

Chapter 1

DOMINATION AND MORAL STRUGGLE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL HERITAGE OF MARXISM REVIEWED

Throughout her life Hannah Arendt viewed Marxism as a nineteenth century theory. She found in Marx's work a revolutionary answer to that "social question" which twentieth century improvements in living conditions had anticlimactically brought to a close.¹ While twenty years ago this view may have run counter to intellectual currents, today Hannah Arendt would have found herself part of a general trend. Everywhere Marx's theory is again placed firmly in the past as an intellectual edifice of the nineteenth century. The period of a systematic revision of Marxism has, so it seems, given way to a trend of historicizing devaluation. For the systems-theorist, Marx's work presents a theory that has fully misunderstood the accomplishments of societies, indeed the very fact of their functional differentiation;² for some historians, the doctrine of Marx and Engels is a romantic critique of the industrial revolution, which inevitably had, as a doctrine of annihilation, to lead directly to communist totalitarianism;³ and for the theoretician of social movements, Marx was the leading advocate of a worker's movement whose productivist goals belong to a past epoch of social conflicts.⁴ Finally, and in addition to this broad front, the last few years have witnessed the genesis of a genre of self-critical history of Marxism.

4 The Tradition of Critical Theory

Here Marx is no longer viewed from an academic distance, and yet the history of his ideas is unsparingly described as a course doomed to failure.⁵ All in all, the suggestive potential of Marxist theory has clearly exhausted itself. Given that its scientific content has been refuted, its political claims historically relativized and its philosophical foundations subjected to critique, Marxism has become an object for the recollections of historians of theory. I wish to address the question of whether anything—and if so, what—nonetheless remains of Marx and Marxism. I propose to do this by first offering three versions of a redemptive critique of Marxism (I); to be sure, the three attempts make more modest scientific claims, as I will show in a second step, than those Marx had associated with his theory (II); only in the reconstruction of this core will we see what topical content Marx's theory still retains (III).

I

Today, Marxism seems to survive in its traditional form only in the context of analytic philosophy. The few writings which in the last years again promulgated an unchanged scientific program of Marxism originate almost without exception in attempts to provide an analytic interpretation of Marx's work; the central doctrines which, like the idea of base and superstructure, belong to the dogmatic stock-in-trade of historical materialism, have been subjected to methodological analyses and developed further at a highly advanced scientific level.⁶ But the methodological efforts of analytic Marxism are in no way matched by the factual gains they yield; for it is precisely the central tenets which they take for granted that are today the object of the general critique of Marxism. Marxism's empirical prognoses have so little stood the test of time that the theory as a whole has in the meantime become problematic. Accordingly, outside of analytic Marxism probably no other theory can be found which still attempts to take up uncritically the historical materialist project. The tradition of Marxist self-critique, extending from Karl Korsch through Merleau-Ponty to Habermas, seems to have reached a new stage: no longer single aspects of Marx's philosophy, but now his social-theoretic program as a whole is questioned.⁷

In the past decade a single locus of problems has emerged as the common reference point for this new state of criticism: the economic functionalism governing the underlying principles of historical materialism. This has become the focus of criticism even in those attempts which endeavor to redeem the remnants of Marx's intentions for a contemporary theory. They jointly proceed from the idea that Marxist-

oriented social theory has so far been unable to break through the limits imposed on it by the economic reductionism of the base-superstructure model; they criticize that principle for considering non-economic spheres only to the extent of their applicability as expressions of or functional elements in the domain of economic activity itself. The efforts toward a redemptive critique, however, insist that these other spheres of action or functional domains must be considered with respect to their own internal logic, if the process of social reproduction is to be adequately analyzed. Today, social theory based on Marx can regain its critical potential only if the functionalist prioritizing of the economic sphere is dropped and the weight of the other domains of action is brought to bear: an analysis in which the achievements of all remaining spheres had been investigated as contributing to the one systemic aim of material production must give way to a research program that investigates the historically specific interrelationships of independent spheres of action.⁸

