a theory. It is possible, on the basis of the scattered indications in the second volume, to reconstruct and attribute various such theories to Marx. The only idea beyond question is that, according to Marx, the competitive, anarchic character of the capitalist mechanism and the necessity for the circulation of capital create a permanent possibility of disproportion between production and purchasing power. This is tantamount to saying that, essentially, an anarchic economy is characterized by crises. Are these crises regular or irregular? What is the combination of economic circumstances in which a crisis breaks out? On all these points, Marx gives hints rather than a precise theory.¹

The third volume of Capital is basically the outline for a theory of the evolution of the capitalist regime, beginning with an analysis of its structure and operation. The central problem of the third volume is as follows. According to the plan of the first volume of Capital, in a given enterprise or a given sector of the economy, the more labor there is, the higher the surplus value; or again defining labor as "variable capital," the higher the ratio of variable to total capital, the higher the surplus value. In the schematism of the first volume, "constant capital"—the machines or the raw material—is transferred into the value of the goods without creating surplus value. All the surplus value proceeds from variable capital, or the capital that corresponds to the payment of wages. (The relation of variable capital to constant capital is called "the organic composition of capital." The relation of surplus value to variable capital is called "the rate of exploitation." ) From this analytic relationship, one must conclude that in a given enterprise or sector, the more variable capital there is, the more surplus value there will be. In other words, there should be less and less surplus value as mechanization increases. Only it is obvious that this is not the case.
Marx was perfectly aware of the fact that appearances in the economy seem to contradict the fundamental relations he laid down in his schematic analysis. Until the third volume of *Capital* was published, Marxists and their critics both grappled with the question: If the Marxist theory of exploitation is correct, why is it that the enterprises and sectors with the highest ratio of constant to variable capital make the most profit? In other words, the apparent mode of profit seems to contradict the essential mode of surplus value.

Marx's answer is that the rate of profit is calculated, not in relation to variable capital, as is the rate of exploitation, but in relation to capital as a whole, i.e., the sum of constant capital and variable capital.

Why is it that the rate of profit is proportional not to surplus value but to the sum of constant and variable capital? Obviously, capitalism could not function if the rate of profit were proportional to variable capital. Indeed, there would be an extreme irregularity in the rate of profit, because the organic composition of capital, i.e., the relation of variable capital to constant capital, differs greatly from one sector of the economy to another. Thus, since the capitalist regime could not function otherwise, the rate of profit is actually proportional to capital as a whole and not to variable capital.

But why is it that the appearance of the mode of profit differs from the essential reality of the mode of surplus value? There are two answers to this question: the answer of the non-Marxists or anti-Marxists, and the official answer of Marx.

The answer of an economist like Schumpeter is simple: the theory of surplus value is false. That the appearance of profit is in direct contradiction to the essence of surplus value proves that the schematism of surplus value does not correspond to reality. When one begins with a theory and then discovers that reality contradicts this theory, one can, of course, reconcile the theory with reality by introducing a certain number of supplementary hypotheses; but there is another, more logical solution, which consists in recognizing that the theoretical schematism was badly constructed.

Marx's answer was that since capitalism could not function if the rate of profit were proportional to surplus value, an average rate of profit is
substituted in each economy. This average rate of profit is a result of the competition between the enterprises and sectors of the economy. Competition forces profit to tend toward an average rate: there is no proportionality of rate of profit to surplus value in each enterprise or in each sector; but the total surplus value constitutes, for the economy as a whole, a sort of grand sum which is distributed among the sectors in proportion to the total capital, constant and variable, invested in each sector.

Why is this true? Because it cannot be otherwise; because if there were too great a disparity between rates of profit in different sectors, the system would not function. If there were a rate of profit of 30 percent or 40 percent in one sector and a rate of profit of 3 2 percent or 4 percent in another, capital could not be found to invest in the sectors where the rate of profit was low. Therefore, there must be established, through competition, an average rate of profit so that in the end the total surplus value is distributed among the sectors according to the amount of capital invested in each.

This theory of profit provides us with one of the main propositions of Marxist economics and also leads to the theory of evolution—what Marx called the law of "the falling tendency of the rate of profit."

Marx's point of departure was an observation which all the economists of his day made (or thought they made), according to which there was a perennial tendency toward a decline in the rate of profit. Marx, always eager to show the English economists how superior he was to them, thanks to his method, believed that in his schematism he had discovered the explanation for the historical phenomenon of the falling tendency of the rate of profit.³

Now, going back to elementary propositions: Average profit is proportional to capital as a whole, i.e., to the sum of constant capital and variable capital. But we also know that surplus value is deducted only from variable capital, i.e., human labor. We know further that the organic composition of capital changes with capitalist evolution and the mechanization of production and that the proportion of variable capital to total capital tends to diminish. This leads Marx to conclude that the rate of profit tends to decline proportionately as the organic composition of capital is altered, i.e., as the proportion of variable capital to total capital in reduced.
This law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit gave Marx a certain purely intellectual satisfaction, for he believed that he had demonstrated in a scientifically satisfactory manner a fact noted by observers but never, or badly, explained. In addition, he believed he had rediscovered what, his master Hegel would have called "the cunning of Reason," that is, the self-destruction of capitalism by an inexorable mechanism functioning both through and beyond human influence. The competitive mechanism of an economy based on profit leads to the accumulation of capital, the mechanization of production, the reduction of the proportion of variable capital to total capital: and this in turn leads to a fall in the rate of profit, which in its turn leads to the doom of capitalism. You see that once again we encounter the fundamental pattern of Marxist thought: historical necessity acting through the influence of men but at the same time transcending the influence of each man—a historical mechanism leading to the destruction of the regime because of the intrinsic laws of its operation.

In my opinion, the center and the originality of Marxist thought lies precisely in this avowal of a necessity which is, in a sense, human but at the same time transcends all individuals. Each man, acting rationally in his own interest, contributes to the destruction of the interest common to all (at least common to all those who are interested in safeguarding the regime). The proposition is a sort of inversion of the essential propositions of the liberal economists. In the liberals' ideal representation of the economic world, each man, working in his own interest, works in the interest of the group. For Marx, each man, working in his own interest, contributes both to the necessary functioning and to the final destruction of the regime. The myth is still that of *The Communist Manifesto*, that of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

There are several further ideas in *Capital* which I must mention before terminating this obviously brief and elementary analysis of the fundamental themes of the book and the problems it raises. Have we demonstrated yet that capitalism is self-destructive? What we have demonstrated is that the rate of profit tends to decline as a result of the modification of the organic composition of capital. But at what rate of profit is capitalism no longer capable of functioning? Strictly speaking, there is no answer to this in *Capital*, for no rational, schematic theory enables us to determine the
specific rate of profit indispensable to the functioning of a particular regime. In other words, strictly speaking, the law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit implies that the functioning of capitalism must become increasingly difficult, in proportion to mechanization or the increase of productivity. It does not demonstrate the inevitability of the final catastrophe; still less does it specify the moment it will occur. What, then, are the propositions which demonstrate the inevitable self-destruction of the capitalist system? Curiously, the only propositions which approach such a demonstration are the very ones to be found in *The Communist Manifesto* and in the works Marx wrote *before* he had made any detailed studies of political economy.

These propositions are those dealing with proletarianization and pauperization. Proletarianization means that, along with the development of the capitalist regime, the intermediate strata between capitalist and proletarians will be worn thin and that an increasing number of the representatives of these intermediate strata will be absorbed by the proletariat. Pauperization is the process by which the proletarians tend to grow poorer and poorer as the forces of production are developed. If we assume that, as more is produced, the purchasing power of the working masses is increasingly limited, it is indeed probable that the masses will have a tendency to rebel. According to this hypothesis, the mechanism of the self-destruction of capitalism is a sociological one and operates through the behavior of social groups.

There is also an alternative Marxist hypothesis: The income distributed to the masses is inadequate to absorb the increasing production, and there results a paralysis of the system, for the latter would be incapable of establishing an equilibrium between the commodities produced and the commodities demanded on the market by consumers.

There are, then, two possible representations of the capitalist dialectic of self-destruction: an economic dialectic, which is a new version of the contradiction between the constantly increasing forces of production and the relations of production that determine the income distributed to the masses, and a sociological dialectic functioning via the growing dissatisfaction and revolt of the proletarianized workers.
One question remains: How can pauperization be demonstrated, i.e., why in Marx's schematization must the income distributed to the workers diminish, absolutely or relatively, in proportion as the productive forces increase? It is not easy, even in Marx's scheme, to demonstrate pauperization. Now, according to *Capital*, the wage is equal to the quantity of commodities necessary to the life of the worker and his family. However, Marx hastened to add that what is necessary to the life of the worker and his family is not a matter of mathematically exact evaluation, but the result of a social evaluation which may change from society to society. But if we accept this social evaluation of the minimum standard of living, we must conclude that the workers' standard of living should rise. Indeed, it is likely that each society considers the minimum standard of living to be the one that corresponds to the productive possibilities of the society in question. Moreover, this is actually the case; the standard of living considered minimal in modern France or in the United States is considerably higher than it was a century ago.

Further, according to Marx himself, there is a way to raise the workers' standard of living without modifying the rate of exploitation. The increase in productivity need only permit the creation of a value equal to the wage in reduced necessary labor time. In the Marxist schema, productivity permits raising the workers' real standard of living without diminishing the rate of exploitation. Thus, given the increase of productivity and the consequent reduction of necessary labor time, you end by excluding the rise of the real standard of living only by a theoretical augmentation of the rate of exploitation. But according to Marx the rate of exploitation is not raised! According to Marx, the rate of exploitation, at different periods, is nearly constant.

In other words, if one follows the economic mechanism as Marx has analyzed it, there is no proof of proletarianization, and one should rather draw one's conclusions from experience, i.e., the rise of the workers' real standard of living as a result of the increase in productivity and the modification of the social evaluation of a minimum standard of living.

