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A Response

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There are a number of pitfalls awaiting those who attempt to summarize and criticize a large body of writings in their field of study. Perhaps most disconcerting is that the content as well as intent of one's criticisms are often misperceived by those individuals being reviewed—with the unfortunate consequence that key issues are often obscured and forgotten. Further problems stem from the extreme difficulty of adequately capturing subtle differences between scholars' arguments—especially when, as in this case, many of the positions being criticized are only implicit and must be inferred. Both responses to my critique highlight these very real pitfalls.

Both my respondents, for example, have misperceived my criticisms of interpretations of Marx as a determinist to mean that I deny the fact that material/economic structures are given analytical priority in Marx. This point has never been at issue. My lengthy treatment of the important causal role attributed to legal and intellectual superstructures and the elastic, interpenetrating definitions and concepts used by Marx were, on the contrary, intended to highlight how misleading the label "determinism" is in characterizing his conception. To challenge the label "economic determinist" is not, consequently, equivalent to denying the centrality of material structures in Marx's

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[387]

writings. Highlighting the overlapping and interrelated nature of Marx's concepts and definitions, further, is neither tantamount to denying that useful analytical distinctions are possible nor akin to collapsing Marx's method of analysis into a Daoist conception of interaction.

In responding to my critique in this manner, Wakeman seems at one point to have my argument backwards when objecting that Marx did not use "presuppose" to mean "ultimately determining force." I have, in fact, argued that in those passages where Marx states that the mode of production "determines" exchange, consumption, and social and intellectual life, he uses "determine" in the sense of "presuppose," *not* in the sense of "ultimately determining force." *Modes* of production "determine" these other aspects of society because, for Marx, the *mode* of production is a term used to describe the economic and social structure of society as a whole, and includes *within its very definition* specific forms of exchange, consumption, distribution, and interrelated patterns of social interaction. To say that social life is "determined" by the mode of production is merely to highlight that particular patterns of social interaction are structurally interrelated with distinctive material processes of production, consumption, and exchange.¹ The point, then, is not to suggest that "presuppose" suggests more than just anteriority, but that "determine" means something quite different from the "ultimately determining force" communicated by the term "economic determinism."

For this very reason I find Wakeman's term "unequivocally determinist," even when applied solely to the passages under discussion from Marx's *Contribution*, to be highly misleading. It is beyond dispute that Marx, in these passages, and Engels, in others, gave ultimate priority to material structures. For philosophical materialists, material structures form the "foundation" of society because they are concrete and, therefore, measurable "with the precision of the natural sciences." "Materialism" is a term that accurately captures the decision made in philosophies of science where, as in Marx's and Engels' writings,

material structures are consistently assigned priority. But “economic determinism,” I submit, is a different conception altogether. “Economic determinism” implies that a separate, clearly distinguishable entity, such as “economy,” is the overriding causal factor. It conveys a dualistic, rather than structural, conception of reality that fails to convey the dialectical interrelation of Marx’s analytical categories and the complex network of causal relations between them. When the “economic structure,” the “determining” foundation, is defined as the *totality of social relations* people enter into in order to ensure their physical existence (Marx and Engels, 1951, 1: 328), and when legal and political superstructures are not only closely interrelated with economic structures but continually condition them, what sense does it make to label this, simply, “economic determinism”? For these reasons I find the fluid historical presentations in *Capital* to be not in contrast with “unequivocally economic determinist” paragraphs from the *Contribution*, but a remedy to the misconceptions communicated by the term “determinism” and a clear, practical illustration of the method of analysis outlined in these passages.

Many of my criticisms of *Marxism and Asia* (Carrere and Schram, 1969) seem also to have been misinterpreted, with the core issues consequently being obscured. I cannot deny that numerous predictions, assertions, and rhetorical flourishes, some implying an ironclad necessity about historical events and many of which are contradictory, can be culled from Marx’s journalistic and political tracts. When I object that Marx’s writings on India do not constitute a theory of “Europeanization” and do not make the events Marx was describing “predetermined,” the fundamental point is *not* that Carrere and Schram have misrepresented these passages.² The core of the critique, rather, is that these Marxian assertions and predictions appearing in the *New York Tribune* and elsewhere cannot be presented as a *theory* that formed a well-integrated facet of Marx’s theoretical writings at any stage of their development. My criticism, therefore, seeks neither to deny that these predic-

tions exist nor to intimate that the authors of *Marxism and Asia* neglected other relevant passages. This criticism *does* take issue with the interpretive claims made for these specific passages and their treatment in isolation from the corpus of Marx's theoretical writings. The issue of contention is, consequently, the relationship of these passages to the more careful and theoretically consistent historical presentations in *Capital* and the theoretical schemas laid out in Marx's *Contribution*. This issue cannot be settled by searching for further "deterministic" quotations—these quotations themselves must be woven, if at all possible, into a concrete and detailed exposition of Marx's theoretical conceptions. Convinced that this concrete theoretical link cannot be made, we have taken issue with the common assumption that Marx's fragmentary writings on Asia are an unambiguous guide to the actual content of his theories. By introducing a relatively detailed treatment of the relevant theoretical writings, and by highlighting some of Marx's other predictions and self-clarifications on this issue, I have attempted to demonstrate that these fragmentary passages are of limited interpretive utility and, treated in isolation, can be quite misleading.³

