Diskussion/Discussion

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Reply to Four Critics

Abstract: This article is a response to criticisms of my book on Karl Marx's Theory of History which were made by four authors in last December's number of Analyse & Kritik. After clarifying (section 2) an ambiguity in an argument for historical materialism which is presented in the book, I contend (3-5), against objections raised by Philippe Van Parijs, that historical materialism is consistent only if it explains production relations functionally, by reference to their propensity to develop the productive forces. Next (6-8) I address and rebut the views of Wal Suchting and Milton Fisk, who both think that the role of class struggle in historical materialism is larger than the one I assign to it. Finally (9-12) I try to vindicate the doctrine of base and superstructure proposed in my book against the skepticism of Steven Lukes.

1. In this article I answer objections to my Karl Marx's Theory of History (referred to henceforth as KMTH) offered by four critics in last December's number of Analyse & Kritik.[1] Since publishing KMTH I have, in a number of subsequent articles, criticized it quite extensively myself. While I still think that the central explanations of historical materialism are, or are akin to, functional explanations, I have revised my view of what functional explanation is (see Cohen 1982). And while I continue to maintain that, on a Marxist view, social revolution occurs when and because relations of production fetter productive forces, I have belatedly addressed myself to problems, which were blithely ignored in KMTH, about what, precisely, fettering is (see Cohen 1983a). I have, in addition, raised doubts (no more than that) about the compatibility between historical materialism and certain elementary features of human nature (Cohen 1983b), and I have also questioned whether the scope of historical materialism need be as wide as KMTH unreflectively assumed it was (Cohen 1983c).

But none of that revision and retraction bears on the matters in dispute between me and my Analyse & Kritik critics. I still think, against Van Parijs, that something like functional explanation is an essential device for rendering historical materialism coherent; against Suchting and Fisk, that

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class struggle cannot play the fundamental explanatory role reserved in KMTH for the development of the productive forces; and, against Lukes, that the defence mounted in KMTH of the distinction between base and superstructure is entirely sound. My own doubts about KMTH do not provide me with reasons for accepting the objections of my four critics, and I do my best to resist them in what follows.

2. But before addressing my critics, I wish to expose, and resolve, an apparent inconsistency in Chapter VI of KMTH, one to which, as we shall see, Van Parijs points, though he does not describe it entirely correctly.

Chapter VI expounds and defends the following pair of claims:

(1) The productive forces tend to develop throughout history.

(2) The nature of the production relations of a society is explained by the level of development of its productive forces.

(1) is called the Development Thesis, and (2) the Primacy Thesis: it asserts the explanatory primacy of the productive forces over the relations of production. I show that Marx held both theses, and I then proceed to argue for them, in their own right. In the latter exercise I begin by adducing considerations in support of (1), and then, taking (1) as established, I derive (2) using (1) as a premiss. So my argument for the primacy of the productive forces incorporates an initial argument for thesis (1), the claim that the productive forces inherently tend to develop.

Now the apparent inconsistency which I wish to expose is between my argument for the primacy of the productive forces (in section (4) of Chapter VI) and my exposition of the nature of that primacy (in sections (5) through (7)). Section (4) is supposed to argue for a view sections (5) through (7) expound, but there is an apparent mismatch between the argument and what it is an argument for, which has given rise to an understandable and widespread misinterpretation of my position. That the misinterpretation is natural is shown by the fact that some of my most sophisticated critics have adopted it.

To expose the apparent inconsistency, let us ask: why do the forces of production tend to develop? Why, that is, do existing forces tend to be replaced by better ones? According to KMTH, the tendency obtains because superior forces make possible a lightening of the burden of human labour. There is a propensity to progress in productive power because such progress attenuates the material scarcity whose consequence is that people "cannot satisfy their wants unless they spend the better part of their time and energy doing what they would rather not do, engaged in labour which is not experienced as an end in itself" (Cohen 1978, 152). This is the reason underlying the tendency to advance in productive power, and, consequently, the actual advance in which that tendency is realized.

Now while the tendency to productive improvement is realized if and only if there are recurrent particular instances of improvement, it does not follow that the explanation of each instance must be the same as, or even similar to, the explanation of the general tendency to improvement. The underlying reason for the tendency can explain why there are so many instances of improvement without explaining each particular instance of it. This point being crucial, it requires a measure of elaboration.

Whatever may be the underlying reason for productive progress, the immediate mechanism of that progress is the replacement of less good forces by better ones, by human beings who favour that replacement. Now the crucial point is that, while the underlying reason for productive progress in general is labour reduction, it does not follow that the reason for a given instance of that progress, the reason operative in the mind of the person(s) who caused better forces to be adopted, is to reduce the labour of some person or group. If a self-employing peasant adopts a superior plough, his reason for thereby improving the forces is indeed similar in content to what I say is the underlying reason for their improvement in general: he does so in order to reduce the amount of labour he must put in per unit output. But if a capitalist adopts productively superior instruments or methods, then he does so to protect or increase his profit, and not at all in order to lighten anyone's labour. Yet the underlying reason for productive progress even here, in my view, retains its role, since, according to that view, capitalism prevails when it does because of the massive contribution it makes to the conquest of scarcity, however remote that end may be from the motivation of forces-improving capitalist.

In sum, the reason for a particular improvement of the forces need not resemble the underlying reason why, in general, they improve, but I am widely misinterpreted as thinking that there always is that resemblance. Attention to my exposition of the nature of the primacy of the forces in sections (5) through (7) of Chapter VI would dispel such a misinterpretation, but it is fed by a natural misreading of the argument for primacy presented in section (4), to which I now turn.

That argument contains qualifications and auxiliary developments which there is no room here to rehearse. I can here state only the heart of the argument, which is that the productive forces tend to develop because people

"are disposed to reflect on what they are doing and to discern superior ways of doing it. Knowledge expands, and sometimes its extensions are open to productive use, and are seen to be so. Given their rationality, and their inclement situation, when knowledge provides the opportunity of expanding productive power they will tend to take it, for not to do so would be irrational." (Cohen 1978, 153)

In this argument, human beings are rational and innovative creatures who have a scarcity problem, which they contrive to solve by improving their forces of production. It is natural, but wrong, to interpret the argument as requiring that the agents who actually introduce better forces always do so in order that their own burden of labour will be lightened. The picture I regrettably encouraged is of individual producers, or cooperating groups of them, striving to upgrade their skills and means of production, so that labour will lie less heavily upon them, a picture in which global productive progress is explained merely as the aggregate result of those several strivings. Following Andrew Levine and Erik Wright (1980)[2], we can call this the Rational Adaptive practices (or RAP) view of the development of the forces. It is not the view I held, but it emerges naturally from the quoted passage. I did not hold it because it excludes the important possibility that the underlying reason for advance in productive power may contrast with the reason for particular instances of it, as is plainly illustrated by the development of the forces under capitalism. The way the forces develop under capitalism contradicts the picture of their development conveyed by the paragraph quoted above when it is read in the most natural way.