While the different approaches to a redemptive critique of Marxism all turn their back in unison on economic functionalism, the positions they adopt, beyond this negative accord, are each different from the other—differences that arise from the differing logics of action which each has systematically upgraded relative to the sphere of economic production. Depending on the problem one takes as central to Marxism, other spheres of action will invariably come into view which must then be extricated from the functionalist clutches of economic analyses. As far as I can see, three versions of such a redemptive critique of Marxism can be distinguished today. The first sees Marxism as decisively lacking in a theory of collective action; this shortcoming is supposedly compensated by placing the strategic actions of individual agents outside Marxist theory's functionalist frame of reference, and then analyzing these with regard to an internal logic. Since this analysis turns to the methods of game theory, I will call this version "game theoretic Marxism" (a). The second version also faults Marxist theory for its central lack of an adequate concept of collective action; however, here this deficiency is purportedly filled by revaluing the logic specific to cultural traditions and interpretive models. I will call this second version of a redemptive critique "culture-theoretic Marxism" (b). Finally, the third version holds the real problem of Marxism to lie in its lack of a sufficiently differentiated understanding of social power; this deficiency is supposedly made up by removing the mechanisms of social power formation from their functional linking to processes of economic reproduction and pursuing instead their independent logic. Hence this third version may be meaningfully called "power-theoretic Marxism" (c).

Let me now characterize these three versions of a redemptive critique of Marxism somewhat more precisely:

(a) The historical experience behind the game-theoretic revision of Marxism is a disappointment with the explanatory potential of Marxist class theory. As a means for explaining the collective action of social groups, Marx's concept of classes had failed from the start. The features he used to differentiate individual classes structurally were heuristically so weak at the level of class-specific life-situations that no conclusions could be drawn as to the factual behavior of social classes.⁹ Accordingly, a tendency towards philosophical-historical objectivism has always predominated in the tradition that took its cue from Marx:¹⁰ the action of collective agents was analyzed purely as the carrying out of objectively given tasks instead of a creative achievement. Game-theoretic Marxism reacts to this objectivist tendency of the Marxist theory of action in the form of a counter-movement. Here the resort to methodological individualism is at first linked with the aim of overcoming action-theoretic objectivism by focusing the analysis on the creative achievements of individuals' actions.¹¹ Yet the game-theoretic frame of reference allows one to consider the creative actions of subjects only to the extent that such actions are required for the purposive-rational pursuit of their own interests; game-theoretic Marxism thus proceeds from the individual agents reacting to historical conditions with the strategic goal of optimizing their opportunities. The game of agents reciprocally calculating their interests is then used to explain the construction of those collective plans for action by means of which social movements in turn act to modify historical conditions. Thus far game-theoretic analyses of this sort have been applied with some success primarily in the historical analysis of social conflicts.¹² In the meantime, however, this approach has begun to encounter critical reactions, since the categorical restriction of the analysis to the calculated plans for action of individuals necessarily omits the communicative context of social action.¹³

(b) The same historical experience that informs the game-theoretic version of Marxism also provides the basis for the second approach: cultural-theoretic Marxism, which finds its home above all in England,¹⁴ also constitutes a theoretical reaction to the failure of Marxist class theory. Admittedly, in its very definition of the causes of this failure it takes up a counter-position to the game-theoretic trend, since it attributes the objectivist tendencies of Marxist class theory to an excess, not a dearth of utilitarianism.¹⁵ In terms of its premises, the cultural-theoretic approach agrees with those current interpretations which follow Parson's critique of Marxian theory.¹⁶ He too proceeded from the idea that the

utilitarian tradition was problematically continued in Marx's work and that, in the wake of this tradition, Marx could only determine the actions of social classes in terms of a model of the rational pursuit of interests. Thus it is concluded that from the outset his theory neglected all the normative convictions and moral sentiments which social groups rely on for practical guidance. If the failure of Marxist theory is explained in this manner, then the theoretical revision must lead into a direction opposite to the game-theoretic approach: not the purposive-rational deliberations of individuals, but collective norms of action must be shifted into the center of the analysis. Culture-theoretic Marxism thus takes group-specific norms and values as its point of departure in order to explain the action of social classes; it takes the practices and customs embodied in class-specific everyday cultures to be the location of these collective norms for action.¹⁷ Thus far culture-theoretical analyses of this sort have been especially successful in treating of the history of the labour movement.¹⁸ At the same time, however, this approach has also run onto criticism, since it has hardly succeeded in systematically embedding the everyday cultures analyzed in an overarching context processes of institutional integration.¹⁹

