



MARX, ENGELS, AND MARXISMS

# Reexamining Engels's Legacy in the 21st Century

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Kohei Saito

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Kohei Saito  
Editor

# Reexamining Engels's Legacy in the 21st Century

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## PREFACE

It's been 200 years since the birth of Friedrich Engels, the closest and life-long comrade of Karl Marx as well as the founder of Marxism. Inevitably, throughout the course of history, the evaluation of Engels has wavered and changed dramatically. Today we are in a position to examine the true legacy of Engels's theory beyond the sterile opposition between traditional Marxism and Western Marxism.

It is certain that Engels's achievements in the history of Marxism are—with the exception of Marx himself—incomparably high. As Terrell Carver points out, it was not Marx's *Capital* but Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that was most read among books on Marxism.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the leaders of the Second International, as well as those who led the first successful Marxist seizure of state power in the Russian Revolution, were heavily influenced by Engels's views on history, the state and revolution. What these traditional Marxists thought of as Marxism was actually Marx's theory heavily influenced by the late Engels.

Engels edited Marx's economic manuscripts and published them as Volume II and III of *Capital*. He also edited and republished various books, pamphlets, and articles by Marx after his death. In doing so, he added new prefaces and introductions, sometimes even emending and modifying original texts written by Marx. Thus, it is no coincidence that

<sup>1</sup>Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983), 119.

the popularity of Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, as well as his systematic intervention in Marx's writings, determined the course of Marxism in the twentieth century.

The reason for Engels's success is largely owing to the simplification of Marx's theory in addition to his sharp analysis of concrete social and political events. Engels clearly recognized that the extensive scope of Marx's project goes far beyond any short-sighted view of the interests of workers' and socialist movements, which made the wide reception of Marx's theory among workers difficult. The essence of Engels's theoretical endeavor is thus not a simple deformation of Marx's theory, but rather the reconstruction of its key elements in a way that was adjustable to and compatible with socialist and workers' movements at the time.

With hindsight, one can say that the conditions for a post-capitalist society such as Marx anticipated did not exist in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In the absence of the conditions for socialism Engels did his best to formulate an ideology to counter the capitalist ideology of the modernization but *within* the modern social system of nation-states. In this attempt, he overemphasized certain aspects of Marx's theory such as rationalism, positivism, progressive view of history, productivism, and Eurocentrism. However, precisely because of this strategy, Engels's attempt turned out to be quite successful. As Michael Heinrich points out, Marxism provided "a comprehensive intellectual orientation" for the working class.<sup>2</sup> Without Engels's re-assembling of Marx's theory, the enormous success of Marxism in the twentieth century would have been impossible.

Nevertheless, insofar as the secret of Engels's success was based on his uncritical appraisal of the modernization process, Marxism was not able to provide a theoretical scope that truly goes beyond modern capitalist society. As Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed out,<sup>3</sup> Marxism in the centers of the capitalist world-system has turned into social democracy, demanding reforms of capitalist economy under representative democracy. In the semi-peripheries and peripheries where socialist revolutions were successful, as Wallerstein says, Marxism has only functioned as an ideology that legitimizes industrialization and modernization under

<sup>2</sup> Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 24.

<sup>3</sup> See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

“state capitalism,” an undemocratic political form. Ultimately, “actually existing socialist countries” remained trapped within the global system of sovereign states.<sup>4</sup>

In this vein, Engels’s theoretical intervention came to be regarded as the reason for the political dogmatization of “Marxism.” As a result, he was severely accused of the “deformation” of Marx’s own theory. As discussed in this volume, Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch criticized Engels already in the 1920s, and Engels’s “scienticism” was also criticized from the “humanist” standpoint of the young Marx in the 1960s.

Furthermore, because the new complete works of Marx and Engels (*Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*) provides easier access to Marx’s own manuscripts and notebooks, a series of works has emerged which investigate the intellectual relationship between Marx and Engels more critically.<sup>5</sup> However, there are also Marxist scholars who point to the one-sided character of the criticisms raised by Post-Marxism. John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, for example, explore the rich theoretical possibilities of Engels’s dialectical investigations of nature in terms of contemporary ecological thinking.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, (re)reading Engels today is somewhat different from doing so in the past. At the early stage of Marxism, Engels was uncritically identified with Marx’s own theory, which made traditional Marxism very dogmatic. In the course of the twentieth century, various critical attempts to distance Engels’s theory from traditional Marxism emerged. However, in the twenty-first century, after the demise of actually existing socialism, as well as the decay of Marxist social and political movements, it is possible to examine the legacy of Engels’s analysis of capitalism more soberly.

For example, Wolfgang Streek, in his recent article in *New Left Review*, has reinterpreted Engels’s interest in military issues historically, attempting to formulate a new theoretical foundation for the analysis of warfare and

<sup>4</sup> See Paresh Chattopadhyay, *The Marxian Concept of Capital and the Soviet Experience: Essay in the Critique of Political Economy* (Westport: Praeger, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Kohei Saito, “Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship Revisited from an Ecological Perspective,” in *Marx’s Capital After 150 Years: Critique and Alternative to Capitalism*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, *Marx and the Earth: An Anti-critique* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

the inter-state-system in the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Paul Blackledge, in his article published in *Monthly Review*, points out how the young Engels, independently of Marx, formulated some key theses of Marxism. In fact, Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England* remains quite useful for analyzing the contemporary capitalist system, because his sharp and pioneering insights continue to astonish today's readers.<sup>8</sup>

Like Streek and Blackledge, the contributors to this volume aim at new theoretical interventions and reevaluation of Engels's legacy on the bicentenary occasion of his birth. In this way, the volume attempts to critically reexamine the merits and limits of Engels's theory in the twenty-first century. The book consists of four parts.

In Part I, Regina Roth and Ryuji Sasaki discuss the issue of class in Engels's theory. In Chapter 1 Roth explores the sources which Engels used for his well-known analysis of the *Condition of the Working Class in England*, focusing on the role of technology. She evaluates Engels's claims from today's standpoint, discussing their validity and limits. In Chapter 2 Sasaki rethinks Engels's theory of class struggle, focusing on his *The Peasant War in Germany* written in 1850.

In Part II, Engels's philosophy will be critically analyzed, particularly in relation to epistemology and ontology in German Idealism. In Chapter 3 Tom Rockmore critically investigates whether Engels's reflection theory of knowledge, as well as any form of materialism on which he relies, could overcome the traditional philosophical problem of knowledge. In Chapter 4 Kaan Kangal examines Engels's dialectics in the *Dialectics of Nature* and shows that, unlike Hegel, his dialectic is intended to work *against* metaphysics.

Part III discusses Engels's theory of crisis as well as post-capitalism. In Chapter 5 Timm Graßmann reconstructs Engels's theory of crisis. According to Graßmann, not only Engels's insider and commercial knowledge, but also his numerous observations and analyses, inspired and shaped Marx's view. Engels made a major contribution to the analysis of both the empirical workings and the spirit of capitalism. In Chapter 6 Kohei Saito revisits the problem of the intellectual relationship between

<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Streek, "Engels's Second Theory," *New Left Review* 123 (June/July 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Blackledge, "Engels vs. Marx?: Two Hundred Years of Frederick Engels," *Monthly Review* 72, no. 1 (May 2020).

Marx and Engels. Here Saito uses Georg Lukács's theory of metabolism that was developed in the *Ontology of Social Being* in order to show that Engels's conception of labor plays a key role in Lukács's theory of crisis. In Chapter 7 Seongjin Jeong explores Engels's vision of socialism. Contrary to conservative or anarchist accusations, Jeong shows that Engels belongs to the tradition of socialism from below, that is, democratic socialism, along with Marx, envisioning post-capitalism as the free and full development of "association."

Part IV "Engels at the Margins" deals with new fields opened up within Engels's theory, such as gender, ecology, colonialism, and anthropology. In Chapter 8 Camilla Royle argues that an ecological sensibility is evident throughout Engels's work, especially his writings on urban life. According to Royle, Engels's sharp criticism of proposed solutions to the problem of poor housing, that were based on the acquisition of commodities, is relevant to debates over environmental strategy today. In Chapter 9 Heather Brown assesses the legacy of Engelsian feminism, both positive and negative, and suggests future areas of study that will contribute, from a Marxist perspective, to the important discussion of intersectional relationships between class and gender.

In Chapter 10 Soichiro Sumida argues that Engels was ahead of Marx in research on political economy and on Ireland. Their correspondence from the 1850s and 1860s also shows that Marx's fully fledged Irish studies relied heavily on Engels's findings. Nevertheless, Sumida concludes that Marx's theory of capitalist colonialism is clearly different from the late Engels's view on Ireland. In Chapter 11 Thomas C. Patterson explores the legacy of Engels's contributions to contemporary anthropological inquiry. Patterson examines selected works by Engels in chronological order—*The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man* (1876), and *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884).

In an Afterword, Terrell Carver reflects upon all the contributions by asking "What is Friedrich Engels?" The question remains an open one because different approaches to Engels in different historical conjunctures always produce new answers, and not always in relation to Marx.

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PART I

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Engels and Class



# Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England* in the Context of Its Time (1845–1892)

*Regina Roth*

The nineteenth century was a period marked by rapid and thoroughgoing social and economic changes. The most striking aspect of these changes lay in the development of technology. Across a number of fields the rate of innovation was gaining pace and leading to ground-breaking inventions. England was at the center of these developments, it was the home of the industrial revolution and was described at the time as the “workshop of the world.” Machines and inventions were taken as signs of a new era. In 1829, the historical and literary writer Thomas Carlyle wrote

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of the “age of machinery,”<sup>1</sup> and the English novelist and future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli made the following observation in one of his early novels from 1844: “cities [were] peopled with machines.”<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Engels, son of a thriving textile entrepreneur in the Wupper Valley, also showed great interest in the innovations of the day. As an 18-year old, while apprenticed to a friend of his father’s in the wholesale trade in Bremen, Engels published several articles in German newspapers and periodicals. These included an article in October 1840 about steamships, in which Engels discussed the invention of the double-propeller and reported on some of the early tests that the British had been carrying out.<sup>3</sup>

This article appeared in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, an influential newspaper also known as the *Augsburger Allgemeine*, which was widely read. The publisher, Johann Georg von Cotta, had received an article from Engels for the daily *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser*. He responded by offering the young writer a contract to act as the Bremen correspondent for his daily newspaper, which Engels undertook from August 1840 to February 1841—contributing five articles.<sup>4</sup> Engels made his debut as a journalist in the *Telegraph für Deutschland*, for which he wrote 15 articles between March 1839 and December 1841, mostly under the pseudonym Friedrich Oswald. The editor of the *Telegraph* was the German poet and publicist Karl Gutzkow. Engels’s first article was his “Letters from Wuppertal” in March 1839.<sup>5</sup> Gutzkow was keen to have young authors contributing to his paper, however, he was critical of “Letters from Wuppertal,” remarking to the publicist Alexander Jung that: “I had to make a number of corrections, and also had to edit out some of the descriptions of personalities that were too lurid. Since then he has sent me much that I regularly have to rework.”<sup>6</sup> In his articles Engels revealed himself to be a critical observer of his times. His themes mainly

<sup>1</sup> Emma Griffin, *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution*. 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Carl B. Frey, *The Technology Trap: Capital, Labor, and Power in the Age of Automation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 112.

<sup>3</sup> See Friedrich Engels, *Korrespondenzen aus Bremen*, in MEGA I/3, 192–198.

<sup>4</sup> See the Cotta’s letter to Engels, 8/7/1840 in MEGA I/3, 673. The five articles are published in MEGA I/3, 134–150, 199–202, 208–209, see also 679–680.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Briefe aus dem Wuppertal*, in MEGA I/3, 32–51, 666–667.

<sup>6</sup> See MEGA I/3, 671–672.

focused on culture, literature, and religion, but he also wrote about social conflict, especially in the textile factories in the Wupper Valley.<sup>7</sup>

In his activities as a journalist Engels showed an ever greater interest in scientific and technological developments. In the spring of 1844, he wrote an article for the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, “Outline of a critique of Political Economy.”<sup>8</sup> In the article he showed that inventions, when looked at from a strictly economic viewpoint, had undoubtedly increased productivity, but that it was the owners who gained the profit. He also mentioned the latest advances in scientific knowledge, especially in chemistry, with the work of Claude-Louis de Berthollet and Justus von Liebig, as well as in mechanics, with James Watt and Edmund Cartwright. He saw the value of these innovations applying equality to agriculture as well as to industry—seeing great potential in the former. He held that it was an inescapable conclusion that an immeasurable increase in productive capacity could support a growing population, in contrast to the pessimistic views of the economist Thomas R. Malthus.<sup>9</sup> Even in later years he continued to show an interest in science and inventions. For instance there was his friendship with the German chemist Carl Schorlemmer, who came to Manchester in 1859 as a lecturer at Owen College and was appointed as a member of the Royal Society.<sup>10</sup> Later, in the 1870s his multi-faceted studies were reflected in the work *Dialectics of Nature* (MEGA<sup>2</sup> I/26), as well as in his exchanges with Marx concerning the latest developments in science (i.e., Engels’s letter to Marx, 23/11/1882).

Yet Engels is far better known for his skepticism, and as an unrelenting critic of the deep economic and social transformations wrought by industrialization. No work has played a more central role in establishing this reputation than *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, which was published at the end of May 1845 by the Leipzig publisher Otto

<sup>7</sup> Engels, *Briefe aus dem Wuppertal*, in MEGA I/3, 35. See also Engels’s critical remarks in his article about migrants in Bremerhaven, in MEGA I/3, 143.

<sup>8</sup> Engels used in the title of his article the term “Nationalökonomie” which was frequently employed in nineteenth-century German to translate the term “Political Economy.”

<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Umriss zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie*, in MEGA I/3, 478–479, 486, 490.

<sup>10</sup> Tristram Hunt, *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Life and Times of the Original Champagne Socialist* (London: Penguin, 2009), 207, 285.



Wigand. At a good 350 pages, Engels managed to write the book in just six months following his return from Manchester. His father had sent him there in 1842 so that he could represent his family's interests in the firm Ermen & Engels, while at the same time gaining an education in business. Despite being in Manchester for only a few years (from November 1842 to August 1844) he had time to pursue his own interests and goals.

He explored the city and its environs while immersing himself in the lively public debates which were possible because of the freedom of the press, as well as freedom of association and assembly. He read newspapers, busied himself with the literature concerning social and political questions, visited libraries, and attended events, especially those held by Chartists and Owenites. The Chartists were named after the so-called People's Charter and campaigned primarily around universal male suffrage. In 1838 they published their six key demands for electoral reform in the "People's Charter." The Owenites were British socialists and supporters of the Scottish industrialist Robert Owen, who owned a textile factory in which child labor had been abolished and working conditions substantially improved. Owen also developed arguments for a fundamental transformation of the economy and society, which found a widespread and receptive audience among the British public. Both groups organized what they called, "Halls of Science," as well as public lectures on a variety of themes. They also published their own newspapers. Engels was particularly struck by the way the Owenites had developed new concepts for analyzing the state and society. Through them he became acquainted with "political economy," a recent intellectual discipline that had been closely associated with the Scottish moral philosopher Adam Smith, and which sought to provide an explanation for economic processes and their repercussions in society. Engels made contact with the editors of the Chartist newspaper *The Northern Star* as well as the Owenite newspaper *The New Moral World*, corresponding with them on social movements occurring on the continent. At the same time, he supplied articles to periodicals and newspapers in Cologne, Paris, and Zürich concerning developments in Britain. In this way, Engels played a dual intermediary role, firstly by connecting oppositional movements in Western Europe, and secondly by helping these movements to develop their analysis of economic questions.

Engels gathered information concerning the condition of workers in Britain, where he could draw upon an established body of statistical surveys and sociographical data. Not only could he use population

data that had begun to be gathered with the first Census of 1801, but he could also benefit from new methods and processes by which “the state could observe itself” (these methods became more widespread in other countries as the century progressed). Engels also had access to official parliamentary and government enquiries known as the “Blue Books,” which were made available to the public. They covered a range of themes from the condition of housing, to the state of health in particular cities or regions.<sup>11</sup> Statistical societies had recently been established in Manchester (the *Manchester Statistical Society* of 1833) as well as in London (the *London Statistical Society* of 1834) and conducted investigations furnishing a wealth of data on many topics. The statistical societies pursued differing goals. In London they centered round the political economist Richard Jones and included professors such as Adolphe Quetelet and well-known personalities like Charles Babbage. They mainly focused on deepening David Ricardo’s deductive method, by combining his abstract principles, which set out the mechanics of the economy, with a body of data, in the hope of being able to develop systematic laws akin to those achieved in the natural sciences. In contrast, in Manchester it was bankers, entrepreneurs, and doctors who were the driving forces behind the statistical society, whose aim lay in social and political reform.<sup>12</sup>

A number of works were published in this milieu, which did much to put questions such as the condition of the lower-classes and awareness of urban problems such as housing, sanitation, and epidemics onto the political agenda. The work of doctors such as James Phillips Kay (1832) and Peter Gaskell (1833) as well as Thomas Carlyle’s “Condition of England Question” became influential in the debates of the 1840s.<sup>13</sup> Engels searched through newspapers for articles on these questions and especially for individual cases. In 1845 he stressed that he wanted to

<sup>11</sup>Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009), 57; Matthias Bohlender, *Metamorphosen des liberalen Regierungsdenkens. Politische Ökonomie, Polizei und Pauperismus* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2007), 296, 348.

<sup>12</sup>Lawrence Goldman, “The Origins of British ‘Social Science’: Political Economy, Natural Science, and Statistics, 1830–1835,” *The Historical Journal* 26 (1983).

It should be added that the London society eventually developed an agenda that focused on using statistics to create practical measures to alleviate social problems.

<sup>13</sup>Michael Levin, *The Condition of England Question. Carlyle, Mill, Engels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 42–43.

focus on “liberal” source material,<sup>14</sup> yet among the papers he read, an overwhelming proportion came from oppositional sources. Engels also established contacts with compatriots such as the merchant and poet Georg Weerth or the publicist and political activist Jakob Venedey. He also met an Irish woman, Mary Burns, who was presumably a factory worker or housemaid, and who subsequently became Engels’s partner. In this way, Engels was able to build a personal network with which he could exchange information, literature, and ideas. It was most likely through Venedey that Engels got to attend demonstrations, such as the weavers’ protest against female labor. It was at these events that he met the Chartist James Leach, who ran a book and newspaper shop in which Engels could find the literature he needed.<sup>15</sup> It is also conceivable that through Mary Burns he was able to make contact with workers’ families, and especially Irish ones. However, the representation of Irish workers and their families in the “Condition” was almost entirely based on anti-Irish prejudices that were common in Britain at the time.<sup>16</sup>

With these materials, Engels developed a form of social reportage that joined the ranks of a genre that had been developing since the turn of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, Engels wanted to research “reality” and immerse himself in “real living things.” On the other hand, he wanted to keep a “charge-sheet” (*Sündenregister*) of the crimes of “the bourgeoisie” (letter to Marx, 19/11/1844). In his polemical indictment, he speaks of the radical exploitation of the workers and does not even hold back from accusing the bourgeoisie of murder—that is the “social murder” which society inflicts upon the workers.<sup>17</sup>

The central themes of *The Condition* include: the development of industrialization, the significance of steam power and machinery, the concentration of capital and economic crises, the catastrophic working conditions in the factories, mines and workshops, and the dangers for

<sup>14</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (New York: John W. Lovell, 1887), 10.

<sup>15</sup>Jakob Venedey, *England* vol. 3 (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1845), 252, 263, 271; Harry Schmidtgal, *Friedrich Engels’s Manchester-Aufenthalt 1842–1844* (Trier: Karl-Marx-Haus, 1981), 60; Gregory Claeys, *Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From Moral Economy to Socialism, 1815–60* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 34, 166.

<sup>16</sup>Regina Roth, “Engels’s Irlandbild in seiner Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England von 1845” *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2011; Hunt, *The Frock-Coated Communist*, 107.

<sup>17</sup>Engels, *The Condition*, 19.

female workers and child laborers in Britain. At the same time, Engels provided a thorough description of the consequences of urbanization for the workers' standard of living, their cramped housing conditions, lack of educational opportunities, and poor health. Finally, he discussed the question of how the laborers should organize themselves, the role of the state, and whether it was possible for the state of misery to be overthrown. Engels's goal lay in a fundamental improvement in the condition of the workers. In his view this meant only one path. The class struggle between the capitalists and workers could not be won by reforms instituted by the employers or the state—only a revolution could fundamentally change the situation.

Engels devoted a major portion of the work to a description of urbanization as a consequence of the spread of industrial production, beginning with the housing conditions of workers in cities that had witnessed rapid industrialization. Although he considered a number of cities including London, Dublin, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, he mainly focused on Manchester and the surrounding region. By the 1840s this city in the heart of northwest England was regarded as a kind of “shock city” and a “symbol of a new age.”<sup>18</sup> Engels was not the first person to describe dense housing tenements, cramped unpaved streets, air pollution, missing sewage, and the lack of waste disposal or clean running water. Many critics, both British and non-British, had pointed to the impact of industrialization on cities long before Engels. There had already been an outcry over “urban overcrowding” and the dangers it posed to public health in Manchester.<sup>19</sup> While partially stemming back to the period after the Napoleonic War in 1815, fascination with the city peaked in the 1840s. Contemporaries, and not only intellectuals, were drawn by the vitality of the city and the new ideas that were coming out of it.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is the image that Engels painted that has exerted a particular influence over the twenty and twenty-first centuries. There is barely a social history of England in the nineteenth

<sup>18</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth: Ed. Penguin, 1992), 56, 88; Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 399.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Lees, *Cities Perceived. Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820–1940* (Columbia University Press, 1985), 16.

<sup>20</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 93–94.

century that does not make some reference to Engels.<sup>21</sup> Even Pope Benedict XVI invoked Engels as the key witness for the “terrible conditions of life” that afflicted the industrial workers of the nineteenth century.

According to Engels Manchester’s problems were of a sort typically faced by all newly industrialized cities. Yet more recent research has shown that this cannot be accepted without qualification. There is no question that rapidly industrializing cities led to a deterioration in the working and living conditions of the workers, especially in relation to the issues raised by Engels—lack of comfort, poor health, and falling life expectancy. Yet it is worth giving consideration to the way in which these problems were addressed in different cities. The classic contrast in this respect is between Manchester and Birmingham (though one could also contrast Edinburgh and Glasgow). Birmingham had a somewhat different economic structure to Manchester with a greater number of smaller businesses organized in workshops and relatively fewer factories. There were also significant differences in the social structure. Among the workers there was a greater variety of skills and specialist trades which meant they typically earned more and could afford better accommodation.<sup>22</sup> While there were a number of purely industrial cities in the wider Manchester region, Manchester itself should not be reduced solely to its status as an industrial city. By the 1840s the city was as much a center for commerce and finance, drawing in entrepreneurs from Lancashire and further afield, as it was a center for the growing textile and machine production industries. Between 1831 and 1841 the proportion of workers in the cotton industry had fallen from 44 percent to 32 percent. In 1825 the proportion of capital invested in the textile factories was around 12 percent. The “landscape of smokestacks and giant factories”<sup>23</sup> that have become the dominant image of modern Manchester only constituted one aspect of the city at the time. One researcher puts it thus: “industrial Manchester was not a factory town which became a commercial centre; from

<sup>21</sup> Lees, *Cities Perceived*, 66–68. Encyclical SPE SALVI from Pope Benedict XVI to the bishops ... 30/11/2007, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 33–35; Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 400–401; Martin Daunt, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*. 3. 1840–1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3–12.

<sup>23</sup> Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 399.

the beginnings of industrialisation it had been a warehouse town with factories.”<sup>24</sup>

One of the phenomena that struck Engels about Manchester was the class division between the wealthy and the workers. Engels made the point that neither of them took notice of the other, that “the working people’s quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class.”<sup>25</sup> One trend in which this division became visible lay in the tendency for the wealthy to move out of the city center to settle down in the outskirts of the city. Similar expressions of social segregation had begun to emerge in the late eighteenth century which became more widespread over the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Urban historians have concluded that this was a slow process that was not uniform across all cities and had slowed down only by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

For the rest of this piece, the focus will be on one aspect of Engels’s analysis, namely, his consideration of the term “industrial revolution.” He made, in contrast to English observers (see below), explicit use of this phrase which has been applied subsequently by modern scholarship as a concept to describe the economic transition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whose origins lay in England. Engels identified three “levers” which had enabled industrialization to become global: the division of labor, machinery, and steam power.<sup>28</sup> The installation of machinery for Engels had a particularly important role to play, especially in terms of the negative implications for workers. Firstly, he showed how machines were displacing workers and the unemployment which resulted. Secondly, he stressed how wages were depressed for those workers who were not thrown out of the labor market. Finally, he underlined how both of these consequences were closely connected to the rise in female and child labor and the displacement of adult males.<sup>29</sup> This was as much admitted by contemporaries like the Scottish chemist and surgeon Andrew Ure. He advocated the introduction of machines and factories because it would lead to improvements in the work process that would

<sup>24</sup> Alan Kidd, *Manchester*. 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, 82, 95–96.

<sup>27</sup> Daunt, “Introduction,” 29–30.

<sup>28</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

result in superseding human labor altogether, or substantially reduce its cost via a greater reliance on female and child labor.<sup>30</sup>

Engels's utter disapproval of female and child labor was based not only on the displacement of the adult male workforce, but also on the serious harm being done to the children. A number of parliamentary reports concerning child labor were published in 1833 and 1842–1843 that provided ample testimony to their long working hours, the difficult and dangerous work they undertook in the factories and mines, and the numerous illnesses they contracted. Along with these concerns, he decried the way children were being denied an education, claiming they should be going to school every day rather than to the factory.<sup>31</sup> Engels was equally critical of the engagement of women in the factories and mines. Here he focused on describing the exploitative conditions in which they worked and the numerous illnesses they contracted as a result. In his discussion of female labor Engels placed a greater emphasis on the impact on “morals” (*Demoralisierung*) than he did when describing child labor. Like conservative reformers, he cites “drunkenness,” “illegitimate intercourse of the sexes,” and the increase in illegitimate births as a result of female and child labor.<sup>32</sup> Above all else, he was concerned about how the family unit suffered when wives and mothers were forced to work while husbands and fathers subsisted on low wages or were out of work. Under these conditions, girls and younger women were denied the skills required to manage a household, as well as the chance to give birth and raise children in peace. This resulted in widespread child neglect and a concomitant increase in the rates of child mortality and children becoming disabled due to accidents.<sup>33</sup>

From all of this Engels drew the conclusion that the family was in a state of dissolution.<sup>34</sup> Similar views were held by contemporaries in the trade union movement. For instance, a protest by weavers in May 1844 denounced female labor as a reversal of the God-given order, which

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures: Or, An Exposition of the Scientific, Moral, And Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (London: Charles Knight, 1835), 23.

<sup>31</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 74–75.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, 168 and 177.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, 139.

needed to be restored.<sup>35</sup> Engels sought to trace the “reign of the wife over the husband” back to the institution of private property and declared it to be as “inhuman” as the earlier domination of the man over the woman.<sup>36</sup> Engels offered corresponding arguments at the end of 1847 in *Principles of Communism*, where he was developing an outline for the political program of the “Communist League.” There he wrote that private property will be abolished by the coming communist social order, which will also destroy the dependence of women on men.

In *The Condition of the Working Class* Engels drew the final conclusion from his observations. He believed that essentially the modern factory worker was the “slave of the whole property-holding class,” and was in a worse state than the slave of antiquity, the serfs of the Middle Ages and even the slaves in the American and Caribbean plantations, because at least in those instances the masters had some responsibility for the preservation of their labor power.<sup>37</sup> Thus Engels had come to appreciate a widespread fear of technologically induced unemployment, depressed wages and poverty shared by many workers. Similar positions were held by the Owenist John Watts and the Chartist James Leach, both of whom were cited by Engels.<sup>38</sup> The comparison between factory labor and slavery was often alluded to when discussing the introduction of legislation to regulate working conditions in the factories in Britain. This was the case not only among trade unions, short-time committees, or radical MPs in the House of Commons, but also among conservative reformers.<sup>39</sup>

Subsequent historical research has demonstrated the broad use of child labor prior to industrialization. Rather than beginning with the introduction of factories and machinery, children had played a major role in

<sup>35</sup> Venedey, *England* vol. 3, 257; Joyce Burnette, *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–3.

<sup>36</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 97. See Marx-Engels Collected Works 6, 354. Engels adds another reason to dismantle the dependence of women on men that is the role that the whole community should play in educating children. It is notable that Marx did not continue with this line of thought in *The Communist Manifesto*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 124.

<sup>38</sup> James Leach had spent many years as a factory worker in different parts of England and had been able to gather information and other material concerning wages and working hours. He has come to be seen as one of the earliest statisticians of the workers' movement. See Schmidtgal, *Manchester-Aufenthalt*, 66–67.

<sup>39</sup> Robert, Gray, *The Factory Question and Industrial England, 1830–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.



agriculture and had been taken on as household servants for centuries.<sup>40</sup> This can be substantiated through the Census returns for 1841 and 1851. They demonstrate that the majority of child labor still took place in agriculture and as servants (though these figures need to be treated with caution). This raises the question of the statistical evidence for child labor in industry. It is difficult to get an exact number for the share of child labor in the total factory workforce. In the mines there are estimates as high as 30 percent, the majority of whom were over ten years old, and it should not be overlooked that the factories of the textile industry were also a significant source of child labor.<sup>41</sup> Despite these caveats, it is indisputable that children played a significant role in the development of the industrial economy and that they suffered far worse working conditions than in other economic sectors and in earlier times.<sup>42</sup>

The same can be said about female labor. Here more recent research provides a more complex picture than the one originally given by Engels. Wage labor for women did not begin with the introduction of factories and machines.<sup>43</sup> Also, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of women working in the factories were aged between 16 and 21 and it was only in certain regions that a high proportion of married women were thus employed. This is substantiated by the 1841 Census in which the main branch of employment for women was in “domestic services.” Therefore, it can be seen that the family continued to generate its income from all its members, with women continuing to devote a greater share of their work to household forms of labor than men.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Tuttle, Carolyn and Simone A. Wegge, “Regulating Child Labor,” in *Institutions, Innovation and Industrialization*, eds. Avner Greif et al., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 337, 358; Peter Kirby, *Child Labor in Britain, 1750–1870* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2–3, 55–56.

<sup>41</sup> Peter N. Stearns, “Child Labor in the Industrial Revolution,” in *The World of Child Labor: An Historical and Regional Survey*, ed. Hugh D. Hindman (Amonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40; Kirby, *Child Labor*, 3–4, 31–32; Carolyn Tuttle, “A Revival of the Pessimist View. Child Labor in the Industrial Revolution,” *Research in Economic History* 18, 62–63, 69–77.

<sup>43</sup> Burnette, *Gender*, 16; Joyce Burnette, “Changing Economic Roles of Women,” in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Economic History*, eds. Robert Whaples and Randall E. Parker (London: Routledge, 2013), 306.

<sup>44</sup> Carol E. Morgan, *Women Workers and Gender Identities, 1835–1913: The Cotton and Metal Industries in England* (London: Routledge, 2001), 2.

*The Condition of the Working Class in England* was not only forceful in its time, but has continued to influence social historians and economists into the twentieth century. Some of the best-known examples include David Landes, Joel Mokyr, Edward P. Thompson, and Eric Hobsbawm. All of them have viewed the nineteenth century through the prism of the industrial revolution and have stressed the role of new technological innovations, fossil fuels, steam power, and new materials including iron and other ores.<sup>45</sup> Yet the fundamental problem is that much of the surviving evidence on wages, prices and the standard of living for the working population is patchy. Regional and occupational differences also have to be factored in. Therefore, it is necessary to make assumptions about the data in order to develop arguments or draw conclusions concerning developmental trends. At the same time, there have been repeated attempts to develop new perspectives or focus on new factors and then see how they relate to existing perspectives. Researchers continue to provide new methods of research or calculation, whose validity is open to debate. One such area of debate has centered on the question of technologically induced unemployment, or the displacement of human labor by machinery, and the effects which they entailed for workers during the process of industrialization.

As has already been mentioned, Engels was one of the first observers to use the term “industrial revolution” in his analysis of the economic development of Britain during the nineteenth century. It was not a concept he found among his British sources as the term was not widely used in Britain prior to the 1880s. Rather, it was an idea that came from French writers. Engels sought to combine the idea with a particular notion of revolution that stemmed from Moses Hess’ *Europäische Triarchie*, published in 1841. In that work Hess claimed that France, Germany, and England each had a role to play in advancing freedom and equality in politics, philosophy, and the economy, respectively. France would lead a political revolution, Germany a philosophical revolution and England an economic revolution. England was predestined to usher in an era of social upheaval due to its economic development which would inevitably result in an unbridgeable class separation between employers and workers.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Griffin, *Short History*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Moses Hess, *Die Europäische Triarchie* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1841), 150–151, 173; Engels, *The Condition*, 12.

The ideas Engels had developed in *The Condition* were amplified by Marx in the first volume of *Capital* in 1867. In that work Marx praised his friend: “how completely Engels understood the nature of the capitalist mode of production,” and “how wonderfully he painted the circumstances in detail.”<sup>47</sup> In citing Engels, Marx was referring to his remarks on female and child labor, and the “moral degradation” that resulted<sup>48</sup> as well as the negative consequences of machinery and the factory system, which had turned the workers into slaves.<sup>49</sup>

In Britain a comparable analysis of the country’s economic development since the eighteenth century began to take shape in the 1880s. Arnold Toynbee<sup>50</sup> developed a similar position to Engels by declaring that the “idea of the Industrial Revolution was a catastrophe.”<sup>51</sup> What followed was a series of economic histories that analyzed the transformation of the British economy and its impact on society. Features included depressed wages, cramped housing in rapidly growing cities lacking the appropriate infrastructure, and a public health crisis that not only affected work, but the entire working population. The main difference between these studies and Engels’s lays in their political conclusions. While Engels waited for the catastrophe to usher in a social revolution, Toynbee and those following him hoped to achieve social reforms that would address the root causes of these problems. In the 1960s Edward P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm produced in depth-studies arguing that industrialization came at the expense of the worker, which they, along with other historians, sought to locate in a stagnation of real wages through the nineteenth century. This point of view came to influence the popular perception of the industrial system and its formation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In more recent times, researchers responding to Engels have sought to explore in greater detail how the working population contributed to the

<sup>47</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*. Vol. 1 (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1887), 223.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 228, 239, 422–423.

<sup>50</sup> Translator’s note—the Arnold Toynbee referred to here was the father of the Arnold Toynbee who wrote on international affairs and developed a philosophy of history that was particularly influential in the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>51</sup> Donald C. Coleman, “Myth, History and the Industrial Revolution,” in *Myth, History and the Industrial Revolution*, ed. D.C. Coleman (London, Hambledon Press, 1992), 22.

process of industrialization. Robert C. Allen has carried out research into the influence of labor saving inventions and wage trends in the British economy from the end of the eighteenth until the twentieth century. He has developed a model to explain the long-term trends in relation to wages, profits, and productivity. For the first half of the nineteenth century (up to around 1840) real wages stagnated despite a tremendous increase in production. According to his model, the capitalists were able to extract additional profits through the introduction of factories and machines, which were used to invest in their further industrial expansion. But from the 1840s onwards workers benefitted from this expansion which resulted in rising real wages and a drop in the price of the consumer goods. Thus Allen confirms Engels's analysis of inequality during the early developmental phase of industrial capitalism, but not his predictions for how this would play out. According to Allen's assessment, the surviving data on wages confirms his theory of wage stagnation prior to the 1840s and wage growth thereafter.<sup>52</sup> Yet these conclusions are open to debate due to the poor state of the data, and trends on wages remain open to interpretation.<sup>53</sup>

In an article published in 2018 Allen looked at the relationship between inventions, growth in production and wage trends for hand weavers. He picked this group because they have served as the prime exhibit for anyone wanting to make a case for the damage done to the workers as a result of technical developments (not least Engels). Allen argues that low wages and high levels of poverty in the 1830s and 1840s followed on a period of rising wages from the 1790s to the 1820s.<sup>54</sup> These high wages suggest that there had been a notable increase in demand for hand weavers. This had been a driving force in the development of mechanical looms as a substitute for labor. Allen has come up with a "theory of induced innovation" to explain these trends: that the development and introduction of machinery prompted a reduction in wages, as can be observed among the hand weavers in the 1830s, but then new "incentives" might have appeared which could have resulted in

<sup>52</sup> See Robert C. Allen, "Engels's Pause: Technical Change, Capital Accumulation, and Inequality in the British Industrial Revolution," *Explorations in Economic History* 46 (2009).

<sup>53</sup> Griffin, *Short History*, 147.

<sup>54</sup> Engels had also noted in the introduction to his work that there had been a previous phase when the workers had better wages. See Engels, *The Condition*, 15.

a stabilization of wages. According to Allen, this was the case after the 1840s.<sup>55</sup>

Most recently a book on “the technology trap” was published. Its author, Carl B. Frey, has traced the history of industrialization over the past 200 years and has restated the argument that workers pay the price for technological progress because of the disruption it causes to their place within work process. The procedure of adaptation requires time and in many circumstances this can take an entire generation.<sup>56</sup>

Already in Engels’s day writers like Andrew Ure, who advocated the introduction of machinery and the establishment of the factory system, stressed the benefits to the workers.<sup>57</sup> During the 1930s the standard view that industrialization had been catastrophic was being challenged by British researchers into economic history who began to emphasize the “achievements” of the period. Other methods for ascertaining and evaluating statistical data supported the view that a rapidly growing population can sustain its standard of living due to the introduction of new inventions that had a revolutionary effect on the production process. Against this backdrop, John Clapham declared the standard view of the 1830s and 1840s as one in which “everything was getting worse for the working man” to be a myth.<sup>58</sup> Since the 1970s debates between “pessimists” and “optimists” have continued to unfold. The pessimists have tended to focus on the short to middle term, stressing the dramatic deterioration of working and living conditions, while the optimists have taken a longer term view, stressing the link between technological achievements and a rising standard of living across the whole population. This latter view of the industrial revolution has found its way into public consciousness, e.g., with the conversion of old industrial sites into museums. Here the industrial cities of the nineteenth century underlined their status as the cradle and birthplace of the industrial revolution.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See Robert C. Allen, “The Hand-Loom Weaver and the Power Loom: A Schumpeterian Perspective,” *European Review of Economic History* 22 (2018).

<sup>56</sup> Frey, *The Technology Trap*, 18–19.

<sup>57</sup> Ure, *The Philosophy*, 18, 307, 321; Engels, *The Condition*, 150; Coleman, “Myth,” 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32.

As we have seen, recent research has put into perspective the notion of the “industrial revolution,” which offers material for ongoing debates. Its critics have begun to challenge the assumption that the introduction of new inventions such as the Spinning Jenny, the Mule, the mechanical loom, and steam-powered machines, played a leading role across all branches of industry. Also, that in those branches where they played a decisive role, many of these inventions had been known decades before they came to dominate the production process. This applies, for example, to the mechanical loom, which had been invented in the 1780s but was only in general use as a method for processing yarn after the 1840s. As much can be said for steam-powered machines that took a good 50 years to reach their hegemonic status. The reason for this was that early innovations tended to be expensive and inefficient. It was only after a process of numerous modifications that they became economically viable. Another factor was that not all branches of industry relied upon the inventors coming up with radically new inventions. In many cases innovation took a more gradual form in which groups of skilled workers or engineers within different regions adapted their tools or working methods. This could result in significant increases in production and productivity, such as in the metalworking industry. Such views have displaced traditional notions of industrialization in Britain, as more recent authors have come to view technological inventions as only part of the story.<sup>60</sup>

So how did Engels view the subsequent development of industry, given that he lived another fifty years after writing *The Condition*? Engels kept receiving demands to republish the book or to issue a new edition (e.g., Wilhelm Liebknecht's letter to Engels on 25/3/1865, or Marx to Engels on 10/2/1866). In 1863, Engels declined a similar request arguing that the English proletariat had lost all revolutionary energy and “has declared itself in full agreement with the dominancy of the bourgeoisie” (Engels to Marx on 8/4/1863). A re-edition finally came about in 1885, thanks to the initiative of the American socialist Florence Kelley Wischnewetsky. Following the publication of an American edition in 1887 and an English edition in 1892, there eventually appeared a second German edition in the same year thanks to the Social Democrats August Bebel and Heinrich Dietz. Dietz, the publisher, had since long asked for the right to publish a new edition (Engels to Karl Kautsky

<sup>60</sup> Griffin, *Short History*, 85, 95; Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung*, 909.

on 16/2/1884, or Engels to Hermann Schlüter on 1/1/1885). Engels, however, was skeptical and took some convincing to give his consent to a second edition. He finally did so on the condition that the text remained basically unaltered, and that it should be reissued with a new foreword and an appendix sketching out developments since 1845 (Engels to Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky on 10/2/1885). This method had proved, according to Engels, successful with the English editions (Engels to Dietz on 23 and 27/4/1892).

Engels wrote the appendix in 1887 and reflected on much that had changed since 1845. Many of the industrial cities no longer had slums resembling his description of “Little Ireland” in Manchester. Many of the demands for parliamentary reform raised during the period had passed into legislation, while trade unions and strikes had become legal. Yet for Engels the basic problems remained, and he now used the categories developed by Marx in his magnum opus *Capital*. The workers necessarily worked for longer than what was required for the reproduction of their labor power, but it was the capitalists who claimed the newly formed surplus value. Engels argued that sustained improvements in the standards of living and working conditions had only been achieved by a minority of workers. He called this group of factory workers and trade unionists the “aristocracy of the working class,” stressing meanwhile that “the great mass of the working people” lived in the same state of uncertainty as they had done before.<sup>61</sup>

It is worth noting how Engels dealt with his earlier predictions in the appendix. He attributed his expectation of an imminent social revolution to youthful impatience, without going further into the reasons for the continuity of the system or the conclusions to be drawn—adding how, to his surprise, “so many” of his predictions have come to pass. Some of these that he mentioned included the way crises have had interrupted the development of the economy as well as the critical condition Britain has had come to find itself in as a result of competition from Germany and the USA. In spite of the changes that had taken place globally, Engels stressed the point that: “the same economical laws are at work, and the results ... must still be of the same order.” This could be seen, according

<sup>61</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, appendix, II–V, VIII.

to Engels, in the ongoing struggle to reduce the working day from ten to eight hours, and the recent miners' strike in Pennsylvania.<sup>62</sup>

Undeterred, Engels maintained his belief that an ever-deepening gulf between a shrinking group of capitalists and an expanding proletariat would result in a social revolution that would be led by socialist parties. It is in this sense that Engels's statements and proposals aimed at the British and American workers' movement should be interpreted. Thus, in 1885 Engels wrote that, as a result of the breaking apart of Britain's monopolistic position, the English workers would lose their privileged position and would find themselves on the same level as workers in other countries. Then, he believed, that "there will be Socialism again in England."<sup>63</sup> In 1892 he responded with enthusiasm to the so-called New Unionism that had sprung up among the trade unions in Britain since 1889–1890.<sup>64</sup> Already in 1887, when addressing three American workers' organizations, he suggested that they take to heart the "line of action first laid down in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1847" to accomplish "the unification of the various independent bodies into a national Labor Army." And he recommended that beyond the achievement of short-term improvements for the workers, they should aim at obtaining an enduring and radically different future.<sup>65</sup>

Despite his initial skepticism, Engels did not limit himself to publishing these views to the foreword of the new edition. Rather, he used the new edition as an opportunity to publicize his interpretation of economic development, his analysis of emerging tendencies in the economy, state, and society, and the role of the workers and their parties within these processes. In particular, he drew upon the socialist press to print these ideas so they would reach the largest possible audience.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., III, V.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., VIII–IX.

<sup>64</sup> Engels, "Preface," XVIII. "Preface" is in the 1892-edition (British edition).

<sup>65</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, VI. This quote is in the 1887-edition (American edition).



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# The Theory of Class Struggle in *the Peasant War in Germany*

Ryuji Sasaki

## ENGELS AND “MARXISM”

The term “Marxism” can be defined as a general term for the theoretical and practical currents that inherit in some way Karl Marx’s theory.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, when most people hear this word, they do not imagine such a general definition, but rather an influential ideology systematized under the name of “Marxism” in twentieth-century history. The person who played a decisive role in this “systematization” was Engels, who was the closest friend and cooperator of Marx. Engels gave “a more or less connected exposition of the dialectical method and of the communist world outlook”<sup>2</sup> in *Anti-Dühring*, and such “communist world outlook” served as a “comprehensive intellectual orientation” for the labor and

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<sup>1</sup>The English text was edited by Liz Suessenbach. I am grateful to her help. All the remaining errors are mine.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW, Vol. 25, 8.

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socialist movements.<sup>3</sup> After the death of Engels, the political movement based on “Marxism” became more successful, as seen in the Russian Revolution. Thus, the ideological influence of Marxism grew so strong that it determined not only the Marxists of the so-called orthodoxy but also other Marxist currents such as the Trotskyists who criticized them, and furthermore, the study of Marx in Academia.

“Marxism” in the above sense has three characteristics. The first moment that constitutes “Marxism” is a philosophical world outlook. Engels wrote in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* that it was by Marx and Engels that “the materialistic world outlook was taken really seriously for the first time and was carried through consistently [...] in all relevant domains of knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> Such a philosophical world outlook also led to the interpretation that dialectic was a universal general law to explain everything in nature. In *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels listed as such universal laws “[t]he law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; The law of the interpenetration of opposites; The law of the negation of the negation,” which, respectively, corresponded to “Die Lehre vom Sein,” “Die Lehre vom Wesen,” and “fundamental law for the construction of the whole system” in Hegel’s *Logik*.<sup>5</sup>

The second moment constituting “Marxism” was simplistic historical materialism based on the first moment. Young Marx and Engels criticized the idealist enlightenment vision of Young Hegelians which posed the change of consciousness by ideology, and they conceived the transformation of society on the basis of the material reproduction of human life. However, afterward, their materialistic view of society and history was separated from the original version and reduced to a rigid simplistic scheme. In other words, it is the scheme in which the political superstructure and ideology are determined by the economic basis, where the development of productive power promotes the transformation of production relations. From such a simple diagram arose vulgar economic

<sup>3</sup> Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in MECW, Vol. 26, 383.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, in MECW, Vol. 25, 356.

determinism or class reductionism, as well as theory of unilinear development stages, based on productivism which always regards an increase in technical productivity as progressive.

The third moment that constitutes “Marxism” is “Marxist economics.” What separates Marx’s critique of political economy from all other economics fundamentally is a critical analysis of economic determination of form.<sup>6</sup> However, in “Marxist economics” such a decisive moment of his critique of political economy has been neglected or reduced to a minor episode which is not so important for economics. Value theory is transformed into vulgar labor theory of value without theory of reification, money theory into theory of exchange process or theory of money function without theory of value form, and theory of capitalist process of production into exploitation theory without theory of labor. Thus, “Marxist economics” has fallen into the property-based theory which finds the foundation of capitalism in the private property of means of production, obscuring the fact that the source of the power of capitalistic modes of production lies in the economic determination of form which is constantly generated by a particular form of labor.<sup>7</sup> Practically, overcoming capitalistic mode of production has been reduced to the mere appropriation of private property and the acquisition of the state power behind the private property.

However, Engels’s theoretical work is not limited to the above-mentioned establishment of “Marxism.” Among other things, his early writings contain elements that can be not reduced to “Marxism.” The aim of this chapter is to rethink Engels’s theory of class struggle, focusing on Engels’s early writing, especially *German Peasants’ War* written in 1850. I explore his theory of class struggle from three perspectives. First—comparing his early writings with late writings—I will clarify that his early descriptions of class struggle are not a mere class reductionism. Rather, it shows that he tried to regard so-called non-class elements as what forms class. Second, by comparing his early works with Marx’s early works, including *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, I argue the significance and limitation of Engels’s early writings in related to the theory of

<sup>6</sup> See Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx’s Capital*, chap. 2.

<sup>7</sup> See Ryuji Sasaki, *A New Introduction to Karl Marx: New Materialism, Critique of Political Economy, and the Thought of Metabolism* (London: Palgrave, 2020); Teinosuke Otani, *A Guide to Marxian Economy: What Kind of Social System Is Capitalism?* (Berlin: Springer, 2018).

the state. Finally, I consider the flaws of Engels's theory of class from the perspective of Marx's critique of political economy.

## CLASS STRUGGLE AND RELIGION

It can be said that the image of *The Peasant War in Germany* was distorted by Engels himself. In preface to the second edition of this book, written in 1870, Engels wrote as follows:

My presentation, while sketching the historical course of the struggle only in its bare outlines, attempted to explain the origin of the Peasant War, the position of the various parties that played a part in it, the political and religious theories by which those parties sought to clarify their position in their own minds, and finally the result of the struggle itself as following logically from the historically established social conditions of life of these classes; that is to say, it attempted to demonstrate the political structure of Germany at that time, the revolts against it, and the contemporary political and religious theories not as causes but as results of the stage of development of agriculture, industry, roads and waterways, commerce in commodities and money then obtaining in Germany. This, the only materialist conception of history, originates not with myself, but with Marx, and can also be found in his works on the French Revolution of 1848-49, in the same *Revue*, and in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.<sup>8</sup>

There are two points to note here. First, according to this preface, his presentation in *The Peasant War in Germany* attempted to demonstrate "materialist conception of history" based on the history of Germany at that time, that is to say, "the political structure of Germany at that time, the revolts against it, and the contemporary political and religious theories not as causes but as results of the stage of development of agriculture, industry, roads and waterways, commerce in commodities and money then obtaining in Germany." This description by Engels shows a typical class reductionism, which later "Marxists" inherited. Second, Engels attributed this "materialist conception of history" to Marx, especially his historical work such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

<sup>8</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Preface to the Second Edition of *The Peasant War in Germany*," in MECW, Vol. 21, 94.

Of course, as many scholars have already pointed out, Marx's materialism is by no means class reductionism.<sup>9</sup> In order to understand Marx's view of history correctly, we need to know the context in which Marx formed it.<sup>10</sup>

Marx built up and developed his view of history in *The German Ideology* (1845–1847), *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), where his object of criticism was “philosophical” thinking such as the “Young Hegelian” and Proudhon. All of these philosophers had different ideas, but one thing they all had in common was the belief that they could change society through the power of their ideas. In other words, they thought that the reason why the world has been going wrong is because it has been dominated by some man-made ideas and ideals, such as religion. According to their thought, if those ideas were replaced by another good “idea” through the power of philosophy, we could free ourselves from the dominance of old ideas and transform society. Marx criticized this kind of philosophical thinking as follows. No matter how powerful the ideas may seem, they do not have any power independently of people's lives. Rather, the dominant idea has a great influence because it arises from and is supported by real life.

Therefore, if there is some kind of “alienation” within the ideas, it is only because there is alienation within the real world of life. This is why liberation from the domination of idea and ideal cannot be achieved by a critique of idea and ideal. It can only be realized by overcoming alienation in the real world. And, if we deny the transformation of the world through ideals and aim to overcome the alienation of the real world, we must find the power to transform this real world not in ideals, but in this alienated real world itself. Further, to find moments of social transformation in the real world, we need to ask not the question of *what* an illusion's secular foundation is, but rather the materialistic question of *why* and *how* that illusion was generated from that secular basis.<sup>11</sup> In this way, focusing on

<sup>9</sup>See Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983); Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>10</sup>For details, see Sasaki, *A New Introduction to Karl Marx*, chap. 1.

