

The German Ideology and the Materialist Philosophy of History (1845-1847)

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Abstract

“The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals who are productively active in a definitive way enter into definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production” (*MECW* 5, p. 35).

Introduction

The German Ideology, written by Marx and Engels between 1845 and 1847, is - like much of Marxism - better ‘known’ than read.¹ This, in part, is for good reason. It was not published until 1903 by Eduard Bernstein (and even then only in part). In full, it was published at last in 1932 (in *MEGA1*). It opens with the well-known line: “Hitherto men have always formed the wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be” (*MECW* 5, p. 23).² Marx and Engels wrote *The German Ideology* as a follow up to *The Holy Family* - a pamphlet written to critique the ‘Young Hegelians.’ The critique is better understood than the substantive ideas they set out to put forward in the work. It is important, first and foremost, to remember that Marx and Engels were interested in liberation. They lived in the generation that

¹See Godelier 1970, where select passages on pre-capitalist societies are presented in French. These correspond to *MECW* 5, p. 31-37, p. 64, p. 67, p. 89-93. Hobsbawm 1964, provides the most sympathetic reading of the text (p. 27-32). One point Hobsbawm misses, however, is the philosophical depth of its defense of historical materialism. For Hobsbawm, the “objective basis of Marx’s humanism... is his analysis of man as a social animal” (p. 12). In *The German Ideology*, however, Marx and Engels critique the notions of “man” as an ideal, stating clearly that they do not begin with an abstraction that refers to the idea of “man” nor synthetic/analytic propositions that presuppose secondary classifications like “social” et cetera. Instead, they state that they begin with one premise: there are human beings.

²Dalia and Gjesdal 2021, p. 207

followed the French Revolution (1789) and were at once deeply impressed by both the ideal and hypocrisy of republican, constitutional liberalism. Modern scholars (especially the philosophically inclined) are too quick to transpose the concerns of the Age of Anxiety to the Long Nineteenth Century.

Like many children, Marx and Engels took the ideals they inherited more seriously than their parents. They took seriously the call for liberalism and its ideal - the democratic republic. Above all, they took seriously the French revolution's demand for "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité." Unlike intellectuals today, revolution brought to mind the question of property - in particular, the fourth 'estate.' This is not unique to Marx and Engels, it is also what came to Dostoevsky's mind first when he meditated on the question of socialism in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

... socialism is not only a labor question or one of the so-called fourth estate, but, in the main, a question of atheism, of the present day embodiment of atheism, a question of a Tower of Babel, one being built deliberately without God, not in order to reach unto heaven but to bring down heaven to earth.³

The fourth estate - i.e. the labor question - is central to Marx and Engels' work. We often fail, however, to understand that property, the fourth estate, and labor are part and parcel of the same question. The question of the Tower of Babel will come to dominate the concerns of 20th century philosophy, but Marx and Engels' did not believe it had a place in historical materialism. Instead, Marx and Engels sought to establish a materialist history that explained why liberation could not be achieved *within* the liberal, modern constitutional republic. The reason, as they understood the problem, was based in the material conditions of property and the ownership of the basic resources of human re-production. The first estate, the kings and church, had been overthrown in France. The aristocrats, however, retained their land (the second estate). The bourgeoisie claimed the right to capital (the third estate). What property did the revolutionary liberal constitution grant to the rest of the people - to the fourth estate? What did they own? In the country, only the limited land they had been able to hold or take from the aristocrats. In the city, the proletariat only had the wage. Unlike reform socialists who believed wage labor could provide a progressive path to working-class liberation, Marx and Engels' revolutionary socialism argued that wage-labor itself enslaved the working-class.⁴ Without this most

³Dalia and Gjesdal 2021, p. 207

⁴This is not unique to Marx and Engels but it central to the question of the social contract itself in European political philosophy. So David Hume in *The Original Contract* (1748) writes, "Can we seriously say, that a poor peasant or artizan has a free choice to leave his country, when he knows no foreign language or manners, and lives from day to day, by the small wages which he acquires? We may as well assert, that a man, by remaining in a vessel, freely consents to the dominion of the master; though he was carried on board while asleep, and must leap into the ocean, and perish, the moment he leaves her."

basic understanding of their concerns and beliefs, it is impossible to understand the philosophy of history they set out to establish in *The German Ideology*. Too many 'philosophers' and 'critics' (many of them nominally 'Marxist') have dismissed their theories on the grounds of assumption that fail to account for the material and historical basis of their ideas.