How, then, did I intend my argument? In my own construal of it, it was, as I said (Cohen 1978, 159), "an attempt to render explicit the premisses" of utterances of Marx quoted at pp. 159-60 of KMTH. Here is one of them, from his letter to Annenkov of 1846:

"...in order that they may not be deprived of the result attained, and forfeit the fruits of civilization, (people) are obliged from the moment when their mode of intercourse no longer corresponds to the productive forces acquired, to change all their traditional social forms."

Texts like the Annenkov letter confer a Marxian pedigree on my use of human rationality as a basis for asserting the primacy of the productive forces, but here that rationality is not applied at the point where it is applied on the RAP view, which such texts do not support. The claim here is not that the producers themselves introduce superior forces to lighten their own labour: that this happens is not denied, but it is not put forward as the general case. Instead, what is said is that, being rational, people retain or reject relations of production according as the latter do or do not allow productive improvement to continue. In Van Parijs's apt formulation (p. 202)[3], I do not here posit a "search-and-selection process which operates directly on the ...productive forces", but "one which operates on the relations of production, which in turn control the search-and-selection of productive forces". This is a non-RAP reading of the argument for the development thesis. It is the reading I intended, and, unlike the RAP reading, it is consistent with the exposition of the nature of the primacy of the forces in sections (5)-(7) of Chapter VI.

In that exposition relations of production can be what I shall call the source of the development of the forces. Relations are a source of development when it is their emplacement in relations of production, and not any interest in reducing labour, which induces agents to improve the forces.[4] That relations are sometimes in this sense the source of the forces' development is compatible with the thesis of the primacy of the forces over the relations, as I elaborate it: the primacy thesis implies that when relations are the source of the development of the forces they obtain precisely because they ensure that development. As I wrote:

"The bourgeoisie is a set of men defined as such by their emplacement in the economic structure. It is that emplacement which makes them revolutionize the productive forces: a policy of innovation is imposed by competition. Capitalist production relations are, consequently, a prodigious stimulus to the development of the productive forces. But this is more than compatible with the thesis of the primacy of the productive forces as we have articulated it. It is congenial to the thesis, for we assert that the function of capitalist relations is to promote growth in productive power - they arise and persist when (and because) they are apt to do so." (Cohen 1978, 169-70. I have added the phrase "and because" to improve the expression of what I had in mind.)

This is an application to capitalism of the general thesis defended in sections (5)-(7), that given relations of production have the character they do because of the contribution they make, in virtue of that character, to the development of the productive forces. The problematic relations for that functional explanatory claim are not such as capitalist ones which, being a source of, evidently contribute to, productive development. The problematic relations for the thesis that relations are functionally explained are the pre-capitalist relations which Marx called "conservative": not being a source of development, they appear not to contribute to it. I devoted section (7) of Chapter VI to the problem conservative relations pose, and I tried to solve it by arguing that conservative relations could be, at the time when they obtain, optimal for productive development, and in place for that reason, even if they are only forms within which development occurs, rather than, like capitalist ones, its very source.

Now, whether or not conservative relations pose a problem for the RAP view of the development of the forces, capitalist ones pose an insoluble problem for it. Accordingly, I held a non-RAP view when I propounded the argument which has been so widely RAP-interpreted. I have now made the non-RAP reading of it more explicit. If, however, that reading of it should turn out to be unsustainable, then I would give up the argument, rather than the non-RAP view of the development of the forces, which capitalism makes mandatory.

3. Van Parijs's discussion of the Development Thesis (pp. 201-2) sharpened my perception of the difference between the RAP and non-RAP views, but it contains a number of errors which call for comment.

To begin with, Van Parijs supposes that the RAP view is inconsistent with functional explanation of the relations by the forces. But, as I have just urged, relations can be hospitable to the development of the forces, and can therefore promote that development, even when they are not its very source. Not only its motor but also a good channel promotes the movement of a ship. Hence, even on a RAP view, relations might be functionally explained, by their propensity to allow the development of the forces to proceed.[5]

Nor should Van Parijs have said that, on the RAP view, relations can "brake or accelerate, but not alter the basic trend" of development of the forces. The implied contrast with the non-RAP view is indefensible. If the "basic trend" is the trend of the forces to develop to higher levels of power, then relations cannot indeed alter it on the RAP view, but nor can they on the non-RAP view: on both views relations which threaten to alter that basic trend count as fetters and succumb to revolution. And if by "basic trend" Van Parijs means something less basic than that, then there is no reason to think that relations cannot alter it on the RAP view. Relations can make a difference to aspects of how development proceeds not only if they are its source but also if they are merely the forms, and not the motivating source, of development.

These errors are connected with a further mistake. I have in mind Van Parijs's alignment of the distinction between RAP and non-RAP conceptions of the development of the forces with respectively these two statements, which he regards as divergent readings of the Development Thesis:

ET1 There is an autonomous tendency for the forces to develop.

ET2 There is a tendency for those relations to be selected which are best for (or facilitate) the development of the forces.

Van Parijs aligns ET1 with the RAP view because he wrongly thinks that ET1 is inconsistend with my "emphatic claim that production relations profoundly affect productive forces'" (201) (ET2 is consistent with the "Profound Effect" claim, since ET2 entails it). Now since, even on a RAP view, relations might block or allow development of the forces, it is not obvious that the RAP view is inconsistent with their exercise of a Profound Effect. But, however that may be, Van Parijs is wrong to think that ET1 entails the RAP view and also wrong to think that ET1 is inconsistent with the Profound Effect claim.

Van Parijs thinks these false things because he wrongly supposes that ET1 entails what I shall call ETo:

ETo There is a tendency for the forces to develop autonomously.

ETo says that the forces tend to develop without assistance, and, therefore, without the assistance of the relations. ETo is indeed inconsistent with the Profound Effect claim, and it does rule out a non-RAP view.

But ET1 does not entail ETo. ET1 assigns autonomy to the tendency of the forces to develop[6], not to the development it is a tendency to. A child has an autonomous tendency to grow up: he is born with a disposition to do so, which is not externally instilled in him by, for example, his parents. But it does not follow that he has a tendency to grow up autonomously, independently of parental or other assistance. The autonomy of the forces' tendency to develop is relevantly parallel: ET1 denies that the explanation of their tendency to develop lies within the relations, but it does not deny that they develop with relational assistance, or even that the relations can be the immediate source of their development. Unlike ETo, ET1 is consistend with ET2, and therefore both with Profound Effect claim and with a non-RAP view of the development of the forces. The consistency of ET1 and ET2 is shown by the consistency of ET3, which entails both of them, and which says, as I do, that ET1 explains ET2.

ET3 There is a tendency for those relations to be selected which are best for (or facilitate) the development of the forces, since there is an autonomous tendency for the forces to develop.

I would add, finally, that Van Parijs is also unjustified in presenting ET1 and ET2 as competing readings of the Development Thesis. I never said that anything like ET2 was the Development Thesis. ET1 is the development thesis, and, as ET3 implies, ET2 is derived from the Development Thesis (together with other considerations): the derivation is given on p. 158 of KMTH.

4. I now address Van Parijs's discussion of the primacy puzzle. I have always conceived that puzzle as follows, and never differently: Marx repeatedly asserts that relations of production correspond to levels of development of productive forces and, as I argue at pp. 136-8 of KMTH, such dictions assign explanatory primacy over the relations to the forces. Yet Marx knew that relations always control the development of the forces, and are in some cases the very source of that development. The primacy puzzle is to reconcile the explanatory priority of the forces with the controlling role of the relations.