<sup>11</sup>“Owing to the fact that Feuerbach showed the religious world as an illusion of the earthly world—a world which in his writing appears merely as a phrase—German theory too was confronted with the question which he left unanswered: how did it come about that people ‘got’ these illusions ‘into their heads’? Even for the German theoreticians this

“why and how” is precisely the standpoint of Marx’s materialism.<sup>12</sup> Marx called this position of his own a “new materialism.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, young Marx departed from the position of the “Young Hegelian” which aimed at the change of consciousness through ideals and shifted to the position of “new materialism” which sought to transform the real world in which we live, and found the foundation of this transformation in the real world itself. Marx’s materialist view of history was born out of his “new materialism,” as described above. Therefore, of course, his historical materialism does not claim that all complex social phenomena are determined by economic interests, nor does it claim that societies with higher productive forces are more progressive. Rather, it seeks to find the power to change society not in ideals, but in the lives of real people. That is why Marx paid attention to the contradictions between the productive forces and the relations of production and tried to find the possibility and conditions for social change within them.

Young Engels, at the time of writing *The German ideology* with Marx, shared these views to some extent. Indeed, it can be said that Engels already had class-reductionist tendencies at the time, unlike Marx. In *The Peasant War in Germany*, for instance, Engels explained:

Even the so-called religious wars of the sixteenth century mainly concerned very positive material class interests; those wars were class wars, too, just as the later internal collisions in England and France. Although the class struggles of those days were clothed in religious shibboleths, and though the interests, requirements, and demands of the various classes were concealed behind a religious screen, this changed nothing at all and is easily explained by the conditions of the times.<sup>14</sup>

question paved the way to the materialistic view of the world, a view which is not without premises, but which empirically observes the actual material premises as such and for that reason is, for the first time, actually a critical view of the world” (Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in MECW, Vol. 5, 236).

<sup>12</sup> “It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of religion than to do the opposite, i.e. to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized. The latter method is the only materialist, and therefore the only scientific one.” See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 494.

<sup>13</sup> K. Marx, “These on Feuerbach,” in MECW, Vol. 5, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, in MECW, Vol. 10, 412.



It would be easy to read Engels's class reductionism from here. According to this paragraph, religion is a mere screen that conceals "the interests, requirements, and demands of the various classes." However, he goes on to point out the dominance of theology in the Middle Ages.

This supremacy of theology in the entire realm of intellectual activity was at the same time an inevitable consequence of the fact that the church was the all-embracing synthesis and the most general sanction of the existing feudal order. It is clear that under the circumstances all the generally voiced attacks against feudalism, above all the attacks against the church, and all revolutionary social and political doctrines were necessarily also mostly theological heresies.<sup>15</sup>

Here it is shown that religion has its own power in the intellectual realm that cannot be reduced to class interests and that class struggle is therefore forced to take religious forms. In other words, Engels not only pointed out the existence of material class interests behind the religious wars, but he also showed that the religious wars of the time were a typical form of class struggle. Clearly, for Engels at the time, medieval religion was more than a mere ideology. This is because he thought that its supremacy was based on "the fact that the church was the all-embracing synthesis and the most general sanction of the existing feudal order." Namely, because medieval religion was inseparable from the real feudal order, i.e., the feudal mode of life, and was an inevitable product of it, class struggles in the Middle Ages had to take on a religious form. Here we can see a similar way of thinking to Marx's "new materialism," which we saw earlier.

Nevertheless, the position of religion is not the same. Although, at the time when Marx was confronting the Young Hegelian, religion had a great deal of political influence in Germany as well, he considered its essence to be nothing more than the "opium of the people."<sup>16</sup> For Marx, the ideological forms that underlie the modern order are the economic categories that capitalist mode of production produces, the fetishism that regards them as self-evident, and the political notions produced by the modern state system. Religion is rather a mere complement to those. In

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 412–413.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique or Hegel's Philosophy of Law", in MECW, Vol. 3, 175.

contrast, the medieval religion, which Engels considered in *The Peasant War in Germany*, was the “all-embracing synthesis and the most general sanction of the existing feudal order,” playing a decisive role in maintaining that order. Just as in the capitalist mode of production economic categories form moments of the relations of production itself and therefore are inseparable from class, so in the feudal order religion forms part of the relations of production. This is why, in feudal order, the class struggle had to take a religious form.

Such a grasp of Engels’s religious warfare has implications not only for the class struggle within the feudal order, but also for the class struggle in capitalism. This is because it allows us to grasp the class struggle differently from class reductionism. Traditional Marxists tended to reduce the class relations to economic interests, especially the property relation of the means of production. Therefore, they thought that gender, for example, could be understood independently of class, though it was not unrelated to class. However, such an understanding of gender relations would not be valid. This narrowed understanding of class led to a critique of Marx from feminists.

For example, the following passage from *Capital* has been subject to a feminist critique.

The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker’s instincts of self-preservation and propagation.<sup>17</sup>

What Marx is indicating here is the reification of the reproduction process wherein capital, in paying a wage corresponding to the value of labor power, not only obtains the right to command that labor power but, at the same time, can rely on the “instincts” of workers to reproduce the labor power that is indispensable to valorization so that more than the cost of wages does not have to be borne.<sup>18</sup> Marx’s argument could explain that the reification of the reproduction process places all labor not directly connected to the production of surplus value, i.e. non-wage, household labor embedded in the life-process, in a socially inferior position, thereby weakening the position of women forced to do this household work.

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 718.

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Sasaki, *New Introduction to Karl Marx*.

However, as Silvia Federici insists,<sup>19</sup> establishing a reified reproduction process requires disciplining not only the waged workers involved with social production but also the mode of activities in the realm of labor-power reproduction. This was clearly illustrated during the historical process of modernization in the frequent occurrence of terrorism that took the form of “witch hunts” against women who possessed knowledge regarding procreation. Without disciplining this realm of reproduction, capital is not able to “safely leave it to the worker’s instincts of self-preservation and of propagation.” In the theory of primitive accumulation presented in *Capital*, there is no description of such witch hunts, and, in this sense, feminists seem justified in criticizing Marx.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that Marx’s theoretical framework inevitably becomes a class reductionism. What we notice through Federici’s critique is that the capitalist relations of production discussed by Marx must be grasped not in the narrow sense, limited to the relation of wage-labor to capital, but in the broader sense, including both of the social production and of the reproductive process. Thus, as typified by witch hunts, struggles over gender and sexuality also form part of the class struggle. Here, gender is not reduced to class, but rather expands the concept of class.

## MODERN STATE AND TAKING POWER

As we have already seen, Engels considered *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* to be the work that demonstrated Marx’s materialist view of history. In his preface to this book in 1885, Engels also said the following: “[i]t was the very same Marx who had first discovered the great law of motion of history, the law according to which all historical struggles, whether they proceed in the political, religious, philosophical or some other ideological domain, are in fact only the more or less clear expression of struggles between social classes, and that the existence and thereby the collisions, too, of these classes are in turn conditioned by the degree of development of their economic position, by the nature and mode of their production and of their exchange as determined by it.

<sup>19</sup> Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

[...] He put his law to the test on these historical events, and even after thirty-three years we must still say that it has stood the test brilliantly.”<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to this view of Engels, many previous studies have insisted that this book is not just a demonstration of the materialist view of history. The typical interpretation is that in this work, unlike Engels, who sought to reduce political discourse to class interests, Marx was rather concerned with the dislocation between political discourse and class interests, or the dislocation between representative and represented person.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in his book, Marx stated the following:

Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic supporters of shopkeepers. In their education and individual position they may be as far apart from them as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter in practice. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent.<sup>22</sup>

It would be easy to find here an analysis of the unique relationship between the political representatives of a class and the class they represent, which differs from class reductionism. The political and literary representatives of a class are not acting on the basis of direct class interests. They are representatives of the class only because they are theoretically driven to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the class. Hence, the relationship between the representative and represented person is not fixed but involves contingency. For instance, it is possible that “[t]he spokesmen and scribes of

<sup>20</sup>Friedrich Engels, “Preface to the Third German Edition of the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte by Marx”, in MECW, Vol. 26, 303.

<sup>21</sup>See Jeffery Mehlman, *Revolution and Repetition: Marx/Hugo/Balzac* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977); Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Text, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983); Kojin Karatani, *History and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup>Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in MECW, Vol. 11, 130–131.

the bourgeoisie, its platform and its press, in short, the ideologists of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie itself, the representatives and the represented, were alienated from one another and no longer understood each other.”<sup>23</sup>

However, young Engels also seemed to think about these points. He wrote in the sixth section of *The Peasant War in German*:

The worst thing that can befall the leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to assume power at a time when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class he represents and for the measures this domination implies. What he can do depends not on his will but on the degree of antagonism between the various classes, and on the level of development of the material means of existence, of the conditions of production and commerce upon which the degree of intensity of the class contradictions always reposes. What he ought to do, what his party demands of him, again depends not on him, but also not on the degree of development of the class struggle and its conditions. He is bound to the doctrines and demands hitherto propounded which, again, do not follow from the class relations of the moment, or from the more or less accidental level of production and commerce, but from his more or less penetrating insight into the general result of the social and political movement. Thus, he necessarily finds himself in an unsolvable dilemma. What he can do contradicts all his previous actions and principles and the immediate interests of his party, and what he ought to do cannot be done. In a word, he is compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whose domination the movement is then ripe.<sup>24</sup>

When the political representatives of a class succeed in taking political power, what they can do is limited by the progress of the class struggle and the material conditions that underlie it, such as the productive forces and relations of production. On the other hand, what they should do is bound by their doctrines and political demands, which do not follow “from the class relations of the moment, or from the more or less accidental level of production and commerce, but from his more or less penetrating insight into the general result of the social and political movement.” Thus, the political representatives are stuck between their doctrine

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>24</sup> Engels, *The Peasant War in German*, 469–70.

and what they can do, resulting in them being “compelled to represent not his party or his class, but the class for whose domination the movement is then ripe.”

The above quote from Engels not only shows that Engels, like Marx, took into account the complex relationship between the representative and the represented, but it also shows that he accurately pointed out the dilemma that the left, having succeeded in seizing political power, falls into. If we look back on the history of the left in the twentieth century, from the Russian Revolution to the social democratic government in Western Europe,<sup>25</sup> his argument can be said to be an outstanding one. This is because this argument reveals the root cause of the predicament that the political left has fallen into in a situation where the maturity of material conditions and class struggle required to realize socialism are insufficient. In other words, it points out the limits of change by political power in the immature state of objective and subjective conditions.

Nevertheless, there is a decisive flaw in Engels’s description. The fatal weakness of his analysis lies in the fact that he reduces the difficulties of the left taking power to economic conditions and class struggle. Basically, Engels regarded those difficulties as a transhistorical phenomenon that can occur as long as classes exist. He considered difficulties that the representatives of the French proletariat had fallen into in the 1848 revolution to be of the same nature as those at the time of the peasant war in Germany. Engels failed to pay attention to the specificity of the difficulties that political representatives of the working class in capitalist societies fall into after their rise to power. This also means that he could not understand the specific character of the modern state.

In contrast to Engels, Marx focused on the specificity of the modern state in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

<sup>25</sup> Various theoretical currents have theorized about the difficulties that the political left faces after taking power. For example, Ernest Mandel sought its cause in the conservatization for the defense of a partial victory (*Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy* [London: Verso, 1992]), while Immanuel Wallerstein based it on the constraint by the interstate system. See *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (New York: The New Press, 2003). However, the fundamental problem is that political power itself cannot abolish the capitalist mode of production. This point has been largely developed by theoretical currents that inherit the outcomes of the state derivation debate. See John Holloway and Sol Picciotto (eds.), *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978); Joachim Hirsch, *Materialistische Staatstheorie: Transformationsprozesse des kapitalistischen Staatensystems* (Hamburg: VSA, 2005).

This executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its extensive and artificial state machinery, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body, which enmeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores, sprang up in the days of the absolute monarchy, with the decay of the feudal system, which it helped to hasten. The seignorial privileges of the landowners and towns became transformed into so many attributes of the state power, the feudal dignitaries into paid officials and the motley pattern of conflicting medieval plenary powers into the regulated plan of a state authority whose work is divided and centralised as in a factory. The first French Revolution, with its task of breaking all separate local, territorial, urban and provincial powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation, was bound to develop what the absolute monarchy had begun: the centralisation, but at the same time the extent, the attributes and the agents of governmental power. Napoleon perfected this state machinery. [...] Every common interest was straightway severed from society, counterposed to it as a higher, general interest, snatched from the activity of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity, whether it was a bridge, a schoolhouse and the communal property of a village community, or the railways, the national wealth and the national university of France. Finally, in its struggle against the revolution, the parliamentary republic found itself compelled to strengthen, along with the repressive measures, the resources and centralisation of governmental power. All revolutions perfected this machine instead of breaking it. The parties that contended in turn for domination regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor.<sup>26</sup>

In this paragraph, Marx summarizes the creation and development of the modern state apparatus in France. What we should note here is that he describes how the modern state apparatus had been strengthened and perfected through the process of modernization and class struggle. Through the experience of the 1848 revolution, Marx deepened his awareness of the uniqueness of the modern state.

He had already pointed out the inevitable relationship between civil society and the modern state in his essay *On the Jewish Question* (1843). According to this argument, in feudalism, the old society was directly political in character. In other words, the various elements of social life, in the form of estate and guild, etc., formed the order of a feudal community. However, when the political revolution overthrew these estates,

<sup>26</sup> Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 185–186.

guilds, and other privileges, the political spirit that had been bound to them was established as the sphere of the general concern of the nation, while the individuals who constituted society were transformed into isolate private individuals. "Throwing off the political yoke meant at the same time throwing off the bonds which restrained the egoistic spirit of civil society. Political emancipation was at the same time the emancipation of civil society from politics, from having even the semblance of a universal content."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the modern form of the state cannot be separated from a civil society composed of egoistic private individuals, i.e., a capitalist economic system. The universal character of the public sphere in modern society can only be established by removing particular interests from the political sphere and transforming civil society to a purely private sphere. In other words, as long as civil society is composed of private individuals, the public sphere must take the form of a modern state that is severed from civil society. This is why the modern state is the only political form that is consistent with capitalism.

Marx further developed the above analysis through a consideration of the historical process in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. According to his analysis, the process of modernization, facilitated by the political revolution, broke "all separate local, territorial, urban and provincial powers" and abolished various feudal privileges, resulting in that "[e]very common interest was straightway severed from society, counterposed to it as a higher, general interest, snatched from the activity of society's members themselves and made an object of government activity." Moreover, just as the class struggle within the feudal order had to take a religious form, the class struggle within the modern order had to take a form of market economy, and the struggle of political representatives of classes had to be aimed at seizing the modern state apparatus. In its struggle against the revolution, the parliamentary republic found itself compelled to strengthen the repressive measures and the governmental power, and the parties "regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor." Thus, not only does the modern state apparatus as a power alienated from society inevitably arise from the form of the modern social system, but it has concentrated in its hands an increasingly powerful political power in the historical process of its birth.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question", in MECW, Vol. 3, 166.



This “appalling parasitic body” that has been reinforced to suppress the class struggle and maintain the capitalist mode of production cannot be used by the working class for its own purposes. Rather, it must be broken down. “First it[revolution] perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it.”<sup>28</sup> In a letter to Kugelmann 20 years later, Marx also wrote:

If you look at the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but to break it, and that is essential for every real people’s revolution on the Continent.<sup>29</sup>

By the time Marx wrote this letter, the state had been further strengthened and made an instrument of even more repressive class rule. “At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labor, the State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism.”<sup>30</sup> What this meant was the thesis that the working class could not wield the ready-made state machinery for their own purpose became all the more valid.

As is well known, Marx found in the Paris Commune a model for the dismantling of the modern form of the state. According to Marx, the significance of the Paris Commune is not simply that it was a government of the working class. Rather, as Marx pointed out in *The Civil War in France*, it was a “Revolution against the State itself, this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people, of its own social life. It was not a revolution to transfer it from one fraction of the

<sup>28</sup> Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 185.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, “Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann in Hanover: London, 12 April 1871,” in MECW, Vol. 44, 131.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in MECW, Vol. 22, 329.

ruling classes to the other, but a Revolution to break down this horrid machinery of Class domination itself.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Marx not only pointed out the limits of social change through political power, but also argued for a revolution against the state apparatus itself, that is, the necessity to dismantle the modern form of the state with standing armies, bureaucracies, and representative democracy and create a new form of governance based on direct democracy. This new political form, which is Commune, is the “reabsorption of the State power by society, as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves, forming their own force instead of the organized force of their suppression—the political form of their social emancipation, instead of the artificial force (appropriated by their oppressors) (their own force opposed to and organized against them) of society wielded for their oppression by their enemies.”<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, Marx pointed out that the significance of this new form of state should not be overestimated.

As the state machinery and parliamentarism are not the real life of the ruling classes, but only the organized general organs of their dominion, the political guarantees and forms and expressions of the old order of things, so the Commune is not the social movement of the working class and therefore of a general regeneration of mankind but the organized means of action. The Commune does not [do] away with the class struggles, through which the working classes strive to the abolition of all classes and, therefore, of all class rule ...<sup>33</sup>

These class struggles for a social revolution must be a long-term effort. The free and associated labor can only be achieved by the progressive work of time. This is because it requires not only a change of distribution, but also a new organization of production, that is to say, a transformation of the social forms of production based on market into the associated mode of production. The political form of commune can only create a “rational medium” for those class struggles to run through its different phases in the most rational and human way.<sup>34</sup> What is presented here is

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 486.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 490–491.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 491.

a revolutionary theory based on the social transformation of the mode of production, rather than a Soviet-type “socialism” based on the nationalization of the means of production and a centrally planned economy, or its more sophisticated version, the Gramscian hegemonic strategy. In a sense, Marx’s theory of revolution anticipated the trend of the left’s strategy of change since 1968.

## THE ECONOMIC FORM OF DETERMINATION AND CLASS

The root of Engels’s theoretical limitations, which I have described so far, is his failure to reach a deep understanding of Marx’s critique of political economy. Engels was not able to read most of his drafts during Marx’s lifetime, and even after Marx’s death, he had his hands full compiling the second and third volumes of *Capital*, so he could not afford to examine all the drafts in detail to get an accurate picture of their contents. Given that contemporary Marxian economists still struggle to understand *Capital*,<sup>35</sup> it was perhaps unavoidable that Engels failed to fully understand Marx’s critique of political economy.

The common theory of traditional Marxists defined class relation as the ownership relation of the means of production. Engels did not explicitly state such a definition, but it is certain that he considered the transformation of the mode of production as that of ownership of means of production. Also, in Marx’s case, descriptions are seen here and there that closely link class to ownership of means of production. However, this conception of class relation as a relation of ownership of the means of production leads to a conception of the innermost basis of the capitalist mode of production as the private ownership of the means of production by the capitalists, paving the way for Soviet-style socialism.

However, as his research for the critique of political economy, starting with *Grundrisse*, progressed, Marx moved away from the ownership-based theory in both class theory and revolutionary theory. This is clearly demonstrated in the earlier quotation from *The Civil War in France*. At the end of the main manuscript for Third Book of *Capital*, where Marx discussed the theory of class, though it was unfinished, he distinguished

<sup>35</sup>See Andrew Kliman, *Reclaiming Marx’s “Capital”: A Refutation of the Myth of Inconsistency* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007); F. Moseley, *Money and Totality: A Macro-Monetary Interpretation of Marx’s Logic in Capital and the End of the Transformation Problem* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

classes according to their sources of income and then tried to show that this source of income is based on things such as the commodity of labor force, capital, and modern land property, and that those things are based on the reification of the relations of production.<sup>36</sup> Here, the property relation is a mere moment generated by the relation of production and constitutes it.

Such a class theory based on a critique of political economy does not only lead to a theory of change that emphasizes more social revolution. It will also lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of class. As I pointed out in the first section, for example, elements such as gender relations and sexuality, which are involved in the reproduction of human beings, are not elements that parallel class, but rather are the moment that constitutes it.

In contrast, Engels reduced these to the relation of property. For instance, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, he wrote: “this was the origin of monogamy, as far as we can trace it among the most civilized and highly developed people of antiquity. It was not in any way the fruit of individual sex love, with which it had absolutely nothing to do, for the marriages remained marriages of convenience, as before. It was the first form of the family based not on natural but on economic conditions, namely, on the victory of private property over original, naturally developed, common ownership. The rule of the man in the family, the procreation of children who could only be his, destined to be the heirs of his wealth—these alone were frankly avowed by the Greeks as the exclusive aims of monogamy. For the rest, it was a burden, a duty to the gods, to the state and to their own ancestors, which just had to be fulfilled.”<sup>37</sup> This argument by Engels could lead to a narrow understanding of class struggle that emphasizes only economic relations in a narrow sense and devalues the feminist movement.

The same can be said of the relationship between the ecological movement and the class struggle. As recent research has shown,<sup>38</sup> if we interpret Marx’s critique of political economy from the perspective of economic determination of form rather than private ownership of means

<sup>36</sup>For details, see Sasaki, *New Introduction to Karl Marx*, chap. 2.

<sup>37</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in MECW, Vol. 26, 173.

<sup>38</sup>See Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017).

of production, we can understand that the core issue of his critique of political economy is precisely how to control metabolism between nature and human beings. This is why Marx in his later years devoted himself to the study of the natural sciences. In contrast, late Engels studied the natural sciences in search of material to illustrate the dialectic of nature. The difference in the character of the critique of political economy led to the difference in the theoretical scope.

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PART II

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Engels and Philosophy



# Engels, Thinking and Being

*Tom Rockmore*

## ENGELS AND PARMENIDES

Parmenides influentially writes in a passage that has been translated in many ways, including: “for the same thing is for conceiving as is for being” (“to gar auto noein estin te kai einai”).<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that according to many observers, this ancient Parmenidean view is the initial statement of what later became the modern problem of knowledge, according to which thinking and being are the same.

More than two millenia later Engels defines the problem of philosophy in general in terms of the relation of thinking and being in writing: “The great basic question of all, especially of latter-day, philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being.”<sup>2</sup> This passage that echoes

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<sup>1</sup>A. H. Coxon, *The Fragments of Parmenides*, ed. Richard McKirahan (Las Vegas: Parmenides, 2009), 58.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in MECW, Vol. 26, 365.

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Hegel's view of the problem of philosophy<sup>3</sup> while further building on the Parmenidean approach to cognition. At stake is a cognitive claim based on the relation between two terms, a relation whose proper interpretation remains unresolved.

## PARMENIDES ON COGNITION

If the Parmenidean version of the problem of knowledge has never been resolved, it will be appropriate to start with his view of cognition. Parmenides's poem is his only extant text. Our knowledge of Parmenides is based on his poem as well as references to him in contemporary or later writings. In part because Parmenides' poem only survives in fragmentary form, its interpretation is difficult, uncertain, controversial. Most observers, including the author of these lines, think that Parmenides is claiming that the necessary condition of knowledge is the cognitive grasp of mind-independent being. Yet even this very general claim has been challenged. In his poem Parmenides points to the distinction between opinion and truth in apparently linking being not to truth but rather to opinion (*doxa*). Yet even this apparently banal point has been questioned. In a recent paper, Altman rejects the standard view of the relation of being to truth as well as any global interpretation of Parmenides that makes a central component.<sup>4</sup>

## INTERPRETING PARMENIDES' CLAIM FOR THE IDENTITY OF THINKING AND BEING

Parmenides' claim for the identity of thinking and being can be read in two main but incompatible ways: as an assertion that we can and do have knowledge since we grasp the mind-independent real, or in a very different way as an assertion that we do not grasp the mind-independent real as it is but rather only as we "construct" it. In the former case there is a mind-independent real that we successfully grasp. In the latter case either there is no mind-independent real or there is a mind-independent real but we do not and cannot grasp it.

<sup>3</sup>See Paul Guyer, "Thought and Being," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: New York, 2006).

<sup>4</sup>See William H. F. Altman, "Parmenides' Fragment B3 (DK 28) Revisited," *Hypnos* 35 (2015).

These two interpretations of the Parmenidean approach to cognition play prominent roles in the post-Parmenidean debate. This debate can be read as a series of efforts extending from pre-Socratic philosophy over the entire later tradition to solve or resolve the problem of knowledge from either of these two Parmenidean perspectives. Depending on which view of the relation of thought and being that we favor, we arrive at different conceptions of knowledge. The main view that runs throughout the entire later tradition is any form of the claim that we in fact succeed in grasping the real. This claim is adopted by many observers who, whether or not they think that this is the correct interpretation of Parmenides, believe that a cognitive grasp of the real is a necessary condition of cognition. This view that continues to attract attention runs throughout the entire Western tradition. The other view that presupposes the failure of any form of the well-known concern to grasp the real is any form of the claim we know only what we in some sense “construct.”

### POST-PARMENIDEAN PLATONISM

Plato, who supposedly met Parmenides in Athens when he was a young man but the latter was around 65 years old, is an early Parmenidean. In the eponymous dialogue, Plato refers to Parmenides as our father, that is presumably as the father of philosophy.

The Parmenidean view that we can grasp the real is followed by Plato. He denies we can infer from appearance to reality that, he holds, we grasp directly. Related conceptions of knowledge run throughout the entire later debate, and are widely accepted today by empiricists, rationalists and other who think the grasp of the mind-independent real is a necessary condition of knowledge. Others think that if the grasp of the mind-independent real is a necessary condition of knowledge, then the cognitive quest cannot succeed.

### KANT, COGNITIVE SKEPTICISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

A skeptical version of the latter view according to which we do not grasp the mind-independent real is authoritatively reformulated by the mature Kant. According to Kant in his critical period, if there is an appearance, then something appears. But, it is not possible to know what appears, nor, following Plato, to infer from appearance, or the appearance of the real, to the real. Plato, who denies the backward inference from appearance to

reality, suggests in its place the direct grasp of the mind-independent real through the notorious theory of forms (or ideas).

Plato argues against the backward causal inference from appearance to reality but for knowledge on the basis of a non-causal relation from being to thinking on the basis of cognitive intuition. The post-Platonic cognitive discussion often turns on a series of later efforts to reinstate a causal inference denied by Plato from the world to the mind. When he intervenes in the debate before the turning of the nineteenth century Kant, like Plato before him, seems to think that the cognitive problem turns on causal inference.

The entire Western discussion of knowledge can be understood as a complex debate beginning in the long effort to know the real, a debate that later gives way, after the emergence of the modern account of constructivism, to a struggle between partisans of Parmenidean realism and of anti-Parmenidean constructivism. In Parmenides' wake we can distinguish two main approaches to cognition understood as the relation between thinking and being. On the one hand, there is the view that to know requires thought to grasp being, in short to grasp the mind-independent world as it is. On the other hand, there is the very different view that we do not and cannot grasp the world as it is but rather only grasp what we construct. The former view extends from the post-Parmenidean debate that reaches an early peak in Plato and that is restated but never successfully formulated by such later tendencies as Cartesian rationalism, Lockean empiricism and the early Kant's representationalism. These and similar efforts fail, because it has never been shown how thought can grasp being or know the real. The latter view emerges in the turn to constructivism in the writings of Hobbes, F. Bacon and Vico, then later in the German idealists and others, all of whom think we can know only what we in some sense construct.

## KANTIAN REPRESENTATIONALISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Kant is a pivotal figure in the cognitive debate. He defends representationalism in his early writings that he later abandons for constructivism. His early representationalist view develops the modern form of the ancient Parmenidean thesis that cognition requires that we know the real without ever successfully formulating this claim. The later constructivist thesis that emerges in the wake of the Copernican turn makes two related claims. On the one hand, we cannot know a mind-independent object since we do

not and cannot know the world. And, on the other hand, we know only what we can be said to construct. The latter thesis runs like a red thread through the writings of the German idealists, all of whom in different ways argue for the complex thesis that we know only what we construct. This includes Marx as well,

### KANT, PLATO AND NATORP

In the B or mature edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, very much like Plato Kant argues that, if there is an appearance, then something appears while denying the backward inference from the appearance to what appears. In the critical philosophy, Kant seems to be replying through Hume to Plato. Among later Kantians, Natorp has seen this point most clearly.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant suggests it is not rare that we know an author such as Plato better than he knows himself.<sup>5</sup> And in the *Prolegomena* he compares his conception of things in themselves to Platonic noumena.<sup>6</sup>

We should take this Kantian hint seriously.<sup>7</sup> A different version of this suggestion was made more than a century ago by Natorp, following Cohen, in his Kantian interpretation of Plato's theory of forms (or ideas). In *Platos Ideenlehre* (1903), he develops a "critical" interpretation of the notorious theory of forms as well as an argument for the order of the dialogues in the context of an introduction to idealism.

Natorp, who thinks Plato has been misinterpreted since Aristotle, denies the familiar interpretation of Platonic ideas or forms as things or substances. According to Natorp, Platonic forms are to be understood as laws or methods, and thus as foundational for science in depicting Plato as the founder of critical idealism. A different version of this suggestion was made more than a century ago by Natorp, following Cohen, in

<sup>5</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 370, 395–396.

<sup>6</sup> See Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed. Gary Hatfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §32, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Hermann Cohen understands Plato as an early idealist thinker. See, e.g., "Die Platonische Ideenlehre psychologisch Entwickelt," in *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* IV (1866); and "Platon's Ideenlehre und die Mathematik," in *Rectoratsprogramm der Universität Marburg* (Marburg: Elwert'sche, 1878).

his Kantian interpretation of Plato's theory of forms (or ideas). In *Platos Ideenlehre* (1903), he develops a "critical" interpretation of the notorious theory of forms as well as an argument for the order of the dialogues in the context of an "Introduction to Idealism."

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Yet it is implausible to suggest either that Kant is a late Platonist or that Plato is an early Kantian. It is more likely that Kant, unlike Plato, denies intellectual intuition of the real. This suggests that he seeks to correct the failed Platonic solution to the epistemic problem. Since Kant denies intellectual intuition, he must reject Plato's claim to intuit, hence to cognize the real. Now one could make cognition depend on a mind-independent object through an anti-Platonic reverse causal inference. Yet Kant, who denies this possibility, rather makes the object depend on the subject.

Kant's relationship to Plato is unclear. It is, for instance, unclear if Kant ever read Plato or rather mentions him on the basis of indirect knowledge only. Yet this is not surprising. We also do not know how well Kant knew Hume's writings either in translation or in English,<sup>8</sup> hence the extent of his reliance on commentaries, abridgments and translations, nor which of Hume's writings he in fact read.<sup>9</sup>

Kant's view of Plato remains ambiguous. Three points are important. First, he disagrees with Plato in denying intellectual intuition. Second, he continues to feature representationalist terminology in his mature period after he has turned away from a representationalist approach to cognition that he earlier defended. Third, he agrees with Plato in denying the backward anti-Platonic causal inference, hence in denying representation of the real, in his terminology the thing in itself or noumenon.

<sup>8</sup> See, for discussion, Sanford Budick, *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Kant's relation to Hume has been extensively studied. See, e.g., Paul Guyer, *Knowledge, Reason and Taste: Kant's Response to Hume* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

The ambiguity lies in the apparent conflict between the representationalist terminology that Kant forges in his early pre-critical writings and never later abandons and the denial of cognitive representationalism that calls for the formulation of a different, presumably anti- or at least non-representationalist cognitive view.

## MARXISM AS A POST-PARMENIDEAN VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE

Like Parmenides, Plato and many others the different forms of Marxism share the familiar claim to overcome the problem of knowledge that begins in the Parmenidean concern with the identity of thought and being. The interest wit, the problem of knowledge emerges in ancient Greece early in the ensuing debate that begins in a given time and place but never ends. The tradition consists in an ongoing effort to bring the philosophical discussion to a successful conclusion. In simple terms, the philosophical debate on cognition consists in two main components, including criticism of whatever theories have been or presently are under discussion as well as the effort, often accompanied by unverifiable claims for originality, to formulate a viable alternative.

I have suggested that the philosophical tradition consists in the examination of two main approaches to the early Parmenidean formulation of the cognitive problem. In this respect, Marxism is not an exception but typical in its resemblance to other modern efforts to bring the examination of the question of knowledge to a high point and an end. Thus, according to Lukács, Marxism solves the problem of philosophy.

In Lukács's account, there is a central problem of philosophy, that is a cognitive problem that requires a perspectival solution. The cognitive problem concerns the thing in itself. According to the mature Kant, since we do not and cannot know the thing in itself, it follows that there is not and cannot be knowledge of the real. For Lukács, this problem is not solved by what Marxists call bourgeois philosophy. It is also not solved by orthodox Marxism. It is finally only solved by proletarian thought.

Lukács' view that there is a central problem of philosophy respect resembles many views formulated since Parmenides. The difference is that Lukács, who is a Marxist, opposes capitalism in favor of communism. Lukács' form of Marxism differs from other theories including other types of Marxism. As soon as we introduce distinctions, say, between different kinds of philosophy, Lukács's conception of and solution for the problem of philosophy differs from orthodox, non-Marxist philosophy as well as

orthodox Marxism. In his Marxist account of the solution to the problem of knowledge Lukács favors two points: the cognitive problem is often misunderstood because Kant is misunderstood, and the correct solution is perspectival.

Important thinkers are often misunderstood. Kant, who is clearly an important thinker, is arguably the central thinker of the modern tradition. There is a before and after Kant, whose specific contribution is often not understood by Marxists, anti-Marxists, non-Marxists and others who have no more than an incidental interest in Kant. Unlike most Marxists, Lukács was deeply familiar with classical German idealism before his sudden conversion to Marxism at the end of the First World War. In an important passage, Lukács correctly notes that Engels' suggestion that the thing in itself is overcome by praxis and industry merely exhibits the latter's misunderstanding of the critical philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Yet Lukács's own view of Kant is also questionable. Plato argues for cognition of the the real, what Kant later calls the thing in itself, in denying the backward inference from appearance to reality in favor of the intuitive grasp of the real. Kant follows Plato in denying the backwards inference from appearance to reality in further rejecting an intuitive grasp of the real. Lukács, on the contrary, argues for knowledge from the perspective of the proletariat, or the real historical subject that transcends the distortions of the bourgeoisie to grasp the historical truth. "Only when the consciousness of the proletariat is able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled, but which it cannot travel unaided, will the consciousness of the proletariat become the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality."<sup>11</sup>

In adopting the view of the proletariat as the sole source of truth Lukács conflates the proletarian perspective, hence the Marxist view of historical change along lines Marxists ascribe to Marx, with the very different idea of truth that is not perspectival but aperspectival. In evoking the problem of the thing in itself Kant is not defending a view of truth from one or another perspective. He is rather defending the traditional conception of philosophical truth as lying beyond perspective. To put the

<sup>10</sup>See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 131–133.

<sup>11</sup>Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 197.

same point differently, Lukács, who conflates Kant's problem of knowledge of the thing in itself with the Marxist idea of political hegemony, runs together the idea of the truth with the very different view of political tactics.

## A NOTE ON ENGELS, IDEALISM AND MATERIALISM

Engels designates his view of knowledge in two main ways: with respect to the distinctions between idealism and materialism and in relation to the so-called reflection theory of knowledge. Materialism takes many different forms throughout the philosophical tradition. Marx finished his dissertation on ancient Greek materialism in 1841 with special attention, as the title indicates, to "The Difference Between the Democritean and the Epicurean Philosophies of Nature." Democritus is known as the father of Greek atomism. Like Democritus, Epicurus taught that there are only atoms and the void. Materialism is understood in many different ways that share the view that whatever exists depends on matter.

Materialism and idealism are usually understood as irreconcilable opposites. Idealism, which is widely criticized by observers who tend to know little or even nothing about it, is any form of the view that reality consists in or depends upon minds or ideas. Berkeley, who is severely criticized by Kant, is often taken as the paradigmatic idealist. Writing in Berkeley's wake, Kant is the first thinker to identify his own view as idealism. Hegel directs attention to the distinction between subjective and objective idealism. His interest in the absolute, a Hegelian theme that is often misunderstood, led to his position being referred to as absolute idealism.

The distinction between idealism and materialism is widely believed to oppose two fundamental philosophical options. According to this view, materialists and idealists favor incompatible and competing views. Marxism thinks idealism is unable to know the real. It depicts idealism as an indefensible view superseded by materialism that is the only defensible philosophical option. The Marxist argument in favor of materialism that is supposedly concrete rejects idealism that is allegedly abstract. Hegel, whom observers routinely consider to be an idealist, rejects the materialist view in pointing out that matter is already abstract and is not perceived.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1971), §39, 79.



## ENGELS AND THE REFLECTION THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Marx, who says little directly about either idealism or materialism, seems to reject both alternatives. It is not clear that his position depends more than indirectly on his view of either. The situation is different for Engels, who clearly rejects idealism in relying on materialism in his so-called reflection view of knowledge. The reflection theory of knowledge goes all the way back to ancient philosophy and continues to appear from time to time in the later tradition. To the best of my knowledge, the first statement of the reflection view occurs in the *Republic* where in the tenth book Plato describes Socrates as carrying around a mirror literally to reflect the world.

Marx never discusses the reflection theory of knowledge that is the centerpiece of Engels's view of cognition. According to the dictionary, the term "reflection," which is used in many different ways, has two core meanings: to think deeply or carefully about, for instance to meditate on; and to be thrown back, so to speak, as when a beam of light is thrown back. In a cognitive context, the term is mainly used in the second sense to suggest that the knower cognizes what is through direct sensory intuition of the real. Stated in this way, reflection theory is clearly related to epistemic representationalism, since reflection is the limiting case of representation, which goes beyond even the most exact imitation. An instance might be a polished surface, which sends back, casts back, or reflects its precise image.

Marx never directly discusses an approach to knowledge as a reflection of the real. But after he died, a link to this view was established by Engels and later confirmed by Lenin and a number of subsequent Marxists. Engels is aware that Hegel is a dialectical thinker, but he is unclear about what this might entail. In his study of Feuerbach, he describes "dialectical philosophy," in establishing a spurious link to the reflection theory of knowledge, as "nothing more than the mere reflection of this [natural] process in the thinking brain."<sup>13</sup> This description suggests that, like Schelling in his natural scientific phase, Engels favors a quasi-Spinozistic conception of knowledge based on a supposed parallel between a mind-independent historical process and the knowing mind through which the latter "reflects" the former. In Engels's opinion, dialectical philosophy

<sup>13</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in MECW (New York: International Publishers, 1990), 26: 360.

differs from religion, which offers “only a fantastic mirror image of reality to speak, as when a beam of light is thrown back. In a cognitive context, the term is mainly used in the second sense to suggest that the knower cognizes what is through direct sensory intuition of the real. Stated in this way, reflection theory is clearly related to epistemic representationalism. And reflection is the limiting case of representation that goes beyond even the most exact imitation. An instance might be a polished surface, which sends back, casts back, or reflects its precise image.

Marx never directly discusses an approach to knowledge as a reflection of the real. But after he died, a link to this view was established by Engels and confirmed by Lenin. This link was subsequently adopted as Marxist orthodoxy by a number of subsequent Marxists.<sup>14</sup> Engels is aware that Hegel is a dialectical thinker, but he is unclear about what this might entail. In his study of Feuerbach, he describes “dialectical philosophy,” in establishing a spurious link to the reflection theory of knowledge, as “nothing more than the mere reflection of this [natural] process in the thinking brain.” This description suggests a quasi-Spinozistic conception of knowledge based on a supposed parallel between a mind-independent historical process and the knowing mind through which the latter “reflects” the former. In Engels’s opinion, dialectical philosophy differs from religion, which offers “only a fantastic mirror image of reality.”

Engels’s exact understanding of “reflection” is unclear. It is unclear if Engels is contending that, as Lukács later argues, a distorted social context, that is distorted from the Marxian perspective by the institution of private property that looms so large in modern industrial capitalism, in turn distorts efforts to grasp it correctly. In that case the context itself, or society, is understood not as an object but rather as a subject that tends not to reveal but rather to conceal itself. A second possibility is that for whatever reason the subject is content with an abstract approach that, in turning away from a concrete historical grasp of the situation, leads to its misapprehension. In the latter case, the individual but not society would be at fault.

Engels restates and refines the reflection theory in later writings. But it is absent in the unfinished *Dialectics of Nature*, where as a supposedly

<sup>14</sup>See, for a reconstruction of the reflection theory of knowledge, Sean Sayers, *Reality and Reason. Dialectic and the Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1985).

privileged source of knowledge it could be expected to play an important role. Engels thinks natural processes are dialectical. In *Anti-Dühring*, a diatribe directed against a contemporary, Eugen Dühring, a philosopher, economist, and critic of Marxist socialism, he develops an analysis of false reflection. In adopting a positivist approach, he opposes religion to science as two conceptual extremes. He thinks Dühring's analytical approach to knowledge is an ideological form of the a priori method. From this perspective, Kant would clearly be a prime offender. Engels, who is committed to naïve empiricism, argues that in the first step in the a priori method "the concept of the object is formed from the object" and in the second step "the object is then made to conform to the concept, not the concept to the object."<sup>15</sup> According to Engels, "the philosophy of reality" is "pure ideology," which engages in "the deduction of reality not from itself but from a concept."<sup>16</sup>

Kant rejects metaphysical realism in favor of empirical realism. Engels overlooks the distinction between metaphysical realism and empirical realism in equating empirical realism with the cognitive grasp or the real or reality. This latter commitment calls for two comments. First, what Engels describes here sounds more like Plato than Kant. We cannot now determine Plato's position, if he had one in a modern sense. But he is often thought to be committed to the notorious theory of forms or ideas central to Platonism. Kant, who famously accuses Fichte of deducing objects from concepts, should not be read as deducing reality from an image of it, mental or otherwise. He should rather be read as identifying the supposedly necessary conditions of objects of experience and knowledge. Since he denies we can know noumena, Kant rejects cognitive claims about reality, including, for instance, its supposed deduction from an image.

Engels's form of the reflection view of knowledge is influenced by Francis Bacon. The latter believes that the so-called idols of the tribe are a kind of logical fallacy rooted in human nature.<sup>17</sup> He cites as an example the Protagorean view that man is the measure.<sup>18</sup> Engels, on the

<sup>15</sup> MECW, 26: 360.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science," in MECW (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 25: 89.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, eds. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), aphorism 38, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Bacon, *The New Organon*, aphorism 41, 71.

contrary, who does not believe that our cognitive mistakes are rooted in human nature, thinks they are due to the organization of the means of production, which provides a distorted, or ideological, image of the tendencies of the historical moment. The image is “distorted” because “it has been torn from its real basis.”<sup>19</sup> An ideological image, which is abstract, not concrete, is “like a reflection in a concave mirror ... standing on its head.”<sup>20</sup> This view can be read as a quasi-Baconian claim about a mind-independent world that, if we can successfully avoid the idols of the tribe, we can know through direct sense perception, and that is correctly reflected by the subject on the conscious level.

Engels further adds a conception of error, which only arises for one of two reasons: either the subject fails to grasp the natural process in sufficiently concrete form or the process itself in some unknown way leads the subject astray. In any case, to know is to know the concrete historical context and ideology that, as *The German Ideology* claims and, as Engels believes, wrongly depicts the surrounding context. Engels thinks, as stated in the latter text, that an approach that abstracts from the real basis, leads to a result, which is inverted, as in a camera obscura. “Consciousness [das Bewußtsein] can never be anything else than conscious being [das bewusste Sein], and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.”<sup>21</sup>

Engels’s contrast between religion and science reflects the form of positivism, mentioned above, that was widespread in the second half of the nineteenth century. Positivism is often understood as some version of the claim that only scientific knowledge is valid and verifiable. This view was developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Henri de Saint-Simon, Pierre-Simon Laplace, Auguste Comte, and others and in the twentieth century in different but related ways by thinkers later associated with the Vienna Circle, including Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Moritz Schlick, and others.

<sup>19</sup> MECW, 25: 89.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 36.

Engels's conception of religion restates without significant alteration remarks about Feuerbach in various publications. He conflates Feuerbach, who believes that religion is a human project, with Strauss, who suggests that the miracles described in the Gospels are only mythological. Engels, who thinks religion provides no more than a fantastic, hence false, reflection of the world it describes in supernatural terms, adopts without argument the view that nature demonstrates dialectic. He depicts dialectic in anti-Hegelian fashion as providing knowledge of the mind-independent world as it is. According to Engels, "An exact representation of the universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the methods of dialectic with its constant regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive or retrogressive changes."<sup>22</sup> It is unclear what an exact representation of the world might be and how dialectic enables us to arrive at it. Is, for instance, a model of the solar system with eight planets exact but one with only seven planets inexact? With the apparent exception of Engels, probably no one understands dialectic as leading to an exact representation of the world, or the world as it really is. Hegel, for instance, takes dialectic as leading to knowledge of what is only given in consciousness, hence as excluding any cognitive claim about the mind-independent world.

### LENIN AND ENGELS'S REFLECTION THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Lenin, whose philosophical baggage improved after he worked on Hegel, but that was always slight, was certainly more interested in violent revolution than in tranquil philosophical argument. Since his political weight in the evolution of Marxism was enormous, his ideas were often adopted, especially during the Soviet period, as Soviet holy writ. They have since been repeated in various formulations by a long succession of Marxist-Leninists more often concerned with political orthodoxy than philosophical correctness. Lenin, who was familiar with a number of Engels's writings, took Engels as the paramount Marxist philosopher,

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 24, translation modified.

though the latter was, as he himself said in a letter to Arnold Ruge, self-taught and not knowledgeable in this domain.<sup>23</sup> Though Lenin venerated Marx, with the exception of the three volumes of *Capital*, he was mainly acquainted with the latter's views through their restatement in classical Marxism. It is then significant that in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1909), his most important foray into philosophy, he cites Engels several hundred times but quotes Marx only once.

Lenin's book should be mandatory reading<sup>24</sup> for anyone interested in the original source of a number of Marxist myths, beginning with the claim, on the first page of the preface to the first edition of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, that "Marx and Engels scores of times termed their philosophical views dialectical materialism."<sup>25</sup> This statement is not only obviously false but also could not possibly be true. There is no passage, and Lenin cites none, where either Marx or Engels refers to their supposedly shared philosophical views as "dialectical materialism." Engels could have but did not make a reference of this kind. But Marx could not have, since he passed away before the term was even coined. It is known that "dialectical materialism" was used for the first time by Joseph Dietzgen in 1887, hence only after Marx died. Neither Marx nor Engels ever employs this term. It was apparently later introduced into Russian philosophy by Plekhanov, for instance in the *Development of the Monist View of History* (1895), published the year of Engels's death. The fact that neither Marx nor Engels ever used this term did not impede Stalin from later supposedly composing, in circumstances that require no description, in the influential study attributed to him, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism." In this text, he describes these two modes of investigation as together comprising the Marxist-Leninist worldview.

Lenin's opus "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy" is not intended as a philosophical treatise in the ordinary sense in which a learned colleague seeks to convince other learned colleagues. It is rather intended as a polemical response to the Russian philosopher Aleksandr Bogdanov's *Empiriomonism* (3

<sup>23</sup>See Engels to Ruge, dated 26 July 1842, in MECW (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 2: 545.

<sup>24</sup>Preface to the First Edition, in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*, in *Lenin: Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 14: 333.

<sup>25</sup>Lenin, *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, 129.

vols., 1904–1906). This study brought together Marxism as well as the views of Ernst Mach, Wilhelm Ostwald, and Richard Avenarius.<sup>26</sup> Lenin violently rejects empiriomonism in his study with the aim of convincing Russian revolutionary Marxists of all stripes. The subtitle provides a useful hint into the character of Lenin’s text. In response to Bogdanov, Lenin formulates a view of materialism based on Engels’s reflection theory of knowledge. Lenin, who accepts a form of the reflection theory of knowledge, thinks that sensation mechanically reflects, or, again, “mirrors” objects in the form of sensory images. Lenin, who never directly argues for this view, argues against those who supposedly misinterpret Marxism. He apparently relies on Lyubov Akselrod to support the claim that our perceptions correspond to or, again, reflect the world.

Lenin advances two main arguments: first, it is only possible to distinguish true from false perceptions if there is a distinction between our perceptions and what they perceive; and, second, everyone knows that there are things outside our heads.<sup>27</sup> Neither argument is persuasive nor original. Both have often been rehearsed in different ways. Both are open to simple objections. Lenin is not supposing that in all cases our perceptions have an empirical constraint. He is rather supposing that we can and do in fact know the world as it is through sensory perception. Yet it does not follow, if we suppose there is a distinction between our perceptions and what we perceive, that our perceptions correctly reflect the world or that we perceive it as it is. Correct perception, which is an epistemological claim, is not the same as the ontological distinction between the perception and the perceived. Further, we do not know but at most only think we know that there are things outside us. Though obviously we must continue to rely on the assumption there is a mind-external world, which is the basis of natural science, it simply cannot be demonstrated.

Later Soviet writers were obviously constrained in what they said by the difficult conditions in which they worked. They often held that cognitive reflection is the result of dialectical reasoning in rejecting Lenin’s efforts to ground sensation in naïve realism. For instance, Ewald Ilyenkov, who presupposes the notorious theory of reflection, thinks logic is scientific if

<sup>26</sup> See for detailed recent discussion, Marina Bykova, “Lenin and Political Philosophy,” in *Handbook of Leninist Political Philosophy*, eds. Tom Rockmore and Norman Levine (London: Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> On Lenin’s arguments, see Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 449.

it reflects, hence reproduces in the form of concepts, a mind-independent external object.<sup>28</sup> He illustrates this approach in claiming that the economic categories of Capital “reflect” mind-independent economic reality objectively and independently of their theoretical interpretation. Yet, as already noted, no argument has ever been devised to show that we in fact directly intuit, reflect, or otherwise grasp reality as it is. It has also never been shown how to “reflect” the mind-independent world on the level of mind. And, finally, following Hegel, Marx denies immediate empirical claims in relying on categorical reconstruction. Hence at least on this point Marxism is incompatible with Marx.

In summary, if Marx has Hegel in mind, then, since for Hegel form and content are inseparable, there is and simply cannot be any dialectical method. It remains to address two related questions: First, in applying the so-called dialectical method, does the subject matter appear as if it were reflected in a mirror, as proponents of the reflection theory of knowledge claim, or, on the contrary, as Marx suggests, as if it were an a priori construction? Second, does Marx rely on any version of the reflection theory of knowledge, hence rely on a key item in the Marxist cognitive arsenal?

There are at least two reasons to deny that Marx relies on any form of the reflection theory of knowledge. First, he distinguishes between the inner connections of the cognitive object and its supposed reflection as in a mirror. Yet, since there is no mirror, nothing is reflected in it. Marx also does not think cognition depends on reflection. He differs in this respect from Engels, from Marxism in general, and from all those committed to cognition through reflection. Second, if there is no dialectical method, the subject matter would not appear as if it were reflected in a mirror or as if it were an a priori construction. Engels relies on reflection. Yet nothing in his writings shows he has in fact achieved this epistemic goal. Marx does not rely on a reflection of the cognitive object but rather, as he explicitly claims, on a concrete grasp of its internal connections. This ideal is only the transposed (*umsetzte*) and translated material (*Materielle*). The translation, which is inexact here, attributes, in following orthodox Marxism, a reflection theory of knowledge to Marx on the basis of very obviously misreading “*umsetzen*,” that is, “*an eine andere Stelle setzen*” (or roughly

<sup>28</sup> E. V. Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays in History and Theory* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 7.