Whence did Marx derive his proof of pauperization? The only proof, in my opinion, operates via a social mechanism, that of the so-called
industrial reserve army. In Marxism, what prevents wages from rising is that there is a permanent surplus of unemployed manpower that weighs on the labor market and that modifies relations of exchange between capitalists and wage earners to the detriment of the workers.

In the theory of Capital, pauperization is not a strictly economic mechanism; it is an economic and sociological theory. Marx was not satisfied with the idea, common in his time, that, as soon as wages begin to rise, the birth rate increases and there also appears a surplus of workers on the labor market. There is also a second mechanism which is properly economic: The permanent mechanization of production tends to free a portion of the employed workers and as a result to create a kind of unemployment which today we call technological, that is, to create a reserve army which is the very expression of the mechanism whereby technologic and economic progress is made in capitalism. But, in that event, it is the sociological existence of the industrial reserve army that holds down the level of wages. Otherwise it would be possible to incorporate the historical fact of the workers’ higher standard of living into the Marxist scheme without relinquishing the essential elements of the theory—although it would remove the element of inevitability.

It was undoubtedly one of Marx’s ambitions to demonstrate that the destruction of capitalism was inevitable; My feeling is that, in Capital, reasons are given why the functioning of the system is difficult or, more accurately, why the functioning of the system becomes increasingly difficult, although this last proposition seems to me historically inaccurate. But it does seem to me that no proof of the self- destruction of capitalism is offered, unless it is via the revolt of the masses rebelling against their lot. If their lot should not, in fact, arouse extreme indignation, then Capital gives us no reason to believe that the destruction of the regime is in principle inevitable.

I hasten to add that all known economic and social systems were theoretically capable of surviving; nevertheless, they have disappeared. One ought not; draw any premature conclusions from the fact that the death of capitalism was not theoretically demonstrated by Marx, for regimes have a way of vanishing without having been condemned to death by theorists.
Why does Marx's historical sociology of capitalism permit so many different interpretations? Why is it so ambiguous? Leaving aside accidental, historical, posthumous reasons—among them the destinies of movements and societies which have, called themselves Marxist—the essential reasons for this ambiguity seem to me twofold. For one thing, the Marxist conception of capitalist society and of society in general, is sociological, but this sociology is related to a philosophy; and a number of interpretative difficulties arise from the relation of a philosophy to sociology. In addition, according to Marx, it is in terms of economic knowledge that a society as a whole is understood; but the relations between economics and sociology, or between economic phenomena and the social entity, are also ambiguous.

Let us start with a proposition that seems to me incontestable, or at least made obvious by all the texts. Marx came to political economy from philosophy by way of sociology, and until the end of his life he remained in a certain sense a philosopher. He always considered that the history of mankind, as it unfolds through the succession of regimes and culminates in a nonantagonistic society, had philosophical significance. It is through history that man creates himself. The culmination of history is at the same time a goal of philosophy. Through history, philosophy—by defining man—fulfills itself. The nonantagonistic, postcapitalist regime is not merely one social type among others; it is the goal, so to speak, of mankind's search for itself.

You will remember that I began my account of Marx with the mature works, or at least with those works written since 1847-1848. But there is a Marxian canon previous to this date, and I must now say a few words about the relation of Marxist thought to its philosophical origins.

Marx's thought is traditionally explained in terms of the conjunction of three influences, and it was Engels himself who named these three influences as decisive: German philosophy, English economics, and French history. This list of influences seems banal enough and is therefore scorned today by the more subtle interpreters. Let us begin with interpretations
which are not subtle, that is, with what Marx and Engels themselves said about the origins of their thought.

According to them, they were in the tradition of classic German philosophy, retaining one of the main ideas of Hegelian thought, namely, that the succession of societies and regimes also represents the stages of philosophy and the stages of mankind. Moreover, Marx studied the English economy; he availed himself of the ideas of the English economists; he adopted some of the accepted theories of his day: for example, the labor theory of value or the law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit. He believed that by adopting the concepts and theories of the English economists he would give a scientifically accurate formulation of capitalist economy.

As for the French historians, from them he borrowed, the notion of the class struggle, which in fact was to be found almost everywhere in the historical writings of the end of the eighteenth century; but Marx, according to his own testimony, added a new idea, namely, that the division of society into classes is not a phenomenon associated with the whole of history or the essence of society but one that corresponds to a given phase. In a subsequent phase, the divisions into classes will disappear.7

These "three influences certainly had their effect on Marx's thinking, and they provide a valid, if oversimplified, interpretation of the synthesis achieved by Marx and Engels. But this analysis of influences undoubtedly leaves most of the vital questions unanswered—especially the question of the relation between Hegel and Marx.

I shall not deal extensively with it here, for I should have to devote several hours to it and to presuppose the reader's familiarity with the works of Hegel, which would be unwise. I shall confine myself to a limited number of rather superficial remarks on the matter.

The first difficulty arises primarily from the fact that the interpretation of Hegel is at least as controversial as that of Marx. One may relate or contrast the two doctrines, depending on one's interpretation of Hegel's thought.

There is an easy way to produce a Hegelian Marx—which is to present a Marxist Hegel. This method is employed with a skill bordering on genius in Alexandre Kojeve's book Introduction a la Lecture de Hegel. Here Hegel is
Marxianized to such an extent that Marx's fidelity to Hegel's work can no longer be doubted.\textsuperscript{8}

On the other hand, when someone, like my colleague M. Gurvitch,\textsuperscript{9} does not like Hegel, he need only present him in the manner of the manuals of the history of philosophy—as an idealist philosopher who conceives of historical evolution as the evolution of the mind, as a succession of ideas very much removed from concrete phenomena—for Marx to become at once essentially anti-Hegelian. Gurvitch, in an attempt to reduce Marx's Hegelian heritage to a minimum, has given an interpretation of the origins of Marxist thought which is original and which places the emphasis on Marx's Saint-Simonianism. One chapter of Gurvitch's treatise is devoted to a demonstration (in my opinion a convincing one) of the Saint-Simonian influences on the thinking of the young Marx.

However, I am in disagreement with my colleague on one point, unfortunately the essential one. I do not doubt for a moment that Marx could have encountered Saint-Simonian ideas in his milieu, for the simple reason that these ideas, which we have already encountered in our study of Auguste Comte, were current in the Europe of Marx's youth and were to be found in one form or another almost everywhere, even in the newspapers. Since the early nineteenth century, sociological ideas have been in circulation, easily adopted by anyone interested in the movement of history. Marx was familiar with Saint-Simonian ideas, but he could not have borrowed from them what, in my opinion, is the heart of his own sociology.

What did he find in Saint-Simonianism? The opposition between two types of societies, the military and the industrial; the application of science to industry; the renovation of methods of production; the transformation of the world through industry. But the center of Marxist thought is not a Saint-Simonian or Comtist conception of industrial society; the center of Marxist thought is the contradictory character of capitalist, industrial society. The idea of the intrinsic contradictions in capitalism is not contained in the Saint-Simonian or Comtist heritage. Neither Saint-Simon nor Auguste Comte believed that social conflict is the fundamental impulse of historical movement; neither believed that the society of his time was torn by
insoluble contradictions. Because I feel the center of Marxist thought to be the contradictory character of capitalist society and the essential character of the class struggle, I refuse to regard Saint-Simonianism as one of the major influences in shaping Marxist thought.  

But what does need clarification, I think, is how Marx believed he explained (1) that capitalist society was essentially contradictory and antagonistic, (2) where the contradictions came from, and (3) that the movement of history tended of itself to resolve this antagonism.

With this in mind, what are the Hegelian themes to be encountered in Marx's thought, in the youthful works as well as in those of his maturity?

The first fundamental idea—expressed in one of his theses on Feuerbach—is that philosophy is complete, and nothing remains but to realize it. Or again, that the only contribution still to be made to philosophy is to transcend it by realizing it. Or again, another proposition not equivalent but related to the foregoing: up to now, philosophers have conceived the world; the time has come to transform it.

What do these propositions mean in ordinary language? They mean that classical philosophy, culminating in Hegel's system, has reached an end; it is impossible to go further, because Hegel has conceived all of history and all of humanity. Philosophy has completed its task, which is to bring the experiences of humanity to explicit awareness. This awareness of the experiences of humanity is formulated in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind as in his Encyclopedia. But man, having become fully conscious of his past experiences and hence of his vocation, has not yet realized that vocation. Philosophy is complete as regards awareness, but the real world is not consistent with the meaning that philosophy gives to man's existence. Which raises what is, as it were, the original philosophical and historical problem of Marxist thought: Under what conditions can the course of history realize man's vocation as classical philosophy—i.e., Hegel's philosophy—has conceived it?

What is incontestably Marx's philosophical heritage is the conviction that historical movement has a fundamental meaning. A new economic and social regime is not just a new event presenting itself after the fact to the
detached curiosity of professional historians; a new economic and social regime is a stage in the evolution of humanity itself.

If this is the central philosophical question, another question immediately arises: What is this human nature, this human vocation which history must realize in order for philosophy to realize itself?

To this question Marx's youthful writings offer various answers, all of which turn on a few positive concepts—universal man, total man—or, on the other hand, "alienation," a negative concept.

In the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, Marx tried to demonstrate that the universalization of the individual in accordance with the demands of Hegelian philosophy has not been achieved in the societies of his time. For—and again I shall express myself in a greatly oversimplified style—the individual, as he appears in Hegel's *Philosophy of Law*\(^\text{12}\) and in the societies of his time, has a double position which is contradictory. On the one hand, he is a citizen. As a citizen, he participates in the state, i.e., in universality. But he is only a citizen once every four or five years, in the empyrean of formal democracy, as Marx put it, and he exhausts his citizenship—he completely fulfills his universality—in the vote. But outside of this single activity in which he fulfills his universality, he belongs to what Marx called the *burgerliche Gesellschaft*, civil society, i.e., mainly professional activities, work, the infrastructure of society. Now, as a member of civil society, he is imprisoned in his particularities; he does not relate to the community as a whole. He is a worker in the service of an entrepreneur, or he is an entrepreneur separated from the collectivity. Civil society imprisons all individuals in their particularities and consequently prevents them from realizing their vocation of universality.