I claimed that the only way to solve the primacy puzzle was to represent the relations as functionally explained by the forces. One must say that

the relations are as they are because, being so, they are suitable to the further development of the forces, that suitability being due to the level of development the forces have already reached (see Cohen 1978, 160). The explanation is a functional one inasmuch as the relations are explained by their effect on the forces, which is to develop them. But that is not the whole of the explanation of the relations, and, if it were, the primacy of the forces would remain unsecured. To ensure their primacy it is necessary to add that, as I said, it is in virtue of the existing level of development of the forces that the relations have the developing effect they do.

I now restate the foregoing more schematically. Since

(3) The level of development of productive power determines which relations would promote the further development of productive power, and

(4) The existing relations prevail because of their propensity to promote productive power,

it follows that

(2) The nature of the production relations of a society is explained by the level of development of its productive forces,

and (2) assigns explanatory primacy to the productive forces: (2) is the primacy thesis. The primacy puzzle is to reconcile (2) with the truth of (5), which is an entailment of (4):

(5) The existing relations promote the development of productive power.

And the puzzle is solved by asserting (3) and (4), which together entail both (2) and (5). But it is, more particularly, (4) which nullifies (5)'s threat to (2), and I therefore laid special emphasis on (4) when speaking of what solves the primacy puzzle. (4) does not establish, without (3), that (2) is true, but (4) does show that (5) does not refute (2).

The above exposition is faithful to the text of KMTH, but it is certainly more clear than it would have been had I lacked the benefit of Van Parijs's critique of my formulations. I agree with him that (4) does not by itself establish the primacy of the forces, and I see that formulations at pp. 161-2 of KMTH, read without reference back to pp. 158-60, which sets the context for them, might lead a reader to think that I say that (4) itself ensures the primacy of the forces. Van Parijs is right that it does not, since it is consistent with, e.g.,

(6) The dominant ideology, which is independent of the existing level of productive power, determines what relations would promote productive power.

(4) is not enough for primacy, since (4) and (6) entail that (2), the primacy thesis, is false.
Both (3) and (4) must be true for the primacy thesis, which is (2), to be true. Notwithstanding that, neither (3) nor (4), nor even their conjunction, is the primacy thesis, and I never said otherwise. I could not have been more explicit that precisely (2) is the primacy thesis: it is introduced as such on the first page of Chapter IV, and again called that when it is defended at p. 158; and, contrary to what Van Parijs says on p. 199 of his piece, I never "use the label" "Primacy Thesis" to designate (4).[7] Why, then, does he find more than one primacy thesis in KMTH?

Because he inappropriately contrasts an assertion of the primacy of the forces over the relations, which is what his PTo[8], a summary of my (2) is, with a partial explication of the nature of that primacy, which is what his PT2 (my (4)) is: the statements play different roles, and the second's role is not to assert the primacy of the forces. PT2 (or (4)) is put forth a part of the solution to the primacy puzzle, which, to repeat, is to reconcile PTo (or (2)) with (5), the fact that relations promote the forces' development. PT2 (or (4)) does not reassert the primacy thesis, or endow it with a different meaning. It specifies, in part, the nature of the primacy of the forces, with a view to showing how PTo (or (2)) can be true. The primacy thesis does not specify the nature of the primacy it asserts. It simply says that the current level of development of the forces of production does enjoy explanatory primacy.

Now if there is not more than one primacy thesis, there is not more than one primacy puzzle, and Van Parijs's several attempts to identify possible primacy puzzles (pp. 202-4) are all wide of the mark. His first suggestion depends on mistreating (4) as a version of the primacy thesis. His third suggestion is, as he says, "far-fetched", and also, in my view, multiply bizarre. But his second suggestion, in the second paragraph on p. 203, calls for further comment.

This particular misidentification of the primacy puzzle results from Van Parijs's undue emphasis on my phrase "to a far greater extent", whose significance, as I indicated in footnote 8, he overvalues. Misled by that phrase, he entertains the possibility that the primacy puzzle is how to establish that one side in a two-sided interaction is more influential than the other. But the "underlying problem" is not to reconcile primacy with two-way causation, but with the particular "massive control" (Van Parijs, p. 202, quoting me) exercised by the relations. And the functional-explanatory device, which I unambiguously say solves the puzzle, could not be thought to justify the phrase "to a far greater extent", since there is no relevant matter of degree which recourse to functional explanation settles here. If relations control the development of forces, but are as they are because, in virtue of the forces' current level, they have a pro-

pensity to develop them, we can conclude that the controlling role of the relations does not upset the primacy of the forces, but it would not be appropriate to conclude that the forces affect the relations more than the relations affect the forces.

5. Does the model of fast and slow dynamics which Van Parijs presents in the final sections of his paper provide an alternative solution to the primacy puzzle? Insofar as I understand the model[9] it perhaps provides a solution to the puzzle in Van Parijs's second misconstrual of it, but it only solves the puzzle I described if, contrary to what Van Parijs says, it models the functional explanation which I say is needed to solve the puzzle. I now elaborate these claims.

What I find hard to understand is the concept of speed which Van Parijs exercises when he refers, for example, to "the (higher) speed at which the relations adjust to the current level of the forces and the (lower) speed at which they carry the forces from on level to another" (205). I understand the idea of a speed at which the relations develop the forces, and, once they are assigned a dimension of variation[10], I also understand the idea of a speed at which relations adjust to forces. But I do not know how to compare these speeds, and so I cannot construe Van Parijs's claim that one speed is higher than another - that claim seems blocked by an insurmountable incommensurability. And even if we surrealistically suppose that the speeds have somehow been made commensurable, by measuring them on cardinal scales with contrived zero-points, then I still do not see why the comparative speeds Van Parijs invokes establish any kind of primacy of the forces over the relations. And why, in any case, are relations said to adjust quickly to forces, when the failure of the former to correspond to the latter can be followed by an epoch of transition to new relations?

But let me now set aside these queries and respond to Van Parijs's proposals insofar as I do understand them. He says that the primacy of the forces may plausibly be identified with the claim that, when forces and relations are in contradiction, "the relations adjust to the forces and not the other way around": the statement about comparative speeds is supposed, somehow, to explicate that claim (see pp. 204, 207-8). But I do not see how such primacy can be understood non-functionally. Contradiction is, by definition, the circumstance that relations fetter the development of the forces. Now if relations go when they fetter the forces, and that generalization is not an accident, then they go because they fetter the forces, because there is contradiction. But that is to say that the old relations go because they fail to develop the forces, from which we can infer that the new relations supervene, and persist, because and as long as they do develop the forces. And that is a functional explanation, and the very functional explanation I defended.[11]

I take Van Parijs's use of Thorstein Veblen (pp. 206-7) as an attempt to forestall something like the above line of criticism. He derives from Veblen a scenario in which the prevailing relations further the development of the forces, but do not prevail for that reason. Instead, they prevail because working with the existing productive forces so shapes producers' minds that it causes them to adopt what merely happen to be forces-improving relations.