The project of 'Marxism' began with their struggle to articulate a material philosophy of history and revolution. The work is dedicated to understanding the nature of false ideas and the dangers they pose. Ideology, we are told, stand between us and liberation, and concepts between us and revolution. As Terry Eagleton rightly notes: "For them, social illusions are anchored in real contradictions, so that only by the practical activity of transforming the latter can the former be abolished. A materialist theory of ideology is thus inseparable from a revolutionary politics" (Eagleton 1991 [2007], p. 72). Idealism (especially the 'radical' idealism of the Young Hegelians in Germany) by contrast peddles the hope that a new vocabulary - one capable of capturing our true essence, and a new critique of the old concepts we have inherited - one with the power to remove the false ideas in "our head" - will bring about progress and revolutionary change (MECW 5, p. 23). These "innocent and child-like fancies are the kernel" of ideology in Germany in the 19th century. It is the ideology of Romanticism. The problem, according to Marx and Engels, is obvious. Phrases do not achieve revolution. Ideas do not produce reality. We no more drown because we believe in water than we die of consumption because we have given tuberculosis a name. The text provides a powerful and in depth critique of Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner, focusing above all on the danger such idealism holds for socialism. The German Ideology sets out "to uncloak" these intellectual "sheep, who take themselves and are taken to be wolves." Despite their revolutionary claims, they interpreted as ideological representations of "the wretchedness of the real conditions" in Germany in the years before the revolutions of 1848 (MECW 5, p. 23). As they write, "It has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the connection of their criticism with their own material surroundings" (MECW 5, p. 30).

Philosophers "who are fighting against 'phrases'" forget that "they themselves are opposing nothing but phrases to these phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world" (MECW 5, p. 30). This is not radical or revolutionary. In the end, it is actually the "staunchest conservatism." Their critique speaks no less powerfully to the popularity of "radical" German "critical theory" and French "post-structuralism" in academic post-Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s and the post-modern liberalism of the 1990s and early 2000s. Marx and Engels begin with a philosophical question that is both elegant and rigorous. What do ideas refer to? Is there a real, concrete object that we are willing to use a first premise of abstraction? For them, there is one first premise. It is not "man" - for this too is an abstraction; it is human beings *in the plural*.

1 Historical Materialism

1.1 The First Premise

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels begin with an articulation of their new philosophy of history in a section titled, “Premises of the Materialist Conceptions of History.” Contra the idealist and utopian philosophy of history, which begins with “arbitrary” and “dogmatic” premises, HM begins with “real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination” (p. 31). By real, they mean: actual, concrete human individuals.

First Premise: The existence of living human individuals.

From this first premise, they move to the labor of history itself. If we are willing to presuppose human individuals exist in the past and present, then we can draw (abstract) from this premise concrete observations. Observations are not something Marx treats uncritically (his understanding of phenomena draws itself from his early work on Epicurean materialism and Aristotle as well as Hegel). Therefore, the “first facts to be established” is a sentence that itself entails deep philosophical thought and theory. Here, however, we will take the terms as they are generally understood in the English translation.

First Observation Principle: The “first’ facts” to be studied (in any historical materialist account) are (A) “the physical organization of these individuals” and (B) “their consequent relation to the rest of nature” (p. 31).