Under what condition will this contradiction be overcome? The answer is simple. Individuals must be able in their work, itself to participate in universality in the same way they do in their activities as citizens, that is, as electors.

What do these abstract formulas mean? Formal democracy—to adopt the expression which has become popular in Marxist literature—is defined by the election of representatives of the people by all the citizens, and by
abstract freedoms like freedom to vote or the freedom of discussion. But this formal democracy does not affect the working and living conditions of the members of the collectivity as a whole. The worker, who has only his wage to live on, who places his labor power on the market in exchange for a wage, bears no resemblance to the citizen who every four or five years elects his representatives and, directly or indirectly, his leaders. In order to achieve true democracy, the freedoms limited in modern societies to the political order would have to be transposed to men’s concrete, economic existence.

Thus, individuals at work would have to be able to participate in universality as citizens do by means of the voting ticket. How could this real democracy be realized? Seemingly by abolishing the private ownership of the instruments of production, which places the individual in the service of other individuals, which in turn entails the exploitation of the workers by the entrepreneurs and prevents the entrepreneurs themselves from working directly for the collectivity, since in the capitalist system the entrepreneur works to obtain a profit.

In other words, the preliminary analysis contained in the Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law turns on the opposition between the particular and the universal, civil society and the state, the slavery of the worker and the fictitious liberty of the elector or citizen. The second concept which, as I have indicated, was central to Marx’s youthful thinking is that of total man, probably more ambiguous than that of "universalized" man since, at least according to the interpretation I have given, the notion of universalization of the individual is not very mysterious.

One might say that for Marx, total man is the one who would not be mutilated by the division of labor. The man of modern industrial society, in the eyes of Marx, is actually a specialized man. He has acquired a specific form as a result of a particular trade. He remains imprisoned for the greater part of his existence by this specialized activity, and hence he leaves unused a number of aptitudes and capacities which might be developed.

According to this line of argument, total man is non-specialized man. And there are several passages in Marx which suggest a polytechnical
training in which all individuals would be prepared for the greatest possible number of trades; after this training, individuals would be free not to do the same thing from morning to night.

Marx's writings contain several idyllic passages describing a future society in which men would go fishing in the morning, go to the factory in the afternoon, and go home and read Plato in the evening. This is not a ridiculous picture. I have known people working in kibbutzim in Israel who did read Plato in the evening. But this is a very exceptional case, associated with circumstances which are not the usual ones.14

One of the possible meanings of total man is man who is not cut off from certain of his aptitudes by the exigencies of the division of labor. According to this line of thinking, the notion of total man is a protest against the conditions imposed on the individual by industrial society—a protest which is both meaningful and sympathetic. For the division of labor docs indeed have the result of not allowing the majority of individuals to realize all their capabilities. But this somewhat romantic protest does not seem very consistent with the spirit of a scientific socialism. Except in the case of an extraordinarily wealthy society in which the problem of poverty has been solved once and for all, it is difficult to imagine how any society, capitalist, or otherwise, could train all individuals for all trades; or how an industrial society in which individuals were not specialized could function. Hence, another direction has been explored for a less romantic interpretation. Total man cannot be man who is capable of doing everything, but man who truly realizes his humanity, who performs those activities which define man.

In this sense, the notion of work is essential, and the central problem becomes this: Man is essentially a creature who works; if he works under inhuman conditions, he is dehumanized, because he ceases to perform the activity that, given the proper conditions, constitutes his humanity. And in Marx's youthful writings, especially in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, there, is in fact a critique of capitalist working conditions.115 In capitalism, man is alienated, and this alienation must be overcome before man can fulfill himself, can realize himself. '
I should explain, for those who know German, that Marx made use of three different terms which, in the translations, are often rendered by the same word, "alienation," although the German terms do not have exactly the same meaning. They are Entausserung, Veradusserung, and Entfremdung. The one that most closely corresponds to "alienation" in French or English is the last, which means to become a stranger to oneself, fremd meaning "stranger." Entfremdung is the activity or process by which someone becomes a stranger to himself. The idea is that under certain circumstances or in certain societies, the conditions imposed on man are such that he becomes a stranger to himself; he no longer recognizes himself in his activity or in his productions.

This notion of alienation obviously derives from Hegelian philosophy, where it plays a central role. But Hegelian alienation is conceived on the philosophical or metaphysical level. In the Hegelian conception the spirit, Geist, is itself alienated in its works; it constructs intellectual and social edifices and projects itself, so to speak, outside itself. The history of the mind, the history of humanity, is the history of these successive, alienations, at the end of which the mind will find itself once again in possession of the whole of its works and of its historical past and will be aware of possessing this whole. In Marxism, including the writings of the young Marx, the process of alienation, instead of being a process which is philosophically or metaphysically inevitable, becomes the expression of a sociological process by means of which men or societies construct collective organizations in which they become lost.  

Alienation, sociologically interpreted, is at once a historical, moral, and sociological critique of the present social order, in the capitalist regime, men are alienated; they are themselves lost in the collectivity; and the root of all alienation is economic alienation.

What does economic alienation mean? It seems to me that, again in ordinary language, there are two modalities which correspond approximately to two criticisms Marx leveled against the capitalist system. A first form of alienation may be imputed to private ownership of the means of production, and a second to the anarchy of the market.
The alienation imputable to private ownership of the instruments of production manifests itself in the fact that work—the essentially human activity which defines man's humanity, as it were—has lost its human characteristics, because for the wage earner it has become merely a means of obtaining the wage necessary to maintain his existence. Instead of work's being the expression of man himself, work has been degraded into an instrument, a means of livelihood.

The entrepreneurs themselves are in a sense alienated, because the commodities they produce do not answer needs which are truly experienced by others but are put on the market in order to procure a profit for the entrepreneur. Thus the entrepreneur becomes a slave to an unpredictable market which is at the mercy of the hazards of competition. Exploiting the wage earner, he is not thereby humanized in his work, since he himself is alienated in the interests of the anonymous mechanism of the market.

Whatever the precise interpretation assigned to this idea of economic alienation, it seems to me clear that Marx's critique of the economic reality of capitalism was originally a philosophical and moral critique before becoming a strictly sociological and economic analysis. And one can understand the difficult problem of interpretation that arises here. I have indicated that Marx's thought may be presented purely and simply as that of an economist and sociologist, because at the end of his life Marx sought to be a scientist, economist, and sociologist. But there is no doubt that in his youth he arrived at economic and sociological criticism by way of philosophical themes. These philosophical themes—the universalization of the individual, total man, alienation—underlie the sociological analysis of the mature works. To what extent is the sociological analysis of Marx's maturity merely the development of the philosophical intuitions of his youth—or, on the contrary, does it utterly replace these philosophical intuitions? This problem of interpretation is still unresolved.

However, it seems clear that Marx certainly kept the philosophical themes I have just outlined in the background, if not in the foreground, all his life. For him, the analysis of capitalist economy was the analysis of the alienation of individuals and collectivities losing control over their own existence in a system subject to autonomous laws. His critique of capitalist
economy was at the same time a philosophical and moral critique of the situation imposed on man by capitalism. Moreover, for Marx, the analysis of the evolution of capitalism was undoubtedly the analysis of the evolution of man and human nature throughout history; he expected from post capitalist society the fulfillment of philosophy.

This granted, what was this total man which the post-capitalist revolution was to achieve? This point is highly debatable, because in Marx there is a fundamental fluctuation between two somewhat contradictory themes. According to one theme, man fulfills his humanity in work, and it is the liberation of work which will mark the humanization of society. On the other hand, there is occasionally another conception according to which man is truly free only outside of work. In this second conception, man realizes his humanity only to the extent that his labor time has been sufficiently reduced so that he has the possibility of doing something besides working. 17

Of course, it is possible to combine these two themes by saying that the complete humanization of society would presuppose that, first, the conditions imposed on man in his work were humanized and that, simultaneously, his labor time was sufficiently reduced so that he could read Plato in his leisure hours. Philosophically, however, there remains one question: What is the essential activity which defines man and which must flourish before society can permit the realization of philosophy? If there is no definition of the essentially human activity, we may have to go back to the conception of total man in its vaguest sense. Society must permit all men to realize all their aptitudes. This statement represents a good definition of the ideal of society, but it is not easily translated into a concrete and specific program. Moreover, it is difficult to ascribe the fact that all men do not fulfill all their aptitudes solely to private ownership of the instruments of production.

In other words, there seems to be a great disproportion between the human alienation imputable to private ownership of the instruments of production and the fulfillment of total man which is to follow the revolution. How are we to reconcile the critique of modern society with the hope of achieving total man by the mere substitution of one mode of ownership for another?
Rapid though this analysis has been, you may have glimpsed what accounts for both the greatness and the ambiguity of Marxist sociology. It is essentially sociology; it seeks to be a philosophy.

V

Within the philosophical ideas which were at the origin of Marx's thought and which constituted the basis for his sociology, there remain a number of obscurities or ambiguities which account for the many interpretations his thought has provoked. These ideas were essentially as follows: The history of social regimes is also the history of humanity—the history of man's creation of himself. Philosophy has conceived the world and man; now the problem is to fulfill what the philosophers have conceived. Philosophy must become sociology, and sociology must become revolutionary. The nonrealization of humanity in the world is alienation. The source of this alienation is in the economy and, more specifically, in private ownership.

The first ambiguity of a philosophical order concerns the nature of historical law. Indeed, we have seen that Marx's interpretation of history presupposes a meaningful evolution of a supraindividual order. Forms and relations of production are dialectically linked; through the class struggle and the contradiction between the forms and relations of productions, capitalism destroys itself. But this general vision of history can be interpreted in two different ways.