“to move from one place to another”) as “to reflect” means in practice can be grasped by going a little further in the text to consider his understanding of dialectic.

Marx undertakes to justify his claims in the four paragraphs comprising the remainder of the afterword. They begin with the sentence “My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite.”<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that Hegel does not have a dialectical method. Marx, who mistakenly thinks there is a Hegelian dialectical method, immediately characterizes it in order to specify his own approach.

Marx writes: “To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e. the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea,’ he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.” Marx’s comment is abstract, hence difficult to evaluate. The situation is further obscured by a faulty translation. In reversing Hegel’s view, Marx accuses him of proceeding from the idea, which, as the putative demiurge, creates reality. Following his predecessors Kant and Hegel, Marx uses two related but different terms: idea and ideal. On Marx’s account, the ideal is only the transposed (*umsetzte*) and translated material (*Materielle*).

The translation, which is inexact here, attributes, in following orthodox Marxism, a reflection theory of knowledge to Marx on the basis of very obviously misreading “*umsetzen*,” that is, “*an eine andere Stelle setzen*” (or roughly “to move from one place to another”) as “to reflect.” “Demiurge,” which derives from the Greek noun meaning “craftsman” or “artisan,” later came to mean “producer” or “creator.” The term occurs in the *Republic*. Yet it is sometimes said to be introduced into philosophy only later in Plato’s *Timaeus*, which describes the demiurge as the creator of the universe. Among the German idealists, Schelling was especially interested in this dialogue. Marx, who attended a classical high school and knew Greek well, was presumably also aware that Plato uses the Greek term *demiurgos* in the famous passage in book 10 of the *Republic*, where he describes the craftsman (demiurge), who relies on an idea, or form, in making a bed. There is an obvious distinction between the craftsman, who relies on an idea to make an object, and the Platonic demiurge, who

<sup>29</sup> MECW, 25: 24.

relies on knowledge of the forms in transforming pure matter into the visible world.

Marx attributes a quasi-Platonic position to Hegel. He apparently thinks that Hegel, like Plato, holds that ideas or even “the Idea” are independent subjects, a kind of demiurge of the real world, which is, in turn, only its external, phenomenal form. A different version of Marx’s complaint resurfaces in Engels’s suggestion that philosophy, which is circular, returns to “the beginning,” which “is possible only in one way. Namely, by conceiving of the end of history as follows: mankind arrives at the cognition of the selfsame absolute idea, and declares that this cognition of the absolute idea is reached in Hegelian philosophy.”<sup>30</sup> According to Engels, who distinguishes between Hegel’s accomplishment and his supposed method, “The whole dogmatic content of the Hegelian system is declared to be absolute.”<sup>31</sup> He is presumably referring to the supposed Hegelian view that is often asserted but has no basis in the texts that Hegel thinks philosophy comes to a peak and an end in his position. Since he thinks philosophy comes only after the fact, Hegel could not make this or a similar claim. Engels, like many observers, refers without qualification to the Hegelian system. Hegel is obviously a systematic thinker, one of the most systematic in the entire tradition. Yet, like Aristotle, for instance, another highly systematic thinker, it is unclear that there is anything so grand as a Hegelian system. The main candidate for the Hegelian system would be the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* that Hegel, who apparently denies that he possesses a system, describes in a letter as no more than “a collection of propositions” (*une suite de thèses*).<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that the origin of the Western philosophical theory of knowledge lies in Parmenides’s early view of the identity of thinking and being. I have further pointed out that the post-Parmenidean effort to show, as Parmenides claims, that thinking and being are the same, runs

<sup>30</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW (New York: International Publishers, 1996), 35: 19.

<sup>31</sup>MECW, 26: 360–361.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 361.

throughout the entire Western tradition, but has never been successfully formulated.

Engels's effort to work out a materialist approach to cognition belongs to modern efforts to demonstrate Parmenides' view that knowledge requires a grasp of the mind-independent real, in Engels' theory through a restatement of a reflection theory of knowledge that arises in Plato and recurs in the modern tradition in the writings of F. Bacon and others. In classical German philosophy, Kant denies, correctly in my view, that it is possible to know the mind-independent real. Engels' approach to cognition rests on an opposition between idealism that, he believes, fails to grasp its object, and materialism that, he further believes, grasps the world as it is. Engels's materialistic approach to cognition attracted Lenin and through the Russian revolutionary many other Marxists, but fails to show either that or how it successfully grasps the real. Now Engels's reflection theory of knowledge is a form of materialism. I conclude that Engels' reflection theory of knowledge as well as any form of materialism on which he relies fails to overcome the traditional philosophical problem of knowledge.

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## Engels's Conception of Dialectics in the *Plan 1878 of Dialectics of Nature*

*Kaan Kangal*

What follows is an attempt to question the ways of how Engels coined the term “dialectics” in his *Dialectics in Nature*. My focus is directed by an interest in re-reading Engels's undertaking from the perspective of his much-celebrated *and* downplayed *Plan 1878*. I would like to make clear from the outset that, by Engels's dialectics, the *Plan 1878* and *Dialectics of Nature*, I refer neither to a complete and compact account of dialectics nor to *the* list of contents of Engels's work nor to a “book.” Rather, I occupy myself with a “work in progress” that reached some stage of maturity at the end of 1870s (documented in *a* plan), and a work *before* it posthumously became a “book.” In this regard, a couple of remarks seem to be in order.

Written between 1873 and 1882, *Dialectics of Nature* was first published in 1925 posthumously under the title *Nature-dialectics*. In a second edition (1927), the title was changed to *Dialectics and Nature*. Until the Adoratskii edition (1935), we have had the 1929 and 1931

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Russian editions reproducing the same heading. Since the special 1935 edition (*Sonderausgabe*) prepared as part of *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA<sup>1</sup>), Engels's work was called *Dialectics of Nature*. B. M. Kedrov's less well-known Russian/German editions (1973/1979) represent an exception in that Engels's manuscripts appeared there under the heading of *Friedrich Engels on Dialectics of Natural Science*. The final historical-critical edition (1985) came out as one of the volumes of the first section of MEGA<sup>2</sup>.

The manuscripts, 197 fragments in total, were put by Engels into four folders in 1886 or later, naming them (1) *Dialectics and Natural Science* (largely February 1873–October 1877, January–July 1882), (2) *Natural Research and Dialectics* (May–August 1876, October–November 1877, December 1877–June 1878, December 1885/January 1886), (3) *Dialectics of Nature* (November 1875–May 1876, January–April 1878, February–July 1880, January 1882–August 1882) and (4) *Math[ematics] and Natural S[cience] Diversa* (May–September 1876, October–November 1877, August 1878–July 1880, and shortly after May or June 1882). Also note that 94 manuscripts from the first folder carried the title *Naturdialektik*, which Engels had subdivided into 11 groups (*Naturdialektik I–II*) plus *Naturdialektik references*.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the well-known pieces of Engels's philosophical dialectics such as *Plan 1878*, *Dialectics* and *Plan 1880* (Ms. 164–166) were put into the fourth folder, while those works from 1880 onward that mainly dealt with contemporary physics ended up in the third folder. What led Engels to this late manuscript rearrangement is unknown. But what we know for sure is that the convolute order was never reproduced in any edition, early or late. The manuscripts were presented either in chronological (1925, 1927) or systematical order (since 1935), or both (1985).

The 1925 edition contained most of the manuscripts except for some mathematical calculations and the *Plan 1878*. The 1927 edition, unlike the previous one, reproduced *Preparatory Works for Anti-Dühring*, but omitted the fragment *Transition from Ape to Man*. Conspicuously, it also included Engels's 1892 article on Carl Schorlemmer. The 1935 edition

<sup>1</sup>Anneliese Griese et al., "Entstehung und Überlieferung," in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA<sup>2</sup>), Vol. I/26 (Berlin: Dietz, 1985), 597–598; Anneliese Griese & Gerd Pawelzig, "Friedrich Engels's *Dialektik der Natur*: eine vergleichende Studie zur Editionsgeschichte," *MEGA-Studien* 1 (1995), 46; Kaan Kangal, *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature* (London: Palgrave, 2020), 58, 122–123.

printed *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature* in the same volume. The materials on Dühring were attached to the subsection of *Anti-Dühring*, hence separated from the section of *Dialectics of Nature*. The manuscript arrangement was switched from chronological to systematic order in that the work was opened with *Introduction* (Ms. 98), followed by *Dialectics* (Ms. 165) (called *General Nature of Dialectics as Science*). The Büchner manuscript (Ms. 1), among others, was considered lengthy footnotes to *Dialectics of Nature*, and it appeared under the chapter heading *Dialectics and Natural Science*. The *Notes* section also contained both the *Plan 1878* and *Plan 1880*. The 1939/1941 Russian editions, by contrast, put the *1878 Plan* and *Dialectics* manuscripts at the very beginning of the volume that were then followed by *Articles and Chapters*. This created the impression that Engels's particular takes on natural sciences figured as exemplary accounts of the axioms formulated in the *1878 Plan* and *Dialectics*. This order was used in the subsequent systematic editions.

Due to an internal editorial controversy, the 1985 edition was decided to offer both chronological and systematical versions. It was rather the Soviet editors that were concerned to polish the text in order to minimize the lack of systematicity of Engels's manuscripts. The East German team resisted this tendency for the simple reason that a historical-critical edition was supposed to follow the guidelines of chronological reproduction. Unsurprisingly, the systematic version opened with the *Plan 1878*, while the chronological version placed it somewhere in the middle of the fragment series.

The systematic versioning was in part a recreation of the *Plan 1878*, as it reordered the manuscripts parallel to the internal division of various sections of the *Plan 1878*. For instance, *Historical Introduction* (first part) was followed by *Course of Theoretical Development since Hegel. Philosophy and Natural Science* (second part), *Dialectics as Science* (third part), *Forms of Motion of Matter and Interconnection of Sciences* (fourth part), *Dialectical Content of Sciences* (fifth part) and *Nature and Society* (sixth part). It is obvious that the headings of the first three parts are directly borrowed from Engels's *Plan 1878*, while the fourth section is evidently an extension of Engels's original formulation ("Interconnection of Sciences"). The heading of the fifth part is a shortened version of Engels's phrase "Aperçus on the Individual Sciences and Their Dialectical Content." The editorial sixth part is presumably intended to collapse

the diversity of Engels's particular takes on various theoretical natural-scientific accounts of epistemology and ontology (Nägeli, Kant, Hegel, Hume, Helmholtz, Haeckel, Darwin, and Virchow).

Aside from the micro-evolution of the historical-critical edition, we have also the more widely circulated popular editions such as *Marx-Engels-Werke* (MEW) or the *Marx Engels Collected Works* (MECW). The versioning of *Dialectics of Nature* in these editions differ from the historical-critical edition in a few ways. Most significantly, they open with the *Plan 1878*, named "Outline of the General Plan," coupled with the *Plan 1880* (called "Outline of the Part[ial] Plan"), though neither Engels openly declared such a partiality of the *Plan 1880* nor was it interpreted as such by the editors of MEGA<sup>2</sup>. This is in a way a crucial detail, as the design of the "book" determines the ways it is read. I doubt that it is a mere coincidence that since the 1940s, the Engels controversy largely clustered around the number of dialectics and their exemplification in particular sciences as uttered in the *Plan 1878*, *Dialectics* and *Plan 1880*.<sup>2</sup>

In the present article, I will occupy myself with the semantic connotations of dialectics in Engels's *Plan 1878*. There the term is used four times in total: once in the second section ["Course of the theoretical development in Germany since Hegel (old preface). The return to *dialectics* takes place unconsciously, hence contradictorily and slowly"], once in the third section ("*Dialectics* as Science of Universal Interconnection"), and twice in the fifth section ("Aperçus on the special sciences and their *dialectical* content'; Mathematics: *dialectical* aids and expressions. – Mathematical infinite really occurring").<sup>3</sup>

I will first go into Engels's reference to Hegel and document potential difficulties of his alliance with Hegel's dialectics. As is well known, Engels posits metaphysics as the diametrical opposite of his dialectics, while a recourse to Hegel's conception of both terms suggests a reconciliation rather than a separation of dialectics and metaphysics. This inquiry will provide some insights into Engels's coinage of the term on the first two occasions of the *Plan 1878*. Then I will concentrate on Engels's "aperçus," and put up for debate what he might have meant by the

<sup>2</sup> See Kaan Kangal, *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature*, 68–69.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, in MEGA<sup>2</sup> vol. I/26, 173; Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, in MECW vol. 25, 313; emphases added.



“dialectical content” of particular sciences. In this respect, I will address the issues of infinity, and physical forms of motion (planetary motion).

### ENGELS'S UNEASY ALLIANCE WITH HEGEL

Engels speaks of the merits of Hegel's philosophy on multiple occasions. For instance, in his review of Marx's work on political economy, he writes that “Hegel's mode of thinking” had an “exceptional historical sense” underlying his system. “He was the first to try to demonstrate that there is development, an internal interconnection in history ... This epoch-making conception of history was the direct theoretical premise of the new materialist outlook...”<sup>4</sup> Hegel's philosophy proved to be a useful tool to the materialist outlook insofar as it depicted “the whole natural, historical and intellectual world as a process” that is, being in “constant motion, change, transformation, development,” and to have attempted to “trace out the internal interconnection of this motion and development.”<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, Hegel represented a mixed legacy for Engels, as Engels's new materialism was tied in with the “dialectical method,” that is, the “revolutionary side” of Hegel's philosophy. “But this method was unusable in its Hegelian form.”<sup>6</sup> It needed to be “freed from its idealist trimmings.”<sup>7</sup> Engels went so far as to claim that the “Hegelian system represents a materialism idealistically turned upside down in method and content.”<sup>8</sup>

Hegel is the most referenced thinker of *Dialectics of Nature*. Though he is mentioned somewhat less frequently in the later stages of the work (post-1880s), he definitely plays a prominent role in Engels's theoretical engagements in the 1870s. It is safe to say that much of the material that

<sup>4</sup>Friedrich Engels, “Karl Marx: Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Rezension),” in MEW vol. 13, 473–474.

<sup>5</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, MECW vol. 25, 24; Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MEGA vol. I/27, 234, translation modified.

<sup>6</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, in MEW vol. 21, 292.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

Engels prepared for the *Dialectics of Nature* was fruitfully used also in *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>9</sup>

Dividing the whole history of philosophy into two distinct lines of thinking, that is, “2 philosophical directions, the metaphysical with fixed categories, the dialectical (Arist[otle] and Hegel especially) with fluid [categories],” Engels brings to the fore the importance of working out a living web of categories shaped by the demand of grasping the internal dynamics of the flux of things.<sup>10</sup> That task is ascribed to what Engels calls dialectics. Accordingly, Engels distinguishes two aspects of dialectics: subjective and objective. While objective dialectics “prevails in the entire nature,” subjective dialectics, i.e., “the dialectical thought” is “just [a] reflex of the motion in opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature.” These opposites “condition the life of nature by their continual conflict and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms.”<sup>11</sup> If metaphysics works with “fixed” rather than “fluid categories,” subjective dialectics “mediates” what metaphysics considers “irreconcilable opposites.”<sup>12</sup>

Sooner or later, Engels believes, natural sciences will come to grips with the inevitability of dialectics. The merit of dialectics is measured against the research objective of natural sciences, that is, nature itself. When speaking of nature, Engels refers to an all-encompassing whole, “a system, an interconnected totality of bodies.” More specifically, what constitutes the chief concern of all natural sciences is in what ways and why natural “bodies are interconnected” and how “they react on one another.” He weaves the concept of motion into his account of dialectics when he writes that “it is precisely this mutual reaction that constitutes motion.”<sup>13</sup>

The remark in the *Plan 1878* that a “return to *dialectics* takes place unconsciously, hence contradictorily and slowly” seems to be largely related to the contemporary Neo-Kantianism influential among natural

<sup>9</sup> See Kaan Kangal, “Engels’s Intentions in Dialectics of Nature,” *Science & Society* 83, no. 2 (2019); Kangal, *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature*, 93–94, 199–200.

<sup>10</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 5; see also *ibid.*, 167, 228.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 48, 32.

<sup>13</sup> Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 363; Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 188.

scientists as well as philosophers at that time.<sup>14</sup> As a response, Engels attacks the ambiguities of Kant's conception of the "thing in itself" and ridicules the emptiness of the term. The "assertation that we cannot know the thing in itself ... passes out of the realm of science into that of fantasy." "What would one think of a zoologist who said: "A dog seems [*scheint*] to have four legs, but we do not know whether in reality it has four million legs or none at all?" He also complains about the harms that "a certain neo-Kantianism" has done to natural sciences with the "least merited preservation" of the "thing in itself."<sup>15</sup>

One can scarcely pick up a theoretical book on natural science without getting the impression that natural scientists themselves feel how much they are dominated by this incoherence and confusion, and that the so-called philosophy now current offers them absolutely no way out. And here there really is no other way out, no possibility of achieving clarity, than by a return, in one form or another, from metaphysical to dialectical thinking.<sup>16</sup>

Now we reached the point to appreciate some incomplete aspects of Engels's coinage of the term "dialectics" with regard to Hegel. This reveals itself most clearly when we follow one of Engels's methodological rules: a past philosophical account "is not done away with by merely asserting it be false." It has "to be 'sublated' in its own terms."<sup>17</sup> It is not only the case that the particular content of Kant's philosophy and its followers of different variety and degree are silently passed over by a sketchy ridicule. A closer scrutiny of Hegel's account of dialectics and metaphysics also unfolds that there is no straight line connecting Engels's own employment of dialectics with the Hegelian heritage which Engels so ambitiously claims.

## THE SHOCK OF DIALECTICAL METAPHYSICS

What underlies the attack in the passage quoted above results probably from Engels's adoption of Hegel's critique of Kant's "thing in itself."

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 12; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 520–521; translation modified.

<sup>16</sup>Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 169; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 340–341.

<sup>17</sup>Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 273.

Hegel famously claims in the *Greater Logic* that it is “absurd” to assert that human cognition “does not know its objective [*Gegenstand*] as it is in itself.”<sup>18</sup> Thing in itself is an “abstraction” from what it appears to be. The appearances of the “thing in itself” are the determinations or the predicates of what constitutes that very thing without which it is all too natural to conclude that “thing in itself” cannot be known. To put into the Hegelian terms, a thing *is* insofar as it is something with regards to its other.

Having this said, Hegel is wise enough to acknowledge the merits of Kant’s metaphysics. A wholesale rejection of Kant’s philosophy is certainly foreign to Hegel, for “Kant had a higher regard for dialectic—and this is among his greatest merits—for he removed from it the semblance of arbitrariness which it has in ordinary thought and presented it as a necessary operation of reason.” Kant “gave justification and credence” to the idea of “the necessity of the contradiction which belongs to the nature of thought determinations.”<sup>19</sup>

This remark can be taken to point to Kant’s transition from logical contradiction to dialectical opposition in the *Critique of Pure Judgement*. Kant advises us not to confuse one with the other. Logical contradictions arise from two incompatible predicates asserted of the same subject, whereby at least one of the propositions is definitely wrong while the other is potentially true. Dialectical opposition is the case if the two mutually opposite predicates cannot be attached to a subject for the simple reason that the subject in question, previously presumed to exist, turns out to be an unsuitable candidate for the predicates at stake. While in the case of contradiction, at least one of the predicates is wrong, in the case of dialectical opposition, both predicates are wrong. Kant demonstrates this in an attempt to attach the predicates “finitude” and “infinity” to the concept of the world. Kant argues that since the predicates of the world cannot replicate the predicates of an ordinary object, attaching the aforementioned predicates to the subject “world” is condemned to fail from the outset.

While Hegel appreciates Kant’s logic of transition from logical contradiction to dialectical opposition, he denies the latter’s conclusion. For

<sup>18</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 39.

<sup>19</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 35.

what underlies the notion of the world is not to be found in the elimination of the asserted predicates but rather in their interrelation. On Hegel's account, there is reason to believe that Kant's "dialectical opposites" can be reconciled in a way that would make Kant's elimination of predicates unnecessary. Hegel argues that the way we gain access to the world takes places by means of a conceptual system constructed by the living web of categories. While what we perceive, witness, experience, and think here and now is necessarily constrained to the very here and now, this here and now presents itself as part and parcel of a whole to which it belongs and from which it stems. The particular articulates the idea that "*each* of the moments is the *whole*," that is, a "self-developing totality" with its "distinctive determinations and laws."<sup>20</sup>

The world is an infinitely textured object; yet we can manage it only by means of finite abstractions.<sup>21</sup> The purpose of metaphysics is to make world intelligible by means of establishing a categorial framework based upon which the very concept of the world is constructed. If isolated from the infinite character of the world, "the finite is not truly an existent." The finite as such is just an "*idealization*." "A philosophy that attributes to finite existence ... true, ultimate, absolute being, does not deserve the name of philosophy."<sup>22</sup> Finite entities have no veritable beings on their own. They depend on other finite entities within an all-encompassing whole: "ideal being is the finite as it is in the true in-finite – as a determination, a content, which is distinct but is not an *independent, self-subsistent* being, but only a *moment*."<sup>23</sup>

In arguing for the reconciliation of Kant's dialectical opposites of finitude and infinity, Hegel also argues for the necessity of a rationalist metaphysics. We are told that, like it or not, metaphysics is embodied in each single act of human thinking and speech. For instance, take the

<sup>20</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften I*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 67; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 47.

<sup>21</sup> Marx Wartofsky, *Models. Representation and the Scientific Understanding* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1979), 33.

<sup>22</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 124. This definition of "ideal" works also as the premise from which Hegel derives his concept of "idealism." For the intimate connection between Engels's materialism and Hegel's idealism, see Kangal, *Friedrich Engels and the Dialectics of Nature*, 153–157.

<sup>23</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 119.

category “being”: “the Sun *is* in the sky,” or “this grape *is* ripe.” When formulating such sentences, we employ intuitions that govern our descriptions and explanations of the real world. Questioning and revising, if necessary, the logic that informs our thought and speech acts constitute the business of metaphysics.

All knowing and representing is interwoven with, and governed by, this metaphysics; it is the network within which we grasp all the concrete subject matter that occupies our consciousness in its actions and endeavors. In our everyday consciousness this web of connections is embedded in the many-layered stuff comprising our known concerns and objects, the things of which we are aware.<sup>24</sup>

If Engels writes that “contra metaphysicians and metaphysical natural scientists, Hegel dialectically turned the rigid differences and opposites upside down,” then Engels probably meant to refer to what Hegel had called “previous metaphysics” (*vormalige Metaphysik*) of the Wolffian sort.<sup>25</sup> Engels is quite in line with Hegel’s own metaphysics when he associates the goal of “dialectics” with the attempt to “prove” empirical facts “in nature,” to “rationally explain,” and “bring” them “into inter-connection among each other.”<sup>26</sup> Any consideration of matter in motion necessarily leads to “the inter-connection of the individual motions of separate bodies, their being determined by one another.”<sup>27</sup> Recall the definition of dialectics in the *Plan 1878*: “Dialectics as Science of Universal Interconnection.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Engels reinforces the Hegelian metaphysical principle of relationality repeatedly as in the following passage:

That these bodies are interconnected already presupposes that they affect one another, and it is precisely this mutual effect that constitutes motion. ... matter is unthinkable without motion ... matter confronts us as something given, equally uncreatable as indestructible, it follows that motion

<sup>24</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy. 1825–1826* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 194.

<sup>25</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 267.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 510.

<sup>28</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 173.

also is as uncreatable as indestructible. It became impossible to reject this conclusion as soon as the universe was acknowledged as a system, an interconnection of bodies.<sup>29</sup>

Engels departs from Hegel in that he acknowledges evolution in nature whereby such an assumption is categorically rejected by Hegel.<sup>30</sup> The dialectician, Engels asserts, has to “prove ... the general interconnection of development in nature,” and show “[h]ow one form of motion develops from another.” He rejects Hegel’s “artificial ... dialectical transitions,” and suggest that “[t]he transitions have to make themselves, [they] must be natural.”<sup>31</sup>

[I]t is precisely dialectics that constitutes the most important form of thinking for present-day natural science, for it alone offers the analogue for, and thereby the method of explaining, the evolutionary processes occurring in nature, inter-connections in general, and transitions from one field of investigation to another.<sup>32</sup>

It remains to be asked how this thinking shaped Engels’s approach to particular issues such as infinity, metamorphosis of motion and the relations of planetary bodies.

## GENERAL AND PARTICULAR DIALECTICS IN THE *PLAN 1878*

The *Plan 1878* (Ms. 164) lists four “main laws” of dialectics: (1) “transformation of quantity and quality,” (2) “reciprocal interpenetration of polar opposites and transformation into each other when carried to extremes,” (3) “development through contradiction or negation of

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 188; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 363; translation modified.

<sup>30</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 225: “[T]he organic nature has no history.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 344–345; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature. Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 280 (translation modified): “We do not see in nature that the universal emerges [*entstehen*], that is, the universal [side] of nature has no history. The sciences, political constitutions, etc., on the other hand, have a history, for they are the universal in the sphere of mind.”

<sup>31</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 167; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 339.

the negation” and (4) “spiral form of development.”<sup>33</sup> Notice that the number of the laws is reduced in the *Dialectics* manuscript (Ms. 165) from four to three: (1) “The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa,” (2) “The laws of the interpenetration of opposites” and (3) “The law of the negation of the negation.”<sup>34</sup> While the three laws of the *Dialectics* manuscript are clearly derived from the first three laws of the *Plan 1878*, the fourth law of the *Plan 1878* is curiously dropped in the *Dialectics* manuscript. This may have to do with the “spiral form of development” figuring as a specification of the contradictory logic of “development” already articulated in the third law.

Another difference between the *Plan 1878* and the *Dialectics* manuscripts is that the *Plan 1878* defines dialectics as a singular “science” of a singular “universal interconnection,” while in the *Dialectics* manuscript Engels speaks of dialectics in terms of a “science” of various “interconnections” (in plural).<sup>35</sup> This may indicate that the plural interconnections are expressive of plural dialectical laws in the *Dialectics* manuscripts, while in the *Plan 1878* the four dialectical laws are subordinated to the singular universal interconnection as specific manifestations of it.

The *Dialectics* manuscript, in contradistinction to the *Plan 1878*, makes clear that both natural and human histories have these laws in common from which dialectical laws are derived. *Dialectics*, unlike the *Plan 1878*, establishes a parallel between three laws and the internal division Hegel’s *Greater Logic*. Accordingly, the first two laws (“quality/quantity” and “interpenetration of opposites”) correspond to the first two parts of Hegel’s *Logic* (*Logic of Being* and *Logic of Essence*). As for the correlate of the third law (‘negation of negation’), Hegel’s “entire system” (instead of the third part of *Logic*) is inserted. The *Plan 1880*, on the other hand, drops the talk of dialectics and dialectical laws altogether.

The subordination of the four laws to the universal interconnection (in singular) in the *Plan 1878* can be taken to refer to the idea that they characterize four aspects rather than four distinct behaviors of natural entities

<sup>33</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 173; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 313; translation modified.

<sup>34</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 175; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 356.

<sup>35</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 175.



in various fields from chemistry and biology to physics and astronomy. For Engels does not seem to deny that whenever the first law (quantity/quality) is at stake, then a transition from one opposite into the other (second law) takes place. This, in turn, suggests that the process of transition goes through the intermediate stages of transformation that find their logical explication in the Hegelian formula of “negation of negation” (third law). Engels repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the emergence of qualitatively new phenomena by means of quantitative change by no means amounts to a “bad infinity,” that is, reproduction of strictly identical copies of previously existing structural features of natural entities (fourth law).<sup>36</sup>

In this regard, he takes the Hegelian concept of infinity quite seriously to the extent of turning it into a tool of attack against those who deny the accuracy of an account of real infinity in nature. This view is expressed most vividly in Engels’s ridicule of the Swiss botanist Carl Nägeli’s “incapacity to know the infinite.” According to Engels, it is absurd to deny the infinity in nature, for natural bodies do consist of “infinitely many quantitative gradations, e.g., shades of color, hardness and softness, length of life, etc., and these, although qualitatively distinct, are measurable and knowable.”<sup>37</sup> The factual basis of this assertion is not so much the assumed existence of an infinite number of entities currently present in the physical universe. Rather, Engels goes out from the premise that since those entities are subject to persistent change, what transformations they may go through or give rise to is open-ended: the very process of change contradicts the assumption that perpetual metamorphosis of natural bodies may come to an (absolute) end. In this regard, the terms “change,” “transformation” and “in-finity” are used interchangeably. “When we say that matter and motion are not created and are indestructible, we are saying that the world exists as infinite progress.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the minds of natural scientists are positively occupied by the phenomenon of infinity, and it is not a coincidence that this resulted in the invention of the mathematical concept of infinity.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 16, 108

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 133; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 512.

<sup>38</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 142; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 516.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 108–110, 148.

## PLANETARY MOTION

In this final section, I will scrutinize Engels's introduction of his dialectical terminology into one particular form of motion: planetary motion. Planetary motion is subject to the second subsection of his fifth part of the *Plan 1878*: "Mechanics of Heavenly Bodies—now resolved into a process. – Mechanics: point of departure of inertia that is just the negative expression of indestructibility of motion."<sup>40</sup> On a few occasions, Engels takes up some issues of astronomy. For example, in one of the earlier manuscripts, he notes that "rotational motion" of "*annular bodies*" revolving around the Sun "runs into [a] contradiction with itself appearing as attraction, on one side, and tangential force, on the other."<sup>41</sup> Here the term "contradiction" is significant not only because it is also introduced in *Anti-Dühring* as an angle of attack against the Neo-Kantian criticism of Marx's dialectics, but also because Marx provides us with a similar illustration in *Capital*. Marx speaks there of an orbital body that tends to simultaneously "fall into" and "fly away from" the Sun.<sup>42</sup> The interrelation of the opposite predicates (fly away/fall into) that are asserted of the same subject (body) run into a "contradiction." Engels might have been initially inspired by Marx's formulation, though his illustration is slightly different from that of Marx. Lastly, this research objective, unlike the dialectical terminology, survives in the *Plan 1880*.

Engels makes use of the elliptical curve of planetary motion to reinforce his account of dialectics in that the orbital rotation is taken to involve "attraction and repulsion" as "inseparable" opposites "just like the positive and negative."<sup>43</sup> "Dialectics has proved from the results of our experience of nature so far that all polar opposites in general are determined by the mutual action of the two opposite poles on each other."<sup>44</sup>

The processual character and the "indestructibility of motion" of which Engels speaks in the *Plan 1878* go back to his engagement with Laplace's theory of the evolutionary formation of celestial mechanics. Historically,

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 45; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 552.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band. Hamburg 1867*, in MEGA<sup>2</sup> vol. II/5, 65.

<sup>43</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 142.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 190; Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, 364–365.

it was heat, not gravitation that was the predominant form of motion of matter in our galaxy. The progressive cooling of nebular bodies gave rise to the interplay of various forms of physical motion that, in turn, transformed into electricity, magnetism, and mechanical motion. The Sun not only attracts orbits revolving around it, but it also produces repulsion via heat. The “conflict of heat with gravity” of the Sun is an ultimate product of this historical process. The “existential process of a solar system presents itself as an interplay of attraction and repulsion, in which attraction gradually more and more gets the upper hand owing to repulsion being radiated into space in the form of heat.” This repulsive form of motion is called “energy.”<sup>45</sup>

Engels’s repeated recourse to planetary motion can be viewed as an attempt to elaborate on his account of the application of dialectical terminology to natural phenomena as well as a political-philosophical response to the theologically motivated debates in the nineteenth-century natural sciences. The same figure is also used as an analogy in the economic context. Philosophically, Engels appears to take into consideration the contradictory tendencies of the orbital motion to fly away from and fall into the Sun due to gravitational attraction and heat-related repulsion.

Natural scientifically, it is evident from Engels’s sources that the historical origin and ultimate end of orbital rotation was subject to heated debates. For instance, Hermann von Helmholtz asserted in his 1854 lecture on the *Interaction of Natural Forces* that the elliptical route of comets around the Sun becomes “ever narrower” and “a time will come when the comet will strike the Sun, and a similar end threatens all the planets.” They all will eventually “approach the Sun.”<sup>46</sup> Julius von Mayer claimed in his *Mechanics of Heat* that the resisting medium in all space would cause the “planetary bodies to rotate in ever narrower orbits around the Sun and at last fall into it.”<sup>47</sup> Johann Heinrich von Mädler pointed out in his *Wonderwork of the Universe* that given the

<sup>45</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 80–81, 142, 191; cf. Kaan Kangal, “Marx and Engels on Planetary Motion.” *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung. Neue Folge*, 2016/17 (2017).

<sup>46</sup> Hermann von Helmholtz, *Ueber die Wechselwirkung der Naturkräfte und die darauf bezüglichen neuesten Ermittlungen der Physik. Ein populär-wissenschaftlicher Vortrag gehalten am 7 Februar 1854* (Königsberg, Germany: Gräfe, 1854), 38–39.

<sup>47</sup> Julius R. Mayer, *Die Mechanik der Wärme in gesammelten Schriften* (Stuttgart, Germany: Cotta, 1874), 171.

external distortions that increase or decrease the tangential or gravitational tendencies of orbits, the elliptical route is subject to alteration. "If the centripetal force [of the peripheral planet] is decreased, then the rotating body approaches slowly to the central body."<sup>48</sup> To name another account, William Thomson and Peter Guthrie Tait argued in their *Treatise on Natural Philosophy* that the "effect of a continued tangential force" is expected to "gradually increase the distance from the central body, and to cause as much again as its own amount of work to be done against the attraction of the central mass, by the kinetic energy of motion lost."<sup>49</sup>

Engels did not challenge the contention that the earth will eventually hit the Sun. However, he was critical of the theological extrapolations that were derived from the apocalyptic end of planetary motion of the orbits of the Sun. For instance, he writes in *Dialectics of Nature* that the earth will "circle in deeper darkness and in an ever narrower orbit around the equally extinct sun, and at last fall into it. Other planets will have preceded it, others will follow it."<sup>50</sup> He uses this figure in an analogy in the following lines in *Anti-Dühring*:

The capitalist mode of production moves in these two appearance forms of the contradiction [organization and anarchy of production] immanent to it from its very origin. It is never able to get out of that "vicious circle"... this circle is gradually narrowing; that the motion presents rather a spiral, and must reach to its end, like the motion of the planets, by collision with the center.<sup>51</sup>

The planetary motion finds a limited use in this passage insofar as the ways of how two opposites are related to each other and the particular mode of the resolution of contradiction at stake are embodied necessarily differently in natural and social spheres. But it is also clear that Engels considers the interrelation of attraction and repulsion more than a matter of analogical illustration of social collapse. We are informed here more about the structural isomorphism of the interaction of components of

<sup>48</sup> Johannes H. Mädler, *Der Wunderbau des Weltalls oder Populäre Astronomie* (Berlin: Carl Heymann, 1861), 165.

<sup>49</sup> William Thomson and Peter Guthrie Tait, *Treatise on Natural Philosophy*, vol. I (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1872), 192.

<sup>50</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 84.

<sup>51</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MEGA<sup>2</sup>, 439.

the core unit of the unity of opposites rather than a categorial system within which the conceptual correlate of Engels's "objective dialectics" is unfolded. The "dialectical content" of which he speaks in the *Plan 1878* seems to be related to the idea that the two opposites of the same structural unit trigger a reciprocal transformation to the extent of a resolution of their contradictory unity.

## CONCLUSION

This article highlighted the traces of how Engels entertains the idea of a dialectics of nature from the angle of the *Plan 1878*. Initially, I focused on the terminologies difficulties of the concept "dialectics" and documented some obstacles of Engels's attempt to claim the Hegelian heritage of dialectics. One could conveniently push the argument further and develop a treatment of Engels's dialectics from Hegel's own point of view. That would reveal that much of what stands and falls with Engels's dialectics is of speculative essence in Hegel's sense of the term. This speculative thinking is most vividly articulated in Engels's first manuscript: "[O]ne pole is already in embryo present in the other, that at a certain point the one pole reverts into the other and that the entire logic develops only from these progressing opposites."<sup>52</sup> This formulation is in line with Hegel's inheritance of Kant's dialectical antinomies, subject to debate in the second section of this article. Hegel puts a great emphasis on the idea of reciprocal manifestation of opposite predicates asserted of the same subject. A natural body that is subject to change already contains the objective features of the result of that change in an "embryonic form." What emerges out of the process of change is expressive of what has preceded it. This is the invariant logic that underlies much of Engels's own illustrations of "dialectics," though Hegel may have preferred the somewhat more accurate term "speculative" in order to capture the "dialectical" interconnection which Engels asserts to exist between natural entities.

<sup>52</sup> Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 5.

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PART III

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Engels and Crisis





# Engels's Theory of Economic Crisis

*Timm Graßmann*

Engels's remarks on the problem of periodically recurring economic crises acquire their significance above all against the background of Marx's much-discussed theory of crisis. In the present article, I argue three things. First, Engels's early thoughts on that matter heavily shaped Marx's ideas (I), but, secondly, despite this influence, Marx and Engels, ultimately, did not share the exact same theory of capital and its crises (III). Thirdly, a major contribution of Engels can be observed in the analysis of concrete business cycle phenomena and of the spirit of capitalism (II and IV).

## BEFORE MARX

Many of the main themes of Marx's theory of economic crisis appear already in the writings of young Engels. That crises are typical of a competitive society which does not consciously control the production process; that crises result from an abundance of commodities and labor

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and that they destroy this material wealth; that they unmask the equilibrium models of political economists as ideological; that they recur periodically and will become larger and increasingly universal over time; that they threaten the entire bourgeois “civilization”<sup>1</sup> and are at the same time a condition for a social revolution—all this can be found in Engels’s pioneering works *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (1844) and *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). Marx did not adopt these features *prima facie* but further developed them throughout his life.

In the 1840s, in the international socialist camp it was unusual to put the issue of recurring crises at the center of the theoretical concern at all. Owenism, for example, occasionally used the theory of permanent underconsumption to also explain economic crises, but it lacked a particular concept to grasp the periodic back and forth of boom and crash of the market. Contrary to this, Engels tried to understand the significance of a still relatively recent historical phenomenon.

The economist comes along with his lovely theory of demand and supply, proves to you that “one can never produce too much”, and practice replies with trade crises, which reappear as regularly as the comets, and of which we have now on the average one every five to seven years.<sup>2</sup>

Engels himself states his source: it is the *History of the Middle and Working Classes* by the British historian John Wade, published in 1833. With Wade, it was probably for the first time pronounced that the “mercantile revulsions”—he calls those of 1811, 1815–1816, 1818 and 1825—devastate the world in regularity every five to seven years as had the plague epidemics in former times.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Wade, Engels provides a cause for the recurrence of crises: It is private property of the means of production that creates a competitive anarchy of the market and leaves the production process out of human

<sup>1</sup> It is quite overlooked that, for Marx and Engels, crises do not imply only a revolutionary potential, but also that of general regression: “Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in MECW vol. 6, 489–90).

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 3, 433.

<sup>3</sup> John Wade, *History of the Middle and Working Classes* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833), 211, 255.

control.<sup>4</sup> Due to the development of productive forces, the production output is therefore always greater than the possibilities of selling it. So, crises are an expression of the fundamental dynamics of capitalism. Because they result from surplus productive power, Engels considers them to be the most striking expression of the “living absurdity” of an economic system in which “people starve from sheer abundance.”<sup>5</sup> The true consequence of private property is not the harmonious creation of the common good behind the backs of the individuals, but instead is destruction and catastrophe. However, according to Engels, crises demonstrate not only the absurd and alienated state in which humanity finds itself, but also the untenability of this state. On the one hand, they promote the process of monopoly formation and thus increase the wage-dependent working population; on the other hand, a crisis, when the system has stopped to work, is exactly the moment when the latter plunges into unemployment and can venture into revolutionary adventures. For Engels, crises are both the most tangible manifestation of the absurdity of capitalism as well as the harbinger and mechanism of its necessary demise. They are thus not “only occasional deviations from ‘normality’,” but indicate that socialism is “a necessary product of historical development,” as he will formulate later in *Anti-Dühring*.<sup>6</sup>

Engels followed Wade in arguing that the mechanism of commercial fluctuations was not due to extra-economic or monetary factors, but to the effect of commodity prices.<sup>7</sup> According to Wade, high and low commodity prices give a different stimulus on consumption: When consumption increases, prices rise and production is expanded; but rising prices also lead to falling consumption, so that at some point the “employment” added during the prosperity phase becomes superfluous. The drop in demand causes prices to fall again, which stimulates consumption, and

<sup>4</sup>“Supply always follows close on demand without ever quite covering it. It is either too big or too small, never corresponding to demand; because in this unconscious condition of mankind no one knows how big supply or demand is.” (Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 3, 433)

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 435.

<sup>6</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW vol. 25, 271–272.

<sup>7</sup>See Daniele Besomi, “John Wade’s Early Endogenous Dynamic Model: ‘Commercial Cycle’ and ‘Theories of Crises’,” *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 15 (4) (2008).

so the game starts all over.<sup>8</sup> Engels repeated Wade's mechanism of the mismatch between supply and demand mediated by price in the *Outlines* almost literally:

If demand is greater than supply the price rises and, as a result, supply is to a certain degree stimulated. As soon as it comes on to the market, prices fall; and if it becomes greater than demand, then the fall in prices is so significant that demand is once again stimulated.<sup>9</sup>

Not least because Engels was one of the first to comprehensively interpret and explain the crisis phenomenon, Marx called the *Outlines* "a brilliant essay [*Skizze*] on the critique of economic categories."<sup>10</sup> But already in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the *Paris Notebooks*, he did not adopt Engels's mechanism of the cycle. He merely noted the unsuitability of equilibrium models à la Say's Law for explaining the "real movement" of production, without himself being able to specify the driving forces of this movement.<sup>11</sup> A crisis theory, Marx remarks, would have to show how, through the "growth of the capitals as well as its modes of application on the one hand," arises a "lack of productive opportunities [...] on the other hand."<sup>12</sup> In his eyes, Engels and Wade were hardly able to do this, because both schematically juxtaposed production and consumption, and their mechanism simply described that prices are high before the crises and low in its aftermath.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Wade, *History of the Middle and Working Classes*, 254.

<sup>9</sup>Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 3, 433. This simple mechanism is still found in the works of Kautsky and Hilferding. See Simon Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 77.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 29, 264.

<sup>11</sup>See Clarke, *Marx's Theory of Crisis*, 81–82; Timm Graßmann, "The Unsolved Problem of Economic Crisis as a Turning Point of Marx's Critique of Political Economy, 1844–1845," *The History of Economic Thought*, 60 (1) (2018).

<sup>12</sup>Karl Marx, *Excerpts from David Ricardo: Des principes de l'économie politique et de l'impôt*, in MEGA vol. IV/2, 416.

<sup>13</sup>Later, in Manchester in 1845, Marx read Wade's *History of the Middle and Working Classes* in detail on Engels's recommendation. He found the outline of the systematicity of crises to be the "most original in Wade" (Karl Marx, *Excerpts from John Wade: History of the Middle and Working Classes*, in MEGA vol. IV/4, 298, my translation), but was less impressed with Wade's contradictory understanding of the industrial revolution as both the condition of the cycle and its mitigation, as his mocking comments indicate (*ibid.*, 297).

Precisely because the crisis-related statements in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), the final version of which Marx probably wrote alone,<sup>14</sup> are very similar to those of the young Engels, some differences become clear, too. For Engels, crises always originate from overproduction of commodities. Taking up Wade's metaphor of the "greater expansive power,"<sup>15</sup> he considered crisis as a direct consequence of the "superfluous productive power."<sup>16</sup> But the *Manifesto* says: "In these crises there breaks out an epidemic that, in all earlier epochs, would have seemed an absurdity – the epidemic of over-production."<sup>17</sup> Overproduction here is not the cause, but the content of crisis. While this may imply that overproduction took place before the crisis and only now appears, Marx chose a more subtle formulation, avoiding a one-sided causality.

At the same time, the causalities are not always clear with Engels. In the *Principles of Communism* (1847), Engels saw crisis-inducing competition emerging from modern industry:

In the steam-engine and the other machines large-scale industry created the means of increasing industrial production in a short time and at slight expense to an unlimited extent. With this facility of production the free competition necessarily resulting from large-scale industry very soon assumed an extremely intense character; numbers of capitalists launched into industry, and very soon more was being produced than could be used. The result was that the goods manufactured could not be sold, and a so-called trade crisis ensued.

<sup>14</sup>That Marx is the only author of the final version is likely due to the chronology of its creation. As late as January 25, 1848, the *Bund der Kommunisten* complained about the lack of a manifesto (see Die Zentralbehörde des Bundes der Kommunisten, "Letter to Kreisbehörde Brüssel, 25 January 1848," in MEGA vol. III/2, 384). Engels spent most of that January in Paris and did not return to Brussels until the 31st, so most likely Marx wrote the *Manifesto* at the end of January based on Engels's *Principles* alone.

<sup>15</sup>Wade, *History of the Middle and Working Classes*, 253.

<sup>16</sup>Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 3, 436. – Still in the *Preface to the English Edition* of Marx's *Capital*, Engels wrote that "the productive power increases in a geometric, the extension of markets proceeds at best in an arithmetic ratio" (Friedrich Engels, *Preface to the English Edition*, in MECW vol. 35, 35). This is not to be mistaken with an underconsumptionist approach. In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels stated explicitly that crises do not directly arise from underconsumption of the masses, as Eugen Dühring assumed, but from a contradiction between socialized production and private appropriation (see part III of the present article). Underconsumption was just one "prerequisite condition of crises" (Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW vol. 25, 272).

<sup>17</sup>Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in MECW vol. 6, 489–490.

However, on the same pages it is first said that “free competition is necessary for the beginning of large-scale industry” and then again that “big industry in its first period of development has created free competition.”<sup>18</sup> But according to the *Manifesto*, the “modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property,” which include competition, “has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange.”<sup>19</sup> In the *Principles*, Engels had primarily assumed reverse causality. In the *Manifesto*, Marx thus defused the simple theory of overproduction and shifted the focus away from technology to social relations. For Marx, it was not a mismatch between supply and demand, between capital and income, but a deeper and more abstract mismatch between relations of production and productive forces that repeatedly led bourgeois society into crisis.<sup>20</sup> Specifying these social relations and the mechanisms of crisis generation became an important theoretical task for Marx in the 1850s.

Despite the great influence of Engels’s early work on Marx, three differences between him and Engels were embryonically inherent already in 1848. First, Engels identified the deep causes of crisis in private property and market anarchy, and this implied certain practical consequences: that replacing private property with another form of property (e.g., state property) and replacing the anarchy of the market with some sort of planning are enough to bring about crisis-free conditions.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Marx tended to regard private property as a (legal) expression of the bourgeois class society; already in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) this concept played no major analytical role for him. Second, in Engels’s crisis theory, monetary aspects were absent, whereas Marx had reflected on money in the *Paris Notebooks* (1844). Consequently, the fact that the crisis of 1847 erupted as a monetary one would motivate him to undertake detailed studies of monetary issues in the *London Notebooks 1850–1853*. Adopting Wade’s weaknesses, Engels, thirdly, set a priority on technology and often derived social conditions from the state of technological development.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Principles of Communism*, in MECW vol. 6, 346–7.

<sup>19</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in MECW vol. 6, 489.

<sup>20</sup> See Clarke, *Marx’s Theory of Crisis*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> “What will be the consequences of the final abolition of private ownership? [...] There will be an end of crises” (Engels, *Principles of Communism*, in MECW vol. 6, 353).

Competition, private property<sup>22</sup> and the proletariat<sup>23</sup> all emerged from modern industry, which Engels considered as neutral and non-alienated. In the third part of the article, we will see how the three differences deepened in Engels's later formulations, which were based more on his own early work than on Marx's theory.

## ALONGSIDE MARX

After his acquaintance with Marx, Engels practically stopped reasoning on the theory of political economy, partly because he started to work in a managerial capacity at the Ermen & Engels textile factory in Manchester in 1850. Through this full-time activity, he gained insights into the functioning of capitalism from the perspective of an insider.<sup>24</sup> Engels acquired his commercial knowledge at the desk of a capitalist enterprise, whereas Marx sat in the library and examined the same objects from a "scientific" perspective. Engels accepted the division of labor between the two, as shown not least by his lifelong financial support for his friend. Conversely, Marx was aware of certain limits of Engels, as can be seen from his poisoned praise of Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England* in his letter of April 9, 1863:

Re-reading your work has made me unhappily aware of the changes wrought by age. With what zest and passion, what boldness of vision and

<sup>22</sup> "Every change in the social order, every revolution in property relations, has been the necessary result of the creation of new productive forces which would no longer conform to the old property relations. Private property itself arose in this way." (Engels, *Principles of Communism*, in MECW vol. 6, 348)

<sup>23</sup> "The proletariat arose as a result of the industrial revolution" (Engels, *Principles of Communism*, in MECW vol. 6, 341), so that "[u]p to 1780, England had few proletarians" (Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of England*, in MECW vol. 3, 487). This does not mean that, for Engels, only factory workers belong to the proletariat, because the characteristic of this class is its propertylessness. But, according to him, the separation of producers from the means of production did not occur until the introduction of machinery and the concentration of the means of production (see John M. Sherwood, "Engels, Marx, Malthus, and the Machine," *The American Historical Review*, 90 (4) (1985), 844–845). Sherwood (*ibid.*), therefore, speaks of a "great machine theory of history" in Engels's work, i.e. the productive forces embodied by large-scale industry and machinery are regarded as the actual agents of history.

<sup>24</sup> See Tiago Mata and Robert Van Horn, "Capitalist Threads: Engels the Businessman and Marx's *Capital*," *History of Political Economy*, 49 (2) (2017).

*absence of all learned or scientific reservations*, the subject is still attacked in these pages! And then, the very illusion that, tomorrow or the day after, the result will actually spring to life as history lends the whole thing a warmth, vitality, and humor with which the later “grey on grey” contrasts damned unfavorably.<sup>25</sup>

Marx loved the *Condition* for its critical and prophetic insights, its courage, humor, and passion—but did not treat it as a theoretical work. Likewise, the first volume of *Capital* states that Engels “well understood the *spirit* [*Geist*] of the capitalist mode of production.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, Engels did not advance to the essence or to the laws of movement of capitalism, but “only” grasped its *spirit*, i.e., a mentality, way of thinking and procedure peculiar to it, but not the general forms on which this spirit is based and in which it moves. But Marx certainly wanted to express his appreciation to his friend here: In Marx’s view, one did not need to do science in order to understand something about capitalism.<sup>27</sup>

It is, therefore, no coincidence that Marx kept the manuscripts to Books 2 and 3 of *Capital* hidden from Engels, and that, instead, such texts were developed jointly, whose initial aim was rather the polemical-humorous settling of accounts with former companions in the *Holy Family* and the *German Ideology*, the elaboration of a political program in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, and the analysis of (and intervention in) a historico-political constellation of bourgeois society in newspaper projects such as the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in the revolution of 1848–1849. So, during the great world market crisis of 1857, Marx

<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, “Letter to Engels, 18 April 1863,” in MECW vol. 41, 469, emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 1* (London: Penguin, 1976), 349.