They are extremely careful not to draw in abstractions at this point. If there are human individuals, they can be observed in different forms of physical organization. At the most simple conception, there can be a few here and few there. We can observe these human individuals doing things - they relate to everything that is not human individuals (i.e. “the rest of nature”). Marx and Engels begin with this distinction. They do not demand, however, that it is a distinction that applies to all domains of human inquiry. They merely delimit the study of human history from other subjects of study. For those, however, who wish to deny the difference between humans and things in the study of human history, historical materialism is fundamentally incompatible.

In fact, Marx and Engels are very careful to delimit the study of human individuals from other types of knowledge. The natural conditions (geological, orohydrological, climactic etc.), animal biology in general, and the physical nature of the human species in particular are beyond the scope of their theoretical analysis. Unlike scholars in the Idealist school, they argue that the history of humanity (as

a subject of study) begins when at the point human beings begin “to distinguish themselves from animals” - that is “as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization” (p. 31). This is what differentiates human history from animal history - how humans “produce their means of subsistence.” Two later quotes from Engles in personal letters reveal how important this distinction was for the theory of historical materialism. In a letter from Engles in Lavrov (Nov. 12, 1875), he wrote: “The essential difference between human and animal society consists in the fact that animals at best collect while humans produce.”⁵ As Engles describes in a letter to Joseph Bloch (Set. 22, 1890), “According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted.” Production is frequently misunderstood in Marxism because of how ontological it is a Marxist concept. “Production” refers to actual, concrete relations between some human individuals and nature. In animal biology, production is the metabolic use of energy in labor. It is what a particular group of animals do. For humans it is more complex because of our greater capacity for producing the conditions of our own environment. Nonetheless, “production” is simply an abstraction that refers to how physically organized humans expend labor and use nature. It is worth asking if we agree with this argument since the implications are profound. Do we agree that human individuals is an abstraction with a concrete referent? Do we further agree that “the physical organization” of human individuals likewise has a real referent? Last, does “production” refer to a real, concrete relation between “the physical organization” of human individuals and a part of nature? This is what Marx and Engles ask us to accept and they stake a great deal of their life work on the belief that it does not introduce false abstractions and concepts into their work.

It is important to note that this argument, as it is presented so far, is incompatible with a materialist history founded on the theory of human consciousness, religion, or (as becomes extremely influential) psychology. For those who desire it, “man” can be distinguished “from animals by consciousness, by religion, or anything else you like” (p. 31). But, according to historical materialism, this will produce ideology. It will ultimately introduce arbitrary premises for the simple reason that they are concepts that lack a known, material referent. Consciousness refers to an idea. Religion refers to an idea. Even language, in their view, refers to an idea. One must begin with an axiom that is closer to chemistry than modern sociology. What is the real, concrete thing that preceedes complex development. Marx and Engles contend (and this is extremely important) that they begin with a real, concrete abstraction - definite human individuals. And “man” is not the atom of their chemistry. In the analogy, human individuals are “atoms.” Atoms refer to real, distinct, different com-

⁵This letter is extremely important for it also speaks to Marx and Engles understanding of natural science and Darwin.

ponents of material reality. So do human individuals. Descartes famously claimed to know one thing: he thought. Marx and Engels' own claims are grounded in a careful scepticism. They are both careful epistemologists and Marx is an especially intense and brilliant. Production is thus explained as an extension of these principles.

1.2 The Mode of Production

The way in which human individuals produce is conditioned by the natural environment. As Marx and Engels write, "The means of subsistence" depends on "the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce" (p. 31). What do they produce? How do they produce? These two questions offer the criterion for the excavation of definite forms of social life. They eschew the false abstractions of idealism and liberalism which seek to define all forms, expressions, and modes of life by means of concepts and ideas without a definite material reference. "What individuals are," concludes Marx and Engels, "depends on the material conditions of their production." (p. 32) This is an ontological and epistemological argument. It states the fundamental limits of historical observation: we can only observe what people do (i.e. how they are physically organized and how they relate to nature by means of their production). Production appears with the increase in human population which "presupposes the intercourse of individuals with one another" (p. 32).