One interpretation I shall call objectivist. This representation of the historical contradictions leading to the destruction of capitalism and to the advent of a nonantagonistic society corresponds to what are commonly referred to as the broad outlines of history. From the confusion of historical data, Marx selected the essential facts, what is most important in the historical evolution itself, without including the details of events in this vision. If we accept this interpretation, the destruction of capitalism and the advent of a nonantagonistic society would be facts known in advance: certain, but at the same time indeterminate as to date and modality. But this type of foresight, in which capitalism will be destroyed by its contradictions, though when or how is not known, is not satisfying to the
mind. Foresight involving an undated, unspecified event does not mean very much, or, at any rate, a historical law of this kind bears no resemblance to the laws of the natural sciences.

This is one of the possible interpretations of Marx's thought. It is the interpretation which is more or less orthodox in the Soviet world today. The necessary destruction of capitalism and its replacement by a more progressive society, i.e., by Soviet society, is asserted, but at the same time it is recognized that the date of this inevitable event is not yet known and that the manner of this anticipated catastrophe is still undetermined. This indeterminacy in the field of political events presents great advantages. For instance, one can declare in all sincerity that coexistence is possible. It is not necessary for the Soviet regime to destroy the capitalist regime, since the capitalist regime, one way or another, will destroy itself.18

The other interpretation of Marxist historical law is the one known, especially on Paris' left bank, as dialectical—and dialectical not in an ordinary sense but in a subtle sense. In this interpretation, the Marxist vision of history is born of a sort of reciprocal action between the historical world and the subject or consciousness that conceives this world. There would also be reciprocal action between the different sectors of the historical reality. This double reciprocity of action between subject and object and between the sectors of the historical reality would make it possible to understand events as they occur, in their concrete form.

If you consider the books of Jean-Paul Sartre or Merleau Ponty, you will see that they retain some of the essential ideas of Marxist thought: the alienation of man in and by the private economy; the predominant influence of the forces and relations of production. But all these concepts, this whole schema of interpretation, is not intended to reveal historical laws in the scientific sense of the term or even the broad outlines of evolution. It is a way of making man's position in the capitalist regime intelligible, of relating events to man's position in the capitalist economic regime without there being determinism in the strict sense of the word.

A dialectical vision of this kind—of which there are several versions among the French existentialists and in the entire Marxist school linked
with Gyorgy Lukacs—is philosophically more satisfying; but it, too, has its difficulties.\textsuperscript{10}

The essential one is to recover the two fundamental ideas of elementary Marxism, namely, the alienation of man in capitalism and the advent of a nonantagonistic society after capitalism's self-destruction. A dialectical interpretation of reciprocal action between subject and object and between sectors of reality does not necessarily lead to these two essential propositions. It leaves unanswered the question: How do we determine which interpretation is true? If every historical subject conceives history in terms of his situation, why is the interpretation of the Marxists or of the proletariat true? Which suggests, if I may say so, the following alternative: The objectivist vision which invokes the laws of history involves the essential difficulty of declaring an undated and unspecified event to be inevitable; the dialectical interpretation can assert neither the necessity for revolution nor the nonantagonistic character of postcapitalist society nor the all-embracing character of historical interpretation.

The second philosophical ambiguity is this: Marx's thinking purports to be scientific, and yet it seems to imply imperatives; it prescribes revolutionary action as the only legitimate consequence of historical analysis. Whence a second duality of interpretation which may be summarized in the formula, Kant or Hegel? Must Marxist thought be interpreted in the context of the Kantian dualism of fact and value, or scientific law and moral imperative, or in the context of the monism of the Hegelian tradition?

In the posthumous history of Marxism, there is a Kantian and a Hegelian school, the latter being larger than the former. The Kantian school of Marxism is represented by Franz Mehring, a German social democrat who has written a biography of Marx, and by the Austro-Marxist Max Adler, who is more Kantian than Hegelian, but Kantian in a very special way.\textsuperscript{20} However, the majority of Marx's interpreters have chosen to remain in the tradition of monism. The Kantians argue that one cannot proceed from fact to value, from a judgment of reality to a moral imperative; hence one cannot justify socialism by an interpretation of history as it occurs. Marx analyzed
capitalism as it is; to advocate socialism involves a decision of a spiritual order.

The opposing school of Marxism asserts that the subject who understands history is engaged in history itself. Socialism, or the nonantagonistic society, must necessarily emerge from the present antagonistic society; moreover, the interpreter of history is led by a necessary dialectic from the observation of what exists to the desire for a society of another type. Certain interpreters like Lucien Goldmann. go further and declare that in history there is no such thing as detached, disengaged observation of reality. For them, the vision of total history is inseparable from what they call an *engagement*, a commitment. It is as a result of one's desire for socialism that one perceives the contradictory character of capitalism. It is impossible to dissociate the taking of a position concerning reality from the observation of reality itself. Not that this taking of a position is arbitrary; it is produced through the dialectic of object and subject. Each of us is a part of history; it is from the historical reality that each of us selects his frame of reference and the concepts of his interpretation. Interpretation is born of our contact with the object—an object which is not acknowledged passively, however, but which is simultaneously acknowledged and denied, the denial of the object being an expression of our desire for another human reality.21

In abstract terms, we might say that there are two tendencies here: a tendency to dissociate the scientifically valid interpretation of history from the decision to be a socialist and, on the contrary, a tendency to make the interpretation of history inseparable from political desires.

Perhaps you are wondering, "And Marx?" Marx, as a man, was scientist and prophet, sociologist and revolutionary. If he had been asked whether these two attitudes are separable, I personally think he would have answered that in the abstract they are. In my opinion, he was too scientifically oriented to admit that his interpretation of capitalism was bound up with a moral decision. But he was so thoroughly convinced of the worthlessness of the capitalist regime that for him the analysis of reality led inevitably to the desire for a revolution.
Beyond these two alternatives of Kant or Hegel, there exists a compromise which has today become the official philosophy of the Soviet world: the dialectical objectivist philosophy as expounded by Engels in his *Anti-Duhring.*

What is dialectical materialism, according to the current official interpretation? The essential ideas are these:

5. A dialectical conception declares that the law of reality is the law of change. There is constant transformation in inorganic nature as well as in the human world. There is no eternal principle; human and moral conceptions change from one age to the next.

6. The real world is also characterized, as it were, by a hierarchy in the species of being, a sort of qualitative progression from inorganic nature to the human world, and in the human world from the initial regimes of humanity to the regime which will mark the end of prehistory, i.e., the socialist regime.

7. Natural and social change occurs in accordance with certain abstract laws, of which the principal ones are these: Beyond a certain point, quantitative changes become qualitative. The transformations do not occur imperceptibly, a little at a time, but at a given moment there is a violent, revolutionary shift. Finally, the changes seem to obey an intelligible law: the law of contradiction or, more precisely, the law of the negation of negation.

What is the negation of negation? Here is an example from Engels: If you negate A, you have minus A; if you multiply minus A by minus A, you get A^2, which is, apparently, the negation of negation.

An example of the negation of negation in the human world: The capitalist regime is the negation of the regime of feudal ownership, and public ownership under socialism will be the negation of negation, i.e., the negation of private ownership.

In other words, and to translate, one of the characteristics of cosmic as well as of human movement would be the fact that changes are in a relationship of contradiction to one another and that this contradiction takes the following form: At moment B, there would be a contradiction of what existed at moment A, and moment C would contradict what existed at moment B.
and would in a sense represent a return to the original state of moment A, but on a higher level.

Another possible example of the negation of negation: First the initial collective ownership of property in archaic societies; the whole of history is the negation of this collective ownership in undifferentiated societies; and socialism negates social classes and antagonisms to return to the collective ownership of archaic societies, but on a higher level.

These dialectical laws have not completely satisfied all Marx's interpreters. There has been much discussion as to whether Marx was in agreement with Engels' materialist philosophy. The main question is this: To what extent is the notion of dialectics applicable to organic or inorganic nature as well as to the human world?

In the concept of dialectics, there is first the idea of change and then the idea of the relativity of ideas or principles to circumstances. But there are also the two ideas of totality and meaning. To achieve a dialectical interpretation of history, it is necessary for all the elements of a society or an age to form a whole and for the transition from one of these totalities to another to be intelligible, to have meaning. These two requirements of totality and intelligibility of sequence seem to be linked to the human world. One understands that, in the historical world, societies constitute total units, because the different aspects of the collectivities are in fact related to one another. The different sectors of a social reality may be explained in terms of one element regarded as essential, for example, the forces and relations of production... But, in organic or, above all, in inorganic nature, can we find the equivalent of these totalities? Can we find the equivalent of meaningful sequences?

In fact, this dialectical philosophy of the material world is by no means indispensable either to an acceptance of the Marxist analysis of capitalism or to being a revolutionary. One may not be convinced that minus A times minus A equals A² is an example of dialectics and still be an excellent socialist. The connection between the dialectical philosophy of nature as expounded by Engels and the center of Marxist thought is neither apparent nor necessary. Historically, certain orthodoxy may combine these different propositions; but logically and philosophically, the economic interpretation
of history and the critique of capitalism in terms of the class struggle have nothing to do with the dialectics of nature.

More generally, to what extent does the Marxist philosophy of capitalism imply metaphysical materialism? Here, again, I should say that the connection does not seem to me either logically or philosophically necessary. But the fact is that a number of politically active Marxists have believed that in order to be a good revolutionary it was necessary to be a materialist in the philosophical sense of the word. Since this belief was generally held by men who were very competent in revolutionary— if not in philosophical—matters, they probably had good reasons for it. Lenin, in particular, wrote a book called Materialism and Empiriocriticism, in which he tried to prove that those Marxists who abandoned a materialist philosophy were also straying from the royal road to revolution.23

Logically, there is no doubt one may be a disciple of Marx in political economy without being a materialist in the metaphysical sense of the word. Atheism, on the other hand, is related to the essence of Marx's Marxism, although one may be a believer and a socialist (but not a faithful follower of Marxism-Leninism). Historically, however, a kind of synthesis has been established between a philosophy of the materialist type and a vision of history.