But whatever may be the intrinsic plausibility of the Veblen scenario, it does not deliver the goods required here, since it does not cater for the inherent tendency of the forces to develop. To be sure, the story affirms that the relations which get selected do develop the forces but, as Van Parijs rightly says, it does not follow that they are selected because they develop the forces, and in the story they are not, indeed, selected for that reason. Yet even if, by remarkable concidence, relations not selected because they develop the forces always in fact did so, the development thesis would remain unsustained, since it "requires that it is of the nature of the forces to develop" (Cohen 1978, 135), and not merely that they always develop, for this or that adventitious reason.

Now in the foregoing I invoke the development thesis to confound Van Parijs's attempt to use Veblen to show that the primacy of the forces does not require functional explanation. Van Parijs might therefore wish to press against me the observations of his footnote 11, in which he remarks that functional explanation

"may be required for primacy to be reconciled with two-way causation and other views Marx or Marxists hold. But (1) these other views would have to be specified - which Cohen does not do. And (2) there is a high risk that, once these views are stated explicitly, the alleged solution will be trivial."

The first of these charges is out of place, since the development thesis is introduced in conjunction with the primacy thesis, and the primacy thesis requires the development thesis as a premiss. Hence nothing solves the primacy puzzle unless it preserves the development thesis. But what about Van Parijs's warning (see his (2)) that the functional-explanatory solution might now be "trivial"? Well, what does Van Parijs mean by "trivial" here? If he means that it will now follow logically that functional explanation is the solution, then I do not mind if my claim is"trivial": all proven claims are trivial in that sense. But there emerges no reason to call it trivial if, as it should, "trivial" entails "uninteresting". It is not uninteresting that the primacy of the productive forces requires functional explanation, even if it is deonstrable when all the elements of the theory are in place.

In fact, however, I do not claim to provide a logical proof of my contention that functional explanation is the required solution. I argue, more modestly, that functional explanation does solve the primacy puzzle, and I challenge others to produce an alternative solution which is not functional-explanatory. Van Parijs has not done so.

6. Wal Suchting disagrees with those many of my critics who, he notes (p. 159), accept my interpretation of Marx, whatever other reservations they may have about KMTH. He rejects my presentation of Marx on forces and relations of production, and offers what he calls an "alternative account". I am unpersuaded. In my opinion, Suchting's exposition of KMTH is inaccurate, his critique of my use of Marxian texts is inadequately supported, and his "alternative account" is not an alternative in any polemically significant sense: among other things, his redefinition of the expression "forces of production" serves no critical purpose. These charges are defended at length in the ancilla.[12] I respond here only to Suchting's attempt to assign primacy neither to forces nor to relations of production, but to the class struggle.[13] Before responding to that, however, it is appropriate to place the dispute about the relative places of forces and relations on the one hand and class struggle on the other in its proper context.

The aim of KMTH (see Cohen 1978, ix) was to construct a tenable theory of history in broad conformity with Marx's writings. I acknowledged (27) that history was not, of course, entirely amenable to theoretical treatment, and, bearing in mind that limitation, I tried to present the best theory of history which respected Marx's pronouncements on the subject.

If one gives up the very project of a theory of history, it is easy to reject the thesis of the primacy of the productive forces. But, so I claimed, there is no alternative to that thesis if there is to be a Marxist theory of history. As I said:

"With focus on the development of the productive forces, history becomes a coherent story. Perhaps history is not really coherent, but Marx thought it was, and he said the development of material power made it so."(Cohen 1978, 150)

A critic like Suchting, who thinks I misconstrue Marx here, must either deny that Marx thought history coherent or find an alternative basis for its coherence in Marx.

Suchting and others hope to found historical coherence on the alternative basis of what he calls (p. 171) the "plangent" opening sentence of the Communist Manifesto: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles".[14] In KMTH I argued against that move, both

textually and theoretically (Cohen 1978, 148-50). The theoretical argument was a challenge to those who make class struggle fundamental to explain, other than by reference to the disposition of classes to develop the productive forces, what makes successful classes succeed. The textual argument was a set of passages in which Marx explains class success in just that way, such as the Manifesto statement that "the economic and political dominon of the bourgeois class" was an outcome of the fact that feudal relations of production had become fetters on productive development and therefore "had to be burst asunder" (CW 6, 489). I concluded that "the class which rules through a period, or emerges triumphant from epochal conflict, is the class best suited, most able and disposed, to preside over the development of the productive forces at the given time" (Cohen 1978, 149).

Suchting says nothing about the texts I adduce in support of that statement. Instead of trying to interpret them differently, he ignores them. (I note that when, at p. 174, he quotes the foregoing KMTH statement together with the question it answers, he replaces the textual support I enter for it by dots). And his response to my theoretical challenge is also unsatisfying. He replies thus to my question "Why does the successful class succeed?"

> "Most generally it is because it has won a victory, or more usually a series of victories, lasting for a longer or shorter time as the case may be, over another class or other classes." (p. 174)

Then, recognizing that his answer does not go very far, he adds that "there is no completely general explanation of why a certain class or group of classes triumphs". But in that case my challenge is unmet: no theory of history emerges. If one renounces theory of history, it is not hard to poke (what I, perhaps merely predictably, find to be humorless) fun at what Suchting calls "Cohen's picture" (p. 174), which lampoons my attempt at an untrivial explanation of the upshot of class struggles. But not a word is spent showing that Marx lacked that picture, or had a different one.

For all that, I would not "downplay" "the practical political significance" of class struggle (p.174). As I hope to make clear in section 8 below, I think it has primary political significance. Nor do I wish to reject, or deflate, the Manifesto's first sentence. For it is not inconsistent with the thesis of the primacy of the productive forces, as that is expounded in KMTH.

The Manifesto sentence implies that major historical changes are brought about by class struggle. But that is consistent with the doctrine of KMTH, since (so that doctrine says) if we want to know why class struggle brought about this change rather than that, then we must turn to the dialectic of forces and relations of production which governs class behaviour and is not explicable in terms of it, and which determines the long-run

outcome of class struggle, though not, of course, its every twist and turn.

Things other than forces and relations of production, such as the interactional structures studied by game theory[15], help to explain the vicissitudes of class struggle and the strategies pursued in it, but they cannot give a Marxist answer to the question why class wars (as opposed to battles) are settled one way rather than another. Marx found the answer in the character of the productive forces: "The conditions under which definite productive forces can be applied are the conditions of the rule of a definite class of society". (GI, 185) And he did not give that answer only when he was generalizing about history. He applied the generalization to cases, as, for example, when he said that

"If the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary ... as long as the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production." 16

Note that Marx writes not "make possible" but "make necessary", a phrase which limits what can be independently decided by class struggle more than the former one would. The Communist Manifesto contains similar phrases (see the one about the transition from feudalism to capitalism quoted at p. 207 above) and therefore cannot be recruited to the non-Marxist view that all history is, in the final analysis, explained by class struggle.

Prosecuting his contention that Marxism should contract a liaison with game theory, Jon Elster remarks tht "game theory is invaluable to any analysis of the historical process that centres on exploitation, struggle, alliances and revolution (Elster 1982, 453). But for Marxian analysis those phenomena are not primary but, as it were, immediately secondary, on the periphery of the centre: they are among the "forms in wich men become conscious of the conflict [between forces and relations of production] and fight it out" (Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economics). To put the point differently, we may say that the items on Elster's list are the actions at the centre of the historical process, but that for Marxism there are also items more basic than actions at its centre.