2 Property

Property is understood within the broader context of their theory of the historical development. "The relations of different nations among themselves depend on the extent to which each has developed (1) its productive forces, (2) the division of labor, and (3) internal intercourse" (p. 32) They claim this proposition to be generally accepted for explanation of relations between "nations" but contend it also is true within a nation. "The whole internal structure of a nation itself depends on the stage of development reached by its production and its internal and external environment intercourse" (32). The best indication of "how far the productive forces of a nation are developed is shown most manifestly by the degree to which the division of labour has been carried" (3). Each new productive force (that isn't only extension) increases the division of labor.

Property: "The various stages of development in the division of labour are just so many different forms of property, i.e. the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument and product of labour" (p. 32)

Property, in this definition, is first and foremost a social relation. This is important and it will be central to Marx's work in the late 1850s and his discovery of the theory of surplus value and his unique re-theorization of the commodity. Here, however, they define property in historical stages. There are three pre-capitalist forms: the tribal, the ancient-communal, and the feudal form.

3 Historical Forms of Property

3.1 Tribal Property

The first form is the tribal. It is restricted to the following forms of primary production: hunting, fishing, cattle raising, and "at most" agriculture. It does not use the word property and this could lead one to think that they did not think there was common property. It is a stage of production that "presupposes a mass of uncultivated stretches of land" (33). ME contend that the division of labour is "confined to a further extension of the natural division of labour existing in the family" (p. 33). "Social Structure" therefore limited to extension of the family, which is defined as "patriarchal" (in the English edition at least). They perceive the division of society as marked by the following divisions:

Table 1: Basic Model of Division in Tribe

The Tribe
Patriarchal Chieftains
Members of the Tribes
Slaves

Slavery, which they appear to argue is endemic to the family, exists in the earliest stage of property. They write, "The slavery latent in the family only develops only gradually with the increase of population, the growth of wants, and with the extension of external intercourse, both of war and of barter" (p. 33). Contra Engels in The Origin of the Family, here, they seem to presuppose that the study of social relations begins with the patriarchal family - a form they interestingly associate with slavery. More work must be done on this conception and the history of their understanding of pre-capitalist history.

They return to the question of "primitive" history and property in their extended critique of Feuerbach. The passage is rarely noted or discussed (for instance, it does not appear in Godelier's review):

The building of houses. With savages each family has as a matter of course its own cave or hut like the separate family tent of the nomads.

This separate domestic economy is made only the more necessary by the further development of private property. With the agricultural peoples a communal domestic economy is just as impossible as a communal cultivation of the soil. A great advance was the building of towns. In all previous periods, however, the abolition [aufhebung] of individual economy, which is inseparable from the abolition of private property, was impossible for the simple reason that the material conditions required were not present. The setting up of a communal domestic economy presupposes the development of machinery, the use of natural forces and of many other productive forces - e.g., of water-supplies, gas-lighting, steam-heating, etc., for the supersession [aufhebung] of town and country. Without these conditions a communal economy would not in itself form a new productive force; it would lack material basis and rest on a purely theoretical foundation, in other words, it would be a mere freak and would amount to nothing more than a monastic economy. - What was possible can be seen in the towns brought into existence by concentration and in the construction of communal buildings for various definite purposes (prisons, barracks, etc.). That the supersession of the individual economy is inseparable from the supersession of the family is self-evident (p. 76).

3.2 Ancient Communal and State Property

The next stage of property "...proceeds from the union of several tribes into a city by agreement or conquest, and which is still accompanied by slavery" (p. 33). This clearly indicates that they saw social development as the unification process of tribes. There are two possibilities: "agreement" or "conquest." (On conquest and colonialism, see p. 83 on Carthage, Greece as well as N. America). The ancient union of tribes centered in the city. This created the conflict between town and country. The city is the locus of the ancient world. Unlike modern theories of internal growth, they perceive as fundamentally separate societies of individuals. If one assumes that property was common in tribal societies, it appears that moveable and immoveable property development as new historical, social forms. They write, "Besides communal property we already find moveable, and later immoveable, private property developing, but as an abnormal form subordinate to communal property" (33). Since ME believe that property is a social relation, it is defined by which individuals use the basic resources of society and nature. Since they knew the basic evidence for slavery in the ancient Greek and Roman societies in which they were well versed and studied, they sought to understand how a group of unified tribes agreed to hold property over animals, over agricultural land, and over slaves. (See p. 136-144 for their satire and critique of Max Stirner's view of ancient Greece and Rome and their