I shall now turn to the second group of these problems of interpretation: those related to sociology. To some extent, we shall encounter the same type of uncertainties that I emphasized in discussing the first group, but I should like to show how, even aside from the philosophical basis of Marxist sociology, this sociology contains several ambiguities.

The center of the discussion is this: Marx's conception of capitalism in particular and of history in general depends on a combination of concepts—forces of production, relations of production, class struggle, class consciousness, or, again, infrastructure and superstructure—which may be used to analyze a given society. Personally, if I want to analyze a society, whether it be Soviet or American, I often begin with the state of the economy, and even with the state of the forces of production, and then proceed to the relations of production and finally to social relations. The
critical and methodological use of these concepts to analyze a modern society, or perhaps any historical society, is unquestionably legitimate.

But if one confines oneself to utilizing these concepts in the analysis of societies, one does not thereby arrive at a philosophy of history. One risk finding that, at the same degree of development, productive forces may correspond to different relations of production. Private ownership does not exclude a high development of productive forces, and conversely, collective ownership may coincide with an inferior development of productive forces. But Marxist philosophy of capitalism and of history does presuppose a sort of parallelism between the development of the productive forces, the transformation of the relations of production, the intensification of the class struggle, and the march toward revolution.

The dogmatic conception of Marxism implies that the decisive factor is the force of production, that the development of the latter marks the direction of human history, and that the different stages in the development of the forces of production correspond to fixed stages of the relations of production and the class struggle. But suppose the class struggle is reduced with the development of the forces of production in capitalism? Or, again, suppose there is collective ownership in an underdeveloped economy? At once the parallelism between movements, indispensable to the dogmatic philosophy of history, collapses.

The same problem may be presented in abstract and, so to speak, epistemological terms, Marx seeks to understand all societies. Societies can be understood only in terms of their infrastructure, which is apparently the state of the productive forces, scientific and technical knowledge, industry and organization of labor. This understanding of societies and above all of modern societies, in terms of their economic organization is entirely legitimate. But to shift from the analysis of societies in terms of the forces of production to a determined interpretation, one must admit determined relations between the different aspects of reality, between infrastructure and superstructure, between forces of production and relations of production. Marxists have felt that it was indeed difficult to use too-precise terms like determination in dealing with the relationship between forces and relations of production or, again, between the latter and the state of social
consciousness. Since expressions of causality or determination have seemed too rigid or, as we say, mechanistic rather than dialectical, the term *conditioning* was immediately substituted for determination. As a formula, it is certainly preferable; but unfortunately the notion of conditioning is exceedingly vague. In a society, any sector conditions the others, the very law of social reality being that the different sectors condition each other reciprocally.

In ordinary language, if we had a different political regime, we should probably have, in certain respects, a different economic organization. If we had a different economy, we should probably have a different regime. If we had a different conception of economy, we should follow a different colonial policy. If we had a different colonial policy, we should have a different economic organization. And so forth. At a given moment, in given societies, the different sectors mutually condition each other.

* Determination* is too rigid a term, but *conditioning* risks being too flexible, because everyone grants that the state of the forces of production conditions relations of production and that the state of relations of production conditions class relations, the teaching of sociology at Harvard or the Sorbonne, and so forth. All this is incontestable—so incontestable that the usefulness of the term *conditioning* remains dubious.

What we need is an intermediate formula between *determination* of the whole of society by the infrastructure (a refutable proposition) and *conditioning*, which does not mean much.

As usual in such cases, the miraculous solution is the "dialectical" one. Conditioning is regarded as dialectical, reciprocal, with everything having an effect on everything else. But this loses its grasp on Marx's essential idea, namely, the determination of the social entity. On this point, I believe, Marx's thinking is quite clear. He believed that a historical regime was defined by certain major characteristics: the state of productive forces, the mode of ownership, and the relations between the workers and the people who take for themselves the surplus value. The different social types he recognized in history are each characterized by a certain mode of relations between owners (of slaves, of land, of means of production) and workers (slaves, serfs, wage earners). Slavery is one social type, wage earning is
another. In other words, Marx believed he could find the specific characteristics of a historical state in terms of certain characteristics which in his eyes were fundamental. From this point on, there may indeed be dialectical relations between the different sectors of reality; but what remains essential, for Marx, is the definition of a social regime in terms of a certain number of facts regarded as decisive. The trouble is that these different facts, which are in Marx's eyes decisive and interrelated, seem to be separable. History, in fact, has separated them. And while dialectics can put them together again, after one ingenious fashion or another, it can never reestablish the original Marxist unity.

The ambiguity of Marx's sociology may also be revealed by an analysis and discussion of its essential concepts. Let us take, for example, the two terms *infrastructure*, and *superstructure*. What are the elements of social reality which belong to the infrastructure? What are the ones that pertain to the superstructure? In general, it seems that infrastructure should refer to the economy, particularly the forces of production. But what are these so-called forces of production? All the technical apparatus of a civilization is inseparable from scientific knowledge; and the latter, in turn, seems to belong to the realm of ideas, of knowledge, and these last elements should derive from the superstructure, at least to the extent that scientific knowledge is, in many societies, inseparable from the way of thinking, from philosophy and ideology.

In other words, there are already present in the infrastructure, defined as forces of production, elements which should derive from the superstructure. This fact in itself does not imply that one cannot analyze a society by considering in turn the infrastructure and the superstructure. But it is exceedingly difficult to separate what belongs, according to the definition, to each.

Further, the forces of production depend not only on the technical apparatus but also on the organization of collective labor. The organization of collective labor depends, in *turn, on* the laws of ownership; the laws of ownership belong to the legal domain; the law is part of the reality of the state (at least according to certain passages), and the state or politics seems to belong to the superstructure. Once again, we perceive the
difficulty of truly separating what is infrastructure from what is superstructure. The discussion of what belongs to one or the other of these two terms can go on indefinitely, These two concepts, as simple instruments of analysis, may, like any concepts, have a legitimate use. The objection applies only to a dogmatic interpretation in which one of the two terms determines the other.

In this discussion of infrastructure and superstructure, I have already anticipated the analysis and possible discussion of the terms *forces of production* and *relations of production*. We all know that one of the dialectics that plays the greatest role in the thinking of Marx and the Marxists is precisely the possible contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. But each of these terms presents ambiguities. Moreover, it is not easy to state precisely what constitutes the contradiction between the forces and relations of production. One of the simplest versions of this dialectic would be the following.

At a certain degree of development of the forces of production, individual right of ownership represents an impediment to their progress. In this case, the contradiction is between the full expansion of the technique of production and the preservation of individual right of ownership.

This contradiction contains, it seems to me, a share of truth, but it is not relevant to the dogmatic Marxist interpretations. If you consider the great modern enterprises in France, such as Citroen, Renault, or Pechiney, or Dupont or General Motors in the United States, you can say, in effect, that the volume of the forces of production has made it impossible to maintain individual right of ownership. The Renault factories may be said to belong to no one, since they belong to the state (not that the state is no one, but the state's ownership is abstract and fictitious, as it were). One might also say that Pechiney belongs to no one, since Pechiney belongs to thousands of shareholders, and while the latter are owners in the legal sense of the word; they no longer exercise the traditional and individual right of ownership. In the same way, Dupont and General Motors belong to hundreds of thousands of shareholders, who maintain the legal fiction of ownership but do not exercise its true privileges.
There is a passage in *Capital* in which Marx referred to the great associations of shareholders, observed that individual ownership is disappearing, and concluded that the modern corporation is already overcoming typical capitalism (but, he added, without breaking the cadres of the system). It may be said, therefore, that Marx was right to show the contradiction between the development of the forces of production and individual right of ownership since, in the modern capitalism of the great shareholding associations, right of ownership, in a certain sense, has disappeared.

On the other hand, if one believes that the great modern corporations, the great shareholding associations, are the very essence of capitalism, then it is easy to demonstrate that the theoretical contradiction between forces and relations of production does not exist. The development of the forces of production requires the appearance of new forms of the relations of production or, again, new forms of the traditional right of ownership.

According to the second interpretation of the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production, the distribution of income determined by individual right of ownership is such that a capitalist society is incapable of absorbing its own production. In this case, the contradiction between forces and relations of production affects the very functioning of a capitalist economy. The purchasing power distributed to the masses would always remain lower than the demands of the economy itself. This version of the contradiction between forces and relations of production is one that continues to be in vogue. I shall confine myself here to a common-sense observation: This contradiction between forces and relations of production has been exposed for a century or a century and a half; meanwhile, the forces of production in all capitalist countries have undergone a prodigious development. In other words, the incapacity of an economy based on private ownership to absorb its own production was already predicted when the forces of production were a fifth or a tenth of what they are today; and this will probably still be the case when the forces of production are five or ten times what they are today—which would seem to indicate that the contradiction has not been clearly demonstrated. It continues to be unknown at
what point an economy in which private ownership persists is incapable of absorbing its own production.

In other words, neither of the two versions of the contradiction between forces and relations of production has been demonstrated. The only version that obviously contains a share of truth is the one that does not lead to those political and messianic propositions on which the Marxists insist most strongly.

Marx's sociology, as we have seen, presents another aspect or, at any rate, lends itself to an interpretation which is complementary to the one I have just been examining. Marx's sociology is, in fact, a sociology of the class struggle. Certain propositions are central, fundamental: modern society is an antagonistic society; classes are the principal actors in the historical drama of capitalism in particular and of history in general; the class struggle is the moving power of history and leads to a revolution which will mark the end of prehistory and the appearance of a nonantagonistic society.

Marx himself wrote, toward the end of his life, that he had found the idea of class and class struggle in the bourgeois historians, especially in the French ones, but that his own contribution to the theory of classes consisted of the following three propositions: The existence of classes is connected only with certain historical phases in the development of production; the class struggle leads inevitably to the dictatorship of the proletariat; this dictatorship is, in turn, merely a transitional stage in the abolition of all classes, in the realization of the classless society.