By "revolution" Elster must mean the political phenomenon of transfer of state power, as opposed to the transformation of economic structure political revolution initiates or reflects. Many facts about political revolutions are accessible to game theoretical explanation, but not the world-historical facts that there was a bourgeois revolution and that there will be a proletarian one (if there will be a proletarian one).

While realizing that I insist on a "fundamentalist" reading of historical materialism, Richard Miller notes that "Cohen ... allows that political and ideological struggle may be essential to the destruction of the old social relations" (Miller 1981, 94)[17]. Indeed, and I am prepared to go further. I do not wish to deny that class struggle is always essential for social transformaton. My position does not prevent me from accepting Marx and Engels' statement that "the class struggle is the immediate driving power of history".[18] On the contrary: it is the doctrine of the primacy of the productive forces which accounts for the otherwise puzzling occurrence of the word "immediate" in this important sentence. "Immediate" is opposed to "underlying".

The reader might now agree that the following characterization of my views distorts them:

"Cohen ... seems committed to the view that the kind of human activity capable of effecting social change would have to be not consciously political activity but technical and scientific activity: the invention of new technology, having as its unconscious byproduct the emergence of new social relations." (Norman 1980, 6)

I do not see how one can wring out of KMTH a denial that consciously political activity effects social change. How could an explanation why politics effects this social change rather than that entail a denial that politics effects social change? Marx was not being untrue to what I claim was his theory when he called on workers, rather than scientists and technicians, to revolutionize society. In encouraging workers to bring about social change he was not asking them to bring about what would explain their doing so: the exhaustion of the progressive capacity of the capitalist order, and the availability of enough productive power to instal a socialist one.

7. Milton Fisk's treatment of class struggle is more subtle than Suchting's, but, before I address it, I should like to say a word about Fisk's general methodological position, which I do not understand.

Fisk rejects the "sharp separations" of "atomistic ontology", which I am said to favour, and he recommends "systematic integrations" in their stead. Among what are not to be sharply separated are the cause and the effect in a causal relationship (p. 182).

Now a cause and its effect indeed seem to me to be distinct entities, and necessarily so. But the necessary separation between them is compatible with the fact that they are integrated, and, if you like, systematically integrated, in the causal relationship. It therefore seems to me wrong to treat separation and systematic integration as mutually exclusive condi-

tions. Perhaps, though, separation becomes incompatible with integration when the separation is what Fisk calls "sharp". But I do not know what sort of separation a sharp one is, since the presumably contrasting idea of an unsharp separation is not, to me, intuitively clear. And I am not assisted, in my attempt to understand it and its putative contrast, by Fisk's reference to the Grundrisse Introduction, whose methodological advice has always struck me as not fully thought through. (Perhaps Marx decided not to publish the Introduction in his Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy because he recognized that it was conceptually inadequate).

Fisk links his notion of systematic integraton with a supposedly Hegelio-Marxian concept of explanatory primacy, which is introduced on p. 183. In this concept, primacy is not a matter of "which way the causal arrow runs". What enjoys primacy is the aspect of society "that makes possible the existing connections between various social entities", the aspect which is the "framework" within which causal arrows run as they do. Fisk withholds this kind of primacy from the productive forces and assigns it to the production relations (Abstract, pp. 190, 192). Productive forces are said to lack primacy because they would not have the effects they do outside the given framework of production relations. But if forces lack primacy for that reason, then relations, being primary for Fisk should have the effects they do irrespective of the character of the forces: for otherwise, by parity of reasoning, they would be as unprimary as the forces are. But the effects of relations plainly do depend on the nature of the forces. Hence either I do not understand Fiskian primacy, or he is wrong to assign it to relations or production.

8. In section 5 of Fisk's piece the theme of atomism versus integration does not obtrude, and I agree with much of what he says. But I do not agree with his opening argument, which runs as follows:

"There is a political factor that enters into the development of the productive forces. The development of the productive forces within a set of productive relations has limits set by the willingness of people to cooperate under those relations to develop the productive forces. It would be nice if we could say that their cooperation will be forthcoming when those relations have the potential for developing the forces. But the claim would be circular since that potential of the relations to develop the forces depends crucially on cooperation." (p. 192).

But the stated claim is not, as Fisk contends, circular. For the fact that cooperation is a necessary condition of the relations actually developing the forces does not show that cooperation is a necessary condition of their possessing the potential to do so, in one pertinent reading of that phrase. Relations might possess the potential to develop the forces in the sense that if cooperation with them is forthcoming, they will do so: cooperation is evidently not necessary to their possessing that potential.

What is more, some relations would not develop the forces even if cooperation with them was assured. It follows that this hypothesis, of which the penultimate sentence in the above extract is an inexplicit formulation, is neither trivial not circular: cooperation is forthcoming just when, the relations being otherwise suitable, cooperation is crucial to the development of the forces. (Consider the analogous hypothesis that pilots will man just those planes which are apt to fly when manned. The fact that these same planes would not fly unmanned does not make that plausible hypothesis circular.)

Now the non-circular and substantive claim italicized above is false for periods of transition from one social form to another, since, during such periods, more than one set of relations would, with cooperation, develop the forces, and it is logically impossible for more than one set to obtain. When "the productive forces have been developed sufficiently under the existing productive relations to sustain a new social order" (p. 192) both the old relations (at least for a time) and the prospective new ones would, with cooperation, develop the forces further, and in such a period which relations prevail indeed becomes what Fisk calls a political question, and one whose answer is not settled by the state of the productive forces. Those who falsely suppose that its answer is objectively available, and does not depend on class struggle, divide, as Fisk perceptively remarks, into "adventurists [who] accuse opportunists of overestimating the ability of the ruling class to develop the productive forces, and opportunists [who] accuse adventurists of underestimating that ability" (p. 194). I agree with Fisk that both sides in that dispute suppose, wrongly, that there is a theoretical answer to a crucial question of practice.

But not all cases are transitional cases. Let us suppose, with Fisk (p. 193), that there was no objective answer to the question whether the Western ruling class could still develop the productive forces after 1945. Then either he thinks there is never such an answer, or he grants that there sometimes is. But if he thinks there never is, he is no Marxist. No Marxist, indeed no one with a shred of sociological initiation, could think that the British capitalist class might have been overthrown in 1795. A Marxist may think that there are cases of Fisk-like indeterminacy, but not that they are the general case. And I wonder whether Fisk himself really thinks they are the general case. He refers, as we saw, to a time when "the productive forces have been developed sufficiently ... to sustain a new social order" (p. 192). That reference implies that there are other times when a new social order is impossible because the forces are not developed enough to sustain it. But if a new order is impossible for that reason, then Fisk will surely agree that it is impossible for an objective reason, which is independent of human will - in which case his disagreement with me disappears. He can only continue to disagree on the bizarre alternative view that even then the new order is impossible simply because

people are unprepared to cooperate with it. Such a view combines an Utopian belief that what sort of society we have depends entirely on human will, with an Utopian belief that, for no objective reason, the required human will is sometimes necessarily unforthcoming.