critique of his understanding of ancient society and philosophy). They wrote, "The citizens hold power over their labouring slaves only in their community, and even on this account alone they are bound to the form of communal property" (p. 33).

Thus, they perceived that slavery as property only existed to the extent that the community of unified tribes protected the right to own humans as property. Thus, slavery is fundamentally a communal form of ownership. They write,

It constitutes the communal private property of the active citizens who, in relation to their slaves, are compelled to remain in this spontaneously derived form of association. For this reason the whole structure of society based on this communal property, and with it the power of the people, decays in the same measure in which immoveable property evolves (p. 33).

At this point, they were not particularly focused on the civilizations of the 'Near East' and knew little of the archaeology that would reveal the extent of the Bronze Age societies that preceded the development of the ancient societies they knew well - ancient Greece and Rome. (They were, however, aware of Egyptian history and comment on both Napoleon's expedition and critique Max Stirner's use of African history, see p. 163 ff.). They were especially - though not only - focused on the development of these societies because they became the paradigm for the new constitutional forms of liberalism that were developed in the wake of the English, American, and French revolutions. In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, first with moveable property and slavery, and then moveable property, private property took its earliest form. This, for them, was also the origin of class. They describe this process as follows:

The division of labour is already more developed. We already find the opposition of town and country; later the opposition between those states which represent town interests and those which represent country interests, and inside the towns themselves the opposition between industry and maritime commerce. The class relations between citizens and slaves are now completely developed (p. 33).

Unfortunately, the passages they provide are very concise and dense. The development of ancient property is captured in one paragraph:

With the development of private property, we find here for the first time the same relations which we shall find again, only on a more extensive scale, with modern private property. On the one hand, the concentration of private property, which began very early in Rome (as the Licinian agrarian law proves) and proceeded very rapidly from the time

of the civil wars to the emperors; on the other hand, coupled with this, the transformation of the plebeian small peasantry into a proletariat, which, however, owing to its intermediate position between propertied citizens and slaves, never achieved an independent development (p. 33).

ME return to Rome near the end of their critique of Feuerbach (p. 84-85). In a section titled, "The Role of Violence (Conquest) in History" (p. 84), they write,

In Italy... the concentration of landed property (caused not only by buying-up and indebtedness but also by inheritance, since loose living being rife and marriage rare, the old families gradually died out and their possessions fell into the hands of a few) and its conversion into grazing land (caused not only by the usual economic factors still operative today but also by the importation of plundered and tribute corn and the resultant lack of demand for Italian corn) brought about by the almost total disappearance of the free population: the slaves died out again and again, and had constantly to be replaced by new ones. Slavery remained the basis of the entire production process. The plebeians, midway between freemen and slaves, never succeeded in becoming more than a proletarian rabble. Rome indeed never became more than a city; its connection with the provinces was almost exclusively political and could, therefore, easily be broken again by political events (p. 84).

In a satiric passage, mocking the idealism of Max Stirner's conception of Roman history, they reveal their general understanding of the end of Roman history and the importance of land: "The powerful mechanic shocks which the Roman empire received as a result of its division among several Caesars and their wars against one another, as a result of the colossal concentration of property, particularly landed property, in Rome, and the decrease in Italy's population caused by this, and as a result of the [pressure of the] Huns and Teuton..." (p. 187). These are conditions captured well by Lucian (p. 187).