<sup>27</sup> In the *Introduction* of 1857, Marx listed other ways of comprehending the world in addition to science: “The totality as a conceptual totality seen by the mind is a product of the thinking mind, which assimilates the world in the only way open to it, a way which differs from the artistic-, religious- and practical-intellectual assimilation of this world” (Karl Marx, *Introduction*, in MECW vol. 28, 38). Engels mastered the practical-intellectual assimilation of the world: a knowledge of how things behave (*know how*). In contrast, the theoretical-scientific way seeks to understand the *what* and the *why*. See Urs Lindner, *Marx und die Philosophie. Wissenschaftlicher Realismus, ethischer Perfektionismus und kritische Sozialtheorie* (Stuttgart: Schmetterling-Verlag, 2013), 244. There is much to suggest that Marx saw no contradiction between science, art and practice, but rather a complementary relationship (*ibid.*).



toyed with the idea of writing a pamphlet together with Engels about the events.

I think that, somewhere about the spring, we ought to do a pamphlet *together* about the affair to the German public that we are still there as always, and always the same. I have started 3 large record books—England, Germany, France. [...] Write to me whenever you have the time, for later on you're sure to forget all the “*chronique scandaleuse*” of the crisis which is so invaluable to us. I make excerpts from your letters and enter them in the principal record books.<sup>28</sup>

The “*chronique scandaleuse*” of the crisis reminds not least of Engels's characterization of his *Condition* as a “fine bill of indictment [*Sündenregister*]” in his letter to Marx on 19 November 1844.<sup>29</sup> Among other things, here it is a matter of documenting and thereby denouncing the insanity of capitalism. According to Marx, crises reveal that, under the rule of capital, a life adequate to the level of technological and scientific development achieved is impossible. Crisis are a manifestation of the “revolt [*Empörung*]” of the productive forces against the conditions of production,<sup>30</sup> and the scandal of their superfluity for capital is something that wage labourers experience most extremely in times of crisis through poverty, unemployment, loss of property, and state repression.

The pamphlet was not written, but Marx's collection of material, the three *Books of Crisis*, has been available since 2017 (MEGA vol. IV/14). The joint work was not to be a *theory* of crisis, on which Marx worked alone in parallel in the *Grundrisse*, but a *history* of the course of the events. Engels was well suited as a partner in this endeavor because he knew where the action was. In particular, one of Engels's strengths was his openness and accessibility to differences and novelties. Since crises as historical events are affected by contingencies, such an eye for the peculiarities is important so as not to miss the decisive moments.

Thus, Engels contributed to collecting material for the “*chronique scandaleuse*.” He sent the issues of the *Manchester Guardian*, which Marx used for the *Books of Crisis*, and in his letters, he discussed concrete crisis events, providing insider information about bankruptcies, defaults and

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, “Letter to Engels, 18 December 1857,” in MECW vol. 40, 224–225.

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Letter to Marx, 19 November 1844,” in MECW vol. 38, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in MECW vol. 6, 489.

debt chains. Marx noted Engels's definition of kite-flying,<sup>31</sup> and in some articles written for the *New-York Tribune*, he gave his assessment of the situation in Manchester from "private letters" sent to him by Engels.<sup>32</sup> Engels eloquently described the Hamburg panic,<sup>33</sup> reported on the Bank of England's rescue measures behind closed doors,<sup>34</sup> plotted curves of the cotton price,<sup>35</sup> and informed immediately about the "standstill" in the crisis, "at least so far as Manchester and the cotton industry are concerned,"<sup>36</sup> before any newspaper could report on it. In the following, the cooperation of Marx and Engels as crisis and business cycle researchers will be examined in more detail with the help of two examples.

The first example is the importance of the discovery of the gold fields in California (1848) and Australia (1851) for the boom phase after the crisis of 1847. Thomas Tooke and William Newmarch estimated in their *History of Prices, 1848–1856*, that the global gold reserves had grown by an unheard-of 27% as a result of these unparalleled discoveries.<sup>37</sup> When Marx, in 1852, began to grow impatient over the outbreak of the new crisis, it was first Engels who, in letters of March 2 and April 20, 1852, offered an explanation for its delay. Because of the "stimulus"<sup>38</sup> of California and the "quite unexpected resilience [*Elasticität*]" of the Indian sales markets, the prosperity of the 1850s "will be of exceptionally long duration."<sup>39</sup> On August 24, he decisively added: "California and Australia

<sup>31</sup> Karl Marx, *Book of the Crisis of 1857*, in MEGA vol. IV/14, 82.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, *The Financial Crisis in Europe*, in MECW vol. 15, 408; Karl Marx, *The Crisis in Europe*, in MECW vol. 15, 411 (see MEGA vol. I/16 critical apparatus, 731, 738).

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 7 December 1857," in MECW vol. 40, 212–213; Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 9 December 1857," in MECW vol. 40, 218–222).

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 7 December 1857," in MECW vol. 40, 212.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 16 November 1857," in MECW vol. 40, 205.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 6 January 1858," in MECW vol. 40, 239.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Tooke and William Newmarch, *A History of Prices, and of the State of the Circulation, during the Nine Years 1848–1856; forming the Fifth and Sixth Volumes of the History of Prices from 1792 to the Present Time. Vol. 2* (London: Longman, 1857), 150–152.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 2 Marx 1852," in MECW vol. 39, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Marx, 20 April 1852," in MECW vol. 39, 83.

are two cases which were not foreseen in the *Manifesto*: creation of large new markets out of nothing.”<sup>40</sup>

Engels insisted on the importance of gold discoveries but viewed this phenomenon primarily in terms of additional effective demand.<sup>41</sup> For Marx, however, the monetary consequences of the gold rushes were to become important too, and he was not able to learn more about this until 1857 with Tooke/Newmarch.

I haven't yet got round to it, but some time I must really investigate the relationship between the rate of exchange and bullion. The role played by money as such in determining the bank rate and the money market is something striking and quite antagonistic to all laws of political economy. Worthy of note are the 2 newly published volumes of Tooke's *History of Prices*.<sup>42</sup>

A second example is the significance of kite-flying [*Wechselreiterei*] for the course of the 1857 crisis.<sup>43</sup> Engels drew Marx's attention early on to the fact that the credit expansion this time took the form of bill jobbing or kite-flying. On December 11, 1857 he wrote:

The outward and visible sign of overproduction is more or less always expansion of credit, but this time it's especially *kite-flying*: [the] system of making money by means of drafts on bankers or “bill-brokers” [...]. In short everyone operated in excess of his resources, *overtraded*. Admittedly overtrading is not synonymous with overproduction, but it amounts to exactly the same thing. [...] The present crisis provides an opportunity for a detailed study of how overproduction is generated by the expansion of

<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Letter to Marx, 24 August 1852,” in MECW vol. 39, 165.

<sup>41</sup> Hence, the assessment, that “the economist of the period who grasped the essential fact that its discovery meant increased effective demand from the gold-producing nations and subsequent international multiplier effects was William Newmarch” (J. R. T. Hughes, *Fluctuations in Trade, Industry and Finance. A Study of British Economic Development, 1850–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 14), requires revision: It was Engels.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, “Letter to Engels, 23 April 1857,” in MECW vol. 40, 126. – In my dissertation, which is nearing completion, I argue that the gold rush had a significant influence on the monetary theory of the *Grundrisse*.

<sup>43</sup> In the case of kite-flying, the credit operation is not directly based on a commercial transaction but on another bill of exchange that is often due and cannot be honoured. Old debts are thus “settled” with new debts, or new debts are created on the basis of old, unredeemable ones.

credit and by overtrading. There's nothing new about the thing as such, save for the remarkably clear-cut lines along which it is now developing.<sup>44</sup>

Marx's expectations about the escalation of the events into an "industrial crisis,"<sup>45</sup> which would reach the heart of the English cotton industry and plunge the factory workers there into unemployment, were based also on the idea that credit directly represents produced goods. Thus, Marx assumed consignment, the sending of goods against a promise of payment, to be the predominant technique of credit expansion in the international trade of the 1850s, as had been the case in the previous crisis of 1847. Engels's letter suggested that this time the relationship between credit and commodities took on a more complicated character. But in the interpretation of the phenomenon Engels showed uncertainties: In the same letter, he wrote first that the expansion of credit is a "sign of overproduction," and then that "overproduction is generated by the expansion of credit." The first thesis is within the framework of Marx's theory of overspeculation as a mere symptom of overproduction,<sup>46</sup> but the latter seemingly reverses the direction of action: *Overtrading*, i.e., overimport, had arisen from kite-flying. Marx recognized through his studies in the *Books of Crisis* that the crisis did not take on the industrial character he had predicted, partly because of this *overtrading by fictitious capital*. By means of kite-flying, credit relations had moved away from the immediate trade in industrial goods, so that the crisis was carried away from the industries that produced it, too. In the manuscript to Book 3 of *Capital*, Marx described that in 1857, unlike 1847, the crisis was characterized less by the consignment of goods by the industrialists themselves, but rather by the *overtrading* of the merchants "on their own account," i.e., by self-manufactured fictitious capital such as kites:

"Did the manufacturers [before the crisis of 1847, TG] export on their own account? – Principally; the *merchants*, I think, very soon saw that the thing would not answer, and they rather encouraged the manufacturers to consign them than take a direct interest themselves." In 1857, on the other hand, it was chiefly the merchants who had to cough up (i.e. to go

<sup>44</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Karl Marx, 11 December 1857," in MECW vol. 40, 220–221.

<sup>45</sup>See MEGA vol. IV/14 critical apparatus, 517.

<sup>46</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Review. May to October 1850*, in MECW vol. 10, 490.

bankrupt), as this time the manufacturers left them to overimport goods into foreign markets “on their own account”.<sup>47</sup>

Engels did not quite correctly include this passage in his edition of the third volume of *Capital* and chose “flooding [*Überführung*] the foreign markets” instead of “overimport goods into foreign markets,” thereby framing the crisis more as having originated from simple overproduction.<sup>48</sup> However, the crisis of 1857 was not so much about the glut with English industrial commodities, but about the *overimport of foreign markets* such as Scandinavia with raw materials and colonial goods, financed and refinanced by British trading houses.<sup>49</sup> Although the English cotton industry and its tendency toward overproduction dominated the industrial cycle, it was, through the movement of credit, derived to the international produce and colonial goods markets. What collapsed was not so much the English cotton industry as international trade in raw materials. The specific nature of the credit expansion had a decisive influence on the character and course of the crisis. Paradoxically, Engels himself first drew Marx’s attention to this overtrading through fictitious capital. But his uncertain interpretation of the phenomenon in the letter of December 11, 1857 is reflected in the fact that he could not fully classify this difference while editing Marx’s manuscripts.

This modification was not Engels’s only crisis-theoretically significant obfuscation of Book 3 of *Capital*. Already in the *Grundrisse*, Marx had emphasized the importance of loanable capital as an autonomous factor: “[I]n a general crisis of overproduction the contradiction is not between different types of productive capital, but between industrial and loan capital, between capital as it is directly involved in the production process and capital as it appears as money independently (*relativement*) outside that process.”<sup>50</sup> Overproduced capital appears as an excess of loanable moneyed capital accumulating in the credit system and seeking productive investment. Loanable capital thus acquires relative autonomy from reproductive capital. A crisis of production appears as a monetary one.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 570.

<sup>48</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy. Vol. 3* (London: Penguin, 1981), 619.

<sup>49</sup> See Docent Ingrid Hammerström, “Anglo-Swedish Economic Relations and the Crisis of 1857,” *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 10 (2) (1962).

<sup>50</sup> Karl Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 28, 340.

But the circulation of credit, as Marx learned in 1857, is not a direct extension of industrial capital, but rather, in its process of autonomization, it produces peculiar effects, which must be of great importance for any theory of crisis.

Hence, in the manuscript to Book 3 of *Capital* in the chapter on the tendential fall of the profit rate, Marx wrote that the “closer investigation” of the over-accumulation of capital “will form part of our consideration of the *apparent movement of capital* in which interest capital, etc., and credit, etc., will be examined in more detail.”<sup>51</sup> This passage has been changed by Engels to: “we shall study it in more detail below,”<sup>52</sup> thereby suggesting that this examination should follow in the same section on the “Law” making this the ultimate place of Marx’s theory of crisis. This intervention marked a fierce modification of Marx’s argumentation.<sup>53</sup> Thus, although Marx explicitly stated that the overproduction of capital can be “closer investigated” only at the level of credit movements, his chapter on credit has been rather neglected in the history of Marxism. Of course, Engels had no interest in distorting Marx. These editorial changes rather expressed a theoretical difference—the different weighting of monetary factors—which Engels was not clear about.

Whether it be the gold discoveries or the special credit techniques in the crisis of 1857, Engels showed himself to be a diagnostician of the times, who observed novel or special developments before Marx and proposed an initial interpretation. Part of the pattern, however, is that Marx was the one who subsequently dealt with these developments comprehensively in theory—and always in a way that went beyond Engels’s initial interpretation. In addition, Engels’s neglect of monetary factors is confirmed: he did not comment on the monetary aspects of the gold rushes and misjudged several of Marx’s statements on the influence of credit on crises.

<sup>51</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865*, 360.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *Capital*. Vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1981), 359.

<sup>53</sup> Assuming that Marx “may not have intended to write so much about the credit system in this book,” Moseley erroneously considers Engels’s modification as “accurate” (Fred Moseley, “Introduction,” in Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1864–1865*, 22). However, in the *Grundrisse* and the *Manuscript 1861–1863*, Marx consistently refers to the importance of credit relations for the theory of crisis. Consequently, in *Capital*, he even considered the possibility of an autonomous monetary crisis (Marx, *Capital*. Vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 236).

## AFTER MARX

Some of the crisis-theoretical formulations that have shaped the history of Marxism were never used by Marx himself, but came from Engels's works such as *Anti-Dühring* (1877) and *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), in which he wanted to present "the dialectical method and [...] the communist world outlook championed by Marx and myself – [...] covering a fairly comprehensive range of subjects."<sup>54</sup> However, these texts were written before Engels was ever able to take a look at Marx's crisis-theoretically highly significant manuscript to Book 3 of *Capital*. As far as crisis theory was concerned, Engels mainly passed on his own considerations.

This can be illustrated by an analysis of his formula of the "contradiction between socialised production and capitalistic appropriation." According to Engels, this contradiction is the deepest reason for the crisis-proneness of capitalism. This formulation appears for the first time in the third section of *Anti-Dühring* and in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Engels added that this is the "fundamental contradiction" of capitalism.<sup>55</sup>

The nature of that contradiction can be understood only in light of Engels's concept of "simple commodity production."<sup>56</sup> According to Engels, "commodity exchange dates from a time before any written history,"<sup>57</sup> and already dating back 7000 years ago there was a mode of production called "simple commodity production," which he tended to depict as free from contradictions. Here, property was based on

<sup>54</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW vol. 25, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 258, 259; Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW vol. 24, 324. – Marx, on the other hand, in the *Grundrisse*, called overproduction the "basic contradiction [*Grundwiderspruch*] of developed capital" (Marx, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW vol. 28, 342) and in the *Manuscript 1861–63* he specified: "the fundamental contradiction [*Grundwiderspruch*]: on the one hand, unrestricted development of the productive power and increase of wealth which, at the same time, consists of commodities and must be turned into cash; on the other hand, the system is based on the fact that the mass of producers is restricted to the necessities." (Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, in MECW vol. 32, 248) Marx dropped the term *Grundwiderspruch* in the manuscripts to *Capital*, which indicates an increasing emphasis on other contradictions and on other possibilities for the emergence of crises.

<sup>56</sup> See Nadja Rakowitz, *Einfache Warenproduktion. Ideal und Ideologie* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Supplement and Addendum to Volume 3 of Capital*, in Marx, *Capital. Vol. 3* (London: Penguin, 1981), 1037.

one's own labor and no appropriation by third parties took place<sup>58</sup>; the law of value held because the commodity-producing farmers and craftsmen joined together by directly calculating their working hours, so that exchanges were equivalent and conditions transparent because people were "in a position to reckon up each other's production costs in raw and ancillary materials, and in labour-time, with a fair degree of accuracy"<sup>59</sup>; and conditions of production and productive forces formed a harmonious relationship<sup>60</sup> constituting a "peaceful, stable condition of things."<sup>61</sup>

In the course of history, this mode of production was replaced by an increasing concentration of the means of production (simple cooperation, manufacture, large-scale industry). Thus, the means of production were socialized, i.e., "only workable by a collectivity of men."<sup>62</sup> But their owners continued to appropriate the products, now products of alien labor. This is why in capitalism the coherency between property and labor is torn and the relations of production, which Engels saw as characterized by *private appropriation*, no longer match the productive forces that he identified with *socialized means of production*:

Thus, the products now produced socially were not appropriated by those who had actually set in motion the means of production and actually produced the commodities, but by the *capitalists*. The means of production, and production itself, had become in essence socialized. But they were subjected to a form of appropriation which presupposes the private

<sup>58</sup> Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW vol. 24, 308. – According to Marx, pre-capitalist societies were structured quite differently: The expenditure of labor was not based on the law of value, and the socialization of the labor products not carried out by means of exchange on the market, but rather by custom, convention, religious rules or personal rule. The vast majority of labor products did not take on the commodity form.

<sup>59</sup> Engels, *Supplement and Addendum to Volume 3 of Capital*, 1036. See Helmut Brentel, *Soziale Form und ökonomisches Objekt. Studien zum Gegenstands- und Methodenverständnis der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989), 140–141.

<sup>60</sup> "The instruments of labor – land, agricultural implements, the workshop, the tool – were the instruments of labour of single individuals, adapted for the use of one worker, and, therefore, of necessity, small, dwarfish, circumscribed. But, for this very reason they belonged, as a rule, to the producer himself." (Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW vol. 24, 308)

<sup>61</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW vol. 25, 260.

<sup>62</sup> Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW vol. 24, 308.



production of individuals, under which, therefore, everyone owns his own product and brings it to market. The mode of production is subjected to this form of appropriation [...].<sup>63</sup>

So, Engels sketches a “linearly progressing historical process”<sup>64</sup> from primitive communism via alienated capitalism to higher communism. In simple commodity production, both production and appropriation were private and thus identical; in the capitalistically deformed commodity production, only appropriation is private; therefore, in communism, production and productive forces that have already been socialized under capitalism must also be socially appropriated.

The formula of the “contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation” has been presented countless times as the core of a Marxist crisis theory.<sup>65</sup> However, Marx never used this phrase and it distorts some of his concepts. In this formula, the three differences between Marx and Engels already inherent in their early work are preserved and developed.

First, Engels's primacy of technology returns as a technological genesis of capitalism and as an uncritical view of modern industry. Engels continues to determine conditions of production through the productive forces. By “production” he understands less a specific *form of social relations*, but rather the organization of the production process within a company, and this is essentially determined by the degree of concentration of the means of production. Furthermore, for Engels, the sociality of “production” is *already set by capital*.<sup>66</sup> For Marx, too, labor-saving processes are a prerequisite for a post-capitalist society, but at the same time he considers the combination of workers in the factory a despotic act of capital and criticizes large-scale industry as an apparatus of surplus value extraction. In contrast, Engels shows a certain optimism about technology: the produced goods, the productive forces, the means and

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>64</sup> Choeng-Lip Chu, *Ideologie und Kritik* (Regensburg: Roderer, 1998), 55.

<sup>65</sup> See, as one of many examples, Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975), ch. 18.

<sup>66</sup> Heinz Dieter Kittsteiner, “„Logisch“ und „Historisch“. Über Differenzen des Marx'schen und Engel'schen Systems der Wissenschaft,” *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 13 (1977), 45.

the process of production are already *non-capitalist elements within capitalism*.

Secondly, in the suggestion that crises are primarily a result of the private appropriation of an *already socialized production*, the primacy of private property of the means of production returns from the early work, since, for Engels, this is still the main characteristic of capitalism. It is therefore no slip of the tongue when he writes: “In these crises, the contradiction between socialised production and capitalist appropriation ends in a violent explosion. [...] The economic collision has reached its apogee. *The mode of production is in rebellion against the mode of exchange.*”<sup>67</sup> For Marx, however, the capitalist mode of appropriation and exchange emerges from the capitalist mode of production. Because of his understanding of the concept of the mode of production as the organization of labor within a company, Engels introduced a separation of production and appropriation that does not exist in Marx: according to which not “production” but only its appropriation is capitalist.<sup>68</sup>

According to Marx, the reason why there are crises is also less to do with the method of appropriation than with the purpose of production. Unlike, for example, the modes of production of ancient societies, in which social wealth was created for private consumption by a ruling class and there were no crises,<sup>69</sup> the purpose of capitalism is the maximization of surplus value. Production for surplus value promotes both a specific delimitation of production (e.g., through the unconditional development of productive forces) and a specific limitation of production (e.g., making a profit)—and according to Marx, the tendency to crisis is based on this contradiction.<sup>70</sup> Marx’s theory of crisis is more related to the fact that wage labor (regardless of its precise organization in the labor process) can no longer maintain the specifically capitalist form of abstract wealth (as materialized in money). If the purpose of production was the private

<sup>67</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW vol. 25, 263.

<sup>68</sup> See Ingo Elbe, *Marx im Westen. Die neue Marx-Lektüre in der Bundesrepublik seit 1965* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2010), 115.

<sup>69</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, in MECW vol. 32, 133.

<sup>70</sup> Marx wrote in the *Manuscript of 1861–1863*: “The fact that bourgeois production is compelled by its own immanent laws, on the one hand, to develop the productive forces as if production did not take place on a narrow restricted social foundation, while, on the other hand, it can develop these forces only within these narrow limits, is the deepest and most hidden cause of crises.” (Ibid., 274)

appropriation of surpluses by a ruling class, there could hardly be crises of overproduction.

The perpetuation of commodity production explains, thirdly, the absence of monetary considerations in Engels's thought. For him, money has no qualitative purpose. The turning point of Marx's value theory, however, is that labor products only take on the form of commodities under such social conditions in which production is carried out by private producers who are independent and separate from one another and whose labor is not directly social, but must yet be socialized through exchange. Money is a material expression of the success of this impersonal and non-direct socialization of the various works. Marx, therefore, locates the most abstract possibility of crisis *within* commodity circulation, because in money as a means of circulation the separation between the private producers can logically unfold. In money as a means of circulation, the inner unity—the socialization of various private works—is actually torn apart by the acts of buying and selling and can begin to move in external opposites. Marx, thus, marks the most abstract possibility of crisis at a point which Engels considered to be free of crisis in principle. Already commodity circulation is characterized by the contradiction between private production and social division of labor, between concrete and abstract labor, between commodity and money.

By first locating the cause of crises in the contradiction between the shape of the means of production and their private appropriation, Engels set in at a more concrete moment of the capitalist totality, but because of the negligence of its most abstract possibility, the entire crisis complex can, ultimately, not be solved with the help of his theory. His confusion of the expenditure of total social labor with the internal-company division of labor obscures the enormous difficulty of associating labor and creating a society that consciously masters its metabolism with nature. By conceiving of “primitive communism” as a *crisis-free society of simple commodity production*, Engels made a socialist commodity production without private property and with large-scale industry appear as a crisis-free society. Presumably Engels chose these formulations in such a way that the Second International oriented toward social democracy, conquest of the state and establishment of state property could tie in with them.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Marx, on the other hand, seems to have made more of a *communal turn* towards the end of his life. See Luca Basso, *Marx and the Common. From Capital to the Late Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

Marx's vanishing point, however, is not "only" the abolition of private property (which is not sufficient for the abolition of capitalism), but also the abolition of the forms on which it is based: private labor, market mediation, wage labor and production for surplus value.

### THE END OF THE INDUSTRIAL CYCLE?

Engels was undogmatic and ready to devote himself to new objects, languages and social developments. It is therefore not without irony that, after Marx's death, he articulated a new historical experience, albeit perhaps hastily generalized it. In the face of the "Long Depression" of 1873–1896, Engels declared central assumptions of Marx's crisis theory to be obsolete, thus initiating a dispute as to whether capital was still moving in the forms described by Marx or whether capitalism had entered a new "stage" with new laws of movement. He observed that the rhythm of sharp ups and downs characteristic of the 1825–1873 epoch with a total of six general crises (1825, 1836–1839, 1847, 1857, 1866 and 1873) had disappeared.<sup>72</sup> In *Anti-Dühring* Engels still assumed a usual cycle,<sup>73</sup> but after Marx's death he placed his recent observations prominently in the prefaces to *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1884) and the English edition of *Capital* (1886) as well as in the footnotes of his edition of the third volume of *Capital* (1894).

Engels was, however, unsure what exactly this change indicated: First, in the 1880s he announced the end of the cyclical form itself: there were now neither real crises nor real periods of prosperity, but only "permanent and chronic depression."<sup>74</sup> Later, he held out the possibility that "what is involved is simply an extension of the cycle's duration"<sup>75</sup> and

<sup>72</sup>As novel and underlying developments, Engels cited the further expansion of the world market, the internationalization and diversification of the market for capital seeking investment, the weakening of national and international competition through the formation of trusts, monopolies and protective tariffs, and at the same time the intensification of international competition as a result of England's loss of the monopoly on the world market (Marx, *Capital*. Vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1981), 620–621).

<sup>73</sup>Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW vol. 25, 263.

<sup>74</sup>Engels, *Preface to the English Edition*, in MECW vol. 35, 35. See also Friedrich Engels, *Marx and Rodbertus*, in MECW vol. 26, 288.

<sup>75</sup>Engels in Marx, *Capital*. Vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1981), 620.

that, because of the elimination of earlier crisis possibilities, the contradictions could have been merely suppressed and, therefore, a global “*giant crisis*”<sup>76</sup> was preparing itself: “might we now be in the preparatory phase of a new world crash of unheard-of severity?”<sup>77</sup> Engels confirmed his abilities as a time diagnostician and anticipated a great crash like that of 1929, but in his own uncertainties, theoretical weaknesses are also reflected.

Marx, too, became aware of a special economic trend in the 1870s. In the face of the crisis of 1878–1879, he wrote to Nikolai Danielson on April 10, 1879 that he could not publish the second volume of *Capital* until the crisis had reached its peak and he could “theoretically consume” its features.<sup>78</sup> But he added: “However the course of this crisis may develop itself—although most important to observe in its details for the student of capitalistic production and the professional *théoricien*—it will pass over, like its predecessors, and initiate a new ‘industrial cycle’ with all its diversified phases of prosperity, etc.”<sup>79</sup> Marx assumed that the basic movement of capital would remain periodical, but nevertheless, because of the peculiarities of the crises in the 1870s (and the developments they expressed), he could not proceed to the formation of theory and complete *Capital*. The solution of this riddle will only be possible—if at all—when all of late Marx’s excerpts are available.<sup>80</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Many essentials that characterize the Marxian thought of crisis go back to Engels, but Marx and Engels did not share the exact same theory of capital and its crises. The weaknesses of Engels’s simple overproduction theory of crisis lie in a technological reductionism, a one-sided focus on

<sup>76</sup> Friedrich Engels, *On Peculiarities in England’s Economic and Political Development*, in MECW vol. 27, 325.

<sup>77</sup> Engels in Marx, *Capital*. Vol. 3 (London: Penguin, 1981), 620. – So, contrary to what is often claimed (as f.i. in M. C. Howard and J. E. King, “Engels, Friedrich,” in David Glasner (ed.), *Business Cycles and Depressions. An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1997), 200), Engels has not only asserted the disappearance of the cycle.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Marx, “Letter to Nikolai Danielson, 10 April 1879,” in MECW vol. 45, 354.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>80</sup> In 1878–9 in particular, Marx once again studied crises and credit. These excerpts will be published in MEGA vol. IV/25.

private property as the deepest reason for crisis and the absence of monetary considerations. Some of his ideas also run counter to those of Marx at crucial points.

However, equating Marx and Engels is as misleading as demonizing Engels, who played a special role in their intellectual partnership. It was not only his pioneering work, his insider and commercial knowledge, but also his numerous observations and analyses that inspired and shaped Marx's considerations. These capabilities are particularly important for crisis and business cycle analysis, because history in capitalism does not repeat itself as the eternally same thing. Like few others, Engels represents the good materialist leaning to observe society undogmatically, to rethink theory and to keep critique up-to-date. However, one cannot help but recognize a touch of tragedy in this constellation. Partly because of his reflections on novel experiences, Engels did not simply repeat Marx. But his much-received explanations do not reach the level of abstraction of Marx's. His great strength lay in grasping the spirit of capital rather than its forms.

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## Metabolism, Crisis, and Elasticity

*Kohei Saito*

The tensed relationship between Engels and Western Marxism is well-known and has a long history of heated debates in the Marxian study.<sup>1</sup> This tension famously originates from Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, in which he criticized Engels's inappropriate expansion of Marx's dialectic into the sphere of nature. However, it is much less known that the late Lukács seems to change his attitude toward Engels's dialectic, and he rather incorporated Engels's discussion of "labor" as a key element to grasp the qualitative jump from nature to society. This important theoretical shift can be properly understood only when one carefully looks at Lukács's theory of "metabolism," which goes back to his unpublished manuscript of 1925/1926 titled *Tailism and the Dialectic*. As a result of deepening his theory of metabolism, the late Lukács loosened his critique of Engels in an other unpublished manuscript, *Ontology of Social Being*.

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However, this shift does not mean that Lukács admitted that his insight claim made in *History and Class Consciousness* was utterly false and no longer worth examining. One can even argue that his late theory of metabolism is a consistent and continuous development of his earlier view in *History and Class Consciousness*. Nevertheless, at least one thing has significantly changed in his late writings as a result of his reception of Engels. Lukács briefly elaborated on his theory of “crisis” in the 1920s based on his theory of metabolism, but this is precisely what disappears in *Ontology of Social Being*. The big problem that Lukács, like other Marxists, confronted at the time was the rather unexpected reality that economic crisis did not lead to the collapse of capitalism. This is because of capital’s “elasticity” and “productive forces” which allow capital to overcome various contradictions and to shift them to somewhere else.

Interestingly, “elasticity” and “productive forces of capital” are exactly what Marx himself emphasized in the 1850s and 1860s, while Engels underestimated their theoretical and practical importance. This is because Engels maintained his earlier view of “historical materialism” developed in the 1840s, according to which the motor of history is rooted in the development of productive forces. In this sense, there is a clear difference between Marx and Engels. Late Lukács’s endorsement of Engels’s *Dialectics of Nature* was only possible by suppressing this difference between Marx and Engels with regard to capital’s elasticity and productive forces, and thus by abandoning his earlier theory of crisis.

### THE BIRTH OF WESTERN MARXISM AND LUKÁCS’S CRITIQUE OF ENGELS

One of the main characteristics of “Western Marxism” is to highlight the differences between Marx and Engels in its attempt to save Marx from flawed theoretical consequences of Soviet Marxism.<sup>2</sup> Although the expression of “Western Marxism” originates from Merleau-Ponty’s *Adventures of the Dialectic*,<sup>3</sup> its basic idea can be traced further back to Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* published in 1923. Challenging the dogmas of the Orthodox Marxism and attempting to explore the

<sup>2</sup>Russell Jacoby, “Western Marxism,” in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 583.

<sup>3</sup>Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 30.

true legacy of Marx's social philosophy as a critique of political economy, Lukács emphasized the decisive *difference* between Marx and Engels.

In a famous footnote of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács argued for the need to strictly limit the dialectical method only to the analysis of society, criticizing Engels's unjustified expansion of the dialectical method to nature, which can be regarded as the cause of the fallacies of Orthodox Marxism:

It is of the first importance to realize that the method is limited here to the realms of history and society [*historisch-soziale Wirklichkeit*]. The misunderstandings that arise from Engels's account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels – following Hegel's mistaken lead – extended the method to apply also to knowledge of nature. However, the crucial determinants of dialectics – the interaction of subject and object, the unity of theory and practice, the historical changes in the reality underlying the categories as the root cause of changes in thought, etc. – are absent from our knowledge of nature.<sup>4</sup>

Though carefully hidden in a footnote, Lukács's claim turned out too provocative at the time. It immediately gained attention, resulting in harsh criticisms from traditional Marxists.

In this passage, Lukács distinguished two different methods of science, i.e., one for social analysis and the other for natural science. His point is clear: one must not confuse these two methods in scientific investigation. According to Lukács, Marx actually only employed his dialectical method as a critique of political economy or critique of capitalist society. In other words, Marx's dialectical method has only to do with the realm of society. Yet, so said Lukács, Engels in his *Dialectics of Nature* and *Anti-Dühring* illegitimately extended Marx's dialectic to the realm of nature, as if there were no differences between the two realms.

In Lukács's view, a serious problem emerges out of such a misapplication. If dialectics *as such* can be found and established through the investigation of nature, Marxists can first focus on natural science in order to bring about a sophisticated dialectical method, and then bring it back to the analysis of capitalist society. However, its consequence was, so said Lukács, the determinist and positivist understanding of society and human history modeled after the method of natural science, the tendency of

<sup>4</sup>Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 24.

which was already clearly discernible in the case of Soviet Marxism. Lukács found such a tendency quite dangerous, so that he instead attempted to avoid its fatal consequence by strictly limiting the dialectics to the realm of the social. Afterward, this limitation of dialectical method became one of the main characteristics of Western Marxism.

Obviously, such criticism of Orthodox Marxism inevitably caused various harsh denunciation of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. One example can be found in Ladislaus Rudas, who was an influential Marxist-Leninist philosopher in the Hungarian Communist Party. According to Rudas, Lukács' rigid separation of the social and the natural inevitably fall into crude "dualism," which is incompatible with Marxian materialism. Rudas writes:

If the dialectic is restricted to society, then two worlds exist, with two quite different sets of laws: nature and society. In nature phenomena are undialectical, in society they are dialectical. Fine. All the great philosophers may have been monists, but that does not mean that they were right. According to L. the world is dualist.<sup>5</sup>

Suddenly, Lukács faced various criticisms, and later Marxists were also eager to point to his theoretical "ambivalences" and "inconsistencies."

In this context, if one reads the second edition of *History and Class Consciousness*, which was published in 1967, one might simply think that Lukács admitted the problematic character of his own assertion made in the 1920s. In the edition of 1967, he added a long, self-critical preface, which seems to confirm his theoretical shifts.

Indeed, Lukács significantly changed over time after facing a number of theoretical and political criticisms. In the new preface, he even regretted the fact that his treatment of nature as a "social category" strengthened "the tendency to view Marxism exclusively as a theory of society, as social philosophy, and hence to ignore or repudiate it as a theory of nature."<sup>6</sup> Lukács admitted that this consequence was because of the fact that the central category of Marxism, i.e., "labor," was missing in *History and Class Consciousness*: "The purview of economics is narrowed down because its basic Marxist category, labour as the mediator of the

<sup>5</sup>See Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2002), 146.

<sup>6</sup>Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, xvi.

metabolism between society and nature, is missing.”<sup>7</sup> Eliminating the categories of “labor” and “metabolism,” Lukács thought he ended up losing a way to comprehend the relationship between society and nature, so that his theory fell into a dualist worldview.

Even after this “self-criticism” by Lukács, there remained opposition between those who emphasize the difference between Marx and Engels and those who rather emphasize the theoretical continuity between them.<sup>8</sup> However, in this context, it is noteworthy that John Bellamy Foster did not simply dismiss Lukács’s discussion as a false one. Rather, Foster points to Lukács’s usage of the concept of “metabolism” (*Stoffwechsel*) in his manuscript from the 1920s entitled *Tailism and the Dialectic*, which was written as a defense of *History and Class Consciousness*. Foster argues that this “critical shift in Lukács’s understanding, via Marx’s concept of social and ecological metabolism, had already been largely reached by that time.”<sup>9</sup> This insight is important because, in contrast to the preface of 1967, Lukács did not actually dismiss the category of “labor” even in the 1920s.

Furthermore, Lukács continued to work upon the concept of metabolism in the following years, in which the concept of labor plays a central role. In the unfinished final work entitled *Ontology of Social Being*, which was published only after his death, he elaborated further on his theory of metabolism. This focus on metabolism is, as Foster highlights, consistent with Marx’s own approach.<sup>10</sup> Instead of simply opposing society and nature, Marx analyzed their dynamic interaction between society and nature mediated by labor.

Thus, it is easily understandable why the concept of metabolism is quite essential for Lukács in his attempt to defend *History and Class Consciousness* from Rudas’s critique of “dualism.” If he began to comprehend the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>8</sup> See Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983); Kohei Saito, “Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship Revisited from an Ecological Perspective,” in *Marx’s Capital After 150 Years: Critique and Alternative to Capitalism*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2019); John L. Stanley, *Mainlining Marx* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2002); John Bellamy Foster and Paul Burkett, *Marx and the Earth: An Anti-critique* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> John Bellamy Foster, “Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature,” *Monthly Review* 65, no. 7 (2013).

<sup>10</sup> See John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

incessant interaction between society and nature as part of a universal and ecological metabolic process, it becomes immediately clear that one cannot completely separate those two realms, as the footnote seems to indicate. A different approach is required in order to understand what the late Lukács intended to develop in his project of the ontology of social being. Surprisingly, Engels's discussion on labor plays an important role here.

### ENGELS AND THE LATE LUKÁCS

Looking at *Ontology of Social Being*, Lukács's theoretical shift is clearly discernible in his attitude toward Engels. In Lukács's theory of metabolism, his general evaluation of Engels became higher: "It is Engels we are indebted to for having ascribed labor the central role in man's becoming to be human."<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that Lukács referred to Engels for his famous insight into "labor" as a key to the transition from the sphere of nature to the sphere of society: "Engels, too, investigates the biological precondition of its new role in this *leap* from animal to man."<sup>12</sup> According to Lukács, it was Engels who pointed to this process of transition from ape to humans, which is of great importance with regard to the relationship between the realm of nature and that of society.

Obviously, Lukács had in his mind the famous passage in a fragment known as "The Part played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man," which is included in the *Dialectics of Nature*:

Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labor, and widened man's horizon at every new advance. He was continually discovering new, hitherto unknown properties in natural objects. On the other hand, the development of labor necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where they had something to say to each other.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Georg Lukács, *Prolegamena. Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, 2. Halbband (Darmstadt: Luchterhand Verlag, 1986), 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, in MECW, Vol. 25, 454.

In this passage, Lukács discerned the existence of “leap” (*Sprung*), which emerged through the laboring activity as a joint activity, because labor brings about something that is entirely new in terms of quality into the sphere of nature: “But Engels is equally at pains to point out that despite anticipations of this kind, there is a leap involved here, no longer belonging simply to the organic sphere, but signifying a qualitative and ontological advance of principle beyond this.”<sup>14</sup> According to Lukács, labor brings in something that did not exist in nature without labor. This is, of course, a gradual historical process of natural evolution, but this continuation does not eliminate the character of “leap,” which is equivalent to the qualitative “break” (*Bruch*).<sup>15</sup>

What is this new quality that labor brings about? It is not just about a creation of new objects and new use-values thanks to the development of hand skills. According to Lukács’s interpretation of Engels, it is “sociality and language” that function as the foundation of social being of humans. Labor does not simply increase the hand skill, enabling humans to work upon the external world in a more complicated way than ape does. The development of the labor process also necessitates the division of labor and cooperation. Such a social act requires communication—“they had something to say to each other”—which leads to the development of language and sociality on a broader level.

Without going into the details of the further development of social being, it is clear that this “leap” from ape to humans indicates a qualitative break between the realm of nature and the realm of society. Obviously, humans are part of nature, as they are a product of natural evolution. Their existence is thus inevitably conditioned by the natural law, and the metabolic interaction between humans and nature is a transhistorical physiological condition, as Marx pointed out in *Capital*.<sup>16</sup> Engels traced the natural history of transition from ape to human, but his contribution lies in pointing to the “qualitative leap” instead of completely reducing it as a natural process.

Engels’s discussion apparently helped Lukács reformulate his old ideas elaborated in the footnote of *History and Class Consciousness*, which thus led to his reevaluation of Engels. What Lukács in *Ontology of Social Being*

<sup>14</sup>Lukács, *Prolegomena. Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, 11.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 283.

aimed at establishing out of Engels's discussion is the dimension of the uniquely social that does not exist in nature without society. Lukács's attempt is obviously consistent with Marx's dialectical method that deals with the realm of capitalist society as manifested in such social categories as "commodity," "money," and "capital."

In this sense, there is a clear continuation in his focus on the "purely social" categories from *History and Class Consciousness* up until *Ontology of Social Being*. It is noteworthy that Lukács did not fully reject the existence of dialectics of nature even in 1923. Without the dialectics of nature, the dialectics of society do not exist either, as society emerges only out of nature. This is actually what he had already and always emphasized in *Tailism and the Dialectic*: "Self-evidently the dialectic *could* not possibly be effective as an *objective principle of development* of society, if it were not already effective as a principle of development of nature before society, if it did not already *objectively exist*."<sup>17</sup> According to Lukács, dialectics of society objectively exist only because dialectics of nature exist prior to the formation of society and because society arose from nature. This remark alone is of great significance, for his recognition of the dialectic in nature is nothing but a complete negation of the basic characteristic of Western Marxism.

However, it is also utterly wrong to directly apply the dialectics of nature to the realm of society, as Lukács warned in *History and Class Consciousness*. It is because there exists a qualitative "leap" between the two spheres, as Engels pointed out. In other words, Lukács found a way of not too strictly distinguishing the realm of society and the realm of nature, which resulted in vehement criticisms in the 1920s. At the same time, he did not eliminate the distinction of society and nature either. Already in *Tailism and the Dialectic*, he attempted to clarify his intention by emphasizing the existence of dialectics of nature prior to the existence of human beings. This is basically what he repeated in *Ontology of Social Being* through his reevaluation of Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*.

This is why in *Ontology of Social Being* Lukács repeatedly used the Hegelian expression "identity of the identity and non-identity" (*Identität der Identität und Nichtidentität*) in order to designate the relationship between society and nature. On the one hand, Lukács emphasized that there is the material "identity"—i.e., continuity—between nature and

<sup>17</sup> Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*, 102.



society, as society could emerge only out of nature. In other words, nature functions as the material basis of society. Dialectics of society only exist as far as dialectics of nature exist. For example, value only exists when the commodity has a use-value. Use-value functions as a material “bearer” (*Träger*) of the pure social category of value.

On the other hand, Lukács also emphasized the non-identity—i.e., qualitative “difference”—between society and nature. As is the case with “value,” there is a dimension of the purely social, which only emerges through symbolic activities associated with labor, such as communication necessitated through the division of labor. With the development of capitalism, the social being multiplies. Here it is possible to think about Marx’s example in *Capital*. Money as the “general equivalent form” requires gold as its material bearer, and gold as money is a classic example of hybridity of the social and the natural. In this situation, it is not adequate to simply apply the dialectics of nature in order to conceptually grasp these social beings because the realm of society has its own qualitatively different aspects, which accordingly requires a different kind of dialectics.

### LUKÁCS AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

Does this mean Lukács completely abandoned his critical view toward Engels’s dialectics of nature? At least, with regard to the dialectic, it is not possible to find his critical remarks toward Engels as seen in *History and Class Consciousness*. There is nothing surprising about this shift per se, as Lukács went over significant theoretical changes throughout his life. However, they do not necessarily mean theoretical progress and sophistication.

One hint that indicates the difference from the earlier view in the 1920s is reflected in the absence of theory of “crisis.” Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*—especially in the most prominent “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”—famously attempts to reveal the problems of natural science characterized by the “contemplative attitude,” which brings about various contradictions in reality in the course of capitalist development.

The point of Lukács's critique of modern science can be summarized in four points.<sup>18</sup> The first characteristic of natural science is *immediacy*. Nature is treated as given and can be objectively known as "pure facts." Second, these pure facts are obtained through the *total quantification* of the world. Modern natural science quantifies everything in a mechanistic fashion, so that the objects can be formulated as regular, general, and predictable laws. The third characteristic is *simplicity*. For the sake of the calculability, the complicated appearance of natural phenomena must be broken down to simple elements. The fourth principle is the *ahistoricity*: the mechanistic law of nature remains always the same.

Lukács rejected these naïve presuppositions under the banner of "formalism." Such formalism of natural science, so said Lukács, reflects the capitalist world of "reification" that quantifies everything for the sake of capital's valorization. Ultimately, formalism results in various disharmonies and discrepancies because of its forceful abstraction of complicated and qualitatively diverse reality.

This formalism of natural science and technologies ultimately causes a real problem because the material side cannot be fully taken into account by the capitalist relations. This destructive tendency against material and qualitative properties of things is an inevitable one, as long as the formalist and reductionist approach of natural science neglects concrete material aspects and their real complexity:

This rational objectification conceals above all the immediate qualitative and material-character of things as things. When use-values appear universally as commodities they acquire a new objectivity, a new substantiality which they did not possess in an age of episodic exchange and which destroys their original and authentic substantiality.<sup>19</sup>

The problem gets worse as capitalism develops. Its contradiction ultimately manifests itself as "crisis." Lukács formulated this contradiction in the following way:

This rationalisation of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depths of man's physical and psychic nature. It is limited,

<sup>18</sup>Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>19</sup>Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 92.

however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalisation of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of formal-laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general “laws.” But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws, upon which disregard their authority as laws is based, makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact. This incoherence becomes particularly egregious in periods of crisis. At such times we can see how the immediate continuity between two partial systems is disrupted and their independence from and adventitious connection with each other is suddenly forced into the consciousness of everyone.<sup>20</sup>

The unique way in which the metabolism between humans and nature is organized in the context of the capitalist mode of production is highly problematic, because—due to its formalist and reductionist approach—capital cannot take into account the material dimensions of the world. The natural-ecological process of metabolism is mediated by the capitalist organization of human labor, but its only goal is the valorization of capital. Consequently, the dimension of the material is subordinate to the primacy of the added value production, which ultimately leads to the violent manifestation of this contradiction in the moment of “crisis.”

Again, this general approach is consistent with Marx’s own approach. Famously enough, Marx argued that this creates an “irreparable rift” in the metabolism between society and nature, as Marx argued in *Capital* Volume III:

[In] this way [large-scale landownership] produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process between social metabolism and natural metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of the soil. The result of this is a squandering of the vitality of the soil, and *trade carries this devastation far beyond the bounds of a single country.*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (Ökonomische Manuskript 1863–1865). *Drittes Buch*, in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA2), Vol. II/4.2 (Berlin: Dietz, 1992), 752–753.

## ELASTICITY OF CAPITAL AND THE COLLAPSE OF CAPITALISM

Unfortunately, this theory of crisis can no longer be found in Lukács's *Ontology of Social Being*. One possible reason for this is his reevaluation of Engels.

The obvious problem that all Marxists confronted after the death of Marx and Engels is that capitalism did not collapse as a result of economic crisis. Rather, it continuously overcame the difficulties and even expanded further after eradicating outmoded production. It finds new ways of transcending difficulties by developing new technologies and increasing productive forces. In short, capital proves to be much more “elastic” than Marx and Engels expected in *The Communist Manifesto*.

Notably, Marx himself started to emphasize the elasticity after the 1850s. The more aware he became of capital's ability to survive the severe economic crises of 1848 and 1857, the more attention he paid to capital's “elastic” power and how it enables capital to overcome various limits. As a consequence, Marx fully gave up the view that capitalism would simply collapse as a result of economic crisis, but rather he came to pay more attention to highly *elastic* characteristic of capital, which utilizes the world in both “intensive” and “extensive” ways.

In a manuscript for *Capital*, Volume II, Marx wrote about capital's elastic potential as follows:

It simply indicates that the capital advanced – a given sum of value which, in its free form, its value form, consists of a certain sum of money – contains, once it has been transformed into productive capital, productive powers whose limits are not given by the bounds of its own value, but, within a given field of action, can operate differently, both in extent and intensity. [...] However, the scale on which this capital operates to form values and products is elastic and variable.<sup>22</sup>

Capital utilizes various elastic characteristics of the world. For instance, labor power is elastic and can be exploited both more “intensively” and “extensively” to increase the rate of surplus value: “Labour power with a certain rate of payment may be more or less severely exploited, both

<sup>22</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 2 (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 433.

extensively and intensively.”<sup>23</sup> This allows capital to produce much more flexibly in accordance with constant market fluctuations.

In addition, capital can also attain its elasticity with the aid of scientific and technological advances that allow it to appropriate the “free gift” of nature to increase productivity. Nature is not simply free, but also it is quite elastic: “The natural materials which are exploited productively (and which do not form an element of the capital’s value), i.e. soil, sea, mineral ores, forests, etc. may be more or less severely exploited, in extent and intensity, by greater exertion of the same amount of labour-power, without an increase in the money capital advanced.”<sup>24</sup> Thanks to the development of natural sciences and technologies, capital can, for example, depend on the elasticity of nature for the sake of “externalities”: capital needs not pay for wastes and pollutions, as the environment can absorb various negative impacts resulting from production and consumption without additional costs on capital.

However, despite Marx’s emphasis in *Capital*, this elastic character of capital was often neglected by the later generations of Marxists. This is a common problem among Marxists especially, because historical materialism often supposed that the increasing contradiction between the “productive forces” and the “relations of production” leads to the transcendence of the existing mode of production. Without the concept of elasticity, Marxism often falls into so-called “breakdown theory” (*Zusammenbruchstheorie*).

Of course, it might be fairer to say that Engels did not explicitly advocate breakdown theory, but it is also true that he did not emphasize the elasticity either. As a result, immediately after his death in 1895, various discussions on the breakdown of the capitalist system emerged.<sup>25</sup>

## TRADITIONAL VIEW OF ORTHODOX MARXISM AND PRODUCTIVE FORCES OF CAPITAL

Such theorization of the breakdown of the capitalist system was allegedly founded upon Marx’s and Engels’s “historical materialism” as a law of history. According to this orthodox view, two concepts, the “productive

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 431.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development: Principles of Marxian Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 192.

forces” and the “relations of production,” are directly connected to each other, forming the “mode of production” together.

With regard to historical materialism, Marx famously stated in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in the 1850s in the following manner:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.<sup>26</sup>

This passage provided a framework of historical materialism. In principle, the driving force of history was located in the productive forces. Maximizing them would lead to the replacement of the existing mode of production with a new one. This view is a main cause of notorious productivist vision—so-called “Prometheanism”—in the tradition of Marxism. According to this view, socialism was supposed to realize the full potentialities of productive forces. Such a view has been repeatedly criticized as unecological economic determinism.

The dilemma of orthodox Marxism is that if one is to emphasize the elasticity of capital, the scheme of historical materialism does not work anymore. Alternatively, historical materialism tends to underestimate the elasticity of capital by emphasizing the iron law of history, falling into Prometheanism.

Certainly, it is not necessary to ascribe Prometheanism to Engels.<sup>27</sup> In the *Dialectics of Nature*, especially in the same section where Engels discusses the relationship between humans and apes, he famously wrote:

Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquest over nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us. Each of them, it is true, has in the first place the consequences on which

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in MECW, Vol. 29, 263.

<sup>27</sup> See Camila Royle’s contribution in this volume.

we counted, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel out the first. [...] Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature — but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, it is wrong to simply attribute “Prometheanism” to Engels. He was clearly aware of the destructive character of capitalist development against nature.