The vicissitudes of class struggle decide just when a ruling class is supplanted, once a superior social order is objectively possible. But if one goes beyond that and says that the vicissitudes of class struggle decide whether or not the ruling class is supplanted at all, so that there is no objectively grounded answer to the question whether it will, in the end, go, then one denies the parameters within which, for Marxism, class struggle operates.

In my view class war is like war, and in war there are three pertinent possibilities:

i. We know that if we engage with the enemy, we shall win.
ii. We know that if we engage with the enemy, we shall lose.
iii. We know neither of these things, either because it is difficult to know which of them is true, or because neither is true.

In discussion of his paper[19] Fisk said that i. and ii. are not historically important cases. I disagree. To be sure, they are not the cases in which there is likely to be massive class struggle: we will not engage in case ii, and presuming, as one can, that they know what we do, they will not engage in case i. To the extent that people are knowledgeable and rational, iii. is the only case in which class struggle will rage. But it is a matter of great historical importance that i. and ii. are true, when they are, and that class struggle is, accordingly, muted. One cannot deny the historical importance of non-transitional periods.

9. Steven Luke's characteristically lucid and challenging contribution is concerned with Chapter VIII of KMTH, which is about the relationship between the economic base and its legal superstructure. Lukes says that he will "focus exclusively" (p. 212) on that relationship, but he also addresses the problem of moral norms, which are not, in my view, superstructural,[20] and my response will cover that aspect of his critique as well.

A number of critics of Marxism, and notably John Plamenatz, have argued that the Marxist pretension that relations of production explain superstructural relations of law is necessarily false, since a searching explication of what must be meant, and of what Marx himself meant, by relations of production reveals that, being essentially relations of ownership, they are themselves legal in character. They may therefore not be regarded as non-legal phenomena distinct from and explanatory of legal relations.

I wanted to defeat that criticism, and I therefore undertook a twofold task: first, to present a plausible characterization of relations of production from which legal terms are expunged, and then to argue that relations of production, in the recommended rechtsfrei characterization, might reasonably be thought to explain superstructural ownership relations. Lukes is concerned to challenge only the first and relatively "narrow" (p. 212) part of that exercise, my attempt simply to distinguish between base and superstructure. Accordingly, my obligation here is to defend that distinction and not, except en passant, the functional explanation of property law by economics which presupposes it. If that explanation is defensible, then so is the distinction it presupposes, but the converse is not true.

My remarks fall into three parts. In section 10 I argue that the indispensability of norms to economic relations does not show that the latter are not conceptually independent of the former. In section 11 I explain why my device for characterizing the economic base is not intended to provide an analysis of social relationships. And in section 12 I question the bearing of the problem of objectivity in social science on the thesis that the base is distinct from the superstructure.

10. The chief instrument of my defense of the distinction between base and superstructure was a distinction between rights, in the usual legal sense (Cohen 1978, 62), and powers, which were defined as follows:

"a man has the power to Ø if and only if he is able to Ø, where 'able' is non-normative. 'Able' is used normatively when 'He is not able to Ø' may be true even though he is Ø-ing, a logical feature of legal and moral uses of 'able'. Where 'able' is non-normative, 'He is Ø-ing' entails 'He is able to Ø'." (Cohen 1978, 220)

Notice that to say that a person has a power, in the defined sense, is to say nothing about what confers the power on him, or sustains his exercise of it. The answer to that question could involve brute force, or ideology, or, or course, the law. And in law-abiding society the law will figure prominently in the answer, since "in law-abiding society men have the powers they do because they have the rights they do" (Cohen 1978, 232). But rights and powers even then remain distinct, and one way of seeing the distinction between them is to note that

"the power to Ø is what you have in addition to the right to Ø when your right to Ø is effective, and ... the right to Ø is what you have in addition to the power to Ø when your power to Ø is legitimate." (Cohen 1978, 219)

Now relations of production involve what people are effectively able to do, legitimately or otherwise. Hence, while to have a right over some productive force is to stand in a superstructural relation of law, to have a

power over some productive force is to stand in a basic relation of production. And the claim that base and superstructure are conceptually distinct now resolves itself into the claims that it is logically possible to have a right without the power you have when the right is effective, and to have a power without the right that would make the power legitimate. Thus ineffective rights and illegitimate powers are proofs of the conceptual distinctness of base and superstructure. And though, as I acknowledged, rights are usually effective and powers are usually legitimated, that truth does not erode the conceptual distinction historical materialism requires. The distinction would be intact even if, what is false, there never existed an ineffective right or an illegitimate power.

Powers are usually legitimate because, as I unequivocally said - this was the title of section (4) of Chapter VIII - "bases need superstructures": legal protection, a covering of legal norm, is generally indispensable to the enjoyment of economic power. I therefore asserted both the conceptual distinctness of norms and powers and the indispensability, in general, of norms to powers. It follows that I did not regard the proposition that powers generally need norms as a suitable premiss for denying that the two are conceptually distinct. Perhaps I was wrong, and the distinction I defend can indeed be impugned on the basis of the premiss I grant, but to show that one must do more than state and reiterate the said premiss. My main objection to Luke's critique is that it is largely an emphatic statement of what I already amply acknowledged. He insists on what I grant, and insist on myself, that powers generally need the support of norms, and he does not spell out why I am not entitled to assert that.

Lukes focusses largely on moral norms, rather than on the legal ones with which Chapter VIII was concerned, but this does not alter the essence of our dispute. Suppose that he is right that moral norms are generally indispensable to basic relations of power. And suppose, too, that the moral norms observed in economic life are less plausibly explained as functional for the economy that ownership law is. The conjunction of these claims - and Luke's case rests on them - does not show that moral norms are conceptually implicated in relations of power. The indispensability of A to B, and the fact that A is not explained by B, do not in combination show that B cannot be described in A-free terms.

I need not differ with Lukes when he says that a

"stable system of enablements and constraints, to be effective, requires that I and relevant others are generally motivated by certain kinds of shared (teleological) reasons for acting and not acting" (p. 217),

for that is just a version of the indispensability claim. But does it follow that, as Lukes adds, "these [the reasons] give such enablements and constraints [a] distinctively normative character"? Only, at most, in a trivial

and uncontroversial sense. For one might, with a pinch of infelicity, say of an A which requires a B to be stable that it therefore has a B-ish character: a dictatorship to which the support of the Church is indispensable might be said to have a religious character (though I would prefer not to say such a thing on merely that basis). But that which the religion here stabilizes can certainly be described in religion-free terms. And similarly, even if powers sustained by norms have in that good or bad sense a normative character, we can still separately conceive, in norm-free terms, what the norms are stabilizing, and I need not and do not assert anything stronger.

To achieve clarity in this matter, one must distinguish between a non-normative concept of power, and a concept of non-normative, or non-normatively based, power. I recommend the first concept, not the second, and much of Luke's critique depends on his having confused the two.