3.3 Feudal or Estate Property

The feudal system was "in part" brought from "Germany" and had "its origin, as far as the conquerors were concerned, in the martial organization of the the army" which "evolved only after the conquest into the feudal system proper through the action of the productive forces found in the conquered countries" (p. 84). The central difference between the ancient form of property and the feudal form is two-fold. First, society is primarily located in the country at Feudal estates. Second, these feudal

estates are worked primarily by serfs. Property is always a social relation. As they write, "If antiquity started out from the town and its small territory, the Middle Ages started out from the country" (p. 34). Furthermore, "Like tribal and communal property, it is also based on a community; but the directly producing class standing over and against it is not, as in the case of the ancient community, the slaves, but the enserfed small peasantry" (34). This arose from the conditions of the fall of the Roman empire and the barbarian conquests which destroyed "the productive forces" (34): "agriculture had declined, industry had decayed for want of a market, trade had died out or been violently interrupted" (34). These conditions plus the organization of "the German military constitution" (34) created conditions of feudalism.

In the country, "The hierarchical structure of landownership, and the armed bodies of retainers associated with it, gave the nobility over the serfs" (34). The seeds of capitalism by contrast slowly arose in the towns - in the forms of new production which demanded the "corporative property" of the guilds and which provided a - "counterpoint" to the landed property of the feudal lords. This, for a reason that they do not state, gave rise to the simple class structure is put forth around these basic divides, which they argue is limited by "the strip" agricultural system.

Table 2: Basic Model of Division in Late Feudalism

The Country	The City
Prince	Master
Nobility	Journeyman
Clergy	Apprentice
Peasant	"rabble of casual labourers" (p. 35)

The break up of feudalism is discussed in a later section (MECW 5, p. 75-79]: "The extension of trade, the establishment of communications, led separate to establish contact with other towns, which had asserted the same interests in the struggle with the same antagonist. Out of the many local communities of citizens in the various towns there arose only gradually the middle class... these common conditions developed into class conditions" (p. 76). This is the class from which the "bourgeoisie develops" and which will lead to the "absorption" of "all propertied classes in existence" - "in the measure to which all property found in existence is transformed into industrial or commercial capital" (p. 77). This is followed by an important (and much understudied) theoretical analysis of class. It is worth citing at length:

The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; in other respects they are on

hostile terms with each other as competitors. On the other hand, the class in its turn assumes an independent existence as against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of life predetermined, and have their position in life and hence their personal development assigned to them by their class, thus becoming subsumed under it. This is the same phenomenon as the subjection of the separate individuals to the division of labour and can only be removed by the abolition of private property and of labour itself. We have already indicated several times that this subsuming of individuals under the class brings with it their subjection to all kinds of ideas, etc.

If this development of individuals, which proceeds within the common condition of existence of estates and classes, historically following one another, and the general competitions thereby forced upon them - if this development is considered from a philosophical point of view, it is certainly very easy to imagine that in these individuals the species, or man, has evolved, or that they evolved man - and in this way one can give history some hard clouts on the ear. One can then conceive these various estates and classes to be specific terms of the general expression, subordinate varieties of the species, or evolutionary phases of man.

This subsuming of individuals under definite classes cannot be abolished until a class has evolved which has no longer any particular class interest to assert against a ruling class (p. 77)

ME provide a helpful summary of their central argument at the end of the section on Feuerbach. They write,

The first form of property, in the ancient world as in the Middle Ages, is tribal property, determined with the Romans chiefly by war, with the Germans chiefly by the rearing of cattle. In the case of the ancient peoples, since several tribes live together in one city, tribal property appears as state property, and the right of the individual to it as mere "possession" which, however, like tribal property as a whole, is confined to landed property only. Real private property began with the ancients, as with modern nations, with moveable property. (Slavery and community) (dominium ex jure Quiritum). - In the case of the nations which grew out of the Middle Ages, tribal property evolved through various stages - feudal landed property, cooperative moveable property, capital invested in manufacture - to modern capital, determined by large-scale industry and universal competition, i.e. pure private property, which has cast off all semblance of a communal institution and has

shut out the state from any influence on the development of property (p. 88-90).