Nevertheless, there are persistent critiques against Engels’s ecology. For example, Jason W. Moore argues in *Capitalism in the Web of Life* that it is too “static” to think that if the law of nature continues to be ignored, nature will take a revenge on humans one day.<sup>29</sup> In *Uneven Development*, Neil Smith rejects this kind of warning from ecological Marxists as “left apocalypticism.”<sup>30</sup> As seen above, this kind of criticism arises because Engels did not fully integrate Marx’s discussion of “elasticity” into his own ecological theory.<sup>31</sup> Without the theory of elasticity, Engels’s discussion on nature’s revenge looks like an apocalyptic warning, as Smith advocates. Furthermore, since Engels did not highlight the concept of elasticity of capital, he contributed to the emergence of breakdown theory.

There is, furthermore, another discussion in Marx’s critique of political economy that Engels did not fully integrate into his own theory, which lead to strengthening the orthodox scheme of historical materialism. And this aspect is much more important as it is directly related to the concept of “productive forces” in historical materialism. The key concept here is Marx’s notion of “*productive forces of capital*.” Marx wrote about the concepts, for example: “To the extent that the worker creates

<sup>28</sup> Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, in MECW, Vol. 25, 460–461.

<sup>29</sup> Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. (London: Verso, 2015), 80.

<sup>30</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 247.

<sup>31</sup> See Saito, “Marx and Engels.” However, this kind of critique does not apply to Marx. See Kohei Saito, “Marx in the Anthropocene: Value, Metabolic Rift and the Non-Cartesian Dualism,” *Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialtheorie und Philosophie* 4, no. 1/2 (2017).

wealth, living labor becomes a power of capital; similarly, all development of the productive forces of labor is development of the productive forces of capital.”<sup>32</sup>

This claim is located in the section where Marx explicated the “real subsumption of labor” under capital. The point of Marx’s argument is that the development of productive forces under capitalism does not proceed in such a way that ultimately emancipates humans from labor, but rather dismantles the knowledge and insight of workers in the labor process—the so-called separation of conception and execution<sup>33</sup>—and completes the domination of capital over workers.

Put another way, workers whose skills and knowledge are deprived by capital lose not only the objective working conditions of production, but even the subjective ability to realize their own labor without subjugated to the domination of capital. This is because workers can now only realize their own labor by working under the command and supervision of capital. Therefore, when social productive forces increase through competition in the market, they appear in the perverse form of an increase in the “productive forces of capital,” even though it is actually an increase in the social productive forces of the workers themselves.

Marx also said:

[T]he *social conditions* of labour, which emerge from the *social productive power* of labour and are posited by labour itself, appear most emphatically as forces not only alien to the worker, belonging to *capital*, but also directed in the interests of the capitalist in a hostile and overwhelming fashion against the individual worker.<sup>34</sup>

As a consequence, workers become subjectless and confront the objective means of production without autonomy to realize their own labor. On the contrary, the objective conditions appear as “an *alien power*, as an *independent power*” to them. Insofar as capital employs labor, the “relation of subject and object is inverted” in the labor process.<sup>35</sup> Marx also calls this inversion of the subject and the object “a personification of the thing and

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, in MECW, Vol. 30, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, in MECW, Vol. 34, 29–30.

<sup>35</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, in MECW, Vol. 30, 113.



a reification of the person.”<sup>36</sup> Since labor is “embodied” in capital, the role of the worker is reduced to a mere bearer of the reified thing, i.e., a means for valorizing capital next to the machines, and the reified thing attains the appearance of the subjectivity that controls as an alien power the behavior and the will of the person. As the reified power of capital now penetrates to the labor process, it is inevitable that the increase of social productive forces emerges only through capital’s initiative. Thus, when one takes Marx’s discussion on “productive forces of capital,” it is no longer possible to assume that Marx held the basic scheme of “historical materialism.” It is not at all clear how the development of proactive forces automatically opens up possibilities to establish the new mode of production.<sup>37</sup>

Compared to Marx’s treatment of “productive forces of capital,” there remains ambivalence in Engels’s discussion. It seems that later generations did not simply misunderstand what Engels formulated as the law of history. In other words, Engels fundamentally remained unchanged with regard to the traditional scheme of historical materialism, while Marx distanced himself from such a productivist scheme, as he became more ecological in the 1860s.<sup>38</sup>

For example, in 1882, the late Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* in a way that resembles an earlier version of historical materialism:

But the bourgeoisie, as is also shown there, could not transform these puny means of production into mighty productive forces, without transforming them, at the same time, from means of production of the individual into social means of production only workable by a collectivity of men. [...] Thus, the products now produced socially were not appropriated by those who had actually set in motion the means of production and actually produced the commodities, but by the capitalists. The means of production, and production itself, had become in essence socialized. But they were subjected to a form of appropriation which presupposes the private production of individuals, under which, therefore, everyone owns his own

<sup>36</sup> Marx, *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*, in MECW, Vol. 34, 123.

<sup>37</sup> This process is clearly coined with abandonment of his earlier Prometheanism. He came to focus much more clearly on ecological critique of the destructive aspects of the development of productive forces.

<sup>38</sup> Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017).

product and brings it to market. The mode of production is subjected to this form of appropriation, although it abolishes the conditions upon which the latter rests. This contradiction, which gives to the new mode of production its capitalistic character, contains the germ of the whole of the social antagonisms of today. The greater the mastery obtained by the new mode of production over all important fields of production and in all manufacturing countries, the more it reduced individual production to an insignificant residuum, the more clearly was brought out the incompatibility of socialized production with capitalistic appropriation.<sup>39</sup>

According to this scheme, the development of productive forces prompts the transformation of the entire means of production to the socialized means of production. In this way, means of production and products become increasingly socialized, so that they cause conflicts with the system of private property and private production under the capitalist mode of production. Social production in reality turns out incompatible with the private appropriation under capitalism.

As already pointed out, this kind of vision goes back to Marx and Engels in the 1840s. As Orthodox Marxism treated *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto* as the grounding text of historical materialism, Marx and Engels founded such a view of historical development at that time. However, the difference between Marx and Engels is that Engels's theoretical framework basically remained unchanged, while Marx significantly modified his vision in his later critique of political economy in the 1860s. According to the scheme of orthodox Marxism, the economic crisis would cause proletarian revolution, as in the moment of crisis the capitalist system is stripped of its fictitious appearances, and the underlying socialized production and property could be appropriated by the working class. As a result, Engels's theory of crisis turned out quite compatible with the inevitability of the collapse of the capitalist mode of production.

In short, in Engels's framework, the "apocalyptic" collapse is twofold. On the one hand, civilization collapses due to the "revenge of nature." On the other hand, capitalist mode of production collapses due to the increasing tension between the increasing productive forces and the capitalist relations of production. These two aspects of crisis are only compatible by presupposing that the socialist mode of production can

<sup>39</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW, Vol. 24, 308–310.

soon overcome the ecological crisis through the emancipation of productive forces under the new regime. Simply by replacing the private property with the communal property under socialism, it would be possible to overcome the destructive character of productive forces under capitalism. After all, this turns out close to a Promethean vision, which however undermines the importance of Engels's discussion on nature's revenge.

What Marx emphasized, in contrast, can be summarized in two points: "productive forces of capital" and "elasticity of capital." These two concepts actually allowed Marx to reject the scheme of historical materialism and the breakdown theory. Furthermore, this approach would have been compatible with Lukács's theory of crisis which is founded on his critique of modern science and technology.<sup>40</sup> The late Lukács, however, did not develop his earlier theory of crisis anymore. This is an unfortunate fact. When Lukács started to focus on the theory of metabolism in *Tailism and the Dialectic*, there still was a way for a more nuanced treatment of the social ontology of being without falling into the Cartesian dualism between society and nature. However, Lukács in the 1960s developed his theory of social ontology together with his more positive treatment of Engels's theory of labor. As such, there is nothing wrong about it, but Lukács came to deemphasize the difference between Marx and Engels in general. As a result, Marx's discussion on the "productive forces of capital" and "elasticity of capital" remained unnoticed to the late Lukács, so that he also eliminated his theory of crisis in the face of the stubborn persistence of capitalism.

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<sup>40</sup>This is actually the direction that István Mészáros, a younger colleague of Lukács, took in his theory of metabolism. See Kohei Saito, "Marx's Theory of Metabolism in the Age of Global Ecological Crisis," *Historical Materialism* 28, no. 2 (2020).

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## Engels's Concept of Alternatives to Capitalism

*Seongjin Jeong*

Studies that create a blueprint of post-capitalist society are often argued to be the domain of utopian socialism, not that of the scientific socialism founded by Marx and Engels. They are believed to be reluctant to discuss post-capitalism itself, as it would lead to utopian socialism.<sup>1</sup> It is also often argued that Engels provided the starting point for the canonization of the “political economy of socialism,” which later served to justify exploitative and oppressive Communist regimes. If the former was mainly brought up by the orthodox Marxism of the Second International and Soviet varieties, the latter is a claim shared by most of the school of Western Marxism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, Marx himself famously argued that “writing recipes ... for the cook-shops of the future” was not his job in his “Postface” to the second edition of *Capital Volume I*. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

<sup>2</sup>Norman Levine, “Marxism and Engelsism: Two Differing Views of History,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 9, no. 3 (1973); Terrell Carver, “Marx, Engels and Scholarship,” *Political Studies* 32 (1984); Andrzej Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

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However, recent works have found that Marx has his own theory of post-capitalism,<sup>3</sup> which can be constructed as a theory of association.<sup>4</sup>

In my previous work,<sup>5</sup> I also argued that Marx's theory of capitalism, i.e., his critique of political economy can be read as a theory of post-capitalism or communism, and that its core lies in the concept of association. In this paper, I will show that Engels created a theory of post-capitalism by developing the ideas of the utopian socialists, especially labor-time calculation planning. In particular, I will read Engels's post-capitalist texts anew with the concept of association as a keyword<sup>6</sup> and argue that Engels's theory of post-capitalism stands in the tradition of socialism from below. Finally, I will discuss the differences in conceptualizing post-capitalist association between Marx and Engels, focusing on planning, freedom, and re-establishment of individual property.

## ENGELS'S UTOPIA: SOCIALISM FROM BELOW COORDINATED BY LABOR-TIME CALCULATION PLANNING

According to orthodox Marxism, socialism has developed from utopian socialism into scientific socialism, with the latter characterizing the ideas of Marx and Engels as directly opposed to the latter. However, Marx and Engels never perceived the development of contemporary socialism as a linear evolutionary progression and did not recognize socialism through the dichotomy of utopian versus scientific. Indeed, they listed as many as five other socialisms in Chapter 3 of their co-authored *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.<sup>7</sup> Marx and Engels, unlike the utopian socialists, were cautious about designing post-capitalism, but almost always borrowed

<sup>3</sup> Peter Hudis, *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003); Teinosuke Otani, *Marx's Theory of Association* (Tokyo: Sakurai Shoten, 2011); Minoru Tabata, *Marx and Association* (Tokyo: Shinsensha, 2015); Pares Chatteropadhyay, *Marx's Associated Mode of Production: A Critique of Marxism* (New York: Palgrave, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Seongjin Jeong, "Marx's Communism as Associations of Free Individuals," *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2015/16 (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Existing Marxist studies on association seldom appreciate or discuss Engels's idea of association separate from Marx. Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx* (London: Verso, 2003) is an exception.

<sup>7</sup> David Leopold, "Marx, Engels and Other Socialisms," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Communist Manifesto*, eds. Terrell Carver and James Farr (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

the latter's blueprints when they had to do so. As Hobsbawm indicated, "Very nearly everything that Marx and Engels said about the concrete shape of communist society is based on earlier utopian writings."<sup>8</sup> From his youth to his later years, Engels, in particular, was very fond of the utopian socialist "triumvirate" of Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Owen. "Despite his insistence upon placing socialism upon a scientific foundation, he [Engels] remained in many respects a true disciple of the great utopians of his youth."<sup>9</sup> Engels's eagerness to envision socialist utopia continued even after he advocated scientific socialism. He never backed off from utopianism in the name of science.<sup>10</sup>

In his *Speech in Elberfeld* in 1845, Engels praised Owen's cooperative communities as "the most practical and most fully worked out," in which "[t]he greatest saving of labor power lies in the *fusing of the individual powers* into social collective power."<sup>11</sup> Almost 30 years later, in his *Supplement to the Preface of 1870 for The Peasant War in Germany* (1874), Engels sustained his high appreciation for utopian socialists.<sup>12</sup>

As late as 1892, in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, Engels not only supported Owen's utopianism but also specifically adopted his idea of planning based on a "certificate of labor" for his theory of post-capitalism:

in his [Owen's] definite plan for the future, the technical working out of details is managed with such practical knowledge — ground *plan*, front and side and bird's-eye views all included — that the Owen method of social reform once accepted, there is from the practical point of view little to be said against the actual arrangement of details. ... He introduced as transition measures to the complete *communistic organisation of society*, on the one hand, *co-operative societies* for retail trade and production. These have since that time, at least, given practical proof that the merchant and the

<sup>8</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, "Marx, Engels and Pre-Marxian Socialism," in *The History of Socialism, Vol. 1, Marxism in Marx's Day*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 9.

<sup>9</sup>Gareth Stedman Jones, "Engels and the History of Marxism," in *The History of Socialism, Vol. 1, Marxism in Marx's Day*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 323–324.

<sup>10</sup>Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, 152.

<sup>11</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Speeches in Elberfeld," in MECW, Vol. 4, 252. Italics in original.

<sup>12</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Supplement to the Preface of 1870 for *The Peasant War in Germany*," in MECW, Vol. 23, 630.



manufacturer are socially quite unnecessary. On the other hand, he introduced *labor bazaars* for the exchange of the products of labor through the medium of *labor-notes*, whose unit was a single hour of work; institutions necessarily doomed to failure, but completely anticipating Proudhon's bank of exchange of a much later period, and differing entirely from this in that it did not claim to be the panacea for all social ills, but only a first step towards a much more radical revolution of society.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Engels took a labor-time calculation participatory planning model from Utopian socialists as the economic coordinating principle for post-capitalism, and sustained it throughout his life.

As early as 1844, before he met Marx, Engels hinted at the labor-time calculation participatory planning model in his *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*:

If the producers as such knew how much the consumers required, if they were to organize production, if they were to share it out amongst themselves, then the fluctuations of competition and its tendency to crisis would be impossible. Carry on production consciously as human beings — not as dispersed atoms without *consciousness of your species* [Gattungsbewußtsein] — and you have overcome all these artificial and untenable antitheses. ... The truth of the relation of competition is the relation of consumption to productivity. In a world worthy of mankind there will be no other competition than this. The *community* [Die Gemeinde] *will have to calculate* [berechnen] what it can produce with the means at its disposal; and in accordance with the relationship of this productive power to the mass of consumers it will determine how far it has to raise or lower production, how far it has to give way to, or curtail, luxury.<sup>14</sup>

According to Engels, post-capitalist society is characterized by voluntary association, the re-establishment of the sovereignty of species-consciousness, and the conscious control by a reunified subject over the whole of social life, in which all the members of society collectively decide how much to produce.<sup>15</sup> Engels also thought that the planning, as an

<sup>13</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in MECW, Vol. 24, 296, emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in MECW, Vol. 3, 434–435, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup>Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 184–185.

*ex-ante* calculation of resource allocation and distribution, would enable society to control the blind forces of the market and reach a state of rational self-governance.

In his 1845 *Speeches in Elberfeld*, Engels adumbrated post-capitalist participatory planning in plain words:

In communist society it will be easy to be informed about both production and consumption. Since we know how much, on the average, a person needs, it is easy to *calculate* how much is needed by a given number of individuals, and since production is no longer in the hands of private producers but in those of the *community* and its *administrative bodies*, it is a trifling matter to *regulate production according to needs*. ... just as one can easily know how much cotton or manufactured cotton goods an individual colony needs, it will be equally easy for the *central authority* to determine how much all the villages and townships in the country need. Once such *statistics* have been worked out — which can easily be done in a year or two — average annual consumption will only change in proportion to the increasing population; it is therefore easy at the appropriate time to determine in advance what amount of each particular article the people will need — the entire great amount will be ordered direct from the source of supply.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, in his 1847, in *Principles of Communism*, Engels recapitulated the principles of post-capitalist participatory planning:

completely new organization of society, in which industrial production is no longer directed by individual factory owners, competing one against the other, but by *the whole of society according to a fixed plan and according to the needs of all*. ... that large-scale industry and the unlimited expansion of production which it makes possible can bring into being a social order in which so much of all the necessities of life will be produced that every member of society will thereby be enabled to develop and exercise all his powers and abilities in perfect *freedom*.... Above all, through *society's* taking out of the hands of the private capitalists the use of all the productive forces and means of communication as well as the exchange and distribution of products and managing them according to a *plan* corresponding to the means available and the needs of the whole of society, all the evil

<sup>16</sup> Engels, "Speeches," 246–247, emphasis added.

consequences of the present running of large-scale industry will be done away with.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, in 1878 in his *Anti-Dühring*, Engels formulated the principle of the post-capitalist labor-time calculation participatory planning model in full:

the colossal productive forces created within the capitalist mode of production which the latter can no longer master, are only waiting to be taken possession of by *a society organised for co-operative work on a planned basis* [planmäßigen Zusammenwirken organisierte Gesellschaft] to ensure to all members of society the means of existence and of the *free development* of their capacities, and indeed in constantly increasing measure. ... Only a *society* which makes it possible for its productive forces to dovetail harmoniously into each other on the basis of *one single vast plan* [einzigen großen Plan] can allow industry to be distributed over the whole country in the way best adapted to its own development, and to the maintenance and development of the other elements of production. ... From the moment when *society* enters into possession of the means of production and uses them in direct association for production, the *labor of each individual*, however varied its specifically useful character may be, becomes at the start and *directly social labor*. The *quantity of social labor* contained in a product need not then be established in a roundabout way; daily experience shows in a direct way how much of it is required *on the average*. *Society* [Die Gesellschaft] can simply *calculate* [berechnen] how many hours of labor are contained in a steam-engine, a bushel of wheat of the last harvest, or a hundred square yards of cloth of a certain quality. It could therefore never occur to it still to express the quantities of labor put into the products, quantities which it will then know directly and in their absolute amounts, in a third product, in a measure which, besides, is only relative, fluctuating, inadequate, though formerly unavoidable for lack of a better one, rather than express them in their natural, adequate and absolute measure, *time*. ... Hence, on the assumptions we made above, *society* will not assign values to products. It will not express the simple fact that the hundred square yards of cloth have required for their production, say, a thousand hours of labor in the oblique and meaningless way, stating that they have the *value* of a thousand hours of labor. It is true that even then it will still be necessary for *society* to know how much labor each

<sup>17</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Principles of Communism," in MECW, Vol. 6, 347, 352, emphasis added.

article of consumption requires for its production. It will have to arrange its *plan of production* in accordance with its means of production, which include, in particular, its labor-powers. *The useful effects of the various articles of consumption, compared with one another and with the quantities of labor [Arbeitsmengen] required for their production, will in the end determine the plan [Plan].* People will be able to manage everything very simply, without the intervention of much-vaunted “value.” ... As long ago as 1844 I stated that the above-mentioned *balancing of useful effects and expenditure of labor* [Abwägung von Nutzeffekt und Arbeitsaufwand] on making decisions concerning production was all that would be left, in a communist society, of the politico-economic concept of value. (*Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, p. 95).<sup>18</sup>

According to Engels, since values and market wither away in post-capitalism, resource allocation and distribution are coordinated by labor-time calculation planning. This balances the socially necessary labor-time used to produce the goods and services needed by people with their working-hours. However, the labor-time calculation planning method depicted above was originally devised by Owen and adopted by Engels in his youth. The certificate of labor is different from the “labor money” advocated by Proudhon, because it is not circulated as money. Marx also adopted Owen’s scheme and developed it in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), which Engels expanded in *Anti-Dühring* (1878). According to Hollander,<sup>19</sup> Engels had a much deeper understanding of the complexities of labor-time calculation planning than Marx, anticipating the Socialist Calculation Debate decades later. According to Hollander,<sup>20</sup> Engels still downplayed the importance of consumer demand in his labor-time calculation planning, and assumed that a central

<sup>18</sup>Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in MECW, Vol. 25, 139, 282, 294–295, emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel Hollander, *Friedrich Engels and Marxian Political Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 173.

<sup>20</sup>Samuel Hollander, “Economic Organization, Distribution and the Equality Issue: The Marx-Engels Perspective,” *The Review of Austrian Economics* 17, no. 1 (2004): 22.

planning authority could determine it. However, according to Cockshott and Cottrell,<sup>21</sup> consumer demand can be democratically reflected in Engels's model.<sup>22</sup>

Theorists of Western Marxism often equate Engels's post-capitalism with central planning, arguing that it opened the door to "socialism from above," state socialism, Stalinism, and totalitarianism, starting from Lenin.<sup>23</sup> It is true that Engels emphasized the roles of authority and nationalization more than Marx in the transition to post-capitalism, which was illegitimately exploited to justify Stalinist regimes. However, it is also true that Engels was ahead of Marx in identifying the spirit of socialism from below. Indeed, one of Engels's main adversaries in his later years was none other than Ferdinand Lassalle, who was the leading figure of state socialism, i.e., socialism from above at that time.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, young Marx was not so firm in identifying his position with the spirit of the self-emancipation of working class,<sup>25</sup> i.e., the essence of socialism from below, when he argued that "The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*"<sup>26</sup> in the *Introduction* to his 1844 *Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*.<sup>27</sup> However, by this time, Engels had already adopted the standpoint of

<sup>21</sup>W. Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, *Towards a New Socialism* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1993).

<sup>22</sup>For a recent discussion of post-capitalist labor-time calculation planning experiences, refer to Seongjin Jeong, "Soviet planning and the Labor-Time Calculation Model: Implications for 21st-Century Socialism," in *Varieties of Alternative Economic Systems*, eds. Richard Westra et al. (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>23</sup>See Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*.

<sup>24</sup>Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Vol. 4: Critique of Other Socialisms* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 263–265.

<sup>25</sup>According to Draper, the phrase "self-emancipation of working-class" "implies that emancipation is not a form of graduation ceremony (getting the diploma from teacher for passing the exam.) but rather it is a process of struggle by people who are not yet *ready for emancipation*, and who can become ready for emancipation *only by launching the struggle themselves*, before any-one considers them ready for it." See Hal Draper, "The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels," *Socialist Register* (1971): 95.

<sup>26</sup>Karl Marx, "Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction," in MECW, Vol. 3, 187. Italics in original.

<sup>27</sup>In fact, during 1842–1843, Marx was "preoccupied by his philosophical confrontation with the work of Bauer and Hegel, [and] he was, by his own admission, rather remote from the working-class movement, and socialist or communist theories" (Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 178).

the self-emancipation of the working class, while working with the labor movement in Manchester.

In 1843, Engels described contemporary socialism from above in Germany as follows:

It will appear very singular to Englishmen, that a party which aims at the destruction of private property is chiefly made up by those who have property; and yet this is the case in Germany. We can recruit our ranks from those classes only which have enjoyed a pretty good education; that is, from the universities and from the commercial class; and in either we have not hitherto met with any considerable difficulty.<sup>28</sup>

Then, he contrasted it with the socialism from below of England in *The Condition of England: Past and Present* by Thomas Carlyle, London, 1843: “for all their moral degradation. It is from them that England’s salvation will come, they still comprise flexible material; they have no education, but no prejudices either, they still have the strength for a great national deed—they still have a future.”<sup>29</sup>

Young Engels’s position of socialism from below was clearly formulated in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (1845):

If the centralization of population stimulates and develops the property-holding class, it forces the development of the workers yet more rapidly. *The workers begin to feel as a class, as a whole* [emphasis added]; they begin to perceive that, though feeble as individuals, they form a power united; their separation from the bourgeoisie, *the development of views peculiar to the workers and corresponding to their position in life*, is fostered, the consciousness of oppression awakens, and the workers attain social and political importance. The great cities are the birthplaces of labor movements; in them the workers first began to reflect upon their own condition, and to struggle against it; in them the opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie first made itself manifest; from them proceeded the Trades Unions, Chartism, and Socialism. The great cities have transformed the disease of the social body, which appears in chronic form in the country,

<sup>28</sup>Friedrich Engels, “Progress of Social Reform on the Continent,” in MECW, Vol. 3, 407.

<sup>29</sup>Friedrich Engels, “The Condition of England: Past and Present by Thomas Carlyle,” in MECW, Vol. 3, 446.

into an acute one, and so made manifest its real nature and the means of curing it.<sup>30</sup>

For Engels, “it was the process itself rather than the intervention of the philosophers which had awakened workers to a consciousness of their class position and which he hoped would lead to the emergence of a ‘proletarian socialism.’”<sup>31</sup> In other words, Engels reached the core of socialism from below: socialism cannot be infused into workers from without by philosophers or avant-garde parties. It can only be acquired by workers themselves. “The importance of Engels’s contribution derived less from his moments of theoretical originality than from his ability to transmit elements of thinking and practice developed within the working class movement itself in a form in which it could become an intrinsic part of the architecture of the new theory.”<sup>32</sup> In this period, Engels tried to learn not only about the workers but also from them and become a part of the labor movement.

In his 1848 co-authored text with Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Engels explicitly formulated the spirit of socialism from below as the principle of self-emancipation of the working class: “The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”<sup>33</sup> 31 years later, in 1879, Engels confirmed the spirit in a circular to August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Wilhelm Bracke and others, co-authored with Marx, in which they criticized socialism from above: “Therefore elect bourgeois! In short, the working class is incapable of emancipating itself by its own efforts. In order to do so it must place itself under the direction of ‘educated and propertied’ bourgeois who alone have ‘the time and the opportunity’ to

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, in MECW, Vol. 4, 418, emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, “Engels and the History of Marxism,” 316.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in MECW, Vol. 6, 495. Engels also said at “The Agreement Debates in Berlin” in 1848: “...there are no longer ‘subjects’ in Germany since the people took the liberty of emancipating themselves on the barricades” (Friedrich Engels, “The Agreement Debates in Berlin,” in MECW, Vol. 7, 54).

become conversant with what is good for the workers.”<sup>34</sup> In 1886, Engels repeated the spirit of socialism from below when he said that workers do not want “gracious patronage from above”<sup>35</sup> in his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. In his “Preface to the 1888 English Edition of the Manifesto of the Communist Party,” Engels re-confirmed that “Our notion, from the very beginning, was that ‘the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself.’”<sup>36</sup>

### ENGELS'S POST-CAPITALISM AS ASSOCIATION: TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

In as much as Marx's theory of post-capitalism can be reconstructed as a theory of association of free individuals, Engels's post-capitalism can be read with the concept of association as a keyword. For Engels, association is “the species-activity of the proletariat” and “it is in the common struggle to win (back) their rights that the associated constitute themselves as such, establishing, by this act of self-determination, the domain of the common, mutual recognition, and association as the truth of politics.”<sup>37</sup> Engels explicitly used the concept of association in as many as 15 texts written for about half a century, from 1843 to 1891, in order to describe post-capitalism. In this section, I will search for the concept of association in Engels's texts in chronological order of publication and interpret its meaning in the related context (Table 7.1).<sup>38</sup>

In 1843, Engels stated in *Progress of Social Reform on the Continent*:

Another of the merits of Fourier is to have shown the advantages—nay, the necessity of *association*.<sup>39</sup> It will be sufficient only to mention this subject, as I know the English to be fully aware of its importance. There is one

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “To August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Wilhelm Bracke and Others (Circular Letter),” in MECW, Vol. 45, 403.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in MECW, Vol. 26, 398.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Preface to the 1888 English Edition of the Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in MECW, Vol. 26, 517.

<sup>37</sup> Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 220.

<sup>38</sup> “I am indebted to Tabata's *Marx and Association*, for locating Engels' texts containing the word, ‘Assoziation’.”

<sup>39</sup> All emphasis of the word “association” in the following quotes is by the author.



**Table 7.1** Association in Engels' texts

<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Text</i>
Engels	1843	Progress of Social Reform on the Continent
Engels	1844	The Condition of England II
Engels•Marx	1845	The Holy Family
Engels	1845	The Condition of the Working Class in England
Marx•Engels	1845–1846	The German Ideology
Engels	1847	Principles of Communism
Marx•Engels	1848	Manifesto of the Communist Party
Marx•Engels	1850	Address of the Central Authority to the League
Marx•Engels	1852	The Great Men of the Exile
Engels	1872	The Housing Question
Engels	1875	On Social Relations in Russia
Engels	1878	Anti-Dühring
Engels	1884	The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State
Engels	1884	On the Association of the Future
Engels	1891	Introduction to Karl Marx's The Civil War in France

inconsistency, however, in Fourierism, and a very important one too, and that is, his nonabolition of private property. In his *Phalanstères* or *associative* establishments, there are rich and poor, capitalists and working men. The property of all members is placed into a joint stock, the establishment carries on commerce, agricultural and manufacturing industry, and the proceeds are divided among the members; one part as wages of labor, another as reward for skill and talent, and a third as profits of capital. Thus, after all the beautiful theories of *association* and free labor; after a good deal of indignant declamation against commerce, selfishness, and competition, we have in practice the old competitive system upon an improved plan, a poor-law bastille on more liberal principles! ... a great many Communist *associations* existed in every part of Switzerland, consisting mostly of German working men; that Weitling was considered as the leader of the party, and received from time to time reports of progress; that he was in correspondence with similar *associations* of Germans in Paris and London.<sup>40</sup>

In 1844, Engels wrote in *The Condition of England II*:

<sup>40</sup> Engels, "Progress of Social Reform on the Continent," 395, 403.

The disintegration of mankind into a mass of isolated, mutually repelling atoms in itself means the destruction of all corporate, national and indeed of any particular interests and is the last necessary step towards the free and spontaneous *association* of men. ... Then the right of *association*. All *associations* which pursue lawful aims by lawful means are permitted; but in any given case, only one big society is allowed, and this may not include branch *associations*. The formation of societies divided into local branches, each with its own organisation, is only permitted for charitable, or pecuniary purposes in general, and may only be embarked upon in England on the issue of a certificate by an official appointed for this purpose. The Socialists obtained such a certificate for their organisation by declaring their purpose was of this nature; it was denied to the Chartists, although they copied the statutes of the socialist society word for word in their own. They are now forced to circumvent the law and are thus put in a position where a single slip of the pen by a single member of the Chartist *association* may entangle the whole society in the snares of the law. But even apart from that, the right of *association*, in its full extent, is a privilege of the rich; an *association* needs money first of all, and it is easier for the rich Anti-Corn Law League to raise hundreds of thousands than for the poor Chartist society or the Union of British Miners to meet the bare expenses of association. And an *association* which has no funds at its disposal is not likely to have much effect and cannot conduct any agitation.<sup>41</sup>

In 1845, Engels argued in *The Holy Family*, co-authored with Marx:

According to Critical Criticism, the whole evil lies only in the workers' "thinking." It is true that the English and French workers have formed *associations* in which they exchange opinions not only on their immediate needs as workers, but on their needs as human beings. In their *associations*, moreover, they show a very thorough and comprehensive consciousness of the "enormous" and "immeasurable" power which arises from their co-operation. But these *mass-minded*, communist workers, employed, for instance, in the Manchester or Lyons workshops, do not believe that by "*pure thinking*" they will be able to argue away their industrial masters and their own practical debasement.<sup>42</sup>

In 1845, Engels wrote in *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*:

<sup>41</sup>Friedrich Engels, "The Condition of England II," in MECW, Vol. 3, 476, 505.

<sup>42</sup>Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. *The Holy Family*, in MECW, Vol. 4, 52–53.

But this competition of the workers among themselves is the worst side of the present state of things in its effect upon the worker, the sharpest weapon against the proletariat in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Hence the effort of the workers to nullify this competition by *associations*, hence the hatred of the bourgeoisie towards these *associations*, and its triumph in every defeat which befalls them ... Of the public character of the English working-man, as it finds expression in *associations* and political principles, we shall have occasion to speak later. ... The workman is far more humane in ordinary life than the bourgeois. I have already mentioned the fact that the beggars are accustomed to turn almost exclusively to the workers, and that, in general, more is done by the workers than by the bourgeoisie for the maintenance of the poor. ... This was enacted in 1824, and repealed all laws by which coalitions between working-men for labor purposes had hitherto been forbidden. The working-men obtained a right previously restricted to the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the right of free *association*. ... In Glasgow as Symons relates, a general strike of weavers had taken place in 1812, which was brought about by a secret *association*. It was repeated in 1822, and on this occasion vitriol was thrown into the faces of the two working-men who would not join the *association*, and were therefore regarded by the members as traitors to their class. Both the assaulted lost the use of their eyes in consequence of the injury. So, too, in 1818, the *association* of Scottish miners was powerful enough to carry on a general strike. ... When, on the other hand, the working-men received in 1824 the right of free *association*, these combinations were very soon spread over all England and attained great power. In all branches of industry Trades Unions were formed with the outspoken intention of protecting the single working-man against the tyranny and neglect of the bourgeoisie. Their objects were to deal, *en masse*, as a power, with the employers; to regulate the rate of wages according to the profit of the latter, to raise it when opportunity offered, and to keep it uniform in each trade throughout the country. Hence they tried to settle with the capitalists a scale of wages to be universally adhered to, and ordered out on strike the employees of such individuals as refused to accept the scale.<sup>43</sup>

In 1846, Engels argued in *The German Ideology*, co-authored with Marx:

In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their *association*. ... With the community of revolutionary proletarians, on the other hand, who take their conditions of existence and those of

<sup>43</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, in MECW, Vol. 4, 376, 420, 503–504.

all members of society under their control, it is just the reverse; it is as individuals that the individuals participate in it. For it is the *association* of individuals ... which puts the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals under their control—conditions which were previously left to chance and had acquired an independent existence over against the separate individuals precisely because of their separation as individuals and because their inevitable *association*, which was determined by the division of labor, had, as a result of their separation, become for them an alien bond. ... Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting-off of all natural limitations. The transformation of labor into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the previously limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such. With the appropriation of the total productive forces by the united individuals, private property comes to an end.<sup>44</sup>

In 1847, Engels stated in *Principles of Communism*:

*Question 14:* What kind of new social order will this have to be? *Answer:* Above all, it will have to take the running of industry and all branches of production in general out of the hands of separate individuals competing with each other and instead will have to ensure that all these branches of production are run by society as a whole, i.e., for the social good, according to a *social plan* and with the *participation of all members of society*. It will therefore do away with competition and replace it by *association*. ... It follows from this that the antagonism between town and country will likewise disappear. The carrying on of agriculture and industrial production by the same people, instead of by two different classes, is already for purely material reasons an essential condition of communist *association*.<sup>45</sup>

In 1848, Engels wrote in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, co-authored with Marx:

<sup>44</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in MECW, Vol. 5, 78, 80, 88.

<sup>45</sup>Friedrich Engels, "Principles of Communism," 348, 353–354. In 1847 in Brussels, Engels formed a Democratic Association and took on the vice presidency. See Terrell Carver, "Engels and Democracy," in *Engels Today: A Centenary Appreciation*, ed. Christopher Arthur (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 18.

The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding *union* [Vereinigung] of the workers. ... The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the laborers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to *association*. ... 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. ... 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.<sup>46</sup>

In 1850, Engels said in *Address of the Central Authority to the League*, co-authored with Marx:

But these demands can in no wise suffice for the party of the proletariat. While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the *association* of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. ... They (Workers) must demand that the confiscated feudal property remain state property and be converted into workers' colonies cultivated by the *associated* rural proletariat with all the advantages of large-scale agriculture, through which the principle of common property immediately obtains a firm basis in the midst of the tottering bourgeois property relations.<sup>47</sup>

In 1852, Engels wrote in *The Great Men of the Exile*, co-authored with Marx, as follows: "He wishes to unite them by getting the artisans, such as the bookbinders of a town, to combine [*assoziiieren*] and maintain a machine." "As they use the machine only for themselves and only when they have an order they will be able to produce more cheaply than the

<sup>46</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in MECW, Vol. 6, 493, 496, 505–506.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Address of the Central Authority to the League," in MECW, Vol. 10, 281, 285.

merchant who owns a factory.” “Capital will be broken by combination [*Assoziation*].” “(And combination [*Assoziation*] will be broken by capital).”<sup>48</sup>

20 years later, in 1872, Engels commented in *The Housing Question*:

Although the Proudhonists were strongly represented in the Commune, not the slightest attempt was made to liquidate the old society or to organize the economic forces according to Proudhon's proposals. On the contrary, it does the Commune the greatest honor that in all its economic measures the “driving spirit” was not any set of “principles,” but simple, practical needs. And therefore these measures—abolition of night work in the bakeries, prohibition of monetary fines in the factories, confiscation of shut-down factories and workshops and handing them over to workers’ *associations*—were not at all in accordance with the spirit of Proudhonism, but certainly in accordance with the spirit of German scientific socialism. ... According to Proudhon's theory all this ought to be divided up into small peasant farms, which, in the present state of scientific agriculture and after the experience with small land allotments in France and Western Germany, would be positively reactionary. The big landed estates which still exist will rather afford us a welcome basis for the carrying on of agriculture on a large scale—the only system of farming which can utilise all modern facilities, machinery, etc.—by *associated* workers, and thus demonstrating to the small peasants the advantages of large-scale operation by means of *association*. The Danish socialists, who in this respect are ahead of all others, saw this long ago.<sup>49</sup>

In 1875, Engels stated in *On Social Relations in Russia*:

The *artel*, which Mr. Tkachov mentions only incidentally, but with which we deal here because, since the time of Herzen, it has played a mysterious role with many Russians; the *artel* in Russia is a widespread form of *association*, the simplest form of free co-operation, such as is found for hunting among hunting tribes. Word and content are not of Slavic but of Tatar origin. ... They are established by a contract signed by all the members. Now, if these members cannot bring together the necessary capital, as very often happens, such as in the case of cheeseries and fisheries (for nets, boats, etc.), the *artel* falls prey to the usurer, who advances the amount

<sup>48</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Great Men of the Exile,” in MECW, Vol. 11, 250.

<sup>49</sup> Friedrich Engels, “The Housing Question,” in MECW, Vol. 23, 370, 388–389.

lacking at a high interest rate, and thereafter pockets the greater part of the income from the work. Still more shamefully exploited, however, are the artels that hire themselves in a body to an employer as wage-laborers. ... Here, then, the artel serves to *facilitate* considerably the exploitation of the wage-worker by the capitalist. On the other hand, there are also artels which themselves employ wage-workers, who are *not* members of the *association*. It is thus seen that the artel is a co-operative society that has arisen spontaneously and is, therefore, still very undeveloped, and as such neither exclusively Russian, nor even Slavic. ... True, the predominance of this form in Russia proves the existence in the Russian people of a strong impulse to *associate*, but is far from proving their ability to jump, with the aid of this impulse, from the artel straight into the socialist order of society.<sup>50</sup>

In 1878, Engels argued in *Anti-Dühring*:

Active social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand, and reckon with, them. ... As long as we obstinately refuse to understand the nature and the character of these social means of action—and this understanding goes against the grain of the capitalist mode of production and its defenders—so long these forces are at work in spite of us, in opposition to us, so long they master us, as we have shown above in detail. But when once their nature is *understood*, they can, in the hands of the producers working together [*assoziierten Produzenten*], be transformed from master demons into willing servants.<sup>51</sup>

In 1884, Engels wrote in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*:

The Iroquois were still far from controlling the forces of nature but within the limits set for them by nature they were masters of their production. ... Production was carried on within the most restricted limits, but—the producers exercised control over their own product. This was the immense advantage of barbarian production that was lost with the advent of civilisation; and to win it back on the basis of the enormous control man now exercises over the forces of nature, and of the free *association* that is now possible, will be the task of the next generations. ... The state, then, has

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Engels, “On Social Relations in Russia,” in MECW, Vol. 24, 43–44.

<sup>51</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 266–267.

not existed from eternity. There have been societies that managed without it, that had no idea of the state and state authority. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity owing to this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes not only will have ceased to be a necessity, but will become a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the state will inevitably fall. *Society*, which will reorganise production on the basis of a *free and equal association of the producers*, will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.<sup>52</sup>

In 1884, Engels anticipated in *On the Association of the Future*:

In essence, *associations*—whether naturally evolved or created—have hitherto existed for economic ends, but these ends have been concealed and buried beneath ideological matters of secondary importance. The ancient polis, the medieval town or guild, the feudal confederacy of landowning nobility—all had secondary ideological aims which they hallowed and which in the case of the patrician body of consanguinity and the guild arose from the memories, traditions and models of gentile society no less than in that of the ancient polis. The capitalist commercial companies are the first to be wholly rational and objective — but vulgar. The *association* of the future will combine the rationality of the latter with the old ones” concern for the social welfare of all, and thus fulfil its purpose.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, in 1891, Engels said in *Introduction* to Marx’s *The Civil War in France*:

The members of the Commune were divided into a majority, the Blanquists, who had also been predominant in the Central Committee of the National Guard; and a minority, members of the International Working Men’s *Association*, chiefly consisting of adherents of the Proudhon school of socialism. ... Proudhon, the socialist of the small peasant and master craftsman, regarded *association* with positive hatred. He said of it that there was more bad than good in it; that it was by nature sterile, even

<sup>52</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in MECW, Vol. 26, 216, 272.

<sup>53</sup>Friedrich Engels, “On the Association of the Future,” in MECW, Vol. 26, 553.



harmful, because it was a fetter on the freedom of the worker; that it was a pure dogma, unproductive and burdensome, in conflict as much with the freedom of the worker as with economy of labor; that its disadvantages multiplied more swiftly than its advantages; that, as compared with it, competition, division of labor and private property were economic forces. Only in the exceptional cases—as Proudhon called them—of large-scale industry and large establishments, such as railways, was the *association* of workers in place. (See *General Idea of the Revolution*, 3rd sketch.163) By 1871, large-scale industry had already so much ceased to be an exceptional case even in Paris, the center of artistic handicrafts, that by far the most important decree of the Commune instituted an organization of large-scale industry and even of manufacture which was not only to be based on the *association* of the workers in each factory, but also to combine all these associations [*Genossenschaften*] in one great union [*Verband*]; in short, an organization which, as Marx quite rightly says in *The Civil War*, must necessarily have led in the end to communism, that is to say, the direct opposite of the Proudhon doctrine. And, therefore, the Commune was the grave of the Proudhon school of socialism.<sup>54</sup>

In above texts, Engels conceived association mainly as the collective subject of the proletariat rather than as an objective reality, prefiguring and culminating in a post-capitalist society. For Engels, the constitution of the proletariat as a class coincides with its struggle for association, which is simultaneously the means and the end of the class movement. Engels endowed workers with an existence as a collective force seeking basic rights, such as the regulation of wages in confrontation with the capitalist class. Engels assumed that “association guarantees the seamless continuity that runs from present attempts to organize the class through the revolutionary rupture down to the future communist society.”<sup>55</sup> In contrast, in his later years, Marx envisioned association as the post-capitalist mode of production when he called it the “associated mode of production” or “cooperative mode of production [*genossenschaftlichen Produktionsweise*].”<sup>56</sup> In addition, Engels’s concept of association shows no substantial change for about half a century. In contrast, Marx continued

<sup>54</sup>Friedrich Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France*,” in MECW, Vol. 27, 187–188.

<sup>55</sup>Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 221.

<sup>56</sup>Karl Marx, Johann Most: *Kapital und Arbeit: Ein populärer Auszug aus “Das Kapital”* von Karl Marx, in MEGA, II/8 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1989).

to concretize the concept of association with his deepening critique of political economy during the 1850s–1860s. In this period, Engels seldom mentioned association in his written text (refer to Table 7.1). It is significant that Engels resumed using the word after the Paris Commune of 1871.

## POST-CAPITALISM IN MARX AND ENGELS: A COMPARISON

The above sections demonstrate that Engels's conceived post-capitalism as socialism from below, coordinated by labor-time calculation planning and pursued by associations of free individuals. However, there exist some substantial differences between Marx and Engels in envisioning post-capitalism. This section highlights how Engels conceived planning, freedom, and individual property, the essential components of association, differently from Marx.

First, Engels changed the meaning of post-capitalist planning when he edited Marx's *Economic Manuscripts of 1864–66* [*Capital Volume Three*]. As Table 7.2 shows, in the latter text, Marx wrote that in a post-capitalist society associated individuals, instead of reified market, would put the “interconnection of production as a whole” “under their common control.” Marx also emphasized that the controlling subject of the production process in post-capitalist society are “the agents of production” with their “associated reason” [assoziierter Verstand]. However, in Engels's edition of Marx's manuscripts, i.e., *Capital Volume Three*, it is hard to grasp the point, because Engels deleted and added some crucial words from and to Marx's manuscript.<sup>57</sup> In Table 7.2, the words underlined are the words deleted from Marx's manuscripts by Engels, and the words with bold font are those added to Marx's manuscripts by Engels. In Marx's manuscripts, post-capitalist planning is described as the process where the “agents of production” put the “interconnection of production as a whole” “under their common control” with their “associated reason.” However, Engels's editing overemphasized the role of *understanding and controlling of the law* (by the vanguard party or Leader?),

<sup>57</sup> On the problems of Engels's editing of Marx's *Capital*, refer to Christopher Arthur, “Engels as Interpreter of Marx's Economics,” in *Engels Today: A Centenary Appreciation*, ed. Christopher Arthur (London: Macmillan Press, 1996) and Regina Roth, “Editing the Legacy: Friedrich Engels and Marx's *Capital*,” in *Marx's Capital: An Unfinishable Project?*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Gerald Hubmann (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

**Table 7.2** Planning in Marx’s *Economic Manuscripts of 1864–66* and Engels’ editing

<i>Marx’s manuscripts</i>	<i>Engels’ editing in Capital, Vol. 3</i>
<p>“<i>innerhalb</i> der capitalistischen Produktionszweige die Proportionalität sich nur als beständiger Proceß aus der Disproportionalität darstellt, indem hier der Zusammenhang der Production als blindes Gesetz <u>auf die</u> Produktionsagenten <u>wirkt</u>, sie nicht als associirter Verstand <u>ihn</u> ihrer gemeinsamen Controllen unterworfen haben” (Marx 1992, p. 331)</p> <p>“<i>within</i> capitalist production, the proportionality of the particular branches of production presents itself as a process of passing constantly out of and into disproportionality, since the interconnection of production as a whole here forces itself on the agents of production as a blind law, and <i>not as a law which, being grasped and therefore mastered by their combined reason</i> [emphasis added], brings the productive process under their common control” (Marx 2015, p. 365)</p> <p>“<i>within</i> capitalist production, the proportionality of the particular branches of production presents itself as a process of passing constantly out of and into disproportionality, since the interconnection of production as a whole here forces itself on the agents of production as a blind law, and <i>they do not bring the productive process under their common control as their associated reason</i>” [emphasis added] (Author translation)</p>	<p>“innerhalb der kapitalistischen Produktion die Proportionalität der <b>einzelnen Produktionszweige</b> sich als beständiger Prozeß aus der Disproportionalität darstellt, indem hier der Zusammenhang der <b>gesamten</b> Produktion als blindes Gesetz <b>den</b> Produktionsagenten sich <b>aufzwingt</b>, nicht als <b>von ihrem</b> assoziierten Verstand <b>begriffenes und damit beherrschtes Gesetz den Produktionsprozeß ihrer</b> gemeinsamen Kontrolle unterworfen hat” (Marx 1964, p. 267)</p> <p>“within capitalist production, the proportionality of the particular branches of production presents itself as a process of passing constantly out of and into disproportionality, since the interconnection of production as a whole here forces itself on the agents of production as a blind law, and <i>not as a law which, being grasped and therefore mastered by their combined reason</i> [emphasis added] brings the productive process under their common control” (Marx 1981, p. 365)</p>

*Note* After deleting the words underlined from Marx’s manuscripts, Engels added the **bolded** words to them

while downplaying that of “the agents of production” with their “associated reason.”<sup>58</sup> As a result, it became difficult to grasp from Engels’s edited text that the essence of Marx’s post-capitalist planning is participatory by “the agents of production” with their “associated reason.” It is a pity that recent English translation<sup>59</sup> of Marx’s manuscripts, i.e., *MEGA* II/4.2,<sup>60</sup> exactly reproduces David Fernbach’s English translation of *Capital Volume Three*<sup>61</sup>. Moreover, both English translations failed to identify the specific meaning of “associierter Verstand,”<sup>62</sup> as they translated it into “combined reason” rather than “associated reason” in the context of association.

This is related to Engels’s understanding of freedom as liberation from chance through the rediscovery of the universal presence of necessity. While Marx understood freedom in post-capitalism as a self-enriching alienation of the species essence of human beings, Engels understood it as a consciousness of necessity.<sup>63</sup> For Engels, freedom was about “appreciating, understanding and mastering necessity” or “rational control over blind passions and affections,” “the rule of the ‘higher’ (rational) self over the ‘lower’ self, the ability to be guided by knowledge and to resist the impulses of blind spontaneity.” In other words, for Engels, “freedom was the question not of the right but of might, of the effective ability to realize human purposes.”<sup>64</sup>

In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels argued:

Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him, freedom is the insight into necessity [*die Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit*]. “Necessity is *blind* only in so far as *it is not understood* [*begriffen*].” Freedom does not consist in any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility

<sup>58</sup> According to Karatani, *Transcritique* 179, “Engels’s interpolation is almost criminal.”

<sup>59</sup> Karl Marx, *Marx’s Economic Manuscripts of 1864–1865* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> Karl Marx, *Ökonomische Manuskripte 1863–1867*, in *MEGA*, II/4.2 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1992).

<sup>61</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3 (London: Penguin Books, 1981).

<sup>62</sup> Karatani, *Transcritique*, 306, linked “associierter Verstand” to Kant’s “transcendental apperception X,” which functions to coordinate the “association of associations” as a “centerless center.”

<sup>63</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, 174–175.

**Table 7.3** From realm of necessity to realm of freedom: Marx vs. Engels

<i>Marx, Capital, Vol. 3.</i>	<i>Engels, Anti-Dühring</i>
<p>“<i>The realm of freedom</i> [Reich der Freiheit] really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends. ... Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the <i>associated producers</i> [die assoziierten Produzenten], govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. But this always remains a realm of necessity. The true realm of freedom, <i>the development of human powers as an end in itself</i> [die menschliche Kräfteentwicklung, die sich als Selbstzweck gilt], begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this <i>realm of necessity</i> [Reiche der Notwendigkeit] as its basis. The <i>reduction of the working day</i> is the basic prerequisite” (Marx 1981, pp. 958–959)</p>	<p>With the seizing of the means of production by society, production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by <i>systematic, definite organization</i> [planmäßige bewußte Organisation]. The struggle for individual existence disappears. ... The laws of his own social action, hitherto standing face to face with man as laws of nature foreign to, and dominating him, will then be used with full understanding, and so mastered by him. ... Man’s own social organisation, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action. The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. ... It is the humanity’s <i>leap</i> [Sprung] from the <i>kingdom of necessity</i> [Reiche der Notwendigkeit] to the <i>kingdom of freedom</i> [Reich der Freiheit]” (Engels 1987, p. 270)</p>

*Note* All emphases are added by the author

this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. ... Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on knowledge of natural necessity.<sup>65</sup>

A second, related difference between Marx and Engels could be found in their understanding of the post-capitalist transition from the “realm of necessity” to the “realm of freedom.” As is shown in Table 7.3, in *Capital Volume Three*, Marx described the transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom as a process of expanding free time, resulting

<sup>65</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 105–106. Italics in original. See Paul Thomas, *Marxism and Scientific Socialism* (London: Routledge, 2008), 44. Engels’s specific understanding of freedom implies an authoritarian tendency, because the “control over the nature” for freedom could lead to or justify the control over human beings.

from the reduction of the working day, and the rational regulation of the metabolism with nature, carried out by the *associated producers* on the basis of realm of necessity. However, Engels explained it in *Anti-Dühring*, as a “*leap* [Sprung]” from the “realm of necessity” to the “realm of freedom,” enabled by the “understanding” and “mastering” of “law of nature” and “social organization,” without mentioning the role of “associated producers” or the necessity of the “reduction of [the] working day.”

