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Comment

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Comment

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Andrew Walder has most courteously sent me a copy of his contribution to the final round of the symposium on Mao and Marx, thus offering me the opportunity to have the last word in our exchanges. The passage in his rebuttal explicitly devoted to my writings deals exclusively with the interpretation which should be placed on Marx's articles of the 1850s regarding "Asiatic" societies. I shall have something to say on this score, but I want to devote most of the space available for this comment to the problem of whether, and in what sense, Marx's view of history can be characterized as "determinist." This is plainly one of the issues on which, in the end, Walder and I remain farthest apart, and it is also directly relevant to the question of the relation between Marx's thought and that of Mao Ze-dong, which has been the central theme of this symposium.

I do not wish to repay Walder for his kindness by being unduly polemical, but in all honesty I must say that it is very difficult to argue with him, because whenever you pin him down he claims that he never meant what he quite clearly said. Wakeman and I, he says, have "misperceived" his criticisms of interpretations of Marx as a determinist to imply a denial of "the fact that material/economic structures are given analytical priority in Marx." I do not believe that in my previous comment I distorted

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[395]

the main thrust of Walder's very lengthy discussion of these issues; I would suggest that it is he who, in his eagerness to discredit what he regarded as my one-sided interpretation, overstated his own position. That is not really important, however, for the differences between us are evident enough even on the basis of his latest statement.

The complexity of the problem, and the fact that the difficulties in analyzing it do not evaporate simply because one thinks dialectically, are illustrated by the many different and partially contradictory formulations to be found in Walder's rebuttal. He acknowledges the "centrality of material structures in Marx's writings" and agrees that these structures are "consistently assigned priority," but he also argues that Marx uses "determine" in the sense of "presuppose," not in the sense of "ultimately determining force." In other words, the priority of material structures is only "analytical." And such priority does not appear to count for very much in terms of historical causality, for Walder then adds: "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."

The ambiguity here results, in my opinion, not from any mental deficiency on Walder's part, but from the fact that he is trying to do something that is inherently impossible. In the passage from his letter to Bloch, which I quoted in my previous comment, Engels said: "We make our history ourselves, but . . . under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these, the economic ones are ultimately decisive" (Marx and Engels, 1968: 682). The first sentence of this quotation corresponds to what I have called the "voluntarist" strand in Marxism, the second sentence to what I have called the "determinist" strand. Walder is persuaded that somehow these two aspects of Marxism, both of which are explicitly present in many writings by Marx and Engels, can be brought together in a grand synthesis clearly defining their relationship to each other. But if this could be done, surely Marx and Engels would have done it, or at least tried. In fact, they had too much wisdom, and too much common sense, to seek a tidy intellectual solution to a problem that can only be resolved in practice.

Whereas Walder tries to escape this dilemma by rationalizing it out of existence, others go to the opposite extreme of presenting free will and determinism as two starkly conflicting principles, between which Marx and Engels ought to have made a clear choice, but did not have the courage to do so. In his original article, Walder suggested that I was one of these, and saw the issue as "a choice between 'human will' and 'objective reality'" (Walder, 1977: 106, quoting Carrère and Schram, 1969: 108). In fact, the sentence evoked here speaks of transforming Marx's teaching "in the direction of a greater emphasis on the role of the human will as compared to objective reality." In other words, it makes quite plain that I see the relationship between these two aspects of Marx's thought as one of complementarity, rather than rigid polarity.

The dilemma of finding a place for human initiative within the pattern of objective circumstances afflicts not only Marxism, but every systematic attempt to analyze historical causality, and is incapable of a clear-cut theoretical solution. Nevertheless, while all meaningful interpretations of history acknowledge both the reality of human freedom and the limitations placed on that freedom by existing reality, there is a wide range of opinion as to which aspects of reality are most intractable, and/or which factors are ultimately decisive in setting the parameters within which people seek to shape their own lives, individually or collectively. Of these factors, Marx regarded the level of technology, the productive forces at work in a given society, and the entire network of social, legal, ideological and other relations which had grown up on this foundation as essential. And within this complex entity, he saw economic conditions as ultimately the most important element. That is why I am quite unrepentant in referring to Marx's "determinism."

On the other hand, this has never meant, as Walder claimed, that in my view Marx was "simply . . . a 'determinist'" (Walder, 1977: 109, citing Schram, 1969: 135). Indeed, the page cited here does not even contain the word "determinism"; it *does* say, though, that "'voluntarism', in the sense of an accent on conscious action, is by no means absent from Marx himself." Similarly, another sentence of which Walder complains (and of which, as usual, he quotes only the half which serves his purpose)

reads: "Without in any sense regarding as negligible the conscious action of human beings, Marx himself, and even more the 'orthodox' Marxists such as Kautsky, tended to emphasize economic and social determinism" (Carrère and Schram, 1969: 17; cf. Walder, 1977: 108). When Walder deigns to take note of such remarks in my writings about Marx at all, he tends to regard them as mere rhetorical flourishes, aimed at giving an appearance of balance and, therefore, increasing the impact of my discussions of the "voluntarism" of Lenin and Mao, and to dismiss references to shifts in emphasis from "the determinist to the voluntaristic strand in Marxism" as "relativistic jargon" (Walder, 1977).