The consequences for modern politics and political economy are presented as self-evident. Unlike modern academic scholarship, Marx and Engels were clear about the direct connection between the ancient and modern property. They write,

To this modern private property corresponds the modern state, which, purchased gradually by the owners of property by means of taxation, has fallen entirely into their hands by means of the national debt, and its existence has become wholly dependent on the commercial credit which the owners of property, the bourgeoisie, extend to it, as reflected in the rise and fall of government securities on the stock exchange. By the mere fact that it is a class and no longer an estate, the bourgeoisie is forced to organize itself no longer locally, but nationally, and to give a general form to its average interests (p. 90).

Like so much in The German Ideology, it has been overlooked that ME proceed to draw a theory of the modern nation-state from their historical synopsis. The modern nation is state is defined as follows:

Through the emancipation of private property from the community, the state has become a separate entity, alongside and outside civil society; but it is nothing more than the form of organization which the bourgeoisie are compelled to adopt, both for the internal and external purposes, for the mutual guarantee of their property and interests... The most perfect example of the modern state is North America (p. 90).

Conclusion

For Marx and Engels in 1845-1847, this outline of history has revolutionary implications. It is not possible to overthrow the power of the ruling class under capitalism by "dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind" - it can only be abolished by the overthrow of the actual, concrete, material conditions. True revolution is the overthrow of the division of labor - making the working-class the subject of the "material powers" of labor. "This is not possible without the community" (78). This is the point of Marx and Engels work - what is known most broadly as "Marxism." As they write, in "The Essence of the Materialist Conception of Social Being and Social Consciousness," ideology obscures the material conditions of capitalist domination: "If in all ideology men in their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura,

this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life processes as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process" (p. 36). The purpose of concrete, real (and thus revolutionary) knowledge is revelatory. "Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse, and for the first time treats all naturally evolved premises as the creation of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals." (p. 81) [See importance of Social Contract p. 80.]

The point of the critique and the establishment of historical materialism is captured most powerfully in Marx and Engels' invective against Max Stirner. Marx and Engels' revolutionary socialism is intensely critical of socialist intellectuals' failure to critique and transcend liberal ideology. How can radical history reveal the truth of capitalism if they begin with assumptions that are incapable of seeing anything but the natural history of capitalism? Marx and Engels work only makes sense within the context of the 19th century labor question. Why do the fourth estate accept the conditions of wage-slavery? In 1748, David Hume could confidently explain: "If the reason be asked of that obedience, which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer, because society could not otherwise subsist: And this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind." After 1776 and especially 1789, it was suddenly clear that 'obedience' was no longer "clear and intelligible to all mankind." The head of the sun-king and the guillotine revealed that revolution indeed was not only possible, for many it was rational. For Marx and Engels, they see Hume's "obedience" as ideology. They set out to show that concrete history revealed the full application of the French revolution's belief in natural, universal human rights. Why should the fourth estate pay the price slaves were forced to pay for the liberty of ancient Greece? Why, in short, shouldn't they rise up and complete the work of the French revolution and take back the property capitalism stole from their labor? Thousands of years of mysticism and lies. For the educated, the romantic ideal of self-actualization and the worship of the self. For the impoverished, threats and self-incrimination. In a word, ideology.

They claim to only know that there are human individuals and that the study of their history is material if it begins with the physical organization of human individuals and their consequent relation to nature. These "things" can be observed directly in real life. When one turns to cases in which they are not directly observable, it is possible to hypothesize and falsify possible "things" that could have, are, and will happen. Ideology by contrast begins with an indeterminate reference - an idea. To Quine and other philosophers of language today, they contend that "the tower of bable" may well be impossible to define. They must try to figure out for themselves what they are doing today in the modern ivory tower. Historical materialism, they argue, should do better work. It struggles to understand the real human beings that produced the ziggurats in Sumeria and why real human beings still must work to

surive and pay taxed to build and maintain such towers for 'philosophers' today.

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