Third, in *Anti-Dühring* Engels gave a different interpretation of what Marx meant by the re-establishment of individual property in post-capitalism. As is shown in Table 7.4, in *Capital Volume One*, Marx explicitly included not just consumption goods but also the means of production in the objects of re-established individual property. For Marx, this is nothing else than the re-establishment of property by associated social individuals, which creates true social management—on which basis capitalist property is already built—by exploding the capitalist shell of

**Table 7.4** ‘Reestablishment of individual property’ in Marx’s own words and Engels’ interpretation

<i>Marx, Capital, Vol. 1</i>	<i>Engels, Anti-Dühring</i>
<p>“But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property [individuelle Eigentum → propriété individuelle] on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common [Gemeineigentum → possession commune → Gemeinbesitz] of the land[Erde → sol], and the means of production produced by labour itself” (Marx 1989, p. 679)</p>	<p>“The state of things brought about by the expropriation of the expropriators is therefore characterised as the re-establishment of individual property [individuellen Eigentums], but <i>on the basis</i> of the social ownership [gesellschaftlichen Eigentums] of the land and of the means of production produced by labour itself. To anyone who understands plain talk this means that social ownership[gesellschaftliche Eigentum] extends to the land and the other means of production, and individual ownership [individuelle Eigentum] to the products, that is, the articles of consumption” (Engels 1987, p. 121. Italics in original)</p>

property.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in the French edition of *Capital Volume One* (1872–1875), Marx substituted “*possession commune*” [possession in common] for “*Gemeineigentum*” [common property] in the first (1867) and second (1872) editions. Reflecting Marx’s changes in the French edition, Engels also replaced “*Gemeineigentum*” by “*Gemeinbesitzes*” [common possession] in the third edition (1883). However, in *Anti-Dühring*, far from reflecting Marx’s changes, Engels replaced it by a new concept, “*gesellschaftlichen Eigentums*” [social property]. Moreover, Engels intentionally deleted the words “*achievements of the capitalist era: namely,*” which qualifies the words “possession in common,” in order to make “possession in common” appear not as the “achievements of the capitalist era” but as some sort of post-capitalist mode of property. Notwithstanding its crucial variation with Marx’s own words, Engels’s formulation of post-capitalist mode of property as a dual system, i.e., individual property (consumption goods) plus social property (means of production) became one of the fundamental principles of twentieth-century socialism.

Indeed, in his later years, Engels mentioned state ownership, which could be exploited to justify the Stalinist administrative command economy. In 1881s *American Food and the Land Question*, Engels argued for “nationalization of the land and its cultivation by co-operative societies under national control.”<sup>67</sup> In 1886 in a letter to Bebel, Engels wrote, “Nor have Marx and I ever doubted that, in the course of transition to a wholly communist economy, widespread use would have to be made of cooperative management as an intermediate stage. Only it will mean so organizing things that society, i.e. initially the *State, retains ownership of the means of production* [emphasis added] and thus prevents the particular interests of the cooperatives from taking precedence over those of society as a whole.”<sup>68</sup> In 1891 in his “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France*,” while emphasizing the importance of association during the post-capitalist transition, Engels argued that eventually all the associations should be united under “one great union.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Otani, *Marx’s Theory of Association*, 157, 163.

<sup>67</sup> Friedrich Engels, “American Food and the Land Question,” in MECW, Vol. 24, 399.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Engels to August Bebel,” in MECW, Vol. 47, 389.

<sup>69</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France*,” in MECW, Vol. 27, 188.

## CONCLUSION

Engels did not reject “Utopian Socialism” in the name of “scientific Socialism.” Engels took the core idea of “Utopian socialism” and developed it into a theory of post-capitalism. Engels was more enthusiastic about Utopian Socialism than Marx. Engels also identified himself with the principle of the self-emancipation of the working class earlier than Marx. Engels theorized the political economy of socialism, coordinated by labor-time calculation planning, as a separate discipline, distinct from the political economy of capitalism. In his later years, Engels extended the arena of post-capitalism beyond value, class, and state toward gender and ecology.<sup>70</sup> For Engels, post-capitalism was open-ended. Like Marx, Engels envisioned it as the flourishing of the “association” [Assoziation] of free individuals. This paper confirms this by finding all the usage of the word “association” in Engels’s texts. Engels’s post-capitalism as association implies that he stands in the tradition of socialism from below (democratic socialism), pursuing the self-emancipation of the working-class with Marx. This paper also discussed some important differences in conceptualizing post-capitalist association between Marx and Engels, focusing on planning, freedom, and the re-establishment of individual property. Above all, Engels’s concept of association did not benefit from Marx’s deepening critique of political economy. Further consideration should be given to whether these differences could enable us “to erase the hyphenation of Marx-Engels”<sup>71</sup> and classify Engels’s post-capitalism as the origin of Stalinism, in opposition to Marx.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>For discussions of Engels’s feminism and ecology, refer to Lise Vogel, “Engels’s Origin: Legacy, Burden and Vision,” in *Engels Today: A Centenary Appreciation*, ed. Christopher Arthur (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996); Frigga Haug, “Problematical Aspects of Engels’s View of the Woman Question,” *Science & Society* 62, no. 1 (1998); Kohei Saito, “The Intellectual Relationship Revisited from an Ecological Perspective,” in *Marx’s Capital After 150 Years: Critique and Alternative to Capitalism*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>71</sup>Norman Levine, “Marxism and Engelsism: Two Differing Views of History,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 9, no. 3 (1973): 92.

<sup>72</sup>See, Karatani, *Transcritique*, 179. Karatani argues that “from Engels sprang the idea of communism qua state centrism.”



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PART IV

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Engels at the Margins



## Engels as an Ecologist

*Camilla Royle*

The human relationship to the natural environment is among the most pressing political issues of the twenty-first century. The planet has already warmed by 1 °C above pre-industrial levels and the temperature rise shows little signs of staying below the 1.5 °C limit taken up as an aspiration within the 2015 Paris Agreement. Indeed, even present rates of warming are leading to an increase in extreme weather events, with ferocious bushfires across Australia and flooding in Jakarta, Indonesia, after unusually heavy rainfall among the most recent examples. Air pollution has become a major health hazard, with pollution levels in Delhi in 2019 reaching 50 times the level considered safe by the World Health Organisation. According to the *Lancet*, air pollution was responsible for 9 million premature deaths in 2015.<sup>1</sup> As epidemiologist Rob Wallace and others have argued, the current global COVID-19 pandemic and similar zoonotic diseases have their roots in the drive toward deforestation for

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<sup>1</sup>U. Irfan, “The Law That’s Helping Fuel Delhi’s Deadly Air Pollution,” *Vox*, December 16, 2019. [www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/11/8/20948348/delhi-india-air-pollution-quality-cause](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2019/11/8/20948348/delhi-india-air-pollution-quality-cause).

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agricultural production and the commodification of wild animals.<sup>2</sup> These and other emerging ecological issues already disproportionately impact on the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable.

In response, there has also been an increasing awareness and activist engagement on issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Most significantly, a global movement of school strikes brought an estimated 7 million people onto the streets between September 20 and September 27, 2019. In the UK and elsewhere, Extinction Rebellion has taken direct action, blocking streets and bridges in central London and carrying out numerous other high-profile actions. Blockades led by the Wet'suwet'en have shut down railway lines in Canada, disrupting freight and passenger railway services in an attempt to halt construction of a natural gas pipeline through indigenous territory.<sup>3</sup>

## MARXISM AND SOCIO-NATURAL METABOLISM

Today's radical environmental movement is diverse in its aims and understandings. However, the idea that the capitalist drive for profit for the few is at the root of ecological breakdown increasingly fits with the views of a wide layer of people. As Matt Huber has recently pointed out, it is widely understood, including by some climate scientists, that we need "system change not climate change." What is often less clear is the precise nature of the system and the mechanism through which it might change.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the work of ecological Marxists has been crucial in identifying the inherently unsustainable nature of capitalism. As will be outlined below, many of these scholars have drawn on Karl Marx's understanding of the concept of metabolism, making productive use of his comments on labor power in general in *Capital*, volume 1, and on metabolism

<sup>2</sup>R. Wallace, A. Liebman, L. Fernando Chaves and R. Wallace, "COVID-19 and Circuits of Capital," *Monthly Review* 71, no. 12 (May 2020). <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/04/01/covid-19-and-circuits-of-capital/>.

<sup>3</sup>A. Bracken and L. Cecco, "Canada: Protests Go Mainstream as Support for Wet'suwet'en Pipeline Fight Widens," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2020. [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/14/wetsuweten-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-allies](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/14/wetsuweten-coastal-gaslink-pipeline-allies).

<sup>4</sup>M. T. Huber, "Ecological Politics for the Working Class," *Catalyst* 3, no. 1 (2019). <https://catalyst-journal.com/vol3/no1/ecological-politics-for-the-working-class>

in volume 3. Relatively little attention has been given to the distinctive contribution of Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engels.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most consistently influential approaches to a Marxist ecology has been the metabolic rift approach associated with John Bellamy Foster, Paul Burkett, Brett Clark, Hannah Holleman, and others. These scholars have done much to dispel the notion that Marx and Engels were "Promethean" thinkers, who wished to manipulate natural processes at will in the interests of human betterment.<sup>6</sup> Marx and Engels developed a materialist account of socio-natural relations. In their early explorations of the issue of "nature," they made clear that they saw human relations with the rest of nature as a starting point for their understanding of historical materialism, rather than something external to social relations. In *The German Ideology*, they stated that: "The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus, the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature."<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, for ecological Marxists, the concept of metabolism has come to be seen as central to Marx's understanding of the labor process. All living things including humans exist in a relationship with the external environment that can be described as "metabolic." In the case of humans, this relationship is mediated by labor, which is, as Marx puts it in *Capital*: "first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature."<sup>8</sup> However, with the shift from feudalism to capitalism, there was an "irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism."<sup>9</sup> When people went from primarily producing goods for themselves and their family to selling their labor power to a capitalist, they became alienated from the products of their labor, now the property of the capitalist, as well as from their own ability to labor. As

<sup>5</sup>For example, Kohei Saito's award winning 2017 book *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism* is (as the title suggests) almost entirely focussed on Marx. Engels is mentioned very rarely. Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017).

<sup>6</sup>Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, 9–11.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in MECW vol. 5, 31.

<sup>8</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital* vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 283.

<sup>9</sup>John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, "The Robbery of Nature: Capitalism and the Metabolic Rift," *Monthly Review* 70, no. 3 (July 2018).



labor was their means of relating to nature, they simultaneously became alienated from nature. Capitalist social relations left workers with relatively little control over which commodities are produced and how they are produced and consumed.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on a detailed study of Marx's unpublished notebooks, Saito strongly argues that metabolism was not merely one element of Marx's thinking but was central to his critique of political economy.<sup>11</sup> Marx was, according to Saito, engaged in an ambitious and unfinished project of fully integrating his economic work with his understanding of issues such as soil science and localized climate change.

The metabolic rift school is not the only ecological Marxist tendency and they have been heavily criticized by others, especially Jason W Moore, who sees the emphasis on rifts between society and nature as fundamentally dualist and prefers that we think of capital as developing "through nature" in a process that he refers to as coproduction.<sup>12</sup> However, the concept of metabolism remains compelling for several reasons. Firstly, the focus on rifts historicizes society-nature relations in a way that makes clear that the destructive capitalist relationship to nature arose out of a particular set of circumstances. It is a powerful rebuttal to assumptions that the shift toward fossil-fuelled capitalism was either inevitable or occurred as a result of a faulty "human nature." The language of rifts suggests a qualitative rupture, rather than the gradual ascendance of capitalist socio-natural relations. The rift approach suggests that working-class exploitation went alongside ecological degradation but also that this class has both the interest and means in restoring control over the metabolic relation and instituting a more rational and sustainable relation with the rest of the biosphere.

The rift approach draws on and combines both Marx's earlier philosophical interests, in particular his turn toward historical materialism and his understanding of alienation, and his later insights, his value theory and general critique of political economy in *Capital*. It therefore goes against the notion that there was an epistemological break between the work of the younger and the older Marx, although Saito also recognizes

<sup>10</sup> Huber, "Ecological Politics for the Working Class."

<sup>11</sup> Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, 14 and 19.

<sup>12</sup> Jason W. Moore, "Metabolic Rift or Metabolic Shift? Dialectics, Nature, and the World-Historical Method," *Theory and Society* 46 (2017): 307.

that Marx developed and rethought his ideas with time, especially as he gained a better grasp of the natural sciences.<sup>13</sup>

From a somewhat different perspective, Marxist urban political ecologists, often within critical environmental geography, have long argued for a focus on the natural processes that constitute the urban environment. They point out that the urban environment is often neglected in favor of a view that conflates “nature” with rural or wilderness areas.<sup>14</sup> However, they argue, the urban is shaped by both social and ecological processes. For example, the ways in which food and water are brought into cities involve what are in essence both ecological and social processes. Furthermore, cities are often the sites where environmental issues such as air pollution are experienced as well as being sites of socio-ecological struggle.<sup>15</sup> These thinkers also draw on Marx and Engels’ conception of metabolism, interpreting this as a historical process whereby material goods brought into cities are qualitatively transformed. Human labor plays a fundamental role in this and should itself be considered a material as well as a social process.<sup>16</sup> Urban political ecology shares the rift school’s interest in developing a conception of socio-natural relations founded on a dialectical rather than a mechanistic conception of materialism. They have sometimes looked to Engels’ urban writings, demonstrating that ecological relations in cities have concerned radical thinkers for well over a century.

For others, however, Engels is treated with hostility. In *Uneven Development*, Neil Smith asserts that Engels treated nature in an objectified manner, as something observed from the outside. This is problematic for Smith as it signals a dualist approach to society and nature that lacks a subject-object dialectic.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, Smith says that Marx takes an

<sup>13</sup> Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism*.

<sup>14</sup> William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (London: W. W. Norton, 1995), 69–90.

<sup>15</sup> NikHeynen et al., eds., *In the Nature of Cities: Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> ErikSwynedouw, “Metabolic Urbanisation: The Making of Cyborg Cities,” in *In the Nature of Cities*, 24–28.

<sup>17</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*, 3rd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 34–35.

emphatically anti-dualist stance. Rather than starting from the assumption that nature and society are two separate realms that come to relate, he: “begins with the relation with nature as a unity and derives as a simultaneously historical and logical result whatever separation between them exists.”<sup>18</sup> Smith’s criticism of Engels recalls a much older debate on the extent to which Engels distorted Marxism by introducing a positivist element to Marxism that was alien to Marx’s own thought. The Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács criticized Engels’ application of the dialectical method to nature in a famous footnote to his *History and Class Consciousness*, written in 1923. Lukács contended, like Smith, that Engels supposed the existence of an objective nature witnessed by a detached observer. As Foster explains, this led to a schism within Marxism, with some “Western Marxists” abandoning the idea that the natural sciences could be discussed on a Marxist basis and also “driving a wedge between Marx and Engels.”<sup>19</sup>

However, there are increasing calls to revisit Engels’ ecological thought. Clark and Foster describe Engels as “one of the most important socialist and ecological thinkers in human history.”<sup>20</sup> Thoroughly examining Engels’ contribution, Foster defends him against accusations that his approach was fundamentally different from that of Marx or that he was responsible for Stalinist distortions of Marxism in the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> He explains how, throughout Engels’ works from the 1840s onward, he developed a materialist understanding based on recognizing the dynamic and evolving nature of an interrelated human society and natural environment.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of global climate and ecological breakdown and emerging threats represented by pandemic diseases and antimicrobial resistance, Engels’ warnings about nature striking back in his essay on “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man” seem apt. Engels argues that humanity ought not to “flatter ourselves overmuch

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>19</sup> John Bellamy Foster, *The Return of Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020), 16–19.

<sup>20</sup> Brett Clark and John Bellamy Foster, “The Environmental Conditions of the Working Class,” *Organization & Environment* 19, no. 3 (2006): 376.

<sup>21</sup> Foster, *The Return of Nature*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 178.

on account of our human victories over nature... For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first.”<sup>23</sup> This chapter will argue, though, that Engels’ ecological sensibility is more wide-ranging and more fundamental to his work than the above quote suggests and is not solely concerned with the “revenge” of nature.

The results of Engels’ enquiries into contemporary science are most famously—and most controversially—outlined in the posthumously published *Dialectics of Nature*. As this is addressed by Kaan Kangal elsewhere in this volume, I do not deal with it in detail here.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the remainder of this chapter will draw on two works, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*<sup>25</sup> and *The Housing Question*.<sup>26</sup> The former was Engels’ first full-length book, published when he was 24 years old while the latter series of articles was written nearly 30 years later.<sup>27</sup> Both of these works concern the immediate living and working conditions of the urban proletariat and their collective struggles to gain access to the means of improving their lives, whether in the form of wages, sufficient food, or housing. Both texts were solely authored by Engels rather than jointly written with Marx. This chapter will address Engels’ understanding of the socio-ecological nature of cities.

## CLASS, CITIES, AND POLLUTION

In autumn 1842, Engels was sent to Manchester by his industrialist father to help with the British section of the family business, Ermen and Engels. But Engels took this as an opportunity to avoid the champagne and parties of the middle classes and opt instead to spend time with the British proletariat and become acquainted with its “strivings, its sorrows and its

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Engels, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man,” in MECW vol. 25, 460–461.

<sup>24</sup> See Camilla Royle, *A Rebel’s Guide to Engels* (London: Bookmarks, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Penguin, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, in MECW vol. 23, 317–391.

<sup>27</sup> *The Housing Question* was written for *Der Volkstaat* (people’s state or republic), a paper of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany. Engels’ articles were republished in various editions in pamphlet form.

joy.”<sup>28</sup> He was influenced and aided by his partner Mary Burns and her sister Lydia (or Lizzie) who were part of the city’s large working-class Irish population.<sup>29</sup> Engels’ interest in workers’ living conditions was also demonstrated by his earlier journalistic accounts of the textile industry near his birthplace in the Wupper valley. In these, he describes the poverty and levels of infectious diseases among industrial workers as well as air and water pollution as a result of the dye-works.<sup>30</sup> First published in Germany, his book *The Condition of the Working Class* aimed to demonstrate the effects of the Industrial Revolution for a German audience where the full influence of industrialization had largely not yet been seen.

It was an extraordinary time for the city. Known colloquially as Cotto-nopolis, Manchester was the center of the weaving industry. Starting in the eighteenth century, the introduction of the steam engine and later technologies such as the power loom meant that it was no longer economical to produce woven goods by hand as “prices were now determined by the machine-made product.”<sup>31</sup> This went alongside rapid changes to working and family life for huge numbers of people. Whereas families in the textiles industry had worked as a unit to carry out all the stages of cloth production within the home, increasingly whole families, including women and children, went to work in factories. The population of Lancashire increased by ten times in 80 years and Engels estimates that annual imports of cotton to England grew from less than 5 million pounds in 1775 to 600 million pounds by 1844.<sup>32</sup> Britain’s empire also facilitated the enormous growth of the textile industry; cotton was grown by slaves in the Americas and the empire, particularly India, provided a market for woven goods.<sup>33</sup>

The restructuring of working and family life went alongside qualitative changes to the natural environment. British industry was at the heart of a transition toward the use of fossil fuels—steam from coal burning

<sup>28</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Tristram Hunt, *The Frock-Coated Communist: The Life and Times of the Original Champagne Socialist* (London: Penguin, 2009), 98–100.

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Letters from Wuppertal,” in MECW vol. 2, 7–25.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Preface to the Second Edition of *The Housing Question*,” in MECW vol. 26, 429.

<sup>32</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Clark and Foster, “The Environmental Conditions of the Working Class,” 379.

at this time—that served the interests of a capitalist elite. As Andreas Malm explains, early industrialists found that coal offered them a way to move industry into the cities as well as a reliable source of power that could be drawn on at a time of day that best suited the factory owners. So, the migration of workers into cities was irrevocably connected to the shift from renewables in the form of waterpower to fossil fuel-based energy. Although the nineteenth-century capitalist class would not have understood the long-term consequences in terms of climate change, their actions paved the way for it—and they would certainly have been aware of the local effects of coal burning on workers' health.<sup>34</sup> As Swyngedouw and Heynen point out, Engels, writing on these themes, was the first to recognize that the environmental conditions of cities were “related to the class character of industrial urbanisation.”<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, the Industrial Revolution represented an ecological transformation on a global scale. One of the most striking consequences of this metabolic rift recognized by Marx was the crisis of soil fertility that arose in nineteenth-century Britain as workers moved into the cities. Not only was the waste from humans and animals polluting the rivers of cities such as London and Manchester, but animal waste was no longer being spread on the fields, leading to a soil exhaustion crisis that forced capitalists to seek new and increasingly unsustainable sources of fertility including guano from South American islands.<sup>36</sup>

Workers' resistance to exploitation sometimes took the form of attacks on the machinery—including in the militant strike movement of August 1842 known as the Plug Plot Riots when thousands of workers marched to Manchester and pulled plugs out of machinery to release the steam. Engels arrived in the city shortly after these events but was aware of the movement through his Chartist associates.<sup>37</sup> As well as the insurrection of 1842, he described the destruction of bricks by armed members of the

<sup>34</sup> Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Erik Swyngedouw and Nik Heynen, “Urban Political Ecology, Justice and the Politics of Scale,” *Antipode* 35, no. 5 (2003): 900.

<sup>36</sup> Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, 203–205.

<sup>37</sup> Foster, *The Return of Nature*, 183.

Brickmakers' Union in a dispute over wage rates in 1843 while he was living in Manchester.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the most memorable passages of Engels' book concern water and air pollution and other issues that concern human lives and the natural environment. He describes the foul smell of the coal smoke and streets that are "rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters, but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead."<sup>39</sup> Engels further evidences how the centralization of the population in London had taken place in such a manner as to make even oxygen scarce due to the cramped conditions, use of fires and the layout of the city which impeded ventilation.<sup>40</sup> He describes Greater Manchester's River Irk in this way:

At the bottom flows, or rather stagnates, the Irk, a narrow, coal-black, foulsmelling stream, full of débris and refuse, which it deposits on the shallower right bank. In dry weather, a long string of the most disgusting, blackish-green, slime pools are left standing on this bank, from the depths of which bubbles of miasmatic gas constantly arise and give forth a stench unendurable even on the bridge forty or fifty feet above the surface of the stream.<sup>41</sup>

People faced these toxic conditions in the workplace as well as in their living areas. Engels refers on several occasions to the atmosphere within the factories, which is "at once damp and warm, unusually warmer than is necessary, and, when the ventilation is not very good, impure, heavy, deficient in oxygen, filled with dust and the smell of the machine oil, which almost everywhere smears the floor, sinks into it, and becomes rancid."<sup>42</sup> Some industries exposed workers to particular hazards. Metal grinders breathed in particles of metal dust and glassblowers were at risk of chest infections. Miners suffered from exposure of the lungs to coal dust resulting in "black spittle disease" as well as the effects of smoke and lack of oxygen underground.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 234 and 238–239.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 71 and 83.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>43</sup> Clark and Foster, "The Environmental Conditions of the Working Class," 383.

Furthermore, Engels described how the relations produced by human activity created an ecological niche in which harmful pathogens would thrive, which then risked impacting back on human lives. The cholera pandemics of the nineteenth century also terrified the wealthy, who feared that the disease would spread beyond the poorest areas:

When the epidemic was approaching, a universal terror seized the bourgeoisie of the city. People remembered the unwholesome dwellings of the poor, and trembled before the certainty that each of these slums would become a centre for the plague, whence it would spread desolation in all directions through the houses of the propertied class.<sup>44</sup>

Engels' account demonstrates how social relations change though time. But it further shows how the same forces of production that change workers' lives also produce what Clark and Foster describe as evolutionary changes in the environment, transformations that are qualitative and irreversible. These changing environmental conditions harm the poorest, who are most vulnerable to the ill effects of industry.<sup>45</sup>

Cities are the sites at which large-scale socioeconomic processes are experienced as everyday reality. Engels describes a situation whereby large-scale influences on the external environment such as the production of polluted air and waterways get under our skin, making themselves felt at a bodily scale in the same way that today, urban planning decisions, agricultural policy, and climate change are felt as air pollution that damages the lungs of young people in Delhi or Sydney. Similarly, biologists Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin have stated that it is "not too far-fetched to speak of the pancreas under capitalism or the proletarian lung."<sup>46</sup> Engels thereby evades a Cartesian separation of human society and the natural environment. This is in sharp contrast to Neil Smith's assertion that Engels was a dualist thinker who treated nature as something that one observes from the outside.

Engels followed the working-class movement of his time in arguing that those who profit from exposing workers to such conditions commit "social murder" in that they create an environment in which people

<sup>44</sup> Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Clark and Foster, "The Environmental Conditions of the Working Class," 380–381.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, *Biology Under the Influence: Dialectical Essays on Ecology, Agriculture, and Health* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007), 37.



cannot hope to live healthy lives: “society knows how injurious such conditions are to the health and lie of the workers, and yet does nothing to improve these conditions.”<sup>47</sup> In this, he was well ahead of his time. In the past few decades, there has been much interest in the lived experience of people exposed to environmental harms, often under the rubric of public health or, increasingly, global health. It is sometimes assumed that public health as a discipline began in 1854 (ten years after Engels was writing) with John Snow’s identification of contaminated water at the Broad Street water pump as the source of a deadly cholera outbreak.

In the early twentieth century, public health was relatively marginalized in favor of an emphasis on health as a state attained by an individual. But it re-emerged in the late twentieth century, when a political economy approach influenced by Marxism became fashionable; this shifted the emphasis toward the social and economic causes of ill health, rather than onto the pathogens themselves and introduced terms such as “structural violence” to describe situations whereby social structures make it impossible for people to meet their basic needs.<sup>48</sup> But Engels’ work anticipates these developments more than a century earlier. Clark and Foster are right then to argue that the young Engels was the rarely acknowledged inventor of social epidemiology.<sup>49</sup>

## HOUSING AND URBAN LIFE

In his 1872 pamphlet *The Housing Question*, Engels referred to his own earlier work: “I described in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* the main features of just this process of driving the workers from hearth and home as it took place in the eighteenth century in England.” He mentions again the “deleterious” effects that the processes of urbanization and mass migration of workers into crowded urban accommodation had on their health.<sup>50</sup>

It might be tempting to argue here that cities are the problem. As discussed above, the spatial distinction between city and countryside, and

<sup>47</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 128.

<sup>48</sup> See Paul Farmer, “An Anthropology of Structural Violence,” *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>49</sup> Clark and Foster, “The Environmental Conditions of the Working Class,” 376.

<sup>50</sup> Engels, *The Housing Question*, 323.

the associated irrational management of waste, including human excrement, meant that polluted rivers combined with under-fertilized fields. This disconnect between city and countryside is often used by contemporary theorists as an illustration of the concept of a metabolic rift. So, did Engels wish for workers to return to the countryside? Marx and Engels, in *The German Ideology*, did call for the “abolition of the contradiction between town and country” and Engels remarks in *The Housing Question* that the “antithesis” between town and country had sharpened within capitalist society and represents the kernel of the problem with housing.<sup>51</sup> However, this does not mean that Engels wanted to see a reversal of urban migration, even if this were possible. Engels makes clear that he sees the Industrial Revolution as a “necessary historical process of development.”<sup>52</sup> The urban proletariats are capable of revolution in a way that rural handloom weavers of the previous century hardly have conceived: “In order to create the modern revolutionary class of the proletariat it was absolutely necessary to cut the umbilical cord which still bound the worker of the past to the land.”<sup>53</sup> Despite the grime, cities are also the sites where drunken parties and late-night philosophical debates take place and where sometimes the revolts of the crowd can also turn to revolution. Conversely, Marx and Engels frequently referred to the isolation and separation experienced by rural inhabitants.<sup>54</sup> Although Engels himself enjoyed spending his leisure time in the countryside and by the sea, he also recognized some of the joy of urban life as well as the possibilities for worker organization, choosing to live in Berlin, Brussels, Cologne, Manchester, and London. The only logical conclusion to draw from Marx and Engels’ statements on the question is that urbanization creates the conditions for social revolution. A situation where the distinction between town and country is abolished and people are more equitably distributed across the country might lead to a healthier environment but could only be achieved after such a revolution and as its consequence.<sup>55</sup>

When Engels was writing *The Housing Question*, the mass migration of newly proletarianized workers into European cities was still an ongoing

<sup>51</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 64. Engels, *The Housing Question*, 347–348.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>54</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 64.

<sup>55</sup> See also Foster’s discussion of William Morris: Foster, *The Return of Nature*, 139.

process, including in Germany in the years immediately after unification. By the 1870s, the price of land in cities increased and town planning adapted to the interests of industry, demolishing workers' housing in order to build wider streets and railways and creating a "luxury city."<sup>56</sup> Speculators were incentivized to invest in buildings that were unaffordable for the working class, whose housing became both scarcer and more expensive.<sup>57</sup> Combined with an industrial factory system that underpaid workers and periodically threw many of them out of work, this created an acute crisis as it forced workers into housing that was crowded, of a poor quality and often on the outskirts of towns. Some workers' housing, especially in the cellar dwellings, was in such an appalling state that people had to bail the water out of their houses once they had flooded. A Manchester newspaper report that Engels quotes at length describes the depths to which housing quality had sunk. A family of an unemployed laborer had been forced to spend the night in their house during a flood. The smell was so bad that the family were left unable to sleep and had spent most of the night vomiting.<sup>58</sup> Removing the worst of the slums did not solve housing problems but merely shifted them elsewhere.

The housing problem was not simply one of "too many people" or "too few houses" as such. In 1872, as in many world cities today, there were enough buildings to remedy any real housing shortage if they could only be rationally allocated.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Engels had been a consistent critic of the ideas of his near contemporary Thomas Malthus, who argued that the human population would outgrow the available resources and therefore opposed measures to support the welfare of the poorest. Engels called his ideas a "hideous blasphemy against nature and mankind" as he thought that agricultural production could conceivably increase in line with an increased population. According to Engels, a surplus population appears to be a problem in capitalist society, where periodic crises throw people out of work and there appear to be more people than there is work available to feed them. But this is specific to societies based on

<sup>56</sup> Engels, *The Housing Question*, 365. As Engels explains, this method was associated with Baron Haussman's renovation of Paris during the reign of Napoleon III, but the process had been carried out in many of cities with similar results.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>59</sup> See Neil Smith, "The Housing Question Revisited," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 15, no. 3 (2016).

competition, rather than a general tendency.<sup>60</sup> In the case of housing supply, Engels pointed out that the crisis was “as good as unknown” in some cities, including Manchester with its huge growth in population mentioned above.<sup>61</sup> It was rather a crisis of cities that had not originally been established as industrial centers rapidly changing in the interests of the industrialist class.

*The Housing Question* was a withering attack on two common responses to the problem. The first aimed to campaign for workers to eventually own their own homes by paying in installments and thus bring about the abolition of renting.<sup>62</sup> Engels describes this as Proudhonist as it is reminiscent of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s prescription of cooperative ownership of the means of production. The second, associated with the social reformer Emil Sax, similarly looked to home ownership; Sax wanted to encourage the enlightened bourgeoisie to provide homes and land to the workers. Gifted the ownership of a home and a garden which they might use to generate income and thereby become small capitalists, workers would become “rooted firmly in the earth.”<sup>63</sup> Unlike Engels, these thinkers both regretted the movement of workers from countryside to city.

The ideas of Engels’ interlocutors might seem attractive to workers—in the twenty-first century as much as in the nineteenth century. The Proudhonists’ anger at the injustice of landlords who do very little and yet live comfortably off the workers will chime with the experience of renters today. The flow of renters’ money into the pockets of landlords with little provided in return can seem superficially similar to the exploitation experienced in the workplace. Yet, Engels rejects both of these bourgeois solutions on the basis that neither of them challenged individual property rights.<sup>64</sup> Firstly, in practice, workers owning their own homes and a small plot of land did not benefit them in the case of Germany. It merely allowed competing capitals to depress wages as workers could supplement

<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy,” in MECW vol. 3, 437.

<sup>61</sup> Engels, “Preface to the Second Edition,” 425.

<sup>62</sup> Engels, *The Housing Question*; See also Henrik G. Larsen, et al., “Introduction: The Housing Question Revisited,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 15, no. 3 (2016): 581.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted by Engels, *The Housing Question*, 343.

<sup>64</sup> Larsen et al., “Introduction.”

their income by growing some of their own produce (or by not having to pay rent); in other words, the workers absorb a part of the costs of their social reproduction. Worse still, wages throughout Germany were reduced to below those of other European countries, affecting also those who did not own a house or a plot.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, whereas owning a home had at one time been a source of stability for workers, it now acted as a hindrance as it made it more difficult for workers to migrate in order to engage in waged work. Therefore, Engels described such “solutions” as reactionary measures—implausible attempts to turn industrial proletarians back into handicraft workers, reinstating the connection to the land that Engels clearly saw as a barrier to urban insurrection. As Engels remarks: “No wonder that the big bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie who live and grow rich from these abnormal deductions from wages are enthusiastic over...the workers owning their own houses.”<sup>66</sup>

More centrally, Engels also rejects the assertion that the relationship between homeowner and tenant is equivalent to that between capitalist and worker in the workplace. As Engels reminds us, the latter is a unique form of exchange—what the worker sells here is labor power, which is unlike other commodities in that it produces value, part of which is extracted as surplus value by the capitalist. By contrast, when a worker makes a deal with a landlord, this is a simple commodity exchange between someone who has possession of a commodity (money) and another who has something to sell (use of a dwelling). Whether this is a fair exchange or not, it is not exploitation.<sup>67</sup> It follows from this that workers’ struggles against their landlords will not ultimately solve the housing crisis as they leave intact the basis of exploitation, the capitalist mode of production. What is needed, according to Engels, is revolutionary change so that workers as a class might collectively own the products of their labor including the appropriation of existing buildings to be used to house the poor. The remedy to the housing shortage can

naturally only occur through the expropriation of the present owners by quartering in their houses homeless workers or workers overcrowded in their present homes. As soon as the proletariat has won political power,

<sup>65</sup> Engels, “Preface to the Second Edition,” 431.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>67</sup> Engels, *The Housing Question*, 319–320.

such a measure prompted by concern for the common good will be just as easy to carry out as are other expropriations and billetings by the present-day state.<sup>68</sup>

Contemporary urban theorists have pointed out how relevant Engels' work remains. For example, Neil Smith likens Haussmannization to what we might call gentrification.<sup>69</sup> Although in some accounts the question of access to housing has been treated as an issue of human relations, if we accept the tenets of urban political ecology, the housing question should also be seen as an ecological question. Indeed, Engels seems to have also understood issues of housing in this wider sense, addressing how these questions were inextricably linked to the environmental conditions of cities. His critique of Malthus discussed above speaks to much wider debates about whether "over-population" is at the root of the climate and ecological breakdown we face today. Echoing his own earlier comments from *The Condition of the Working Class*, Engels also returns to questions of epidemiology, explaining how driving workers into crowded districts had created "breeding places" for the spread of infectious disease which: "spread their germs in the pestilential air and poisoned water of these working class quarters." He draws again on the imagery of a vengeful nature, mentioning consequences that "fall back on" the capitalist class as these diseases also impact on them to some extent.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, Engels' approach to the housing question has implications for contemporary debates about environmentalist strategy. In a recent intervention, Matt Huber has outlined a key distinction between what he calls "professional class" environmentalism and working-class ecological politics.<sup>71</sup> The former advocates for struggles over the consumption of material goods. For example, it might involve calls for individual lifestyle changes such as flying less often, recycling, or otherwise acting in a manner that reduces one's carbon footprint. This way of thinking (in some cases influenced by Malthus) assumes that there is an inherent conflict between the desire to attain material goods and the need to preserve the natural environment, or at the least, that a balance

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>69</sup> Smith, "The Housing Question Revisited."

<sup>70</sup> Engels, *The Housing Question*, 337.

<sup>71</sup> Huber, "Ecological Politics for the Working Class."

must be sought between the two competing aims. But such strategies will, according to Huber, be unattractive to workers who depend on the purchase of commodities for their survival as it asks them to accept further austerity while exempting polluting industry from blame. Huber calls instead for strategies based on demanding more and demanding goods for free, including public housing, which “could also integrate green building practices that provide cheaper heating and electricity bills for residents.”<sup>72</sup>

These debates, resting on a distinction between liberal demands for change within the existing system and radical calls for systemic change, parallel the debates in which Engels was engaged in 1872. Whereas the Proudhonists advocated that people acquire further commodities for themselves as individuals, Engels’ solution leads in the opposite direction, toward *decommodification*, or as Huber puts it, “extricating things people need from the market.”<sup>73</sup> Engels calls for housing to be distributed by a collective of people as a free public good according to need, rather than for workers to engage in a struggle over the possession of privately owned commodities. This also has implications for the type of housing that will be produced. In the former system, choice is limited to a choice of what the building companies want to build and what they think will sell. By contrast, with Engels’ solution, workers might establish collective and democratic structures in order to plan and build the types of dwelling that they decide are most suitable. Similarly, Huber might hope to see a world in which ordinary people collectively manage and run infrastructure, rapidly replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy installations.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the twenty-first century, more than half of the world’s population live in cities. The global working class is a significant force, in terms of numbers and increasingly due to its participation in worldwide revolts and revolutionary movements. Yet cities are often theorized in an anthropocentric manner that downplays the relationship between processes of urbanization and exploitation with changes in the natural environment. Urban political ecology has attempted to address this by elaborating how

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

cities themselves are constituted from process that are inseparably social and natural.

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* and *The Housing Question*, Engels draws attention to the ways in which capitalist social relations produced an urban environment that was detrimental to workers, providing descriptions of living conditions that sometimes eerily reminiscent of contemporary reports. His account of water-logged housing in Manchester could be written about Jakarta in 2020. As Engels recognized and expressed with his use of the term social murder, the tragic consequences for health and well-being created by capitalist socio-natures are not always expressed as outright, spectacular violence. The poor often die out of sight, whether in the face of unliveable heatwaves or the destruction of their lungs by polluted air or pathogenic attack. Contemporary writer Rob Nixon calls this “slow violence”<sup>74</sup>; Engels likewise describes the “slow but sure undermining, and final destruction of the human being physically as well as mentally.”<sup>75</sup>

Foster argues, then, that we should see Engels’ work as foundational to the development of an ecological dialectic.<sup>76</sup> The term ecology was not widely used when Engels was writing. Originating with the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866 and entering the English language ten years later, the term was only popularized in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> However, this chapter has shown how evidence of a concern with the relationships between humans and other living things and their natural surroundings, the original meaning of ecology, can be seen in Engels’ work from as early as the 1840s. Engels develops an approach that has much in common with contemporary urban political ecology as it relates economic trends that dramatically altered working people’s lives with ecological transformations that affected their health in an integrative and dialectical manner.

This chapter has also touched on the question of what Engels contributed to ecological thinking that was distinct from that of Marx, whose understanding of metabolism is highly influential. Of course, the

<sup>74</sup>Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2–6.

<sup>75</sup>Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 221.

<sup>76</sup>Foster, “The Return of Engels.”

<sup>77</sup>Foster, *The Return of Nature*, 13–14.



image of “second fiddle” is one that Engels himself cultivated. However, this does not mean that Engels has nothing to say that is distinctive on questions of ecology. Engels’ observations of working-class life were evidently influential to the writing of *Capital*. However, in 1844, Engels was writing independently of Marx. Although they had met by this point, they had yet to begin their lifelong collaboration so it seems reasonable to assume that Engels was more influenced by his connection to the workers’ movement than by Marx at this point. *The Housing Question*, published in 1872, does demonstrate much more of Marx’s influence on Engels, who frequently refers to and praises his colleague’s work.<sup>78</sup> The two lived in close proximity, Engels having moved to London by this time, and his text is undoubtedly influenced by their mutual discussions. However, at this time, it was Engels who often took on the role of debating with their political enemies, leaving Marx to focus on trying to complete his economic work.<sup>79</sup> So, the arguments in *The Housing Question* ought to be treated as evidence of some of Engels’ distinctive interests.

This chapter has proposed that in his work on questions of urban life and housing, Engels delivers independent insights that should be considered more closely by critical ecological thinkers today. This might broaden discussions of a “Marxist” political ecology, moving it beyond debates around metabolism and turning its focus toward the issues of urban political ecology which are of evident significance in the twenty-first century.

*The Condition of the Working Class* is impressive in that it pre-empts discussions in global health that took place more than a century after its publication. But the book stands out from other more recent work in this field in that Engels looks to the power of labor movements. It would be unusual today to find a work in global health that concludes with a call for “war of the poor against the rich.”<sup>80</sup> In *The Housing Question*, Engels is consistent in his emphasis on workers’ struggle. He rejects the idea that workers must own their own homes—and calls instead

<sup>78</sup> Engels, *The Housing Question*. Engels refers especially to the first volume of *Capital* which had been published five years earlier.

<sup>79</sup> Hunt, *Frock-Coated Communist*, 249 and 301–302 on the Marx-Engels relationship.

<sup>80</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 292; although see Lee Humber, *Vital Signs: The Deadly Costs of Health Inequality* (London: Pluto Press, 2019) for a recent exception that does occasionally refer to Engels.

for revolutionary change so that the proletariat as a class might collectively own the products of their labor. As discussed in this chapter, this is highly relevant to debates over the future of environmentalism today where strategies based on changing one's consumption patterns contrast sharply with working-class demands. The kind of revolutionary transformation that Engels spent his life trying to bring about has the potential to achieve more rational living conditions alongside a sustainable relationship with the rest of nature.

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## Engels and Gender

*Heather A. Brown*

Engels's *Origin of the Family* has become a classic of Marxist studies on the origins of the family and gender oppression, drawing wide discussion from feminist and Marxist circles alike. While it is an extremely important early work that attempts to chart a relationship between class and gender, it is marred at times by an overreliance on economic determinism. This was something that has been argued by many feminists, both Marxist and non-Marxist. Many of these attempted to rework Engels's theory from a Marxist perspective.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will attempt to assess the legacy of Engelsian feminism, both positive and negative, and suggest that Marx's

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<sup>1</sup>For Marxist feminist responses see for example: Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban et al., "A Marxist Reappraisal of the Matriarchate," *Current Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (1979); Carol C. Gould, "Engels's Origins: A Feminist Critique," in *Engels After Marx*, eds. Manfred B. Steger, and Terrell Carver (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Eleanor Leacock et al., "Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution," *Current Anthropology* 19, no. 2 (1978); Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

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work is of more use to Marxist scholars of intersectionality due to his more nuanced and dialectical framework.

### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE*

Engels's *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* has been one of the more significant and at the same time controversial texts in Marxist thought. Written in a very short period during 1884, Engels intended for this project to be only a critical review of Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society: Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (1877), but it became much more than that. Particularly, in terms of the debate on the origins of the family and women's oppression, it became the standard text for Marxists. In many cases, it became the baseline for women's and family policy in some states calling themselves socialist. In feminist circles, Engels's claims have been endlessly debated and rightly or wrongly attributed to the positions of both Marx and Marxism more generally. Thus, while in anthropological and archeological circles, much of what Engels and Morgan claimed has been either disproven or at the very least, lacks proof,<sup>2</sup> this text remains essential reading for Marxists for both historical background and contemporary concerns.

After Marx's death in 1883, Engels was responsible for organizing Marx's vast array of papers, notes, and manuscripts. Of particular importance was preparing for publication Volumes II and III of *Capital*, which Engels found in a state of disarray. However, while sorting through these papers, Engels found what are now referred to as Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* dealing with a number of authors and topics including Morgan's *Ancient Society*, which Engels quite clearly took a strong interest in. Writing to Kautsky on February 16, 1884, he made the striking claim that Morgan had "quite independently discovered the Marxian materialist conception of history within the limits prescribed by his subject and he concludes with directly communist propositions in relation to present-day society." Moreover, he claimed that judging by Marx's

<sup>2</sup>While space does not permit a full discussion of this issue, see for example: Evelyn Reed, "Introduction," in Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Pathfinder Books, 1998); Fluehr-Lobban et al., "A Marxist Reappraisal of the Matriarchate."

lengthy extracts, he had intended to publicize this important text among the Germans. Had he had the time, Engels claimed he would have worked up Marx's material himself, but that was out of the question since he was consumed with revising and assembling the disparate elements of *Capital* Volumes II and III.

Engels later changed his mind, however, and completed the work by May 1884, when it was published in German. In the preface to the first edition, Engels claims that he completed this work as a sort of "bequest" of Marx and that it was a "meager substitute for what my departed friend no longer had the time to do."<sup>3</sup> However, he would be using Marx's notes as a guide.

The reason why he decided to write *The Origin* is not clear. In the aforementioned letter to Kautsky, he had complained about the difficulty in finding a copy of Morgan's book. Engels expanded on this point in his preface to the fourth edition of *The Origin* (1891), arguing that Morgan's profound work was difficult to obtain because of the attempt by English ethnologists to "kill by silence" Morgan's revolutionary work.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Engels believed that there was a need for the new text since it was very important that Morgan's ideas reached an international audience.

This argument and the claim that Marx had sought to make Morgan accessible to a German audience are not all that convincing, however. First, Marx did not appear to hold the same level of praise for Morgan as Engels.<sup>5</sup> Second, *Capital*, rather than *The Origin*, was likely the more important work to complete given its originality and importance to the movement. This digression has been explained by Lise Vogel and Tristram Hunt as an attempt to regain status in the socialist movement after the publication of August Bebel's *Women and Socialism* in 1879. The book which was quite popular evinced both elements of utopian socialism and reformist tendencies.<sup>6</sup> Engels's book may have been an attempt to both set the record straight in terms of the ahistorical assumptions of Bebel about women's continuous oppression and reassert his version of socialism in the movement.

<sup>3</sup> Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Krader, "Introduction to *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*" (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972), 78–79; Dunayevskaya, *Luxemburg*, 179.

<sup>6</sup> Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 75.

While the exact reasons for writing the text are not completely certain, what is clear is that Engels never intended the book to have the significance that it has had. As noted above, this was primarily Engels's effort to provide to a German audience a critical review of Morgan's work, rather than an attempt to put forward a fully developed theory of the relationship between class and gender. Moreover, it was written up very quickly with the proviso that he would return to it at a later date—something that he never did.<sup>7</sup>

This work was given further legitimacy when Lenin stated that it was "one of the fundamental works of modern socialism, every sentence of which can be accepted with confidence, in the assurance that it has not been said at random but is based on immense historical and political material."<sup>8</sup> While this was certainly an overestimation of the work, Lenin's statement does to some extent foreshadow its importance in later socialist policy.

### ENGELS, MORGAN, AND THE ORIGINS OF THE FAMILY

Engels begins his discussion of the development of the family with Morgan's theory of the evolution of the modern family from the "primitive horde" to monogamy. Morgan describes five types of family formations. They are the consanguine, punaluan, syndyasmian (pairing family), patriarchal, and monogamian. The earliest, the consanguine, refers to group marriage where all brothers and sisters were eligible to be married to each other. The punaluan family involves marriage outside of the clan. Women could be married to their sisters' husbands and men could be married to their brothers' wives. The syndyasmian family "was founded upon marriage between single pairs, but without an exclusive cohabitation."<sup>9</sup> The patriarchal family involves the "marriage of one man with several wives" while the wives remain in seclusion.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the

<sup>7</sup> Michele Barrett, "Introduction," in Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986): 12.

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "The State," in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 29 (Moscow: Publishers' Press, 1965), 473.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1877), 394.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



monogamian family is similar to that of the syndyasmian family but with exclusive cohabitation.

Most important for Engels is the transition from the pairing family to the patriarchal and then monogamous family. This is where he argues that the oppression of women really begins. In the earliest families, kinship is based on mother-right—children are born into their mother's kinship group since it may not be clear who the father is. Engels and Morgan argued that women had much more power in these early societies than the women of their own time. Morgan documents this in the case of Iroquois women who had the power to divorce their husbands and were quite influential in terms of tribal governance, having the right to depose a chief and have a male speak for them in the council.<sup>11</sup>

The transition from barbarism to civilization changed all of this, however. Using Morgan's work, Engels argued that the introduction of private property brought about the end of matrilineal society and thus created the conditions in which gender oppression could arise. Since men became responsible for providing food for the clan, and because it was necessary to use heavy tools for this purpose, men gained power over women. Also, Engels stressed that with the development of the new form of the family—the pairing family—the paternity of children could be determined more easily. Finally, within these arrangements, fathers wanted to be sure to pass their property on to their own children. For Engels, these factors taken together led to the change from the matrilineal to the patrilineal determination of family,<sup>12</sup> which led in turn to a significant change in position for the women in society:

The overthrow of mother right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glossed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form; in no sense has it been abolished.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 79.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 87; emphasis in the original.

Women lost all of their former power as they were relegated to the private sphere. Their work was no longer socially valued since it was done for individual men rather than society as a whole. It would only be with the reintroduction of women into the workforce that this would begin to change, since they would again have a public role to play. Moreover, it was only with the reintroduction of communism in a higher form that women would regain their equal status relative to men.

Engels departs from Morgan in at least two ways in his discussion of the family. First, he is even more certain that there was complete equality between men and women in these early societies before the introduction of patriliney (father-right) and private property. He consistently downplays or ignores that evidence in Morgan that points to a lesser status for women in Iroquois society.<sup>14</sup> Second, Engels adds to Morgan's discussion by incorporating more recent developments such as his discussions on the necessity of heterism with monogamy and the development of individual sex love. He argues that individual sex love is really only possible with the modern proletarian family since property and the power that it conveys are no longer an issue for the working class because they have no such property. As we will see below, both of these points have been problematic for feminists.

After a significant discussion of the development of the modern family and individual sex love, Engels begins his discussion of the development of the state from kinship groups. Following Morgan closely, but also adding examples from his own research, Engels describes the evolution of society from kin-based forms through the development of the state. In the earliest societies, there is nothing approaching the coercive power of even the ancient states of Greece and Rome. Instead, society is organized into gens or clan—groups of individuals seemingly stemming from the same blood-line.

This is a unilateral form of descent as one is born into the clan of either their mother or their father but never both. One of the primary ways in which members of different clans may interact is through marriage. In each society, there will be relatively strict rules on who can marry who. In most cases, it will mean that members of a clan will have to marry outside of the clan of their birth—more often than not, to a member of a particular clan.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 78.