As I have already indicated in my previous contribution to this symposium, I now feel that I have in the past exaggerated the degree of "voluntarism" and/or "irrationality" in Mao's policies of the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, while some of the passages I wrote in the peculiar circumstances of the Cultural Revolution may have exaggerated the contrast between Mao and Marx, I remain convinced that the contrast is there, and that the much-maligned term "voluntarism" can be useful in defining it. What, then, did Mao himself have in mind when, quoting Engels' statement that freedom was the understanding of necessity, he observed: "This sentence is not complete, it only says one half and leaves the rest unsaid. Does merely understanding it make you free? Freedom is the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity—one has some work to do too" (Schram, 1974: 228). Was he not thereby quite clearly characterizing the difference between his outlook and classical Marxism in terms of greater emphasis on the need for men to strive actively to make their own history?

This much being said, I entirely agree with Walder that what we need is more detailed and concrete analysis of the relation between superstructural change and changes in the relations of production in both Marx and Mao. Here we run up against the problem of the significance of Marx's writings on "Asiatic" societies, to which Walder has given such emphasis in his rebuttal. The passages on this theme are not, in fact, quite so fragmentary as Walder claims. They include, in particular, the long section of the *Grundrisse* on "Pre-Capitalist Economic

Formations" (Marx, 1964), which Walder nowhere mentions. Moreover, while I agree with Walder that these texts cannot be taken as Marx's definitive word on the subject of Asian society and its possible future development, but must be viewed in the context of his thought as a whole, the fact remains that Marx himself, for a time at least, regarded the concept of the "Asiatic mode of production" as very important.

In any case, are Marx's ideas of the 1850s about Asiatic societies as much out of key with his basic theoretical assumptions as Walder suggests? In one sense, I think they are, but in another sense it seems to me that they are not. In Marx's view, Asiatic societies were not so much backward because their productive forces were not developed, it was rather that their productive forces could not develop because of vices inherent in the very nature of these societies themselves. The importance thus attributed to cultural factors is difficult to reconcile with the materialist dialectic which is central to Marx's philosophical outlook, and to this extent the notion of an "Oriental despotism" can be viewed as uncharacteristic of his thinking—something he picked up from Hegel and Montesquieu, and which reflected the intellectual fashions of the age in which he lived.

On the other hand, there is another theme to be found, for example, in the articles on India, which was not only typical of the mid-nineteenth century, but equally characteristic of Marx himself. I am referring to the postulate that progress in Asia could only come about as a result of the impact of the industrial revolution in Europe, and of the Promethean spirit which accompanied it. To the end of his life, Marx never abandoned his conviction that Europe was the fountainhead of progress and creativity in the world; this is why, as I pointed out in my previous comment, the possibility of a "noncapitalist road" in "Asiatic" countries such as Russia, about which Marx and Engels wrote in later years, was always strictly subordinated to the postulate that the initiative for such a development must come from the European proletariat.

It is perhaps because of this twist to my analysis of Marx's "Asiatic" writings that Walder has made so much of the issue. Surely he must have grasped from reading *Marxism and Asia* that I am not myself a defender of Marx's theories of the 1850s as

the key to understanding Asia in general, or the Chinese revolution in particular. On the contrary, in the French edition of this book, which first appeared in 1965, Helene Carrère d'Encausse and I sharply criticized those members of the French, Hungarian, and other communist parties of Eastern and Western Europe who had revived the concept of the Asiatic mode of production with the evident intention of using it in order to excommunicate the Chinese from world history, thereby drawing on ourselves the ire of Chesneaux, who had been one of the principal artisans of this movement (see Carrère and Schram, 1969: 92-93, and footnote 2). Nevertheless, while there are important elements of continuity between Marx and Mao, there are also aspects of Marx's thinking which are quite simply incompatible with what Mao has done to Marxism. That does not mean, in my view, that Mao was wrong to do what he did. It does imply that those who are concerned to show that Mao was not only a great revolutionary, but also a great Marxist whose thought and actions are in all important respects fully in harmony with Marx's ideas, must look more closely at the Europocentric bias of Marx's view of history, and at such corollaries of this as the role of the working class, and see whether these things were not in fact part and parcel of the very substance of Marx's thought, and not mere accidents of transitory importance.

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