Given these propositions, which are central to Marx's thought, it seems to me that I should raise the most basic question, the one I did not raise when I was presenting Marx's thought because it is so difficult a question to answer: What is a social class? A great many passages can be found in Marx on this point. There is a classic passage which everyone knows, because it occurs on the last page of the manuscript of Capital. (The final chapter of the third volume of Capital is entitled "Social Classes.") Since Capital is Marx's principal scientific book, we must consider this passage, which is, unfortunately, incomplete.
In it, Marx distinguished three classes, related to the three sources of income: owners of simple labor power, owners of capital, and landowners, whose respective sources of income are wages, profit, and ground rent. Hence salaried workers, capitalists, and landowners form the three great classes of modern society, based on the capitalist mode of production.  

This *analysis* of classes in terms of their economic structure is the one that best answers Marx's scientific intention. From it, we may elucidate one or two of Marx's essential ideas regarding classes.

(8) A social class is that which occupies a fixed place in the process of production. A place in the process of production has two meanings, moreover: a place in the technical process of production, and a place in the legal process superimposed upon the technical one. The capitalist, owner of the means of production, is at the same time master of the organization of labor, master in the technical process, and also, because of his legal position, the one who takes the surplus value from the associated producers.

(9) Class relationships tend to become simpler with the development of capitalism. Indeed, if there are only two sources of income, aside from ground rent whose importance diminishes with industrialization, there are only two large classes: the proletariat, consisting of those, who possess only their labor power, and the capitalists, those who appropriate a portion of the surplus value.

The second category of Marx's texts relating to classes consists of his historical studies, most of which are admirable; for example, his study of the German Revolution of 1848 or his study of Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état* of the Eighteenth Brumaire. In his historical studies, Marx utilized the notion of class, but without making it into a systematic theory. The enumeration of classes in Germany or France is longer and more complete than the structural distinction between classes to which I have referred.  

For example, in *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, Marx distinguished the following classes: the feudal nobility, the bourgeoisie, the *petite bourgeoisie*, the upper and middle peasantry, the free lower
peasantry, the slave peasantry, the agricultural laborers, and the industrial workers. In *The Class Struggle in France*, the list is as follows: financial bourgeoisie, industrial bourgeoisie, *petite bourgeoisie*, peasant class, proletarian class, and finally what he calls the *Lumpenproletariat*, which more or less corresponds to what we call the subproletariat.

This enumeration does not contradict the theory of class outlined in the last chapter of *Capital*. The problem Marx raised in these two kinds of passages is not the same. In one case, he was trying to ascertain the large groupings characteristic of a capitalist economy; in others he was trying to ascertain the social groups that have exerted an influence on political events in particular historical circumstances.

It is true, nevertheless, that it is difficult to effect the transition from the structural theory of class, based on the distinction between sources of income, to the historical observation of social groups. In fact, a class does not constitute a unity simply because, from the point of view of economic analysis, its income has a single and identical source; from all appearances, there must also be a certain psychological community and possibly a certain sense of unity or even a desire for common action.

This observation brings us to a third category of Marxist texts: and here I shall quote a classic passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. In this passage, Marx explains why a large group of men, even if they share the same economic activity and the same style of life, do not necessarily represent a social class. Here is the passage.

The peasants are an immense mass whose individual members live in identical conditions, without however entering into manifold relations with one another. Their method of production isolates them from one another, instead of drawing them into mutual intercourse. ... In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions that separate then mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and that place them in a hostile attitude toward the latter, they constitute a class. In so far as there exists among these peasants only a local connection in which the individuality and exclusiveness of their
interests prevent any unity of interest, national connections and political organization among them, they do not constitute a class.

The idea—a very important one—is that community of activity; way of thinking, and mode of life is a necessary but insufficient condition for the reality of a social class. For there to be a class, there must be a consciousness of unity, a feeling of separation from other social classes, and even a feeling of hostility toward other social classes. Which explains a shorter and more categorical passage: "Separate individuals form a class only to the extent that they must carry on a common struggle against another class."

If we take all these passages into consideration, it seems to me that we arrive, not at a complete and professorial theory of class, but at a political and sociological theory of class which is sufficiently clear.

Marx's original idea was a fundamental contradiction of interests between wage earners and capitalists. He was convinced, moreover, that this fundamental opposition of interests dominated all of capitalist society and would assume an increasingly simplified form in the course of historical development. From another point of view, Marx, as an observer of historical reality (and he was an excellent one), was extraordinarily aware of the plurality of social groups, a plurality not reducible to two large groups, i.e., capitalist on the one hand and wage earners on the other. But class, in the true sense of the word, is not to be confused with any ordinary social group. Social class, in the true sense of the word, implies, beyond a community of existence, the consciousness of this community and the desire for common action with a view to a certain organization of the collectivity. And on this level, it is clear that in Marx's eyes there are in effect only two great classes, because there are, in capitalist society, only two groups which have truly contradictory images of what society should be and have also a definite political and historical purpose. These two groups are the wage earners and the capitalists.

In the case of the workers versus the owners of the means of production, the various criteria which may be invented or observed are identified. The industrial workers have a determined mode of existence which depends on
the lot they are assigned in capitalist society. They are conscious of their solidarity; they are becoming conscious of their antagonism toward other social groups. They are, therefore, a social class in the true sense of the word, a class which is politically and historically defined by a will of its own. The proletariat's will places it in fundamental opposition to the capitalists. There are sub-groups within each of these classes and also groups which are not yet absorbed into the camp of one or the other of the two chief actors in the drama of history. But these exterior or marginal groups, the merchants, the petite bourgeoisie, the survivors of a former social structure, will gradually, in the course of historical evolution, be obliged to join one or the other of the two existing camps: the camp of the proletariat or the camp of capitalism.

These, I think, are Marx's major ideas regarding social classes. What in this theory is most open to debate or misunderstanding? It seems to me that two points, central to Marx's thought, are ambiguous and debatable. One might say that the point of departure of Marxist analysis is the parallel between the rise of the bourgeoisie and the rise of the proletariat. In his early writings, Marx described the advent of a fourth estate as analogous or similar to the rise of the third. The bourgeoisie developed new forces of production within feudal society. In the same way, the proletariat is developing new forces of production within capitalist society. But this analogy seems to me to be false. One must have political passion, as well as genius, not to see that the two cases are radically different.

The bourgeoisie, whether commercial or industrial, which created new forces of production within feudal society was really a new social class formed within the old society. But the bourgeoisie, whether commercial or industrial, was a privileged minority which performed socially dominant functions. The bourgeoisie opposed the feudal ruling class as an economic aristocracy opposes a military aristocracy. Hence this socially unprecedented privileged class was able to create new forces and relations of production within feudal society; at a certain moment in history, this socially privileged class overthrew the political superstructure of feudalism. The French Revolution, in Marx's eyes, represented the moment
when the bourgeois class seized the political power still in the hands of the remnants of the politically dominant feudal class.

Let us now consider the proletariat. In capitalist society, the proletariat is not a privileged minority; it is the great mass of unprivileged laborers. The proletariat does not establish new forces or relations of production within capitalist society. The workers, the proletarians, are the agents of execution of a system of production directed either by capitalists or by technologists. Therefore, the analogy between the rise of the proletariat and the rise of the bourgeoisie is sociologically false. In order to restore the equivalence between the rise of the bourgeoisie and the rise of the proletariat, the Marxists are forced to resort to something which they themselves condemn when practiced by others, namely, myth. For in order to link the rise of the proletariat with the rise of the bourgeoisie, one must identify the minority ruling the political party in the name of the proletariat with the proletariat itself.

In other words, in the last analysis, in order to maintain the analogy between the rise of the bourgeoisie and the rise of the proletariat, Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev must each in turn represent the proletariat. In the case of the bourgeoisie, it is the bourgeois who are privileged, who control commerce and industry, who rule. But when the proletariat has its revolution, it is men claiming to represent the proletariat who control commerce and industry and who exercise power.

The bourgeoisie is a privileged minority which passed from a socially dominant position to the exercise of political power; the proletariat is the great unprivileged mass which cannot, as proletariat, become the privileged and dominant minority, though of course political parties or groups of men may claim to represent the proletariat in order to establish a new regime.

Do not misunderstand me; I make no value judgment as to the respective merits of a regime claiming to represent the bourgeoisie and one claiming to represent the proletariat. All I should like to establish here, because to me these are facts, is that the rise of the proletariat cannot, except by mythology, be compared with the rise of the bourgeoisie and that herein lies
the central, immediately obvious error of the entire Marxist vision of history, an error whose consequences have been considerable.

This brings us to the difficulties inherent in the Marxist relation between sociology and economics. First of all, as I have tried to explain, Marx wanted to combine a theory of the functioning of the economy with a theory of the evolution of the capitalist economy. This synthesis of theory and history contains two intrinsic difficulties, one at the outset, and one at the end. The initial difficulty is this: The capitalist regime, as Marx described it, can function only if there exists a group of men who possess available capital and consequently are in a position to rent the labor power of those who possess nothing else. This raises a historical question: How does this group of men come to be? What is the formative process of the original accumulation of capital which is indispensable to the functioning of capitalism itself?

It is not difficult to explain historically the formation of this group of capitalists. Violence, force, guile, theft, and other procedures traditional in political history easily account for the formation of a group of capitalists. The difficulty is to explain in economic terms the formation of this group that is indispensable to the functioning of capitalism. In other words, an analysis of the functioning of capitalism presupposes at the outset extra economic phenomena in order to create the conditions under which the regime can function.

The same difficulty appears at the conclusion. If you will recall, I tried to explain Marx's notion of the mechanism of self-destruction inherent in capitalism, and I also showed how, in the last analysis, there was no conclusive demonstration either of the moment when capitalism will cease to function or even of the fact that at a given moment, it will cease to function. For the economic demonstration of the self-destruction inherent in capitalism to be conclusive, the economist should be able to say, with reference to the law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit, that capitalism cannot function at a rate of profit below a certain percentage; or again, that after a certain point, distribution of income is such that the regime is incapable of absorbing its own production. But, in fact, neither of these two demonstrations is to be found in Capital; even the doctrine of
increasing pauperization is not demonstrated in the economic analyses of *Capital*.