For Engels, what began the change to political society from clan society was the advancement of industry and the ability to have significant surpluses. With the development of husbandry and plow-based agriculture, significant food surpluses could occur that had not been possible in the past. This tended to erode the values and practices of communalism, since some individuals were regularly producing more than others. They did not have to worry as much about giving to those in need and expecting reciprocity in return when they were in a similar state of need since they now had their own surpluses to ride out the bad times. Moreover, surpluses allowed other practices that had not been possible in the past. Now, there were individuals like priests who could be supported without performing their own manual labor.

Due to the productivity of agriculture, slaves became economically useful. They were no longer a burden because each could produce a surplus above what was necessary for their own maintenance. This, for the first time, introduced status into the egalitarian clan, for Engels. Where in the past, men captured in war would often be killed because their upkeep would be a burden, or in some cases, they were adopted into the clan, now they would be incorporated into society as unfree persons. There now were individuals in society that had a very different status than those that were members of the clan.

This development of inequality in status and property would eventually undermine the relatively egalitarian clan system, making way for civilization and class society. Instead of the democratic deliberation of the gens, the state—that arbiter between the interests of the various classes—makes its appearance. From this point onward, a victory for one element of society is necessarily a defeat for another element of society.<sup>15</sup> Just as the development of private property led to the necessity of the state, it is only with the abolition of private property that the state will be abolished. For Engels, a return to the egalitarianism of the clan in a higher form due to the development of productive forces and the individualization of human beings will have been accomplished with the advent of communism.

Engels follows the thread of Morgan's argument fairly closely in his discussion of the state although he does leave out quite a bit of information on Native American societies other than the Iroquois which he holds as a typical example of a society in that stage of development.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

However, the relative egalitarianism of the Iroquois could be contrasted with Morgan's discussion of the more developed and less egalitarian Aztec, for example. This is something that Engels does not do, leaving the impression that class conflict came about all the sudden with the development of property rather than gradually, as we will see below, Marx was more inclined to believe.

## THE FEMINIST RESPONSE TO *THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY*

The *Origin* was written at a time where feminist issues were beginning to gain prominence in the socialist movement in a way that had not happened in the recent past. Certainly, utopian socialists such as Henri de St. Simone and Charles Fourier discussed the plight of women in significant detail but without providing a workable remedy. However, during much of Marx and Engels's involvement within the international socialist movement, sexism was prevalent particularly within the French movement of Proudhon. It was around the 1880's that the socialist movement returned to these issues in a significant way with Bebel's *Women and Socialism* (1879) which went through many editions.

Despite the rhetorical support for women, in practice, women's issues were often viewed as secondary. For example, Rosa Luxemburg notes that the issue of universal suffrage for Belgians was limited by the social democratic party to just demanding universal male suffrage.<sup>16</sup> It was not considered by the party to be feasible at the time to ask for both; therefore, it was seen as a better alternative to work toward partial change that could be accomplished more easily and work for more incremental change later. On the other hand, at the international level, the Second International in 1907 adopted a resolution calling for all members to work toward the political and legal equality between the sexes.<sup>17</sup>

This ambivalence on the "woman question" to some extent relates to Engels's formulation on women's oppression. While it is certainly a simplification to read Engels as saying that the entry of women into the workforce would lead to their equality with men—instead he argued that only the abolition of private property would do this—Engels's position

<sup>16</sup>Rosa Luxemburg, "A Tactical Question," in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 233–235.

<sup>17</sup>Tristram Hunt, "Introduction," in Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 22.

on women's emancipation was not well developed and that has led to some vulgarization of his points in the political realm. This is particularly true in terms of strategy for ending women's oppression. Engels, himself, never clearly asserts whether struggle related to sex or class conflict comes first. Instead, he sees the two as parallel, avoiding the difficult problems of origins and theoretical relationships which link these two seemingly separate spheres together.<sup>18</sup> The answer to this question has clear stakes in terms of the strategy to be adopted.

If one believes that the oppression of women stemmed from the introduction of private property—as it has been popularized in economic Marxist circles—it made sense that once private property is eliminated, women's oppression would disappear as well. Thus, one only needed to work on the primary goal of abolishing capitalist relations and all other oppressions would fall according to this logic. There was no need to have a separate women's movement. This has been an important basis for marginalizing women's sections within the socialist movement throughout the world.

On a slightly different note, the importance of the *Origin* is recognized in the fact that many societies working toward socialism used Engels's arguments as a baseline for crafting their policies toward women and the family, albeit sometimes relatively crudely, and quickly shifted policies when traditional politics seemed to call for it. Maxine Molyneux has argued that Engels's analysis was a blueprint for the emancipation of women in the Soviet Union, China, and a number of developing socialist states. This formulation included nearly universal support for the entry of women into the workforce as the first step toward emancipation. Additionally, there are, in some cases, gestures made toward the socialization of housework to relieve some of women's burdens due to the double working day—some form of collectivization of domestic labor would be necessary. This project was not fully carried out as these proto-socialist states were never fully able to eliminate capitalist property and became state capitalist. This drive by the state for surplus value and economic development necessitated counter-revolutionary policies, including a return to more “traditional family values.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 84.

<sup>19</sup> For the argument that the seemingly socialist states like the Soviet Union and China were state-capitalist and, therefore, counterrevolutionary, see, for example: Raya

At the theoretical level, Michèle Barrett argues that we need to take a closer look at Engels's argument. For example, the introduction of women into the workforce has not abolished the patriarchal family and its oppressive relations. Despite Engels's prediction that the proletarian family, absent of property, would be abolished in its oppressive form, this has not been the case. Because Engels focused so heavily on industrial labor, he was unable to see that the oppression of women would not end, nor would their conditions even necessarily improve, with the further involvement of women in the workforce due to the sexual division of labor:

Engels did not attend sufficiently to the amount of domestic work women have to do even when they go out to work full time, and he certainly did not see how heavy the familial and household burden was and is on working-class women. Hence he ignored the factors that have continued to depress women's wages and keep them in part-time and insecure work, and he failed to appreciate the far-reaching effects of ideologies of what was appropriate as men's work and women's work.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, for Barrett, it was Engels's failure to understand the importance and burdens of household labor which is most often done by women that mars his work.<sup>21</sup>

Lise Vogel brings up a related point. She argues that Engels does not go far enough in his discussion of the means of reproduction of workers.<sup>22</sup> Engels is right to make the distinction between the mode of production and the mode of reproduction but "he simply takes a very primitive distinction between natural and social phenomena to its logical conclusion."<sup>23</sup> For Engels, production relations change significantly, but reproductive relations change little because they are rooted in an unchanging biology. Only when society is able to overcome this biological division of labor with new technology, will women's lot change. Therefore, the somewhat crude materialism that characterizes Engels's

Dunayevskaya, *Marxism & Freedom: From 1776 until Today* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, "Introduction," 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>22</sup> Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 91.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

writings results in his leaving out important aspects of socialization that significantly have changed familial and gender relations over time. This constitutes a major flaw in his work.

Due to Engels's failure to adequately theorize the domestic sphere, many feminists have supplemented Engels's economic theory of production with a radical feminist perspective on the domestic sphere focusing on men's oppression of women. While generally in agreement with the methodology of Marx and his analysis of production, dual systems theorists such as Zillah Eisenstein (1979), Nancy Hartsock (1983), and Heidi Hartmann (1997) largely agreed with radical non-Marxist feminists, that "traditional Marxian theory cannot articulate the origins and structure of sex oppression in a way that accounts for the presence of this oppression as a pervasive and fundamental element of most societies."<sup>24</sup> The answer provided by most socialist feminists was to put forth a theory of two distinct systems—one involving Marx's economic analysis of society and the other based on patriarchal gender relations. These two social structures exist largely independently of one another. Patriarchy interacts in a variety of ways with the capitalist mode of production in order "to produce the concrete phenomena of women's oppression in society."<sup>25</sup> However, as Young notes, it is very difficult to theorize the intersections of these oppressions with this type of approach.

While many Western feminists may have viewed Engels's *Origin* as defective in certain ways, there are still a number of redeeming qualities. First, the fact that Engels posits a sphere of reproduction is an important theoretical achievement, despite the fact that he did not discuss it all that much. It at least opened the door for feminists to take up this sort of project in a materialist way as some socialist feminists did. Second, as Rosalind Delmar (1976) has argued, the *Origin* "asserted women's oppression as a problem of history, rather than of biology, a problem which it should be the concern of historical materialism to analyze and revolutionary politics to solve."<sup>26</sup> While Engels did not fully get beyond biological determinations, he at least started the process of historicizing

<sup>24</sup> Iris Young, "Socialist Feminism and the Limits of Dual Systems Theory," *Socialist Review* 10, nos. 2–3 (March–June 1980): 171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>26</sup> Rosalind Delmar, "Looking Again at Engels's *Origins of the family, private property and the State*," in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (New York: Penguin, 1976), 287.

gender and the family as he pointed to the relevance of social relations to understanding gender. Finally, “it speaks to our renewed debates on what we understand by the term, ‘the family’ and how this relates to an understanding of sexuality and gender in more general terms.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, it began to open up the discussion of gender and sexuality to a materialist analysis.

While Engels’s theory of gender, the family, and the state is more popular than that of Marx, its failure to integrate the public and private spheres of production leads to theoretical dead ends. The eclecticism of dual systems leads to two separate spheres based on two separate theoretical viewpoints. Because there are few links between the two, one eventually has to be privileged over the other theoretically. I will argue that Marx, in his *Ethnological Notebooks*, illustrates a much more dialectical structure to social change in the public and private realms, providing a better model for understanding gender relations and the family.

### SEPARATING MARX AND ENGELS

While it is generally assumed that Marx and Engels shared similar views relating to gender, the family, and Morgan’s work—and certainly Engels himself popularized this view—it is not necessarily a sustainable one. First of all, it is not clear that Marx wanted to simply introduce Morgan to the German audience. Instead, Morgan’s work was only one of a number of sources that he extracted from on ethnology at the end of his life in the 1880’s. Others included John Budd Phear, Henry Sumner Maine, John Lubbock, Ludwig Lange, and Maxim Kovalevsky.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, the notes on Morgan took up relatively more space than the others, being around 90 pages total, but the fact that he was working with a number of sources, along with a number of other factors, has led others to argue that Marx was engaged in a totally different research project. Krader has argued that these notes gave Marx a unique prospective on what a non-exploitative society could potentially look like in addition to providing a relatively sympathetic critique of Morgan. Kevin B. Anderson and David

<sup>27</sup> Barrett, “Introduction,” 29.

<sup>28</sup> See Krader, “Introduction”.



Norman Smith have argued that Marx was trying to expand his knowledge of precapitalist societies for their revolutionary potential and for his work on the unfinished volumes of *Capital*, respectively.

The difference was not just quantitative, however. While Engels's focus was solely on the introduction of private property as the beginning of class conflict and the "world historic defeat of the female sex," Marx in his *Ethnological Notebooks* showed a much more nuanced view of these early societies. Instead of a monocausal, unilinear view of development toward class society, Marx saw the contradictions within communal societies developing much earlier than Engels: "Marx... showed that the elements of oppression in general, and of women in particular, arose from *within* primitive communism."<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Engels seems to fall into the trap of critiquing property rather than class relationships at times.<sup>30</sup> The more economic elements of Engels's work do not appear to be present in Marx's notes and instead a more relational and dialectical model is put forward in at least an indirect way.<sup>31</sup> However, any assessment is difficult to make with certainty since these are simply notes and not even a draft of what he intended to write up.

One significant area of difference between the two has been on women's subjectivity. For Marx, women were not passive victims and were not condemned to be completely subject to the will of men after the fall of matrilineal society, waiting for society to advance far enough to liberate them. This said, Marx saw that women did not have complete control over their lives. In fact, Marx frequently noted that while women's position in precapitalist societies was at times preferable to that of Europe at this time, one should aim higher than these limited rights.<sup>32</sup> Marx's analysis of women's position in these societies is something that has profound consequences both for understanding women's history and for efforts to overcome the current gender counterrevolution that threatens to force at least some women from many of those spaces that have been opened to them.

<sup>29</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Women's Liberation*, 180.

<sup>30</sup> Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> See for example: Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Heather A. Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Luxemburg*, 184–186.

This difference in the accounts of Engels and Marx is extremely important to socialist politics, given the fact that it is Engels's voice that has been dominant within Marxism as it relates to the intersectional oppressions of class and gender. Many feminists have been rightly critical of the economic determinism of Engels's *The Origin of the Family*, which leaves women necessarily in a state of oppression even after the overthrow of capitalism. On the one hand, Engels is fairly clear that bringing women into the public sphere through their introduction to wage labor and the abolition of the bourgeois family would not be sufficient to emancipate them: "it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished."<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, there is no mechanism within his theory that can account for societal change other than in the abolition of the family following the destruction of capitalism. For Engels, the abolition of the family will ultimately lead to the end of women's oppression, but he offers no specific theory of how this would come about. He seems to be arguing that because private property and patriarchy were born together, they would also fail together. However, both institutions are very adaptive and in fact, patriarchy can exist without capitalist relations.

Dunayevskaya made a sharp distinction between Marx and Engels in terms of their respective positions on women's oppression. Most significant for Dunayevskaya in this respect is Marx's multilinear theory of women's oppression in contrast to Engels's unilinear, monocausal formulation in *The Origin of the Family*. For Marx, the origins of women's oppression were much more complicated and began much earlier than "the world historic defeat" that Engels posited with the beginning of private property.<sup>34</sup> She writes, "Marx drew no such unbridgeable gulf between primitive and civilized as Engels had... The pivotal point was that everything 'depends on the historical environment in which it occurs.'"<sup>35</sup> In contrast to Engels's relatively uncritical account of early societies and their treatment of women, Marx saw the need to go beyond this still limited sense of freedom.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Engels, *Origin*, 105.

<sup>34</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Luxemburg*, 180–181.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

A central part of Dunayevskaya's focus is on the degree to which Marx charts a dialectical course for the development in the family, one that includes significant evidence of women's subjectivity, even in the most limited of circumstances. Marx repeatedly commented in his notes on the position of women before and after the colonial experience:

What was crucial to Marx in seeing the great freedom of the Iroquois women was to show how great was the freedom the women had before American civilization destroyed the Indians. Indeed, first, it was true throughout the world that 'civilized' nations took away the freedom of the women, as was true when British imperialism deprived the Irish women of many of their freedoms when they conquered Ireland. Marx's hatred of capitalism as he studied pre-capitalist societies grew more intense...<sup>37</sup>

Thus, it was not an issue of the "progressive" West showing the rest of the world their future. Instead, the West was taking away rights and freedoms of women in these supposedly primitive societies. Women's position in society varied on the basis of real conditions on the ground, not due to any abstract formulation of mode of production and familial superstructures, although these did influence the options available. As Marx contemptuously noted when discussing how the leaders of early societies dealt with the change from mother to father right: "Innate casuistry! To change things by changing their names! And to find loopholes for violating tradition while maintaining tradition, when direct interest supplied sufficient impulse."<sup>38</sup> Tradition had to be made to service a new practice that was in the interest of a few at the expense of the others.

Marx was not content with noting the sometimes-elevated position of women in these precapitalist societies, however. While their position may have been better than that of the Victorian women of his day, it was far from ideal for both men and women in these societies:

Marx demonstrated that, long before the dissolution of the primitive commune, there emerged the question of ranks *within* the egalitarian commune. It was the beginning of a transformation into opposite—gens into caste. That is to say, within the egalitarian communal form arose

<sup>37</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya, *Women's Liberation*, 201.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks*, 181.

elements of its opposite—caste, aristocracy, and different material interests. Moreover, these were not successive stages, but *co-extensive* within the communal form.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to Engels, Marx showed that the position of women at the dawn of class society was not due to any essentialist biological need of women for protection or based on a preference for monogamy,<sup>40</sup> but instead was based on a real social struggle that extended beyond the issue of gender. As Marx and Engels had argued in *The German Ideology*, slavery was “latent in the family.”<sup>41</sup> Already as the family moved to reduce the partners available for marriage, men began buying and capturing women from other clans. These women were outsiders who did not have to be fully incorporated into the clan with similar rights. This paved the way for others to be brought into the clan on less equal terms and eventually led to rank being ossified in what was a once egalitarian group.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the position of women was entangled with the structure of rank in the clans and eventually with the state as it began to gain power over clans and subsume much of the authority held by the elders. However, their position varied based on the rank that they held and the social forces available to them at the time.

In these notebooks, Marx continuously points to the continuing conflict within the family rather than pointing to a long-term defeat of women:

The point at all times is to stress a differentiation in the family, both when it is part of the gens and as it evolves out of the gens into another social form, at which point Marx again differentiates between the family in a society that already has a state and the family before the state emerged. The point at all times is to have a critical attitude to both biologism and uncritical evolutionism.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>40</sup> Engels, *Origin*, 83.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this issue see: Brown, *Marx on Gender and the Family*.

<sup>43</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Luxemburg*, 184.

This difference is significant not merely for understanding the history of precapitalist societies, but instead points to the idea that women have always been actual and potential subjects who are often erased by those who write history. If women have always had a role to play in history, then there is no reason to wait until after the revolution to demand equality with men.

In fact, as Marx is discussing the role of women in Greek society, he does not just emphasize their oppression: “But the situation of the *goddesses on Olympus* demonstrates nostalgia for the former more free & influential position of the females. Powerhungry Juno, the goddess of wisdom springs from the head of Zeus etc.”<sup>44</sup> Even where women faced some of the harshest oppression, Marx saw a yearning for a better future, if only in fictional representation. More importantly for today, these studies helped Marx to produce a positive view of what the future could look like based on critical analysis of the past: “Marx envisioned a totally new man, a totally new woman, a totally new life form (and by no means only for marriage)—in a word, a totally new society.”<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Despite the rapidity with which it was written and some methodological errors and problems with the data used, Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* remains an important work for Marxist theory. It has historically had a very significant impact on the socialist movement, being one of the most read and cited sources of Marxist thought related to women’s oppression. Engels’s arguments were used to craft policies toward women in fledging socialist states. It has also drawn attention from feminists throughout the world who have sought to understand the origins and continuation of women’s oppression. It remains an essential read for those interested in understanding the origins of the state, property, and gender oppression from a materialist perspective.

Despite the importance of Engels’s work, I argue that Marx’s position is a more useful one for understanding the intersections of gender and class today. Perhaps the most significant difference that emerges from

<sup>44</sup> Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks*, 121.

<sup>45</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Luxemburg*, 186.

a comparison of Marx and Engels is Engels's more deterministic arguments. While Marx often takes note of the contingent nature of certain developments and notes possibilities for human activity—in addition to economic and technological forces—to change social conditions, Engels primarily looks to economic and technological forces to explain possibilities for change. Thus, Engels remains within a relatively deterministic and unilinear framework, whereas Marx's formulation allows for greater variety in outcomes and for a much greater degree of human agency, especially for women. Here, gender and family relationships really do interact with economic and political factors to create both potentially oppressive relationships and avenues for progressive change. One must be tuned to conditions on the ground to craft successful strategies for change.

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# Engels and the Irish Question: Rethinking the Relationship between the Peasants and Socialism

*Soichiro Sumida*

Since the advent of “Dependency Theory” on the background of the North-South problem in the 1960s, the Marxist unilinear theory of history has been severely criticized. However, as Kevin B. Anderson revealed through the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter referred to as MEGA), the Irish Question in the late 1860s urged Marx and Engels to review fundamentally their own perspectives in 1840s and 1850s on the world history and the revolutions in capitalist societies. As postcolonial studies often criticized, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) and the *New York Tribune* writings of the early 1850s certainly included Eurocentrism and class reductionism. In those writings, violent modernization in pre-capitalist societies, such as India and China, had been grasped as positive, insofar as it formed some elements of the communist society. But this unilinear view of history changed gradually thereafter. In particular,

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Marx deepened his critique of political economy by writing the *Grundrisse* and as a result rediscovered “the communal social forms” as “possible loci of resistance to capital.”<sup>1</sup> As Anderson emphasized, since the 1860s Marx had made his view of history more multilinear and abandoned his theory of revolution in the developed country as a starting point,<sup>2</sup> but this transformation is best illustrated in the Irish Question, a subject of more than 15 years of collaboration between Marx and Engels.

However, there has been persistent criticism of Anderson’s new interpretations in recent years. According to Aidan Beatty, some researchers such as Anderson and Teodor Shanin did not fully consider the historical context of the nineteenth century and ignored how much of their Irish discourse had been racialized.<sup>3</sup> Beatty underlined how racism played a significant role, especially in Engels’s discourse analyzing Irish migrant workers in Victorian England.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he refers to the work of Kerby A. Miller, an American historian highlighting the capitalization of Ireland before the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries,<sup>5</sup> and concludes that Irish peasant communities did never exist as “possible loci of resistance to capital” as Marx and Engels believed. While recognizing the significance of these criticisms, this paper emphasizes that Marx and Engels’s studies of Ireland provided the first radical discourse with critique

<sup>1</sup> See Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3. In fact, Marx’s view had already begun to shift toward the end of the 1850s. See Soichiro Sumida, “The Breadth and Depth of “the Asiatic Form” in *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*,” in *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2015/2016 (2017).

<sup>2</sup> See K. Marx to F. Engels on 10 December 1869, in MECW (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 43: 398: “For a long time I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by *English working class ascendancy*. I always took this viewpoint in the *New York Tribune*. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English *working class* will *never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland*. The lever must be applied in Ireland. This is why the Irish *Question* is so important for the social movement in general.”

<sup>3</sup> See Aidan Beatty, “Marx and Engels, Ireland, and the Racial History of Capitalism,” in *The Journal of Modern History* 91 (2019), 832.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 819.

<sup>5</sup> See Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 44.

of capitalism.<sup>6</sup> To clarify this point, we will rethink the intellectual relationship between Marx and Engels and focus on how their theoretical approaches have diverged since Marx's writing of *Capital*, despite the fact that the two shared much of the research material on the Irish Question. Therefore, this paper primarily examines Engels's Irish analysis of the 1840s and that of the 1870s onwards, in comparison with Marx's Irish analysis in the 1860s.

### “SECOND FIDDLE”?: EARLY ENGELS'S ANALYSIS OF IRELAND

As is well known, Engels's writings *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy* (1843) and *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) had a major impact on Marx's subsequent projects on the critique of political economy. It was Engels who preceded Marx in the research on political economy as well as on Irish Question (especially the relationship between class and ethnicity). In fact, Engels wrote several articles on the Chartist movement and the Irish liberation movement in the 1840s, starting with the article called “Letters from London” (1843) published in a Swiss newspaper. Above all, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels inserts Irish analysis throughout his work, pointing out the following three themes earlier than Marx in the 1850s, and especially in the late 1860s.

First, Engels grasps in effect Irish migrant workers as the “relative surplus population” for English capitalism. According to Engels, “more than a million” Irish immigrants have already flowed into large cities in England and “not far from fifty thousand still come every year.”<sup>7</sup> “The rapid extension of English industry could not have taken place if England had not possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Irish migrant workers living in poor towns are a form of “surplus population” for English capital. Therefore, “the wages of English working-man should be forced down

<sup>6</sup>See Jürgen Herres, “Marx und Engels über Irland: Ein Überblick. Artikel, Briefe, Manuskripte und Schriften,” *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2011 (2012).

<sup>7</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, in MECW vol. 4, 389.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

further and further in every branch in which the Irish compete with him.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, Engels reported that Irish migrant workers were at an inhuman minimum level of living compared to English workers and “have introduced, too, the custom, previously unknown in England, of going barefoot.”<sup>10</sup>

The second point is an analysis of rural Ireland, where the capitalist mode of production has not yet been penetrated. “If England illustrates the results of the system of farming on a large scale..., Ireland exhibits the consequences of overdividing the soil. The great mass of the population of Ireland consists of small tenants.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, in Ireland, “[i]n consequence of the great competition which prevails among these small tenants, the rent has reached an unheard-of height, double, treble, and quadruple that paid in England.”<sup>12</sup> As results of this competition, “[t]he Irish people is thus held in crushing poverty, from which it cannot free itself under our present social conditions.”<sup>13</sup> Engels attributed the poverty phenomenon peculiar to Irish people to “the character of the people, and to their historical development”<sup>14</sup> rather than English colonialism. His discourse would be very problematic from a modern postcolonial point of view.

Third, Engels describes the significance of the Irish immigrants and Irish liberation movement for the English working class. “On the one hand it [the Irish immigration] has, as we have seen, degraded the English workers, removed them from civilisation, and aggravated the hardship of their lot; but, on the other hand, it has thereby deepened the chasm between workers and bourgeoisie, and hastened the approaching crisis.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, while Engels describes in a very ethnocentric manner the Irish “crudity, which places him but little above the savage”,<sup>16</sup> he hopes that “the passionate, mercurial Irish temperament, which it imports into England and into the English working-class”,<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 557.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 558.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 559.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 419.

will dispel their selfishness as English people. Engels also warned that Daniel O'Connell's campaign for repeal of the Union could not solve Irish poverty.<sup>18</sup> However, Engels did not disapprove of the Irish independence movement. In his article "Feargus O'Connor and the Irish People" (1848), Engels praised O'Connor, who linked the working-class movement Chartism in England with the Irish liberation movement and supported Ireland's independence from an Anglocentric perspective: "the victory of the English democrats, and hence the liberation of Ireland."<sup>19</sup>

Engels's Irish analysis was shared by Marx at the time, but in the *Tribune* articles of the 1850s, Marx had more concretely considered the relationship between England and Ireland. By the end of 1840s, the Chartist Movement, which had called for repeal of the Union, had lost its influence and the conflict between the English trade union movement and Irish migrant workers was intensifying. In addition, as noted by Marx in the article "Ireland's Revenge" (1855), after the Great Famine and the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846, "the *Irish agricultural system is being replaced by the English system, the system of small tenures by big tenures.*"<sup>20</sup> As a result, more immigrants were rushing to England than Engels had ever observed. As seen in his London excerpt notebooks,<sup>21</sup> Marx in the 1850s also examined the implications of British colonial rule in India and China for the global development of capitalism and the emergence of universal proletariat. In his *letter to Marx on May 23, 1856* reporting on the travel to Ireland, Engels also stated: "Ireland may be regarded as the earliest English colony and one which, by reason of her proximity, is still governed in exactly the same old way."<sup>22</sup> Marx then takes over Engels's analysis of Ireland and begins a full-fledged analysis of the capitalization of Ireland as English colony and the Irish tenant rights movement against capitalism after 1846. The text in which Marx developed this analysis most systematically is nothing less than *Capital*, Vol. 1 Ch. 25: *The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation 5. Illustrations of the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation (f) Ireland*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 561.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Feargus O'Connor and the Irish People," in MECW vol. 6, 449.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Marx, "Ireland's Revenge," in MECW vol. 14, 80.

<sup>21</sup> See Lucia Pradella, *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings* (London: Routledge, 2015), 116.

<sup>22</sup> F. Engels to K. Marx on May 23, 1856, in MECW vol. 40, 49.

### WHAT IS 'CAPITALIST COLONIALISM': MARX'S ANALYSIS OF IRELAND IN THE 1860S

Already in the late 1960s, Marx researchers in Japan also argued that Marx had rejected the unilinear view of history in his Irish analysis and had rather constructed a schema like "Dependency Theory." They asserted that capitalism did not destroy the communal social forms in colonial countries but prevented the economic development in colonies by preserving and reorganizing the communal forms.<sup>23</sup> However, as Slater and McDonough criticize, by simply emphasizing the "prime mover" of colonialism rather than focusing on the capitalist mode of production itself, as in the case of "Dependency Theory," it is not possible to capture the two contexts of Marx's Irish analysis: "the changing historical reality of Ireland over the long period of colonialism and...Marx's own more theoretical approaches to the Irish Question."<sup>24</sup>

Marx himself has stressed in a series of Irish studies that the capitalist mode of production makes earlier colonialism even more severe and destructive. Indeed, Marx's views are often criticized for being optimistic about the penetration of capitalism into agriculture and being a unilinear, labor-centric approach.<sup>25</sup> But these are misleading criticisms. This is because Marx grasps the "qualitative" transition from

<sup>23</sup>See Kenzo Mohri, "Progressive and negative perspectives of capitalism and imperialism," in *Imperialism: Theoretical Directions*, ed. Ronald Chilcote (New York: Amherst, 2000).

<sup>24</sup>See Eamonn Slater and Terrence McDonough, "Marx on 19th Century Colonial Ireland: Analyzing Colonialism beyond Dependency theory," in *NIRSA* 36 (2008), 8.

<sup>25</sup>From a positivist point of view, Hazelkorn argues that Marx ignored Irish industrialization, the increase in tenant farmers, and their resistance to proletarianization in the 1850s and 1860s. See Ellen Hazelkorn, "some problems with Marx's theory of capitalist penetration into agriculture: the case of Ireland," in *Economy and Society* 10 (3) (1981). However, Marx himself, in several passages, stresses the existence of the unproletarianized tenants. For example, as follows: "On the one side you have there [in Ireland] a small class of land monopolists, on the other, a very large class of tenants with very petty fortunes, which they have no chance to invest in different ways, no other field of production opening to them, except the soil." See K. Marx, "The Indian Question: Irish Tenant Right," in *the New-York Daily Tribune* No. 3816, July 11, 1853, in MECW vol. 12, 158.

traditional colonialism to “Capitalist Colonialism”<sup>26</sup> through both “theoretical approaches” and “historical investigation” into the capitalist mode of production. This chapter first examines the “Capitalist Colonialism” as a characteristic of Marx’s research, mainly based on his letters to Engels and some drafts for speeches. We then comment on the Irish analysis in *Capital*, Vol. 1 Ch. 25., and finally reconsider what role the Irish Question played in Marx’s theory of revolution.

In *Capital*, Marx gives a more detailed account of the reality of capitalization in Ireland by using the latest government documents and publications, but his analysis is not merely an illustration of “the General Law of Capitalist” but reflects his deeper understanding of capitalism. Against the background of the anti-colonial struggle and national independence movement (e.g., the Fenian Rising of 1867 and the campaign for the release of the Fenian prisoners) that flourished in Ireland at the time, Marx describes the latest findings from Irish studies since the late 1860s. Indeed, there is no clearly formulated concept of “Capitalist Colonialism” that Marx acquired through Irish studies. However, by grasping the specificity of the capitalist mode of production, Marx regards a new phase of English colonialism in Ireland since 1846 as “Capitalist Colonialism,” as the following three citations show:

1. After the *Union* [the] system of rack-renting and middlemen, but left the Irish, however ground to the dust, holder of their native soil. Present system, quiet business-like extinction, and government only instrument of landlords (and usurers).<sup>27</sup>
2. What the English do not yet realize is that since 1846 the economic content and hence the political purpose of English rule in Ireland as well has entered an entirely new phase, and that for that very reason Fenianism is characterized by socialist (in the negative sense, as directed against the appropriation of the soil) leanings and as a lower orders movement. What could be more absurd than to lump together the barbarities of Elizabeth or Cromwell, who wanted to drive out the Irish by means of English colonists (in the Roman

<sup>26</sup>The distinction between Capitalist Colonialism and traditional colonialism is inspired by Wood’s one between “Capitalist Imperialism” and “a traditional form of non-capitalist imperialism.” See Ellen M. Wood, *Empire of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2003).

<sup>27</sup>Karl Marx, “Notes for an Undelivered Speech on Ireland in International Workingmen’s Association 1867,” in MECW vol. 21, 192.

sense), and the present system, which wants to drive out the Irish by means of sheep, pigs, and oxen!<sup>28</sup>

3. Here is what baffles the English: they find the present regime mild compared with England's former oppression of Ireland. So why this most determined and irreconcilable form of opposition now? What I want to show...is that the [oppression] since 1846, though less barbarian in form, has been in effect destructive, leaving no alternative but Ireland's voluntary emancipation by England or life-and-death struggle.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, it is crucial that Marx distinguishes the "new phase" of colonialism after 1846 from the "former" colonialism. In other words, there is a fundamental distinction between the political expulsion "in the Roman sense" and the cleaning of lands "by means of sheep, pigs, and oxen" i.e., by commodities. The oppression of the latter is, "though less barbarian in form," substantially the most extinctive. Of course, even in the former colonialism, "cleaning of the estate" was carried out "during the entire period" through "successive Insurrection Acts, Arms Acts, Coercion Acts."<sup>30</sup> However, these evictions were often employed as a means of political punishment and "were exceptional in that period [1801-1846]."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, in contrast to 1846 and later, Irish people continued to be "the dust holder of their native soil."<sup>32</sup>

For Marx, the capitalization of Irish society was first formed after 1846. Since then, English extra-economic power in colonial Ireland has gone beyond political repression to a new purpose in promoting the "Agricultural Revolution"<sup>33</sup> in Ireland. In other words, against the background of former political colonialism, extra-economic power mediated by "reified relations"<sup>34</sup> (i.e., commodity, money and capital) has caused a more

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels. on 30 November 1867, in MECW vol. 42, 486.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, "Outline of a Report on the Irish Question Delivered to the German Workers," in MECW vol. 21, 194.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels. on 30 November 1867, in MECW vol. 42, 486.

<sup>32</sup> Marx, "Notes," 192.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* vol 1 (London: Penguin, 1976), 908.

<sup>34</sup> In a capitalist society with full commodity production relations, isolated private individuals cannot form social relations of production through the personal relations of the community. There, individuals must perform their social division of labor, not through

severe “Primitive Accumulation” than in any Western European country. Therefore, “Capitalist Colonialism” is clearly distinguished from former colonialism in the sense that the old colonialist political power mediated by reified relations promotes the establishment of the capitalist mode of production. In *Outline of a Report on the Irish Question* (1867), Marx sees the historical process of colonialism as the “phases of development,” not just in the last two decades: Henry II’s invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century, colonization by Elizabeth, James I, Cromwell in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Mercantilism and Penal Code for repression of Catholics in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and strengthening feudal landlord system after Union in the early nineteenth century. However, this chronological “historical investigation” does not merely deal with traditional colonialism. Rather, it is intended to highlight the “Capitalistic Colonialism” since 1846 by understanding the “change of character of English rule in Ireland.”<sup>35</sup>

### THE IRISH QUESTION IN *CAPITAL*

Thus, we can understand why the Irish Question was exactly considered in *Capital*, Vol. 1 Ch. 25. There, Marx does not deal with the political conquest of other people, nor is he concerned with “the condition of the colonies,”<sup>36</sup> where capitalist production did not yet exist.<sup>37</sup> Instead, Marx only addresses the Irish Question within the framework of a theoretical approach to capitalist production. In fact, alongside Britain, including

communal labor as in pre-capitalist societies, but through private labor that is independent of each other. However, since this private labor itself does not have social character directly, private producers have no choice but to form social relations of production, i.e., “reified relations” by relating [verhalten] to their labor products as to commodity and relating their products as commodity to each other. For reification as the kernel of Marx’s theory, see Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism: Capitalism, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 102–13.

<sup>35</sup> Marx, “Notes,” 192.

<sup>36</sup> Marx, *Capital* vol. 1, 940.

<sup>37</sup> Of course, this does not mean that Marx himself ignored the colonial issue. In fact, as Pradella points out, the French edition of *Capital* Pt. 7: *The Process of Accumulation of Capital* contains several historical illustrations of “colonial issues” and “foreign trade.” See Lucia Pradella, “Kolonialfrage und vorkapitalistische Gesellschaften. Zusätze und Änderungen in der französischen Ausgabe des ersten Bandes des Kapital (1872–1875),” in *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch* 2010 (2011).



Scotland and Wales, the country discussed in Ch. 25: *The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation* was Ireland, not continental Europe.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the Irish period is clearly limited to 1846 and thereafter. Of course, capitalist production is only fully developed in England as the metropolis of capital. But what is important here is that the colonialism of England over Ireland has entered a whole new phase since 1846, which must be considered in the context of the development of capitalist production.

From here, we will concretely analyze the Irish Question treated as an important illustration in *Capital*, Vol. 1 Ch. 25. There was no study of Irish Question in *Capital* comparing the second edition (1873) with the French edition (1872–1875), except for Kevin Anderson’s MEGA study.<sup>39</sup> The Irish analysis in *Capital* of the second edition is summarized in the following two points:

The first is the transformation of “scattered means of production”<sup>40</sup> to capital. Since the 1846 Great Famine, Ireland has “absolutely” depopulated. In Ireland, more than five-sixteenths of the population have fallen from 8.22 million in 1841 to 5.5 million in 1866, and almost two million immigrants have migrated to England in the past 15 years. This depopulation was due to the disappearance of smallholder farms of less than 15 acres and an increase in the number of larger holder farms. Marx has questioned why the total capital has been accumulated, despite the decline in the amount of means of production used for agriculture. The answer lied in the transformation of scattered means of production to capital. In other words, before 1846, the scattered means of production was “originally owned”<sup>41</sup> by peasants and smallholders and was used as so-called “Labor Fund” for the producers themselves. However, after 1846, the

<sup>38</sup> K. Marx to S. Meyer on 30 April 1867, in MECW, 42: 366.

<sup>39</sup> However, Anderson only emphasizes the ecological critique of modernism and the revolutionary subjectivity of migrant workers but does not consider the “Original Ownership” of peasants on which this paper focuses below. See Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 191.

<sup>40</sup> Marx, *Capital* vol. 1, 860.

<sup>41</sup> What “original [ursprünglich] ownership” in pre-capitalist modes of production means is that “the producers relate [verhalten] to the objective conditions of their labor as to their own property” (Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858*, in MECW vol. 28, 399). Original ownership also enables the individuals to belong to their community, to be guaranteed as proprietor. Marx’s theory of original ownership shows that the communal social form not only restrains the individuals but guarantees their original property in a non-capitalistic or pre-capitalistic society.

scattered means of production transformed into self-valorizing capital by appropriating the unpaid labor of others.

The second is the law of “relative surplus population,” which Engels sketched out in the foresight. While the accumulation of capital with the absolute depopulation in Ireland seemed to substantiate the Malthusian theory of population, for Marx this situation rather illustrated the general law of “relative surplus population.” The famine in 1846 killed more than one million poor people in Ireland. At the same time, another million people were forced to move to the United States. However, in Ireland, which had no longer “absolute surplus overpopulation,” pauperism was not resolved as Malthusians said. Rather, as prior to 1846, “hard work” and “rural poverty” were spreading, and, in fact, “surplus overpopulation” continued to occur. The reason for the “relative surplus population,” which far exceeded the absolute decline in population, was precisely because the “agricultural revolution”—that is, the conversion of arable land to pastureland in Ireland—had progressed more rapidly than in England.

Importantly, the law of capitalist accumulation in Ireland, which was developed in the second edition, is even more emphasized in the French version. In fact, Marx has incorporated much of the excerpt from the *Reports of the Irish Poor Law Inspectors* (1870), which was only mentioned in the note of the second edition.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the French version takes a closer look at the proletarianization of rural workers and smallholders in Ireland.

Marx has analyzed the condition of rural wage workers in detail, based on the report of the Irish inspectors. “[F]or a full elucidation of the law of accumulation, his condition outside the workshop must also be looked at, his condition as to food and accommodation.”<sup>43</sup> Then, Marx confirmed that “[b]efore the famine, the great mass of agricultural wages was paid in kind, and only the smallest part in money; today, payment in money is the rule.”<sup>44</sup> According to the report, “[p]revious to the famine, the labourer enjoyed his cabin ... with a rood, or half-acre or acre of land, and facilities for ... a crop of potatoes. He was able to rear his pig and keep fowl... But they now have to buy bread, and they have no refuse

<sup>42</sup> See K. Marx to F. Engels on 14 April 1870, in MECW vol. 44, 480.

<sup>43</sup> Marx, *Capital* vol. 1, 807.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 864.

upon which they can feed a pig or fowl, and they have consequently no benefit from the sale of a pig, fowl, or eggs.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, before the Great Famine, rural workers were guaranteed “Original Ownership” of their means of production, but after the Famine, they fell into property-less wage laborers. “Only since the catastrophe of 1846 have they begun to form a section of the class of pure wage-labourers, a special estate which is now connected with its masters only by monetary relations.”<sup>46</sup>

For the first time since 1846, rural workers have lost “Original Ownership” of their means of production, and Labor Fund has taken the form of wage through the reification of means of living. In other words, their relationship with the employer has lost its former communal relationship and has turned to mere “monetary relations.” Marx made a point of this reified relation by considering not only “food” but also “accommodation.” In Ireland before 1846, “[s]ome of the agricultural day-labourers...continue to live on the holdings of the farmers, in overcrowded huts whose hideousness far surpasses the worst examples the agricultural districts of England can offer.” But it is important to note that, as Marx emphasized in a study of Richard Jones in the *1861–1863 Economic Manuscript*, the Irish peasant, called *cottier*, was “*labouring cultivators or peasants*” and originally “possesse[d] their own instruments of labour.”<sup>47</sup> The agricultural revolution since 1846 systematically confiscated cottiers’ huts, including cultivating land, on the largest scale. “Thus[,] many labourers were compelled to seek shelter in villages and towns. There they were thrown like refuse into garrets, holes, cellars and corners, in the worst slum districts.”<sup>48</sup> This description seems to imply Marx’s critique of modernism that rural property-less workers have worse housing conditions than the worst “overcrowded huts” of cottiers.

## THE IRISH QUESTION AND SOCIAL REVOLUTION

In the second edition of *Capital*, Marx described the transformation of scattered means of production to capital and the law of “relative surplus population” in Ireland. The French version, on the other hand, focused

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Karl Marx, *1861–1863 Economic Manuscript*, in MECW vol. 33, 334.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 864.

on the “Original Ownership” of peasants and smallholders, which had been destroyed by the capitalist mode of production since 1846. At the end of this chapter, we will confirm the importance of Irish issues as a revolutionary strategy for Marx, one of the leaders of the *First International*. In his *letter to Engels on 30 November 1867*, Marx proposed the following platform for the working class in England:

What the Irish need is: 1. Self-government and independence from England. 2. Agrarian revolution. With the best will in the world the English cannot do this for them, but they can give them the legal means to do it for themselves. 3. *Protective tariffs against England*. From 1783-1801 every branch of industry in Ireland flourished. By suppressing the protective tariffs which the Irish parliament had established, the Union destroyed all industrial life in Ireland.... As soon as the Irish became independent, necessity would turn them, like Canada, Australia, etc., into protectionists.<sup>49</sup>

This platform was based on Marx’s deepening critique of “Capitalist Colonialism” in the late 1860s. First, Irish independence as a sovereign state against English political repression does not imply merely a political revolution of national independence. This is because the purpose of the political revolution is to pursue reformist struggles for peasants’ land ownership and the protective tariffs in connection with the social revolution in England. Second, “agrarian revolution” here refers to the transformation of landlordism, not to the “agricultural revolution” as the capitalization of Ireland. From a theoretical point of view, these reformist struggles, such as protective tariffs, have a socialist (“in the negative sense, as directed against the appropriation of the soil”) tendency to resist the dissolution of “Original Ownership.” As Marx stated in his *letter to Meyer and Vogt on 9 April 1870*, the rise of Chartism since the 1840s subsided and the labor aristocracy and racism spread among the English working class.<sup>50</sup> Marx praised Fenianism including Irish migrant workers, coming from the United States, a former colony of England, in order to overcome the growing fragmentation of the working class across the Atlantic Ocean as well as within Britain. Marx therefore in 1870 stated that “the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this is decisive for the

<sup>49</sup> K. Marx to F. Engels on 30 November 1867, in MECW, 42: 486–7.

<sup>50</sup> K. Marx to Meyer and Vogt on 9 April 1870, in MECW vol. 43, 475.

workers' movement *all over the world*) cannot be struck *in England*, but *only in Ireland*.”<sup>51</sup> This is the reason why in Ireland “the *land question* has, so far, been the *exclusive form* of the social question; it is a question of existence, a *question of life or death* for the immense majority of the Irish people.”<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, as Marx stated in *The General Council to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland* (1870), “England alone can serve as the *lever* for a serious *economic* Revolution.”<sup>53</sup> “It is the only country where the *capitalist form*, that is to say combined labour on a large scale under capitalist masters, embraces virtually the whole of production. ... It is the only country where the class struggle and the organisation of the working class by the *trades union* have *acquired* a certain degree of maturity and universality.”<sup>54</sup> However, the centrality of England in “social revolution” does not simply mean labor-centrism in the developed country. Rather, it is theoretically important that the land-lordism in the capitalist sense has been newly grasped as a set of capitalist system. Although this has not been mentioned in previous studies, it is necessary to consider Marx’s critique of Lassalle in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875).<sup>55</sup>

In present-day society the means of labour are the monopoly of the landowners (the monopoly of land ownership is even the basis of the monopoly of capital) *and* the capitalists. ... The correction was introduced because Lassalle, for reasons now generally known, attacked only the capitalist class and not the landowners. In England, the capitalist is mostly not even the owner of the land on which his factory stands.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 473.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 474.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx, *The General Council to the Federal Council of Romance Switzerland*, in MECW vol. 21, 86.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Marx had already in 1865 strongly criticized Lassalle’s partnership with Bismarck, a Junker. “I had fully explained and “proved” to him [Lassalle] here in London that direct socialist intervention by a “Prussian state” was an absurdity.” See K. Marx to L. Kugelmann on 23 February 1865, in MECW vol. 42, 101.

<sup>56</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in MECW vol. 24, 83.

Historically, capitalist societies were established by the creation of property-less workers and the exclusive possession of means of production, which includes land as well as instruments of labor. Therefore, it is wrong to attack only the monopoly of capitalist, as Lassalle does. Especially in England, the landlordism is the subject of socialist intervention, because “the monopoly of land ownership is even the basis of the monopoly of capital.” And “[i]f England is the *bulkmark* of landlordism and European capitalism, the only point where official England can be struck a great blow is Ireland.” This is because “Ireland is the *bulkmark* of English landlordism. If it fell in Ireland, it would fall in England,” as Marx stated in *The General Council 1870*.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, as Marx stated in his *letter to Kugelmann on 6 April 1868*, “the social revolution must begin seriously from the ground, i.e. from landed property.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, the revolution of the Irish landlordism is the basis of the social revolution against the English landlordism. Indeed, Marx highly valued the Irish independence movement as “life-and-death struggle” against the plunder of land. This is the reason why, as underlined in the French version of *Capital*, Irish peasants and smallholders had “Original Ownership” before 1846, and the liberation movement against “Capitalist Colonialism” after 1846 was trying to prevent the dissolution of “Original Ownership.” Thus, Marx defined the re-establishment of the Irish people’s “Original Ownership,” i.e., the establishment of substantial land ownership of smallholders, as “socialist,” albeit “in the negative sense.”

### IS FENIANISM CHARACTERIZED BY SOCIALIST LEANINGS?: LATE ENGELS’S ANALYSIS OF IRELAND

Marx’s study of Ireland was made possible by the close exchange of letters with Engels from 1867 to 1870 (about 40 letters referencing to Ireland). While Marx tended to use relatively contemporary materials such as newspaper articles, journals, and parliamentary reports, Engels was

<sup>57</sup> Marx, “General Council,” 87.

<sup>58</sup> K. Marx to L. Kugelmann on 6 April 1868, in MECW vol. 43, 4.

more familiar with the pre-capitalist Irish history.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, in the process of preparing an unfinished book, *The History of Ireland*<sup>60</sup> in the 1870s, he listed more than 200 books. Although this unfinished book included only two chapters, in the chapter on *Natural Conditions* Engels examined various works on geography, climatology, and agriculture and Irish analyses of A. Young, E. Wakefield, and L. Lavergne in order to criticize the pro-colonial arguments represented by G. Smith's *Irish History and Irish Character*.<sup>61</sup> In the chapter on *Old Ireland*, Engels also considers the period from mythological prehistory to the English invasion of the early eleventh century, but describes a comprehensive Irish history by dealing with Celtic original, chronicles and poems.

Marx's historical investigation, as we have already seen, dates back to at least the twelfth century in Ireland, while his study in the end of the 1860s—in contrast to Engels—also dealt mainly with the eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup> We now need to focus on the difference between the two theoretical approaches. As Terrell Carver points out, Marx's historical investigation was, first of all, aimed at revealing the specificity of Ireland as the capitalist society since 1846. On the other hand, it was important for Engels to explain “historical progress as such” up to modern Ireland, as seen in the *materialist conception of history* first formulated in his anonymous review of Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political*

<sup>59</sup> See Eamonn Slater and Terrence McDonough, “Marx on nineteenth-century colonial Ireland: analysing colonialism as a dynamic social process,” in *Irish Historical Studies* 36, no. 142 (2008), 158.

<sup>60</sup> See Friedrich Engels, *The History of Ireland* and “Notes on Goldwin Smith's Book *Irish History and Irish Character*,” in MECW vol. 42, 145–87 and 283–96.

<sup>61</sup> As Slater highlights, “Engels placed this ecological chapter at the beginning of his book ... to explicate the natural (ecological) conditions of the Irish social formation before beginning his analysis of how Irish society and its various social processes metabolise with its organic processes of Nature over time.” See Eamonn Slater, “Engels on Ireland's Dialectics of Nature,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 29 (4) (2018), 33. However, according to Saito, Engels's theory of metabolism was intended to demonstrate that the law of dialectic was valid also in nature, while Marx's theory of ecology clarified how the reified relations caused metabolic rifts in capitalism. See Kohei Saito, “Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship Revisited from an Ecological Perspective,” in *Marx's Capital after 150 Years*, ed. M. Musto (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>62</sup> See Karl Marx, “Ireland from the American Revolution to the Union of 1801. Extracts and Notes,” in MECW vol. 21, 212.

*Economy* (1859).<sup>63</sup> As often criticized, Engels's emphasis on correspondence between logical and historical development<sup>64</sup> obscures that Marx's critique of political economy is characterized by a theoretical analysis of the capitalist system. This methodological difference is most evident in how they perceive the peasant question in capitalized Ireland since 1846 in relation to the socialist revolution.

As we saw in the previous chapter, for Marx, Irish struggles for land ownership sought to re-establish a substantive tenant right to guarantee "Original Ownership." Thus, Irish studies of the 1860s have opened a new way for Marx to grasp the national independence struggle against the landlordism, a foundation of English capitalism, as a "lever" of the "social revolution." Later, in the 1870s, Marx's political interest shifted from Ireland to the Paris Commune and he would rarely mention the Irish national movement. Engels, on the other hand, continued to refer to Ireland in letters and writings since the 1870s.<sup>65</sup> But for Engels, the peasants are not considered as possible resistance to Capitalist Colonialism, as for Marx, but rather in terms of hegemony for the socialist political party (especially in Germany) to gain political power.

For example, in his *letter to Bernstein on 26 June 1882*, Engels distinguished the Irish liberation movement into two tendencies: the *agrarian* and the *constitutional*, and positioned Fenianism, which emerged during the American Civil War, as a new third tendency. In addition, Engels—in contrast to the early 1870s—negatively evaluates Fenianism, including the fact that it has fallen into a "kind of Bakuninism" as follows: "[i]n the absence of a foreign war or the threat thereof, an Irish uprising has not the remotest prospect of success.... accordingly the only recourse remaining to the Irish is the constitutional method of gradual conquest, whereby one

<sup>63</sup> See Terrell Carver, *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship* (Sussex: Wheat-sheaf Books, 1983), 139–40.

<sup>64</sup> See Friedrich Engels, "Karl Marx *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," in MECW vol. 16: 475–6.