To see that he is subject to this charge, consider pp. 219-220 of his article. He there distinguishes between a "pure, non-normative relationship of power - say, of simple coercion", and one which is in some way normatively freighted, because it depends, for example, on the belief that it is morally right to honour agreements; and he then proceeds as though I am committed to the falsehood that all relationships of power are non-normative in his sense. But constructing a non-normative concept of power carries no such commitment. The concept is constructed to cover what Lukesian non-normative and Lukesian normative relationships of power have in common - their being relationships of power. What I call "powers" are not essentially non-normative (in Lukes's sense of not being supported by norms) but simply not essentially normative, and I have no difficulty in admitting that, in the standard case, "norms ... are what enables" people to exercise powers (pp. 219-220). My claim is just that what norms enable are not themselves norms.

In illustration of the point that powers, as I define them, are what mere coercers and benefitters from norms have in common, I said that it is true both of an illegal squatter (whose tenure is secured by, for example, savage dogs whom the legitimate authorities cannot overcome) and a legal landowner that they have the power to use their land and exclude others from it (Cohen 1978, 223-4). Lukes objects that, unlike the squatter, the legal landowner can, by virtue of an environment of legal and other norms, do such things as bequeath his property to others. Now it is true that the squatter cannot precisely bequeath his land, since bequeathing is an essentially legal activity. But it does not follow, and it is false, that he cannot achieve the effect of bequeathal, by the brute means he favours: he can bring it about that another has over his land the same power he now has over it. And his power to do that complex thing is also enjoyed

by the legal landowner, so that Lukes is wrong to conclude that "one cannot identify powers ... embodied in norm-governed economic relationships independently of the norms which ... govern them" (p. 220). (See, too, the remarks in section II (iii) below, which cast further light on the error in Lukes' objection.)

II. My non-normative characterization of powers was not an attempt to define what social relations (really) are. I did not say: some may think that social relations importantly involve norms, but actually they are nothing but relations of power. My thesis that legal property norms obtain because they secure powers conceptually distinct from them burdens me with no need to deny the claim of Plamenatz, which Lukes endorses (p. 212), that "all properly social relations are moral and customary".

I must therefore take up what Lukes says at p. 218 about

"the basic economic relationship of contract. If any relation of production is central to the economic structure of capitalism, this must be. Can it be described in the manner proposed [i.e., in abstraction from the norms governing it]?"

I reply:
(i) Lukes did not reject my description of relations of production as relations of power over productive forces, the issue between us being whether those relations of power are conceptually separable from norms. Since contract is not a relation of power over productive forces, it is not a relation of production in the required sense.

There is, nevertheless, an important connection between contract and relations of production, since, in capitalist society, the bringing together of productive forces such as the worker's labour power and the capitalist's means of production standardly proceeds via contracts. And contracts, I acknowledge, are essentially legal entities, involving as they do exercises of rights of ownership. What I must and do claim is that such exercises, when effective, are accompanied by exercises of powers to do what one has those rights to do, powers which may be non-normatively described.

(ii) Now in describing those powers and their exercise I do not take myself to be providing a description of contract considered properly as such. I intend, instead, to be providing a matching non-normative analogue of that normative relationship. To describe the powers which match rights is not to describe the rights themselves but just, of course, the powers which match them. What is the difference between an enforceable and a de facto unenforceable but legitimate contract? In the second the exercise of rights is unaccompanied by an exercise of matching powers.

So while the relation of contract, properly so called, is indeed "essentially norm-governed" (p. 218), that is immaterial, since powers are supposed to match, not analyse norms. Lukes is right that exercises of powers do not identify exercises of the rights those powers match, but he is right about that precisely because of the conceptual distinctness of rights and powers he elsewhere strives to deny.

(iii) Lukes is also right (p. 219) that contracts are normative not only in that they involve exercises of rights, but also in that what one has the right to do is often itself described in normative language. It follows that we do not reach a norm-free description when we replace such a phrase as "he exercised his right to alienate his labour power" by the phrase "he exercised his power to alienate his labour power": "alienate" is a legally defined term. But, as I indicated at p. 221 of KMTH, which Lukes ignores, the matching programme need not stop there, and I explained how to continue it until a quite norm-free description is reached. (One may construct a norm-free power matching the concept of the right to bequeath - see p. 215 above - by analogous means. Does such a description qualify as a "thin 'behavioural' description" in Lukes's use (p. 219) of that phrase? Suppose it does. Then Lukes says of such descriptions that they could not match just those normatively loaded descriptions with which the matching procedure begins. But either this means, once again, and once again irrelevantly, that the terminal decriptions do not analyse the initial ones, or, by virtue of the way matching is defined, it is simply false.

For it is important to realise that "matching" is nothing but a label for the syntactical relationship expressly defined at pp. 219-222 of KMTH. You guarantee that a power matches a right simply by following the perfectly explicit recipe for achieving a matching power which I lay down, by making the appropriate deletions and substitutions in the phrase denoting the right. The viability of the matching programe is then ensured by the common syntax of rights and powers.[21]

(iv) I would add, finally, that I do not find the doctrine of Herbert Spencer, or Durkheim's Spencer (p. 218), in the least credible, nor, of course, equivalent to that of Cohen's Marx.

12. At pp. 216-7 Lukes claims that how one describes a person's powers and constraints depends on how one conceives him, and that there is always a choice to be made between competing ways of conceiving him, partly because competing normative judgments will support different conceptions of him. Lukes infers that the economic structure cannot be described in a "normatively neutral" (p. 217) way. It cannot possess the "hardness" (p. 216) I am said to want to attribute to it.

I disagree completely with the methodological doctrine Lukes applies here, and with his development of it elsewhere (see Lukes 1974, especially Chapter 6). But suppose that the doctrine is correct. Then I still think it is inappropriate to apply it to the present dispute. For historical materialists need not be more committed to objective, normatively neutral historiography and social science than non-Marxist historians and social scientists need be. If social science in general can accommodate itself to Luke's methodological strictures, then so can historical materialism. And if historical materialism falls before those strictures, then so does any historiography which presumes merely to tell it like it was. Accordingly, the methodological issue should be debated in general terms, and not in the specific context of a dispute about the tenability of the historical materialist distinction between base and superstructure.

Lukes has conflated two questions. Suppose he is right (p. 217) that whether or not I think a slave has the power to withhold his labour power depends on whether or not I think it would be reasonable for a slave to risk death by rebelling, and that such a judgment of reasonableness is a normative judgment. Making such a judgment, I conclude that a slave lacks the power to withhold his labour power. To defend the judgment, I would now have to defend the relevant norm, but it does not follow that in attributing lack of power to the slave I am saying something about the norms of the slave's society. My contention that a norm-free characterisation of powers is always possible is unrefuted by the thesis that the characterization of powers which I favour depends on my norms. Even if it is true that how the economic structure "is conceived will be relative to perspectives that are ... not normatively neutral", no doubt consequently attaches to my "claim that norms can be seen as bringing about and sustaining relations of production while remaining no part of their content" (p. 216). The supposed normative non-neutrality of social science does not entail that every object it studies is itself normatively loaded. Hence Lukes's conclusion does not follow from his premiss.