Elsewhere, however, the respondents clearly understand and take issue with the content of my critique. Wakeman, for example, remains unconvinced that mass campaigns involve a deliberate transformation of production relations—the core of the economic foundation of society (Wakeman, 1977). I agree with him that the Cultural Revolution has been described by Mao himself as a class struggle within the superstructure—but I contend that this is only a partial view. Mao has stated elsewhere that the very purpose of such struggle within the superstructure is to facilitate further changes in production relations.

In the course of the revolution, only after the backward superstructure was overthrown was it possible to put an end to the old relations of production. The old relations of production were wiped out and new relations of production set up . . . we must continue to carry out the transformation of relations of production and ideological remolding. [Mao, 1960: 259]

This conception of backward elements in the superstructure as a barrier to changes in relations of production, coupled with the wide differences of opinion on the nature of the relations between superstructure, production relations, and productive forces exhibited during the theoretical debates of 1961-1963 (Jingji yanjiu, 1963; Gu, 1962; Sun 1962), underscore the link between this desire to transform the economic structure and the impulse to wage "class struggle" in the superstructure. Those theoreticians who, in the early 1960s, differed with Mao's view that production relations and superstructure require continual transformation during the transition period argued that the development of productive forces requires that these changes in production relations and superstructure must be postponed for a period, and that this postponement can occur without altering the socialist nature of China's economic structure. This theoretical expression of the resistance to Mao's transformation policies—later labeled the "theory of productive forces"—would subsequently be viewed by Mao as an indication that certain elements in the Party saw these transformations as threats to the consolidation of their privileged bureaucratic positions—a resurgence of the "ideology of the exploiting classes." "Class struggle" between proponents of these two lines of thought was seen by Mao as necessary to overcome this resistance to change presented within the political and ideological superstructure. The subsequent changes attempted after Cultural Revolution "power seizures" in ownership relations (restrictions of private plots), distribution relations (wage and incentive policies), and authority relations (management and leadership practices)—Mao's three "aspects" of production relations (Mao, 1960: 270)—are comprehensible only within this framework. Deliberate effort to transform this "totality of relations" comprising the economic structure of society is, then, the core issue of "ideological struggle" during any mass campaign—especially the Cultural Revolution.

None of this implies that there are no analytical weaknesses or theoretical inconsistencies in Mao's positions on these issues,

much less that this is the only possible "Marxist" position. I suggest only that before we can adequately assess Mao's formulations, we must appreciate them, as well as Marx's, in their full complexity. For this reason I welcome the professed openness to new interpretations exhibited by both respondents to my critique and urge them to follow through on this profession by dealing with a whole complex of issues raised by Mao's more recently available writings. Critical assessment of these writings requires careful use of Marx's most difficult concepts: the relation between capital accumulation and the organization of production; the relations between accumulation, production relations, and legal and ideological superstructures; the historical effects of changes of production relations (ownership, distribution, authority) on both capital accumulation and the social distribution of political power; and the relations of modes of exchange, circulation, and consumption with both the progress of material production and the reproduction of social relations and human consciousness. These issues have long been the topic of serious discussion and debate among economists, philosophers, historians, and Party theoreticians in China. When Western scholars begin to deal with such theoretical issues, a more balanced, truly critical perspective on Mao's Marxism in particular and Chinese Marxism in general will become possible.

NOTES

1. Keep in mind the crucial distinction between the "mode" of production and the actual process of production which forms a link in the chain of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. The "mode" refers to the overall social process of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. The actual production process, or the specific act of production, is simply a component part of the overall structure, and is itself endowed with no causal priority.

2. Thus, the concluding sentence of the paragraph introducing my critique of the "Europeanization" thesis (Walder, 1977: 142) based on the articles on India, which can be read as making this point and to which Schram reacts at length, does justice neither to *Marxism and Asia* nor to my own argument.

3. In the interest of fairness I must additionally inform readers of some misleading passages in my original essay (Walder, 1977). My attribution to Schram of a number of positions about Marx's conceptions of stages of history, as Schram rightly points out, are not direct quotes. They are based on implications drawn from his statements about revisions of Marx by Lenin, Trotsky, and others. While the form of these attributions is indeed misleading, I still view the implications I have drawn as both accurate and fair.

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