In other words, Marx gave a certain number of reasons for believing that the capitalist regime would have to function badly, but there is no economic demonstration of the destruction of capitalism because of its internal contradictions; hence it becomes necessary, I think, to introduce at the end as well as at the beginning of the process a factor external to capitalism itself, which must be of a political order.

Secondly, there is an essential difficulty about the theory of capitalist economy, as an economy of exploitation. The capitalist theory of exploitation is based on the notion of surplus value. The notion of surplus value is, in turn, inseparable from the theory of wages. Now, every modern economy is a progressive economy. This means that every modern economy must accumulate a part of the annual production with a view to expanding the forces of production; or, to use modern terminology, with a view to augmenting the machinery of production. Thus, if capitalist economy is defined as the economy of exploitation, the problem is to show how and to what extent the capitalist mechanism of saving and investment, or again the capitalist mechanism of accumulation, differs from the mechanism of accumulation which exists or would exist in a modern economy of another type.

Marx wrote, "Accumulate, accumulate, that is the law and the prophets." In his eyes, the characteristic of capitalist economy is a higher rate of accumulation of capital. Yet let us consider an economy of the Soviet type. You know that one of the merits which theorists of Soviet economy claim for the latter is the high percentage of accumulation.

A century after Marx, the ideological competition between the two regimes is focused on the rate of accumulation practiced by each. All well and good. But the question is whether the capitalist mechanism of accumulation is better or worse than the mechanism of accumulation of another economic regime (better for whom, and worse for whom?). In abstract terms, the problem is this: In his analysis of capitalism, Marx considered simultaneously the characteristics of all economies and the characteristics of a modern economy of the capitalist type, because he knew
no other. A century later, the true problem of the true Marxist would be to analyze the peculiarities of a modern economy of the capitalist type in relation to the peculiarities of a modern economy of another type.

The theory of wages, the theory of surplus value, the theory of accumulation, cease to be entirely satisfactory in themselves. Rather, they represent questions raised, or analytical points of departure, in order to differentiate what might be called capitalist exploitation from Soviet exploitation or, to employ a more neutral terminology, to differentiate capitalist surplus value from surplus value in the Soviet regime. For, in any regime, it is impossible to give the workers all the value they produce because a part of this value must be set aside, on the one hand for the wages of management, and on the other hand for collective accumulation. There remain, naturally, important differences between the two mechanisms, since in the capitalist regime accumulation proceeds via individual profit and since the distribution of income is not the same in the two regimes.

VI

The various critical remarks I have directed toward Marxism, criticisms that are easy to make a century after Marx, imply no claim—which would be ridiculous—to superiority. I merely want to show that Marx, observing the beginnings of the capitalist regime, was not able to distinguish easily between what is implied by a regime of private ownership, what is implied by the phase of development of a modern economy which the English economy was going through at the time he was observing it, and finally what is implied by any industrial economy. Today, the task of economic analysis, sociologically speaking, is precisely to discriminate among these three kinds of elements: characteristics of any modern economy, characteristics of a particular system of modern economy, and finally characteristics linked to one phase of growth of the modern economy. Such discrimination is difficult, since in reality all these characteristics are always present and combined. But if one seeks to make a political or moral judgment of a certain system, obviously one must not
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Ascribe to the system that which is imputable either to the general characteristics of modern economy or to a specific phase of its development.

The very type of the confusion between these different elements is the theory of capital accumulation and surplus value. Every modern economy implies accumulation. The rate of accumulation is higher or lower according to the phase of development and also according to the intention of the government of the society in question. What does vary, on the other hand, is the economic and social mechanism of surplus value, i.e., the mode of circulation of savings. A planned economy may obtain a flow of savings of a determined type, while an economy in which private ownership of the instruments of production persists admits of a more complex mechanism and does not readily tolerate the authoritarian determination of the amount of savings and, thereby, of the percentage of accumulation in relation to total national income.

I come now to a final aspect of the relation between the economic and the sociological analysis, namely, the problem of the relation between the political regime and the economic system. In my opinion, it is on this point that Marx's sociology is weakest. For what do we find on this decisive problem in Capital, as well as in Marx's other works? A few familiar ideas, always the same ones. The state is considered essentially as the instrument of domination of one class, the instrument by which one class exploits the others. In contrast to the economic and social regime, consisting of antagonistic classes and of the domination of one class over the others, Marx points the picture of an economic and social regime in which there will no longer be class domination, or political power exercised by one class over the others. After the antagonistic society, there will appear a nonantagonistic society and, as a consequence (by definition, as it were), the state will have to disappear, since the state exists only so long as one class needs to dominate and exploit the others.

Between the antagonistic society and the nonantagonistic society of the future is interposed what is called the dictatorship of the proletariat, a phrase which occurs twice in Marx's works, particularly in a famous text,
The Critique of the Gotha Program (a program established by the German socialist party). The dictatorship of the proletariat is defined as the final strengthening of the state before the crucial moment when the state itself must perish. Before disappearing, the state attains, so to speak, its culmination.

The dictatorship of the proletariat was not very clearly defined in Marx's writings, which offered two versions of the idea. One was that of the Jacobin tradition, namely, the absolute power of a party claiming to represent the masses. The other, almost opposite, version had been suggested to Marx by the experience of the Commune of Paris, which tended toward the decentralization of political authority.

This conception of politics and of the disappearance of the state in a nonantagonistic society seems to me by far the most easily refutable sociological conception in all of Marx's work. Without indulging in any sort of polemics, the reasons why it is easy to criticize this theory seem to me to be these.

(1) No one denies that in any society—and particularly in a modern society—there are common functions of administration and authority which must be performed. No one can reasonably suppose that an industrial society as complex as our own can do without an administration, and an administration which is centralized in certain respects. Moreover, to the extent that we presuppose a planned economy, it is inconceivable that there not be centralized organisms to make the fundamental decisions implied by the very idea of planning. But these economic and social decisions made by central organisms of planning presuppose functions which are commonly called functions of state. Therefore, unless we imagine a period of absolute abundance in which the problem of the co-ordination of production no longer arises, a regime of planned economy requires a reinforcement of the administrative and directorial functions performed by the central power.

In this sense, the two ideas of a planned economy and the disappearance of the state are contradictory for the foreseeable future, so long as it is important to produce as much as possible, to produce according to the
directives of planning, and to distribute production among the social classes at the discretion of those in power.

Therefore, if the word *state* refers to all the administrative and directorial functions of the collectivity, the state cannot disappear in any industrial society, let alone a planned industrial society, since by definition central planning implies that a greater number of decisions are made by the government than in a capitalist economy, which is partially defined by the decentralization of the decisionmaking power.

(2) Hence, the disappearance of the state can have only a symbolic meaning. What *does* disappear is the class character of the state in question. It is, in fact, conceivable that from the moment class rivalry ceases to exist, these administrative and directorial functions, instead of expressing the dominant intention of a particular group, become the expression of the society as a whole. In this sense, one can in fact imagine the disappearance of class character, of domination and exploitation, from the state itself.

But beyond this political interpretation, a new question arises: Can the state, in the capitalist regime, be defined solely and essentially in terms of the power of a given class?

We have seen that Marx's central idea is that capitalist society is antagonistic. All the essential characteristics of this regime proceed from this antagonism. But the question arises as to whether or how there could be a society without antagonism. The whole argument rests on the qualitative difference between the bourgeois class, which exercises power when it possesses the instruments of production, and the proletariat, considered as the class which is to succeed the bourgeoisie.

I have explained why, in my opinion, the comparison between the coming to power of the bourgeoisie and the coming to power of the proletariat does not hold true in sociological terms. As for the relation between the economy and politics in a nonantagonistic society, the same question arises again in the following form: To say that the proletariat is a world class which, at some point, assumes power can have only a symbolic significance, since the mass of factory workers cannot be confused with the dominant minority which exercises power. Consequently, the expression
"the proletariat in power" is merely a symbolic way of referring to the party or group of men claiming to represent the masses.

As for the nonantagonistic society, the problem is that in a society in which there is no longer private ownership of the instruments of production, by definition there is no longer any antagonism connected with this ownership; but there are men who exercise power in the name of the masses. There is, therefore, a state which performs the administrative and directorial functions indispensable to any developed society. A society of this type is not characterized by the same antagonisms as a society in which there is private ownership of the instruments of production. But a society in which the state, by means of economic decisions, largely determines the condition of each and every man may obviously be characterized by antagonisms between groups, whether these be horizontal groups—peasants versus workers—or vertical groups—those at the bottom and those at the top of the hierarchy.

Understand, I am not saying that in a society in which economic conditions depend on planning and the planning is done by the state, conflict is inevitable. I am simply saying that one cannot establish the basis for a nonantagonistic society on the mere fact that private ownership of the instruments of production has disappeared and each man's condition depends on the decisions of the state. Because the decisions of the state are made by individuals or by a minority, these decisions may correspond to the interests of particular groups. There is no pre-established harmony between the interests of different groups in a planned society.

Thus, the power of the state does not and cannot disappear in a planned society, even when private ownership of the instruments of production has disappeared. A planned society can be governed in an equitable manner by the planners, but there is no guarantee that the latter will make decisions which correspond either to the interests of all or to the highest interests of the collectivity, insofar as these can be determined.

The guarantee of the disappearance of antagonisms would presuppose either that intergroup antagonisms have no other basis than private ownership of the instruments of production or that the state disappears. But each of these two hypotheses is, to say the least, unlikely. There is no
reason why all the interests of the members of a collectivity should become harmonious simply because the instruments of production cease to be private property. One type of antagonism disappears, but not all possible antagonisms. Furthermore, as long as administrative and directorial functions persist, there is by definition the risk that those who perform these functions may be either unjust, ill-informed, or unwise and that those governed may not be satisfied with the decisions made by those governing.