But is his premiss true? Is he right that a characterization of the slave's powers requires judgments about what forms of resistance would be reasonable? I think not. I put this as my basis for saying that the slave lacks the power to withhold his labour power: "if he does not work he is likely to be killed, and he will certainly die" (Cohen 1978, 222). That statement seems to me to require no judgment of reasonableness and indeed no normative judgment whatsoever. It seems to me quite objectively true (or false). To be sure, it gives an incomplete description of the slave's power position. To get a fuller picture of it, more such normatively neutral conditional statements would have to be added. And, contrary to what Lukes says on p. 217, there is no problem about what conditions should be specified in their antecedents. The more conditions that are specified, the greater will be the amount of normatively neutral information about the

slave's position. With enough such conditionals to hand, we have a tolerably full description of the economic structure of a society, and one with no normative entailments or presuppositions at all.[22]

Notes

1 I do not here also respond to the challenging treatment of KMTH provided by the editor, Anton Leist, in the same number. The reason is that I work very slowly, and slower still on material written in German, and Leist's piece came into my hands too recently for me to cope with it in advance of the required deadline.

2 Levine and Wright are not alone in characterizing me as a RAP theorist. Richard Miller does so too, in Miller 1981 and in his forthcoming Analysing Marx: in a forthcoming review of Allen Wood's Karl Marx Allen Buchanan calls Miller's attribution to me of the RAP view a "striking misinterpretation". Joshua Cohen also takes my argument in a RAP sense (in J. Cohen 1982) and claims, on that basis, that the argument is afflicted with circularity (see esp. 264-5). I shall try to show, in an ancilla to the present article, that Cohen's circularity charge does not stick, even when I am interpreted in the RAP way, and it does not so much as arise on the non-RAP interpretation of the argument given at p. 198 below. I shall post the ancilla to any reader who asks for it. Requests should be directed to me, and not to Analyse & Kritik.

3 Pure page references generally relate to the articles in Analyse & Kritik 4, 1982, 159-222.

4 It is possible for agents to seek to improve the forces both because of their emplacement in relations of production and out of an interest in reducing labour, but relations count as a source of development in the present purely technical sense just when the first condition holds and the second does not.

5 Unlike Van Parijs, Joshua Cohen recognizes that the RAP view is consistent with functional explanation of the relations by reference to the development of the forces. He achieves consistency by representing the functionally explained property of the relations as their tendency "not to provide obstacles to productive development" (J. Cohen 1982, 265).

6 That autonomy is with respect to the relations of production. It is not an absolute autonomy, since the tendency derives from fundamental material features of the human situation.

7 Van Parijs says that I apply that "label" to his (b), which is my (4). (I take the word "label" from the original English version of Van Parijs's piece, which appeared in T. Ball and J. Farr (eds.) (1983). "Label" is translated "Begriff" at p. 199 of the Analyse & Kritik German translation).

8 See p. 200 for Van Parijs's formulations PTo and PT2, and also for his PT1, a variant of PTo. PT1 says that the forces determine the relations to a far greater extent than the relations determine the forces. Van Parijs introduces PT1 on the basis of this statement of the primacy thesis:
"The primacy thesis is that the nature of a set of production relations is explained by the level of development of the productive forces embraced by it (to a far greater extent than vice versa: some such qualifying phrase is always to be understood whenever the primacy thesis is asserted)" (Cohen 1978, 134).
The phrase in parentheses has misled Van Parijs into one of his misidentifications of the primacy puzzle, which I describe in a moment. I included the phrase because not every feature of relations, and not even every feature of them which affects the forces' development, characterizes the relations because of its effect on the forces' development. There are, that is, features of relations which might be thought to threaten the primacy of the forces, and the apparent threat they pose is not neutralized in the way (4) neutralizes (5)'s threat. I review those features at pp. 164-5 of KMTH, and I conclude, on a merely intuitive basis, that, despite them, "the productive forces on the whole dominate the production relations". But that is not a contribution to the solution of the primary puzzle. For the puzzle is to reconcile (2) with (5), not to reconcile (2) with the more general fact that relations affect forces.

9 It is presented more fully in Van Parijs 1980, but even that is, as Van Parijs acknowledges, a "very abstract ... sketch" (96). I think my limited understanding of his construction is partly Van Parijs's fault and partly my own.

10 See p. 89 of Van Parijs 1980, where relations of production vary with how collective or private the ownership of means of production is.

11 I note with satisfaction that, in section 64 of his Evolutionary Explanation in the Social Sciences (Van Parijs 1981), Van Parijs construes contradiction as I have here, and, far from denying that a functional explanation of relations by forces is necessary, proceeds to consider what sort of functional explanation is required. This increases my perplexity about why he should strive to argue against me that the central theses of historical materialism do not require functional explanation.

12 See footnote 2 above. (My defense of the stated charges was originally intended for inclusion in the present article. I have removed it on the advice of Anton Leist, who rightly regards it as of insufficient general interest to warrant its appearance here).

13 According to Suchting, the class struggle is the "ultimate determinant" of both the forces and the relations of production (pp. 172-3), though, as I show in the ancilla, he is not fully faithful to that assertion of ultimacy.

14 Before invoking the Manifesto, Suchting quotes a Capital text which he regards as very important and from which he omits a phrase which I would say assigns primacy to the productive forces. The phrase is unomitted in his earlier quotation of the text in the less polemical context of p. 165.

15 Jon Elster has persuaded me that game theory is supremely relevant to certain Marxist concerns, but I deny that it can replace, or even supplement, functional explanation at the very heart of historical materialism. See Elster 1982.

16 Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality (CW 6, 319) See Wood 1981, 250, Fn. 41 for a list of texts which carry a similar message.

17 But Miller appears to think that this view of mine is an optional and rather arbitrarily added extra, "readily detachable" from a theory assigning primacy to the development of the productive forces, since such a theory would "suggest the effectiveness of an alternative to revolution, in which change is brought about by appeals to material desires common to all classes" (Miller 1983). This rather astonishingly presupposes that the material interest of humanity could not conflict with the material interest of ruling class persons. For my part, I expect no one under socialism to be as rich as Rockefeller, and I therefore expect Rockefeller to be hostile to the idea of socialism.

18 It comes from their letter of 17-18/9, 1879 to Bebel, Liebknecht and Bracke: SC, 307. (The word translated "immediate" is "nächste".)

19 Which he read at a meeting of the London University Philosophy Group.

20 See Cohen 1978, 216. I presume that moral norms belong to the "forms of social consciousness", which Marx mentions in distinction from the superstructure. Note, by the way, that Marx does not say, as Lukes reports (p. 212), that forms of social consciousness correspond to the superstructure. That is a (polemically irrelevant) misinterpretation which rests on a misreading of the syntax of the Preface sentences Lukes quotes.

21 A divergence between their syntaxes, which does not defeat the matching programe, and which is not exploited by Lukes, is discussed at Cohen 1978, 236-7.

22 Thanks are due: to Anton Leist, for excellent editorial guidance, and for patient forbearance; to Jon Elster, for helping me to understand better, and to criticize, Van Parijs's model of fast and slow dynamics, which is discussed in section 5 above; to Philippe Van Parijs himself, for extensive criticism of the draft of my response to him, not all of which I have been able to accede to, partly (though not only) because the deadline is looming; and to Arnold Zuboff, for dedicated and uncompromising criticism cf the entire draft, which led me to remove a number of confusions and infelicities.

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