<sup>65</sup> In 1872, Engels opposed the motion to bring the Irish sections under the jurisdiction of the British Federal Council, stating: "If the motion was adopted by the Council, the Council would inform the Irish working men, in so many words, that, after the dominion of the English aristocracy over Ireland, after the dominion of the English middle class over Ireland, they must now look forth to the advent of the dominion of the English working class over Ireland." See Friedrich Engels, "Relations Between the Irish Sections and the British Federal Council," in MECW vol. 23: 156.



position is taken after another.”<sup>66</sup> And in *Interview to the New Yorker Volkszeitung* (1888), contrary to Marx, who in the late 1860s regarded Fenianism as “socialist,” Engels stated:

*A pure socialist movement cannot be expected from Ireland for quite a long time yet.* First, people want to become small landowning farmers, and when they are, along comes the mortgage and ruins them all over again. Meanwhile, that is no reason why we shouldn’t help them to free themselves from their landlords—that is, to make the transition from a semi-feudal to a capitalist condition.<sup>67</sup>

It is important to note that, even if we take no account of the changes in the Irish situation, Marx’s and Engels’s theoretical approaches to Irish tenant rights are different. Moreover, Engels had no view of “Capitalist Colonialism” that the Irish landlordism was integral to capitalist production in England. As mentioned in *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* (1894), for Engels, “our small peasant, like every past mode of production, is hopelessly doomed. He is a future proletarian.”<sup>68</sup> Of course, Engels stresses that “[i]t will serve us nought to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small handicraftsman and the last small peasant [*Kleinbauer*] have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production.”<sup>69</sup> However, for small peasants, “[p]ossession of the means of production by the individual producers nowadays no longer grants these producers any real freedom.”<sup>70</sup> According to Engels, this is because “[socialism’s] task is rather only to transfer the means of production to the producers as their *common possession*,” not individual possession.<sup>71</sup>

In fact, the small peasants that Engels defined as “a survival of past mode of production”<sup>72</sup> are completely different from “peasants” who

<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein on 26 June 1882, in MECW vol. 46, 287–8.

<sup>67</sup> Friedrich Engels, “Interview to the New Yorker Volkszeitung,” in MECW vol. 26, 626.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, in MECW vol. 27, 486.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

have “Original Ownership.” In the French version of *Capital*, Vol. 1 Pt. 8: *So-Called Primitive Accumulation*, Marx defined the small peasants in capitalism, which are distinct from the originally-owning peasant [*paysan*], as “a new class of small villagers [*petits laboureurs*] who cultivate the soil as a subsidiary occupation, but find their chief occupation in industrial labour, the products of which they sell to the manufacturers directly, or through the medium of merchants.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, “in the manufacturing period,” where “the destruction of rural domestic industry can [not yet] give the home market of a country that extension and stability which the capitalist mode of production requires,” “manufacture conquers the domain of national production only very partially, and always rests on the handicrafts of the towns and the domestic subsidiary industries of the rural districts.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, the domestic subsidiary industries stood in the background as manufacture’s basis, with being destroyed somewhere and resurrected elsewhere, resulting in new “small villagers.” As Engels mentioned in Preface to the Second Edition of *The Housing Question* (1887), unlike “[i]n England, where there are no small peasants,” “[o]nly in Ireland can we observe the rural domestic industry of garment making being carried on, as in Germany, by real peasant families.”<sup>75</sup> Certainly, for Marx, there were no peasants in England, but he thought that in Ireland the peasants resisted Capitalist Colonialism in order to gain “Original Ownership.” However, for Engels, there are no peasants in Ireland as well as in England, but it is the small peasants as *small villagers* that are reproduced under the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, Fenianism of the 1880s only required land ownership for *small villagers*, *not originally-owning peasants*, and Engels thought that it was far from the “socialist” peasant movement that Marx appreciated in the late 1860s.

Although we cannot consider in full scale the socialist character of the peasant movement, which is at issue in their Irish analysis, the problem depends on how we understand theoretically the small-scale industry (e.g., handicraft and peasant) as “a necessary condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the worker

<sup>73</sup>K. Marx, *Le Capital*, MEGA. II/7, 665; *Capital*, vol. 1, 911.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Housing Question*, in MECW vol. 26, 429.

himself,” as formulated by Marx.<sup>76</sup> In other words, what matters is how to evaluate the status of peasants as free and independent producers in the transition to socialism. In fact, in *The Peasant Question in France and Germany*, Engels also referred to Danish socialist agricultural policy and mentioned the peasant in a post-capitalist society: “[o]ur task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private undertaking, private property to a co-operative one, ... by the proffer of social assistance for this purpose.”<sup>77</sup> In our opinion, there also seem to be subtle differences between Marx’s and Engels’s views on the peasant problem and socialism.

This paper examined Irish studies, the de facto collaboration between Marx and Engels, along with the *Manuscripts for German Ideology* (1845–1847) and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). Although Engels provided much of the material for Marx’s Irish analysis, there were clear differences in their theoretical approaches. Nevertheless, the Irish excerpts to appear in full in MEGA, IV/20 (including Engels’ experts) and MEGA, IV/21 (including Marx’s some) have not been published yet, and a further study of clarifying the full picture of their studies should be conducted.

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<sup>76</sup> Marx, *Capital* vol. 1, 927.

<sup>77</sup> Engels, *The Peasant Question*, 496.

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## Engels's Legacy to Anthropology

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Friedrich Engels was born on November 28, 1820, in Barman, a mill town on the Wupper River in North Rhine-Westphalia. His wealthy family owned a diversified cotton textile business in Barman with branches in Bremen and Manchester. His father sent him to apprentice in the family export business in Bremen for a year in the summer of 1839 and to clerk two years later in the Manchester factory in 1842. In the interim, he completed his military service in Berlin. Engels read widely in these years—philosophy, literature, and critical theology; published poetry, literary and political criticism, and travel accounts; and audited lectures by Left Hegelians at the University of Berlin during his military service. In Manchester, he met Mary Burns, an Irish factory worker, her family, and friends. She became his lifelong partner and companion. She introduced him to the everyday life of workers in Manchester and neighboring cities, escorting him into dangerous neighborhoods and affording him opportunities to meet their residents and to participate in

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and observe their activities. As a result, she played an important role in the formation of his legacy to anthropology.

Engels framed *The Condition of the Working Class in England. From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources* in terms of the Industrial Revolution that was transforming the landscape of British society. The men, women, and children constituting the new proletariat class came from the countryside, colonies, and even other countries. They were drawn by opportunities to support themselves and their families that were found in the factory towns and cities where old mills were located and newer ones with up-to-date machines were being built. However, not all proletarians were urban-dwellers. Agricultural workers and miners still residing in the countryside provided essential raw materials and commodities for the cities and thus were integral parts of the new proletarianized landscape emerging before his eyes.

The workers toiled long hours in dark, polluted factories around dangerous machines, chemicals, and raw materials. Their living conditions were filthy, disease-ridden, often lacked beds, and had piles of garbage in streets and alleys outside their houses. They were usually hungry, often ill and suffering or disabled because of workplace accidents, and generally in poor health. Alcohol consumption was high. While it dulled the pain and misery of their lives, it also destroyed interpersonal relations and often led to the dissolution of families.

Factory owners viewed workers as interchangeable objects and pitted against native workers against immigrants in order to drive down wages to levels that provided them barely enough to subsist. To avoid starving, workers often shared and helped each other.<sup>1</sup> The owners sought to ensure that there were always more people looking for work than jobs available in the city. As workers competed with one another for jobs, the owners lowered wages. The owners also ensured that workers' wages fluctuated depending on the labor supply and demand for workers. The owners also ensured that there was a growing gap between the living standards of workers, shopkeepers, and owners.

The workforce was also racialized with the Irish at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. The Irish were portrayed as poor, speaking a different language, working at unskilled jobs, wearing tattered clothing, not bathing, and living in squalor. However, Engels pointed out that

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England. From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*, in MECW, Vol. 4, 388.

by learning a skilled trade, the Irish worker might pass and be viewed as English. Conversely, an unskilled English worker—out of work, marginally employed, or when jobs were scarce—was forced to adopt many traits associated with the Irish. The working class was racialized but the racial categories were not stable.<sup>2</sup>

Racialization of working-class people in the United States was investigated by W. E. B. DuBois *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*<sup>3</sup> and St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*.<sup>4</sup> They also drew upon statistical data and information produced through participant observation. While race relations was the focus of their books, social class framed in economic terms and viewed more broadly in terms of the social and cultural structures and institutions they support as their organizational principle. While industrialization, urbanization, and secularization were formative processes in the development of the cities, their residents created the cultural landscapes they inhabited—the buildings, churches, social clubs, and practices, to name a few. What both works showed are the kinds of worlds that Blacks constructed in cities where they were assigned subordinate positions.

Karen Brodtkin's study, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*,<sup>5</sup> explored the history of racial classifications and the fluidity of Jewish and White identities in the twentieth-century America. She pointed out that Jews were assigned to a "not-quite-white" category until after World War 2, and that "whitening" occurred in the late 1940s and 1950s with the assistance of the GI Bill and low-interest loans from the Federal Housing Authority. She argued that race and gender were equal parts of the US class structure. New immigrants were crowded into the bottom rungs of the economy as unskilled labor. She focused her attention on social reproduction—i.e., how class structures are reproduced. Brodtkin emphasized that the American working class has been organized hierarchically by gender, race, and ethnicity since its inception with wage differentials between men and women, Whites

<sup>2</sup> Engels, *The Condition*, 392.

<sup>3</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).



and non-Whites, and between native English speakers and non-English-speaking immigrants. She also pointed out that the whiteness created by Jews after World War II was contested and not necessarily the same as that practiced by non-Jews.

Class continues to be a contentious concept. In “Class,”<sup>6</sup> Don Kalb critiques the notion of the “global middle class” composed of autonomous individuals unencumbered by social relations to save those that occur as they purchase commodities in the market. He points out that this notion of class is pushed by governments, policymakers, the press, and academics. It is flimsy and full of contradictions. It purports to explain everything and actually explains very little. It obscures rather than clarifies what is happening in the world today.

Engels’s only foray into physical anthropology was his brief piece on the transition from non-human primate to human natural being in “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man.” The impetus was Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*<sup>7</sup> and *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*.<sup>8</sup> His argument was deductive, since there was almost no incontrovertible paleontological and archaeological evidence until the discovery fifteen years later in 1891–1892 of fragments of a *Homo erectus* skullcap, thigh bone, and tooth (not the same individual) in Java.

Engels argued that the common ancestors of human beings were social, arboreal apes who lived in bands in the Old World tropics toward the end of the Tertiary Period, which we now know occurred between 5 and 8 million years ago. The transition occurred when they gradually began to occupy terrestrial habitats and developed more or less erect posture and bipedal locomotion for increasingly longer periods of time. This freed their hands from walking and opened possibilities for the acquisition of new functions. There were anatomical changes in the pelvis, knees, ankles, and toes associated with upright walking. Perhaps more notable,

<sup>6</sup>Don Kalb, “Class,” in *A Companion to Urban Anthropology*, ed. Donald Nonini (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014).

<sup>7</sup>Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>8</sup>Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).

however, were changes in their shoulders, elbows, hands, wrists, fingers, and thumbs—that were associated with greater dexterity, flexibility, and the appearance of a precision grip (using the forefinger and thumb to pick up an object). For Engels, this was the decisive step in the transition from ape to human being. It enabled them to grasp and manipulate objects, to transform flint cobbles into stone tools, and to replicate them intentionally. We now know that toolmaking may have begun as early as 3.3 million years ago in East Africa.

Labor is the distinctive feature of human beings for Engels, the core condition of human existence. It created human beings themselves.<sup>9</sup> It begins with toolmaking and entails transforming a natural object like a flint cobble into useful object like a stone tool.<sup>10</sup> It involves more than just hitting one rock against another. The toolmaker selects an appropriate raw material, visualizes the desired object in it, plots what must be removed from the cobble, and how best to accomplish that task. In the process, her hand becomes a tool itself, an extension of her body. Labor is purposeful, intentional activity; it is practical in the sense that it is the way human beings satisfy their needs; and it is the way in which they interact with the natural world they are creating. It is how they extend their skills and knowledge to new tasks. It is also the way in which they expanded and deepened their social worlds, explored interpersonal relations within their group, and extended them beyond individuals they encounter face to face on a daily or regular basis.

The next step in the evolution of human beings involved the gradual enlargement of the brain over several million years until about 50,000 years ago.<sup>11</sup> This was fueled by the increased consumption of meat, which they hunted or scavenged with stone tools (we know today that the adult human brain consumes 20–30% of the body's total daily energy intake; children's brains consume nearly twice that amount). Speech emerged together with labor, the development of the hand, and the enlargement of the brain. It was associated with the anatomical changes in the mouth, throat, and larynx, the growth of communication and language, and the expansion of social relations and intellectual

<sup>9</sup>Friedrich Engels, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man," in MECW, Vol. 25, 452.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 457.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 458.

capabilities. Early speech probably conveyed information about how to do something, changes in the environment, information about other people, or how one is feeling.

The meat diet led to the use of fire and later to the domestication of animals. The first shortened the digestive process and provided warmth. The second provided a new food resource, new products like milk or cheese, and new raw materials—like sinew or hide that could be transformed into leather and other goods that created new needs or satisfied existing ones.

In “Engels on the Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man: An Anticipation of Contemporary Archaeological Theory,”<sup>12</sup> archaeologist Bruce Trigger noted that, as late as the 1960s, Engels’s argument about human evolution differed from those of virtually all paleoanthropologists in the mid-twentieth century. Their theories were based on deductive arguments. They believed human beings were qualitatively different from other animals; they virtually ignored variation; and they believed there was only one human species, *H. sapiens* that lived alongside a few “non-quite-human” species during the Pleistocene Epoch. In other words, in their minds, our human ancestor was big-brained, walked erect, and lived in England. The Piltdown cranium found in 1912 fit the bill and provided the proof. Unfortunately, however, it was found to be a gigantic hoax in 1953. The core image of their theories crumbled. A few scholars turned their attention turned to the *Australopithecine* fossils found in South and East Africa that were thought at the time to be contemporary with *H. sapiens*. They were the antithesis of the image conveyed by Piltdown: varied in appearance, bipedal, small-brained, and possibly stone tool-makers. In the 1960s, they were also found to be older than *H. sapiens*. What differentiated Engels’s views from those of many paleoanthropologists today were his dialectical materialist foundations and views about labor. It differs from the various technological, ecological, and demographic determinisms that are still prevalent today.

In “Tools and Human Evolution,” Sherwood L. Washburn put forth an argument similar to but not identical to that of Engels: Pre-human apes (*Australopithecines*) made and used tools before *Homo sapiens* appeared in the fossil record. Toolmaking and use changed the pressures of natural selection. “Selection produced new systems of child care, maturation and

<sup>12</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, “Engels on the Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 4 (1967).

sex, just as did alterations in the skull and teeth. Tools, hunting, fire, complex social life, the human way and the brain evolved together to produce ancient man [sic] of the genus *Homo*....”<sup>13</sup> From the mid-1950s onward, Washburn and his colleagues elaborated a complex picture of the development of human society. It was underpinned by the idea that the fundamental pattern of human life was the hunting adaptation, which necessitated new activities and kinds of cooperation—e.g., a new sexual division of labor, male dominance based on personal achievement, and habitual food sharing between a male, female, and their offspring (the basis of the family). Social order in the group is hierarchical and maintained by hormonal and neural activity.

Washburn’s bio-determinist argument was influential; however, not everyone agreed with his “man, the hunter” thesis. Leila Leibowitz “In the Beginning...: The First Origins of the Sexual Division of Labor and the Development of the First Human Societies”<sup>14</sup> provided a thought-provoking alternative. She argued that the age or stage of maturation may have been more important than sex or dominance in structuring social relations in early human populations. Larger body size, which is correlated with solitary or transient group membership in modern great apes, gave males a greater chance for survival outside a social group; it also meant that males and females engaged in the same foraging activities but in different places. Her model of early human societies is that social groups were small and composed mainly of individuals who had not yet reached reproductive age. Within these groups, prepubescent males and females of roughly the same age were of similar size; they foraged for themselves from a young age and shared food with other individuals, when there was more than one of them could consume. They learned to make simple tools from their peers. They shared information about the world through empathy and language. Their understanding of their world was gained through practical activities and experiences, the successes and failures of everyday life. Males left the group when they reached puberty and lived alone or in transient, all-male groups of teenagers and young adults.

<sup>13</sup>Sherwood L. Washburn, “Tools and Human Evolution,” *Scientific American* 203, no. 3 (1960): 63.

<sup>14</sup>Lila Leibowitz, “In the Beginning...: The First Origins of the Sexual Division of Labor and the Development of the First Human Societies,” in *Women’s Work, Men’s Property: The Origins of Gender and Class*, eds. Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (London, UK: Verso, 1986).

Implicitly, older females and peers were conduits of intergenerational knowledge.

Engels's best-known contribution to anthropology is *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State: In Light of the Investigations of Lewis H. Morgan*. It is a synopsis and critical examination of Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society, Or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization*<sup>15</sup> combined with Karl Marx's notes on Morgan in *The Ethnological Notebooks*<sup>16</sup> and his own studies of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Celts.

Morgan is still widely regarded as a foundational figure in anthropology, especially with regard to studies of kinship and social evolution. He organized *Ancient Society* in terms of a progression of stages from savagery through barbarism to civilization. He believed that progress, the movement from one stage to the next, resulted from discoveries and technological innovations that transformed the mode of subsistence and the kinds of social institutions that were inextricably linked with them—ideas about government, the family, and property. Societies at the same stage of development progressed along similar lines until agriculture and herding appeared. Then, local differences began to emerge. Early forms of social organization were based on personal or kin relations. The first steps toward political organization occurred when clans began to reduce the number of possible marriage partners. The shift toward territorially based political organization occurred with the increased centrality and dominance of men, their growing importance in monogamous patrilineal families, and the diminished status of women. Finally, private property and its inheritance emerged when civilization—i.e., social class structures and the institutions of the state—began to crystallize and then crumble as contradictions developed under the alienating conditions they promoted.

Engels viewed Morgan as an authority on the ethnology of primitive peoples and primitive communism or “communism in living”—a term the latter coined in *Houses and House Life of the American Indians*.<sup>17</sup> Other

<sup>15</sup> Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society, Or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery Through Barbarism to Civilization* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Lewis H. Morgan, *Houses and House Life of the American Indians* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2003), 63–78.

features attracted Engels's interest as well: Morgan's emphasis on the relation between technological innovations and new economic relations; his discussion of communal or collective relations in primitive societies; his analysis of class and state formation; his concern with women's subjugation and the roles of women in bourgeois and proletarian marriages; his focus on class and state formation and the rise of private property; and his recognition of dialectical return as an integral feature of class and state formation. Engels reworked many of these. For example, he paid less attention to the stagism of Morgan's work and more attention to instances where people resisted efforts to subordinate and exploit them. In her "Introduction,"<sup>18</sup> Eleanor Leacock was one of the first anthropologists to undertake a detailed examination of Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

Later, Leacock "Relations of Production in Band Society"<sup>19</sup> and Richard B. Lee "Reflections on Primitive Communism"<sup>20</sup> discuss, explicitly and implicitly, Engels's impact on hunter-gatherer studies in anthropology since the twentieth century. Leacock emphasizes a number of features held by primitive communal societies: Social relations are ordered by kinship; the collective possession, ownership, and use of resources; the importance of sharing among all members of the band; the participation of all adults in production, exchange, distribution, and consumption; the active participation of all adults in public decision-making and adjudication; and egalitarian sex-gender relations. Lee stresses the importance of hospitality, generosity, and sharing as well as the invocation of various leveling mechanisms, like shaming, to ensure sharing, to prevent hoarding, and "insulting the catch" to nip in the bud any nascent attempt to establish patriarchy. Lee also unpacks the foundations of the critiques of the concept of primitive communism by anthropologists and the wider public.

<sup>18</sup> Eleanor Burke Leacock, "Introduction," *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, by Friedrich Engels, ed. E. B. Leacock (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

<sup>19</sup> Eleanor Burke Leacock, "Relations of Production in Band Society," in *Politics and History in Band Societies*, eds. Eleanor Burke Leacock and Richard B. Lee (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> Richard B. Lee, "Reflections on Primitive Communism," in *Hunters and Gatherers. Vol. 1: History, Evolution and Social Change*, eds. Tim Ingold et al. (Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers, 1988).

Leacock also explored the conditions underlying the beginnings of gender inequality and gender hierarchy in "Interpreting the Origins of Gender Inequality: Conceptual and Historical Problems."<sup>21</sup> She made four points: (1) the necessity of getting rid of the myth of the ethnographic present; (2) not employing categories derived from capitalist cultures to interpret other primitive communist societies; (3) rooting out the pervasive assumption that women are not actors to the same degree as men; and (4) recognizing that tribes and tribal leadership are constructions of convenience by colonial societies.<sup>22</sup> She also pointed out that it is essential to understand the historical contexts in which the loss of control over the production process and the appearance of relations of dependency within individual families took place. And, moreover, that these varied from one society to another—for example, the status of women among the egalitarian Iroquois society is quite different from that among Middle Eastern societies in which control over female sexuality was important for the inheritance of status and property in upper-class families.<sup>23</sup>

In *Kinship to Kingship: Gender Hierarchy and State Formation in the Tongan Islands*,<sup>24</sup> Christine Gailey linked the decline of women's authority and status to the rise of exploitation and the processes of class and state formation. In her view, "class formation is a process in which groups that cut across age and gender distinctions come to have differential control over what is produced in a society and how it is distributed. At least one group—the largest numerically—loses control over at least part of its own production or labor. In the process, one or more groups become divorced from direct engagement in the making of goods needed to reproduce the existing society. This unproductive group is dependent on the labor or goods supplied by other groups; class relations emerge if those who supply the goods and services lose the ability to determine what is produced and what is supplied. State formation is a closely related process, namely, the emergence of institutions that mediate between the dependent but dominant class(es) and the producing class(es), while

<sup>21</sup> Eleanor Burke Leacock, "Interpreting the Origins of Gender Inequality: Conceptual and Historical Problems," *Dialectical Anthropology* 7, no. 4 (1983).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>24</sup> Christine W. Gailey, *Kinship to Kingship: Gender Hierarchy and State Formation in the Tongan Islands* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987).

orchestrating the extraction of goods and labor necessary to support the continuation of class relations.”<sup>25</sup>

Rayna Rapp “Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes toward an Understanding of Ideology”<sup>26</sup> explores the differences between proletarian, middle-class, and bourgeois families in a capitalist society. In working-class or proletarian families, men maintain the financial autonomy of the family or at least the illusion of its autonomy. Wages are turned into consumption and the reproduction of labor-power. Women ensure its emotional well-being and ensure its demographic and social reproduction by pooling or sharing goods and services with other families in neighborhoods which are the locus extended kin networks and fictive kin. When death occurs, property is inherited horizontally with neighbors and kin. Middle-class (petit bourgeois) families rely completely on commodities for consumption and social reproduction than extended kin networks. Psychic and emotional energies vested in friendship rather than kinship. The wife often works. An ideology of egalitarianism prevails in the marriage. The husband’s career is partly reflected in the presentations of and by the wife, education, social value of children, and knowledge of the husband’s world. The inheritance of property shifts from lateral to lineal—i.e., from siblings to offspring. Bourgeois families are oriented toward ancestors; they accumulate and transmit wealth. They are concerned with identity and maintaining appearances. They accumulate and transmit wealth to their descendants. The family as a social unit is highly valued. Bourgeois families maintain multiple households that recompose seasonally. They have access to one another through churches, elite schools, clubs, summer camps, and social events that launch children and identify appropriate marriage partners. The wives act as gatekeepers, and their work with charities and philanthropies serves to soften the hard edges of capitalism.

Engels ends *The Origin* with a quotation of Morgan’s closing statement to *Ancient Society*: “Since the advent of civilization, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become on the part of the people, *an unmanageable power*....

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>26</sup> Rayna Rapp, “Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes Toward an Understanding of Ideology,” *Science and Society* 42, no. 3 (1978).



such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence, and knowledge are steadily tending. *It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.*<sup>27</sup> Gailey's "Culture in Civilization"<sup>28</sup> calls such a shift dialectical return. Examples arise in resistance to the alienating conditions of civilization—e.g., opposition to Trump's separation of refugee children from their parents and caging them in concentration camps along the Mexican border; the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States in the wake of police shootings of unarmed African-Americans; the almost spontaneous Women's Marches in cities around the world following Trump's inauguration; or the cultural revivals (ethnogenesis) taking place today among many First Nations peoples in North America.

In "On the History of the Prussian Peasants. Introduction to Wilhelm Wolff's Pamphlet *The Silesian Milliard*," Engels pointed out that the agrarian transition unfolded differently in various parts of Europe. As feudalism waned, a class of large landlords seized both peasant and Catholic Church lands in East Prussia. The peasants were turned into serfs and subjected to unlimited labor services and dues. The landlord class was turned into a feudal nobility that was increasingly in need of money, but there was little money to be had from the peasants who had been transformed into serfs.

In "The Peasant Question in France and Germany," Engels noted that capitalist production relations were spreading from the cities to the countryside and that rural economies were developing along different trajectories in France and Germany from Great Britain and the rest of Europe. The self-supporting English peasantry was expropriated and forced off the land beginning several centuries earlier by large estates engaged in large-scale, capitalist food production. The small landholders of Prussia east of the Elbe River were being displaced and forced into capitalist production relations. In France and Belgium, small peasants were a

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>28</sup> Christine W. Gailey, "Introduction: The Politics of Culture and Civilization," in *The Politics of Culture and Creativity: A Critique of Civilization. Essays in Honor of Stanley Diamond*, ed. Christine W. Gailey (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1992), 18–19.

significant political force by virtue of their apathy and isolation; as a result, they were the foundation for parliamentary corruption in Paris and Rome and Russian despotism.<sup>29</sup> Engels's questions after sketching the historical trajectories of peasantries and rural class structures in different parts of Europe were: Which parts of the rural class structure can be won over by the socialist parties springing up in the West and with whom should the socialists ally themselves?

Engels distinguished the economic and social circumstances of small peasants from those of the middle and large peasants.<sup>30</sup> Small peasants owned or rented small plots of land that the family could till to feed their households; they possess their farming implements and engage small-scale petty commodity production to supplement their incomes. He saw differences between the small peasants of the late nineteenth century and those of earlier times: (1) They were free from rent and feudal service and dues owed the landlord; (2) they lost access to the resources and protection of the commons which had been expropriated by lords and bureaucrats; and (3) the peasant communities lost a great deal of their productivity, and its members were driven deeper into poverty and capitalist markets. "Where middle and big peasants predominate and the operation of the farms requires, generally, the help of male and female servants and day labourers it is quite a different matter.... [T]hey cannot manage without wage workers".<sup>31</sup> In these areas, there were rural proletarians.

Engels concluded that it was important for the socialist parties to focus their attention on regions with masses of rural proletarians—like East Elbe—rather than France, southern and western Germany, where the middle and small peasantries predominated. His analysis was one of a number of early studies of the impact of capitalism on agriculture: for example, Max Weber's "Developmental Tendencies in the Situation of East Elbian Rural Labourers"<sup>32</sup>; Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*<sup>33</sup>; V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the*

<sup>29</sup>Friedrich Engels, "The Peasant Question in France and Germany," in MECW, Vol. 27, 483–484.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 485–486.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 499.

<sup>32</sup>Max Weber, "Developmental Tendencies in the Situation of East Elbian Rural Labourers," in *Reading Weber* (London, UK: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>33</sup>Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question*, 2 vols. (London, UK: Zwan Publications, 1988).

*Formation of a Home-Market for Large-Scale Industry*<sup>34</sup>; Mao Zedong, *Report on an Analysis of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*<sup>35</sup>; or Antonio Gramsci, "The Southern Question",<sup>36</sup> to name a few. Many of these became widely cited and discussed by anthropologists in the context of the Cold War and struggles for political independence around the world after 1945.

Weber, who wrote at the same time as Engels, was also concerned with the changes taking place in the rural-labor relations of East Prussia. He saw variations of the agrarian systems of the region's developmental tendencies. They marked the shift from a social order based on the superficially shared interests of estate owner and permanent estate worker to one firmly rooted in modern rational capitalism and the maximization of profits in which the interests of owner and worker were antagonistic. Briefly, he argued that in the old system, the estates produced a combination of food grains and root crops; the aristocratic owners would sell grain harvested by permanent estate workers in the market; the workers received a small portion of profits from the sale of grain as well as housing, use of marginal land for their own gardens, access to estate pastures, and other considerations in exchange for their labor. Since their labor was largely seasonal, the estate workers often went after the harvests to western and southern Germany where they visited friends or relatives, engaged in some wage work, and enjoyed what leisure time they had. In the new system as the demand for the more profitable grain crops grew, the estate owners increasingly planted grains on rented land or on the more marginal lands formerly used by estate workers, decreased the portion of profits the tenants received, and reduced the size of the payments in kind and use rights to commonlands. As their living standards diminished, there was a massive exodus of rural workers to the industrial cities in search of more sustaining work. Confronted with a rapidly shrinking labor force, the estate owners turned increasingly to Polish migrant farmworkers hired seasonally for the harvest.

<sup>34</sup>V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the Formation of a Home-Market for Large-Scale Industry," in *V. I. Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1962).

<sup>35</sup>Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. 1 (Peking, PRC: Foreign Language Press, 1965).

<sup>36</sup>Antonio Gramsci, "The Southern Question," in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International Publishers 1967).

Rural communities were center stage in the postwar years. Historically, they had played key roles in underwriting industrial development in both capitalist and socialist countries. Policymakers recognized this centrality, especially after the Chinese Communists took power in 1949. They were increasingly seen as potential forces of revolutionary change. This meant that policymakers and social scientists had to pay renewed attention to peasant communities and how they were integrated into national structures. However, US anthropological journals were generally averse to publishing articles with a Marxian orientation in the late 1940s and 1950s. This constrained the range of thought. Hence, authors published articles elsewhere; cited acceptable sources to obscure the identities of the actual sources; or dropped citations altogether.

In the 1940s, anthropologists working in southern Mexico and highland Guatemala conceptualized the cultural, social, and spatial diversity of rural communities in ways that effectively homogenized it. In Yucatán, they saw the diversity of rural communities in terms of three distinct ideal types—primitive, folk, and urban. The folk and urban types were seen as opposite ends of a continuum that could be construed as representing the course of history. The primitive type was off the continuum altogether and, hence, stood outside of history. The motors driving change were ideas emanating from urban centers that were adopted variously by different folk communities. In highland Guatemala, they saw diversity in terms of economically specialized and interdependent rural communities. Sidney Mintz, “The Folk-Urban Continuum and the Rural Proletarian Community,”<sup>37</sup> challenged the utility of the folk-urban continuum model for explaining the diversity of rural communities in Yucatán. He pointed out that it did not take into account the rural proletarians associated with the henequen plantations that constituted the backbone of the Yucatecan economy. It stood outside the folk-urban continuum altogether, even though they constituted more than half of the labor force. It was a form of industrial organization that was an integral feature of modern, industrial society itself and was molded by the same social forces.

Eric Wolf, “Types of Latin American Peasantry: A Preliminary Discussion,”<sup>38</sup> noted that there were diverse types of peasant communities in

<sup>37</sup> Sidney Mintz, “The Folk-Urban Continuum and the Rural Proletarian Community,” *American Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 2 (1953).

<sup>38</sup> Eric R. Wolf, “Types of Latin American Peasantry: A Preliminary Discussion,” *American Anthropologist* 57, no. 3 (1955): pt. 1.

Latin America. There were closed corporate communities whose members were agricultural producers who retained effective control over their lands and were concerned with subsistence rather than agriculture as a business requiring continual reinvestment. They were often characterized as “Indian.” The persistence of Indian cultural forms both shaped and depended on the maintenance and reproduction of the structural identity of those communities. Their members defended the traditional rights and customs that perpetuated those subsistence imperatives and usages that protected them from memories of famine, risk, and the market. A second type consisted of the open communities whose members engaged in the production of coffee, cocoa, and other cash crops for the market. Fifty to 75% of their produce was sold in the market. As a result, their livelihoods were subject to fluctuations in market demand for the crops they grew, and they continually needed capital to invest in their businesses. The landowning middle peasants of the open communities had continuous interactions with the outside through the capitalist market. Their fortunes were tied to the larger market-based structures of which they were a part. Wolf recognized other types of peasant communities as well: those that produced entirely for the market; those that sold their goods in local markets; those whose holdings were residual bits of earlier large-scale organizations and foreign colonists; and those that lived on the margins of capitalist markets and sold portions of their crops to obtain goods they could not produce for themselves.

The social upheavals in Africa, Asia, and Latin America sparked renewed interest in the relationships between peasants and social revolution. These efforts were important, because they paid close attention to the historical specificity and particularities of different cases at the same time that they attempted to provide empirically grounded generalizations about peasant wars.

Hamza Alavi’s “Peasants and Revolution”<sup>39</sup> compared the roles of poor and middle peasants and the pre-conditions necessary for mobilizing poor peasants. He argued that the peasantries in Russia, China, and India were internally differentiated and that rich, middle, and poor peasants did not stand in a single hierarchical order, but rather belonged to three different sectors of the rural economy. In the first sector, land owned by landlords was worked by sharecroppers—i.e. poor peasants. In the second,

<sup>39</sup> Hamza Alavi, “Peasants and Revolution,” in *Socialist Register*, eds. R. Miliband and J. Saville (1965).

middle peasants owned the land they cultivated and did not rely on the labor of others. The third sector was constituted by capitalist farmers—i.e., rich peasants—who owned substantial amounts of land and relied on the waged work of a rural proletariat rather than sharecroppers or tenants.

Alavi argued that poor peasants were initially the least militant of the peasant classes, because they and their families were totally dependent on particular landlords for their livelihood and were often enmeshed in paternalistic patron-client relations with them. He further argued that middle peasants were initially the leading force of revolutionary change in the countryside, and further that, once the success of the revolution was no longer in doubt, their position was taken over by poor peasants, whose revolutionary energies were set in motion by the militancy of the landowning middle peasants.

In *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, Wolf remarked that the “peasant rebellions of the twentieth century are no longer simple responses to local problems. ... They are ... parochial reactions to major social dislocations, set in motion by major societal changes”<sup>40</sup> associated with the spread of Western capitalism, markets, and capitalist economic rationality. The intrusion of capitalism upset traditional social relations and ways of making a living, as well as the balance of force. As peasants lost control over their lands and were transformed into “economic actors, independent of prior social commitments to kin and neighbors,” a crisis in the exercise of power emerged.<sup>41</sup> Peasant revolutions were one possible response to crises provoked by social change and sometimes crystallized in these circumstances.

These revolutions, in Wolf's view, were launched by landholding peasants who had material and organizational advantages that sharecropping poor peasants and rural proletarians lacked. Since they controlled the disposal of their crops and were outside the direct control of landlords, they were neither as poor nor as vulnerable to repression as the poor peasants and rural waged workers. It was the middle peasants and tenants in villages outside the direct control of landlords, as well as the free peasants in frontier areas where landlords and state authorities exercised indirect and/or intermittent control at best, who possessed tactical advantages

<sup>40</sup>Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 295.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 279.

during these transitional phases. Furthermore, the middle peasant who remained on the land while he sent his children to town to work was also more exposed to the influences of the urban proletariat. As a result, he became the transmitter of urban unrest and political ideas. It was his attempt "... to remain traditional which makes him revolutionary".<sup>42</sup> For Wolf, the battlefield of peasant revolutions in the twentieth century was society itself.

By the mid-1960s, anthropologists were reading and citing writers who were indebted to Engels; there were readers on peasants edited by anthropologists that included selections by Mao. In 1973, the *Journal of Peasant Studies* appeared and regularly published articles by anthropologists who were indebted directly and indirectly to Engels.

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## AFTERWORD

### WHAT IS FRIEDRICH ENGELS?

This is quite an unusual question and suggests, for a moment, an alternative way of thinking about Engels. Or rather the answer to this question is usually presupposed, so there is usually no need to ask it. The usual question is, “*Who* was Friedrich Engels?” And even then the answer is almost self-evident. He was Marx’s friend and collaborator, famously second fiddle and junior partner, and so the story unfolds. That set of presupposition—about what is important, and therefore what to ask—frames the Engels that we know, and thus the one we usually introduce to readers. That Engels is the one we ask questions about, and about whom we disagree among ourselves.

However, back to the alternative question, “*What* is Friedrich Engels?” For some years after his death in 1895 Engels was a memory among the living. Possibly even as late as the 1950s there were still a few individuals who knew him. Others would have heard about him, from them, but we are now quite far removed from those experiences. And there is anyway quite some distance between experience and memory. Anyone’s experience of any living individual is going to be partial, mutually selective and variable over time, and even more so in recollection. And indeed everyone will have some different “take” on an encounter or letter, since no individual is a constant against whom others are necessarily right or

wrong, and others are of course in the same position as individuals. In short Friedrich Engels *was* a human being, knowing others and known by them, but now for us what he *is* is a set of texts.

For most readers those texts are printed books on the shelf or pages on the screen, edited and often translated from published and/or manuscript originals. Nowadays Engels's words appear in a uniform format and neatly typeset. There are no facsimile editions that I am aware of, only internet thumbnails of first and sometimes later editions, and a few images—photographs and now digital—of some manuscript materials. In the case of the English-language Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, the texts are extensively annotated and helpfully indexed. While those volumes, and of course the much larger *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* project, represent a tremendous achievement and hugely useful scholarly resource, I am reminded of this line from T.S. Eliot: "... Like a patient etherized upon a table."<sup>1</sup>

Engels for us is an artifactual persona, a mental metonym that allows us to personify the texts identified bibliographically as his, and thus to make him speak to us and to our readership. His presence now is metaphysical for us, because it is physical for us: the texts, for us, *are* him, and his presence—two hundred years after his birth—is quite real. But the reality is phenomenological, so our ordering of him in time becomes his timelessness for us, as we choose to make it. This happens even as we note the dates and places, the years and decades, through which we follow his life and thought, as biographers have constructed it from his archival *Nachlaß* and anecdotal memoirs. But his time now is when we wrestle with what we want him to say, because the textual collections present him in a timeless present. Chronological order and contextual introductions tend to fall away, and most commentators presume an authorial intellect—over some forty-five years—who will anchor the narrative.

That persona comes out in our selection of, and our understanding of, words and sentences that we make him speak, whether in quotation or paraphrase. Oftentimes those words are abstracted to suit the commentators' interests and arguments, since indexing makes it easy to search through lost time and construct a man with a view. From that perspective Engels's lived experience as his life unfolded in time has shrunk to a

<sup>1</sup> "Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock."

singularity where time stands still. He thus mirrors his texts on the shelf, sitting quite still.

Some of us have been able to touch manuscript pages that Engels actually touched, but rather unusually we lack the literality of stepping on his floorboards and seeing his furniture and books. Freud's well furnished house-museum in Hampstead has trumped Engels's two similarly salubrious London addresses. Both were in the Regent's Park Road, where a blue plaque on one is all that is available. *On ne visite pas*, even by appointment.

Engels's "birth house" in Barmen, now Wuppertal, was destroyed in World War II. His grandfather's similarly substantial residence survives opposite the empty plot, and is now the "Engelshaus" museum. The mill-owning family-compound, however, is rather more themed to the industrial history of the area than even to the multi-generational Engels clan. Of that clan Engels was fourth generation down from the founding entrepreneur and not a favourite son in his own time. Nor was he much regarded there later, up to World War II. Given the hometown location in post-war western Germany his deification over in the east as a founder of communism made him easily forgettable. In the post-Cold War Federal Republic, however, Engels now occupies an honoured place in victors' history. But no one wants to rename the conurbation.

In Manchester, where Engels lived, off and on, for many years at many different addresses, every single house where he resided has by now been pulled down. The mature Engels's own household effects have all but disappeared. Even his body has vanished, and there is no gravesite, because, at his own request, his ashes were scattered into the English Channel off Eastbourne. In short, Engels is rather difficult to visit, other than between book-covers or scrolling through a PDF.

Unusually, though, for such an august, grey-bearded presence, as we learn to visualize him, we have reproductions of his schoolboy watercolours and adolescent cartoon caricatures. Presenting him, in silhouette or early photograph, as a young man is a very new idea, though the images have been available for years. Having him impersonated by an actor, on the London stage or in the European cinema, is even newer. Those interested to see that real-life version of Engels can find images of Oliver Chris in "Young Marx" (Richard Band and Clive Coleman, Bridge Theatre, 2017), and of Stefan Konarske in the bio-pic movie discussed below.

Much of the above, of course, would be true of any figure who has become a cultural artifact, whatever the media through which they now

exist for us. Engels, though, is a rather special case, possibly unique in certain ways, or at least highly unusual. Most great heroes, artists and writers exist for us as individuals, often struggling to become themselves, i.e. the selves that we already know are important, so we want to know the how and why in relation to that. These are the selves that will satisfy, in some way or another, presupposed categories of importance. Rather more than most, Engels curated his own afterlife, starting at age thirty-nine, and creating an epiphany, a moment of great revelation. That moment can be found textually when, in 1859, he reviewed a short book by Marx, introducing him to a German public. In that role Engels presented his curated self, which he repetitively cited from that time onwards, and which circulates today almost without rival. His self-styled importance was that he was not quite so important as someone else. At that point he began, presciently but somewhat prematurely, his own afterlife as Boswell to Marx's Johnson.

In setting himself up for posterity, Engels did an excellent job. His narrative has exerted a powerful grip on biography, commentary, reference books, iconography, politics, journalism, textbooks, even playwrights and film-makers. The bio-pic *Le jeune Marx* ("The Young Marx," dir. Raoul Peck, 2017) presents the youthful Engels, arriving in Paris in August 1844, already hero-worshipful of Marx. And Marx is all ready to patronize the eager disciple, saying how much he liked the younger man's new book. While this makes a great dramatic vignette out of what Engels has taught us all to think, it is not what we have in the archival record. Marx's published achievements at the time were barely a fraction of Engels's, which were in two languages in a very wide variety of publications and genres. His international recognition, as *litterateur*, journalist, pamphleteer and foreign correspondent, was well established, quite unlike Marx's. Marx was lucky to have attracted some notoriety in Cologne. He cannot have read Engels's new book, presumably *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, by the time of the meeting in Paris, because the excited young author had not written it up yet. He was on his way from Manchester back home to the Wupper Valley to do just that. Myth-making, hagiography and iconizing are very characteristic human activities, so intellectual historians need always to be on high alert for artistic licence.

The present excellent volume is unusual in foregrounding Engels as a thinker in his own right, rather than as a foil for Marx's genius or as the second stop after Marx in writing the story of Marxism. Engels is

usually cast as a follower, so he either agrees with, or deviates from, the master. Marx the master is either always the same, or he is developmental, possibly dramatically so, with breaks, bumps or blips. Engels is then left in the lurch, waiting for Marx's next move, reactive and discounted. This volume is therefore quite different from most.

Focusing on Engels, though, there are two ways to go, and contributors have had a choice. Some consider him in relation to Marx, showing what he brought with him to the relationship, at the outset and later, as well as where he took the relationship in his own works, during Marx's lifetime and then afterwards. All along, then, the central interest is Engels, and in that way he is driving the narrative. However, this approach does put all of Engels's works in a certain Marx-related light, even the ones written before Marx was a figure in Engels's life and anything like his self-assigned guru. This is because Engels's intellect is always already merged with Marx's, but subordinated. And that is because, so it is assumed, Marx is what makes Engels important.

Alternatively some contributors have taken up the challenge to explore Engels's works, and his intellect, by skirting around the ones where he obviously involved himself with Marx's theorizing, which is how most commentators see Engels today. That approach, taking Engels as an independent intellect, has the further advantage that in following him "just outside the box" we get a bit closer to his politicking, and to Marx's. This changes our own focus, at least somewhat, and thus we see Marx, and a number of familiar works, rather differently. For both men, what later commentators have extracted as theory was, in their own context, any number of specific political interventions. As the quotidian moments and issues have faded into the past, so it has become easier to assemble theory from tract. But here we have signs of something different.

Looking at the historical record in terms of political activism, perhaps it is helpful to see the two more as equals than as principal and junior. And indeed some of Engels's supposed weaknesses begin to look more like strengths. His highly accomplished and readily accessible journalistic talents now look quite good, rather than like efforts distinctly removed from intellectual greatness. Following that thread, then, there is a promising line in connecting Engels's works, from the early "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" and *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, to "The Peasant War in Germany" and "The Housing Question," and then on to "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State." That way of viewing Engels as an activist, and considering how

those works themselves fit together—rather than how they fit, or don't fit, with Marx's great thoughts—then begins to raise interesting questions. We might ask how Engels was working on his own account as thinker and do-er, consistent or inconsistent, effectual or ephemeral—even if he did not see himself centered in quite that way.

If we consider Engels on his own, then, he emerges as a talented pamphleteer and polemicist, taking his opportunities where they arise and getting his views out in a timely way. His one very large book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, is actually an enlarged version of preceding newspaper articles, rather similarly titled, and of his review of Carlyle's short work *Past and Present*. That essay had just been published, and was the latest contribution by Carlyle to the "condition of England question" that he had raised a few years earlier. Politically, then, Engels's book was a topical review of that question aimed at the German public. It was thus a pamphlet-style polemical intervention. It was not, in intention or in execution, a long-awaited magisterial masterpiece.

Engels had form already in this genre, dating back to his post-adolescent Berlin days, bunking off military training at the barracks and writing up the politically charged public disputations at the university. That polemical formula extends even earlier to his very first original publication at age nineteen. That was the scandalous "Letters from Wuppertal," which were on very much the same subject, namely the social and environmental consequences of contemporary industrialization.

However sizeable and thoroughly researched, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*—Engels's wonderful mix of documented factuality and shock-horror observations, eye-witness tour-guiding and analyses of urban spaces—is more "long read" investigative journalism in book-form than it is heavyweight academic treatise. And it generated that kind of sensational reception at the time, something that Marx never actually achieved with any of his works, whether they were dashed off in weeks or slowly gestated for years.

Indeed "The Housing Question" is in topical mode, addressing a current political crisis, as is "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," even though it might not seem obvious to us now. August Bebel's *Women and Socialism* had become a best-seller, and Engels carefully packaged his corrective response as a serious-minded review of recent, English-language anthropological researches, once again to enlighten the German public. And more pertinently to get the short

work published under the anti-socialist laws, and within the strictly patriarchal order, he had to avoid stirring up trouble by keeping both socialism and women out of the title. Bebel had not been so cunningly careful, so his book, though published abroad in Switzerland, was banned from legal importation into Germany.

Even the apparently retro and recondite “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy,” interesting now as a memoir of the 1840s updated to the 1880s, was a political intervention. The deceased philosopher was experiencing a revival in socialist circles in Germany, which was not good news for Marx’s literary executor and titular head of a political tendency. The “Marx party” was one among many, since the socialist movement had been banned and activist politicking forbidden. In his *métier* once again, Engels consolidated the Marxist position by reviving Marx as Feuerbach’s superior, gaining ground that—after socialist political participation was legalized in 1890—proved highly useful. The programmatic Erfurt conference of 1891 soon followed, and the Marxists generally got their way as the mass movement advanced.

Considered as a political pamphleteer, Engels’s involvement in drafting the “Communist Manifesto,” at least parts I and II, is possibly due for some re-examination. This could also be the case with respect to his role in producing the miscellany of polemical manuscripts conjointly composed, with Marx and others, in late 1845 to mid-1846. Those writings were posthumously published as a book *The German Ideology*, and republished under various conflicting editorial hands. Once the moment of intervention had passed, however, Engels—the topical pamphleteer—had no problem leaving the whole pile aside. Indeed in co-signing the 1872 “Preface” to the republished “Communist Manifesto” he agreed, with the same view of his old stuff, that the work was out of date. He rather wondered why someone wasn’t writing a new one.

Intellectually, and from our perspective, Engels shared a characteristic with Marx that is little remarked on, and was not acquired in conjunction with him. Neither felt the need to conform, in his thinking and writing, to the academic disciplines and boundaries that constrain so much writing today: philosophy, sociology, political science, geography, cultural studies, historical studies, anthropology, economics, even the academic/popular distinction. While Marx wins praise, occasionally, for this apparently interdisciplinary approach, he is also always puzzled over. This is because what he writes, how he writes, and for whom he writes, do not seem very



clear to most readers and commentators. But in this case, commentators generally resolve their puzzlement, so that Marx contributes to some disciplinary study that makes sense for their target audience. Unsurprisingly Marx also gets considerable credit for at least trying to be academic when he writes about what his editors construe as economics, even if he does not quite succeed to later standards.

Yet for Engels it is just as true that academic boundaries, even when they were beginning to appear, were not there to tell him what to think and how to think it. Rather they were contra-indications and class-ridden mystifications. In the pages of the present volume he gets some credit for productive transgression and startling catachresis: ecology = urbanity, sociology = geography, anthropology = economics, science = philosophy, history = knowledge, even publication = activism.

With Engels, though, it is really the other way around from Marx. Engels did not go formally to university, and did not get constrained by academic disciplines and habits, even to the extent that Marx was. Marx's famous procrastinations, and life-long inability to get his words into shape for the press on time, even for topical pamphlets, probably had something to do with his trajectory to a philosophy PhD. Engels really did not suffer from that, and in that way, his pamphleteering made for better political interventions than Marx's ever did, notwithstanding Engels's characteristically modest disclaimers and credit-displacements. Even if Engels did not write the final drafts of the "Communist Manifesto," he had worked hard on the format. Over and above that, the sweeping historicism and pamphleteering idiom, so characteristic of the first two sections that everyone reads, are much more his than Marx's. Up to then Marx had done only *ad hominem* critiques and convoluted op-eds. Maybe for the "Communist Manifesto" he got into the swing of things by reading Engels's published works and by listening to the man himself.

Rather unfortunately—though not for the Marx family—Engels's best years for that kind of activity were spent locked down residentially in smoky central Manchester and attached job-wise to an industrial site in suburban Salford. That way he could he could launder capitalist profits to socialist enterprise. After his retirement—striking a severance deal with his wealthy family—he left his day-job, when he was just turning forty-nine, and get down to pamphleteering again, full-time. The prefaces and introductions to republished works by Marx are in themselves pamphleteering political interventions, even if fairly short, and Engels's words

thus effectively framed the reception of those texts for many millions of activists.

What Engels had to say about Marx went all the further because he could catch the wave internationally. “Anti-Dühring” was a German newspaper series from 1876 that went to pamphlet-form, and shortly after that to a specially angled and edited-down version in French. That popular work soon went back into German as an independent pamphlet, and into other languages very swiftly. The translation into English, in 1890, was tenth in the list. “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” caught the socialist tide and floated the Marxist boat.

*Engels Without Marx* would make an intriguing study in alternative history that never happened, that is, how things would have turned out for Engels had he never teamed up with Marx. As an entertaining fiction it would be all the more telling as a way of adjusting our sights and judgements. However, as non-fiction *Engels Before Marx* was published in 2020, since that was actually true for the first twenty-four years of his life.<sup>2</sup> The present volume of critical commentary and appreciation focuses on the texts that we are fortunate to have, through which this fascinating character speaks to us. The register of texts through which this happens has got bigger and bigger in recent years, so “What is Friedrich Engels?” has become a bigger and bigger question—with ever more interesting answers.

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<sup>2</sup>Terrell Carver, *Engels Before Marx* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

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