Behind these deliberately elementary remarks, there remains a fundamental problem, namely, the reduction of politics as such to economics. Marx's sociology, at least in its messianic and prophetic form, presupposes the reduction of the political-order to the economic order. But the political order is essentially irreducible to the economic order. Whatever the economic and social regime may be, the political problem will remain, because it consists in determining who governs, how the leaders are chosen, how power is exercised, and what the relationship of consent or dissent is between the government and the governed. The political order is as essential and autonomous as the economic order. These two orders have a reciprocal relation. The way in which production or the distribution of collective resources is organized influences the way in which the problem of authority is solved; and inversely, the way in which the problem of authority is solved influences the way in which the problems of production and of the distribution of resources are solved. The mistake is to think that a certain way of organizing production and the distribution of resources automatically solves and does away with the problem of leadership. The myth of the state's disappearance is the myth that the state exists only to produce and distribute resources and that, once this problem of production and distribution of resources is solved, there is no longer any need for a state, i.e., for leadership.30

This myth is doubly misleading. First, the solution of the planned economy entails a strengthening of the state. And second, even if planning did not entail a strengthening of the state, modern society would still have the problem of leadership, of the mode in which authority was to be exercised.
In other words, it is impossible to define the political regime simply by the class supposedly exercising power. The political regime of capitalism cannot be defined by the power of the monopolists any more than the political regime of a socialist society can be defined by the power of the proletariat. In the capitalist system, it is not the monopolists who personally exercise power; and in the socialist regime, it is not the proletariat which personally exercises power. In each of these two regimes, we must determine which men perform the political functions, how they are chosen, how they exercise authority, and what is the relationship of government to governed. It is impossible to reduce the sociology of political regimes to a mere appendage of the sociology of economics or of social, class.

It remains for me to examine one last aspect of the problem of the relation of the economy to the whole of the society: the question of ideas or ideologies, Marx often spoke of ideas or ideologies, and he tried to explain ways of thinking—intellectual systems—in terms of their social context.

Generally speaking, in Marxist doctrine ideas belong to what Marx called the superstructure. The mode of interpretation of ideas by the reality may assume various modalities. It is possible to explain ways of thinking by the mode of production, the technical style of the society in question. But the explanation which has been most successful is the one which ascribes certain ideas to a certain social class.

In general, Marx understood by "ideology" the false consciousness or the false image a social class has of its own situation and of society as a whole. To a large extent, he regarded the theories of the bourgeois economists as a class ideology. Not that he imputed to bourgeois economists the intention of deceiving their students or their readers or of giving 'a false interpretation of reality; but he was inclined to think that a class cannot see the world except in terms of its own situation. As Sartre would say, the bourgeois sees the world defined by the rights he possesses in it. The juridical image of a world of rights and obligations is the social image which the bourgeois must have as a result of his situation as a bourgeois.
This interpretation—the false consciousness linked to class consciousness—can be applied to a number of ideas, ideological systems, and economic and social doctrines. But there are two difficulties about this interpretation of ideology. First, if as a result of its situation a class has a false idea of the world—if, for example, the bourgeois class does not understand the mechanism of surplus value or remains the victim of commodity fetishism—then how did a certain individual member of this class (e.g., Marx) succeed in ridding himself of these illusions, of this false consciousness? It is possible to find an answer to this question, but then another question arises: If every class has a partial and partisan way of thinking, there is no longer any such thing as truth. How is one ideology superior to another, if every ideology is inseparable from the class that creates or adopts it? Whence the temptation to reply that, among ideologies, there is one that is superior to the others because there is one class capable of conceiving the world as it really is.

In fact, one of the tendencies of Marxist thought is to show why in the capitalist world it is the proletariat, and only the proletariat, that conceives the truth about the world, because it is only the proletariat that conceives the future beyond the revolution.

For example, if you read the works of Lukacs, one of the last great Marxist philosophers, you will find in his book "History and Class Consciousness" (Geschichte und Klassebewusstsein) an attempt to prove that class ideologies are not identical and that the ideology of the proletarian class is true because, in the situation imposed on it by capitalism, the proletariat and only the proletariat is capable of conceiving society in its development, in its evolution toward the revolution, and hence in its reality.  

There is, then, a primary theory of ideology which tries to avoid slipping into utter relativism by maintaining the link between ideology and class and at the same time the truth of one of the ideologies.

The difficulty with a formula of this kind is that the truth of this class ideology is open to debate. It is easy for defenders of other ideologies and other classes to say that we are all on the same level; assuming that our
view of capitalism is governed by our bourgeois prejudice, then your proletarian view is governed by your proletarian prejudice. Why should the prejudice of the out's be better as such than the prejudice of the in's? Or, if you prefer, why should the prejudice of those on the wrong side of the tracks be better, as such, than the prejudice of those on the right side? This line of argument leads to a complete skepticism in which all ideologies are equal, equally partial arid partisan, prejudiced, and therefore illusory. Another direction has therefore been explored which seems to me preferable, the same direction that has been taken by the sociology of knowledge. There is good reason to establish distinctions between different types of intellectual constructs. In a certain sense, all thinking is related to social milieu, but the relation of painting, physics, mathematics, political economy, or political doctrines to social reality is not the same.

It is proper to distinguish scientific methods or theories related to, but not dependent on, the social reality from ideologies or misconceptions resulting from class situations which prevent men from seeing the truth. Or again, it is proper to establish distinctions between types of intellectual constructs and to study carefully the modalities of the relation of these different types of intellectual constructs to the social reality. This task is the very one which the various sociologists of knowledge, Marxist and non-Marxist, are trying to accomplish in order to safeguard, on the one hand, the possible universal truth of certain sciences and, on the other, the possible universal value of works of art. Indeed, it is important for a Marxist or a non-Marxist not to reduce the significance of a scientific or aesthetic production to its class content. Marx, who was a great admirer of Greek art, knew just as well as the sociologists of knowledge that the significance of human creations is not exhausted by their class content. Works of art have value and meaning even for other classes and other ages.

Without in the least denying that thinking is related to social reality and that certain varieties of thinking are related to social class, it is important to re-establish qualitative distinctions and to defend two statements which seem indispensable if we are to avoid nihilism: (1) There are domains in which the thinker can arrive at a truth valid for all, and nor merely a truth
of class. (2) There are domains in which the intellectual and esthetic products of societies have value and importance for the men of other societies.

I would like to conclude by indicating very briefly the Marxist schools which have come into being since Marx. Basically, there have been three major crises in Marxist thought during the last century. The first is the one which has been called the crisis of "revisionism." Regrettably, this word has been used several times in history with meanings which are both different and related. The first crisis was that of German social democracy at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one. The two protagonists were Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. The basic argument was this: Is capitalist economy changing in such a manner that the revolution which we predict and on which we are counting will occur according to plan? Bernstein was the revisionist who declared that class antagonisms were not increasing in the capitalist economy, that economic concentration was not coming about either as quickly or as completely as had been anticipated, and that consequently it was not certain wisdom to rely on the historical dialectic to achieve both the catastrophe of revolution and the nonantagonistic society. This Kautsky- Bernstein dispute ended, within the German social democratic party and the Second International, with the victory of Kautsky and the defeat of the revisionists. The orthodox thesis was maintained.

The second crisis in Marxist thought was (he crisis of Bolshevism. A party calling itself Marxist seized the power in Russia, and this party, as was natural, described its victory as the victory of a proletarian revolution. A fraction of the Marxists—the orthodox Marxists of the Second International, the majority of the German socialists, and the majority of Western socialists—did not agree. Since, let us say, 1917 to 1920 there has been within those parties calling themselves Marxist a dispute whose central point might be summarized as follows. Is Soviet power a dictatorship of the proletariat or a dictatorship over the proletariat? These expressions were used as early as 1917 to 1920 by the two great protagonists of this second crisis, Lenin and Kautsky. In the first crisis of revisionism, Kautsky was on the side of orthodoxy. In the Bolshevist crisis, he believed that he was still
on the side of orthodoxy; but there was now a new orthodoxy to victimize him.

Lenin's thesis was simple and may be summarized as follows. The Bolshevik party that called itself Marxist and proletarian represented the proletariat in power; the power of the Bolshevik party was the dictatorship of the proletariat. Since, after all, it had never been known with any certainty what the dictatorship of the proletariat would be like, the hypothesis that the power of the Bolshevik party was the dictatorship of the proletariat was, in the last analysis, rather tempting, and in any case it could be maintained. From this point on, everything was easy, for if the power of the Bolshevik party was the power of the proletariat, the Soviet regime was a socialist proletarian regime, and the construction of socialism followed from it.

On the other hand, according to Kautsky's thesis, a revolution occurring in a nonindustrialized country in which the working class was in a minority could not be a socialist proletarian revolution. The dictatorship of one party was not a dictatorship of the proletariat but a dictatorship over the proletariat.

From this cleavage there developed two schools of Marxist thought: one which regarded the regime of the Soviet Union as the fulfillment, with a few unforeseen modifications, of Marx's prophecies, and the other which believed that the essence of Marxist thought had been distorted, because true socialism implied not only collective ownership and planning but political democracy as well. According to the second school, socialist planning without democracy is not socialism.

The third crisis, finally, is the one in which we are living and which might be expressed by the question: Is there, between the Bolshevik version and what we might call the Scandinavian-British version of socialism, a third, intermediate term?

Today it is obvious that one of the possible modalities of a socialist society is central planning under the direction of a more or less absolute state, itself identified with a party calling itself socialist. This is the Soviet version of Marxist doctrine. There is a second version, the Western version, whose most perfect form is probably Swedish society, where there is a
mixture of private and public institutions and a very extensive equalization of income. Partial planning and partially collective ownership of the instruments of production are combined with Western democratic institutions, i.e., multiple parties, free elections, free discussion of ideas and doctrines. A Sovietized socialism, on the one hand, and a bourgeoisified socialism, on the other: these are the two very obvious extremes in the modern world.