(c) Finally the power-theoretic approach, which represents the third contemporary version of a redemptive critique of Marxism, embodies the historical experience of what have become autonomous state-bureaucracies and administrative apparatuses. On the one hand, the state-authoritarian development of East European socialism has dramatically revealed the possibility of bureaucratically supported state control; on the other hand, the continued political stability of Western capitalist societies has inevitably given the impression of perfectly functioning techniques of control. Experiences of this sort, however, could no longer be reconciled with the Marxist theory of power, in which all political power was conceived as economically grounded class domination articulated in the form of the state. The doubts which had already earlier been raised in respect to the Marxist conception now grew still further across a broad front.²⁰ A first reaction to these difficulties can be seen in the debate launched by Althusser on the Marxist theory of state;²¹ but the question of how much autonomy falls to political authority was at first answered only from within Marxism's traditional horizon. Only after Foucault's theory of power had influenced debates on political theory²² did the discussion start to develop in a direction that led to a power-theoretic Marxism. Under Foucault's influence, social power was removed from the functional context of economic reproduction and in this respect held to be an independent element of historical development. Every social order relies upon tech-

niques of power conservation that are able to develop according to laws possessing their own independent logic. These logics of power conservation, each distinguished by the type of means it employs and the depth of its impact, then form the real nucleus of this sort of theory.²³ To be sure, thus far this power-theoretic approach seems not yet to have developed as far at the level of substantive empirical investigations. Moreover, it has already run into theoretical criticism, since the social processes of power conservation are disengaged from the structure of social interests to such an extent that they are in danger of becoming established as an independent substance of historical development.²⁴

All three approaches thus juxtapose a new paradigm to the traditional Marxist economic functionalism: in order to explain the development of societies, the first resorts primarily to a logic of competition among individuals who calculate their own interests, the second to a logic of the intersubjective handing-down of collective norms and traditions and the third to a logic of the implementation and refinement of social power. In addition, differences in methodological stance and in diagnosis of the present era correspond to those in the basic paradigm adopted. While the game- and culture-theoretic approaches proceed methodologically from the practical orientations of subjects, the power-theoretic approach refers to the subject-independent processes of systematic mechanisms; the first two approaches claim to give an internal view, the third an external view of societies. This difference in methodological stance in turn determines the type of diagnostic questions which the different approaches can raise in respect to the social process. While the two action-theoretic alternatives inquire as to the potential for conflict within contemporary societies, in the third, attention is focused upon the rapid growth of power which distinguishes capitalism today. Seen in this way, it would seem that Marxism's revolution-theoretic legacy has been handed down to the game- and culture-theoretic approaches, and its systems-theoretic legacy to the power-theoretic approach. If this is so, however, then precisely what in Marxism had originally formed a theoretical unity would now be split in two, with the severed elements of Marxist social theory being abstractly opposed to one another in the various approaches attempting to save Marxism. A brief review of the claims which Marx systematically associated with his theory will confirm this finding.

II

As we know today, Marx's work systematically connected the claims of a theory of emancipation to the goal of an analysis of society;

his aim was to analyze, along with the process of the social integration of capitalism, the conditions for its revolutionary overthrow. Marx was aided in his project of merging a theory of emancipation and social analysis by a speculative philosophy of history, the foundation of which was the concept of "social labour." By means of this concept he was able to conceptualize the formation of social orders and the development of social freedom as one single process.²⁵

"Labour" for Marx is always something more than the mere productive utilization of energy. To be sure, he first critically engages the reduction of the concept of work to economic categories, by means of which classical political economy had worked out the historical experience of the industrial revolution. For Marx, as well, labour is principally a value-creating activity and to that extent the constitutive condition of societies as such. But he understood human labour not only as a productive achievement, but as a formative event as well; he always injected an emancipation-theoretic aspect into the economic meaning of labour. In doing so, he was guided, via Hegel, by the central motifs of that expressive anthropology which can be considered the main achievement of the Romantic wing of the German Enlightenment, dating back to Herder. In this tradition, as Charles Taylor,²⁶ following Isaiah Berlin's example, has shown, all human action is interpreted as the means of expressing one's own essence; human action is then a process of the active realization of a self—of self-realization. Hegel adopted this expressive motif and interpreted labour as a process of externalizing human abilities.²⁷ Marx, for his part, could follow suit, namely by adding onto labour as an economically defined activity the dimension of human self-realization. This enabled him to conceive of forms of instrumental action, which he, along with classical political economy, held to be the crucial factor of production, as a singular expressive event as well. Human labour is then understood as a process comprising both a person's productive output as human being and the externalization of his or her essential powers: labour is factor of production and expressive event in one. Therefore, in Marx's concept of labour are combined what H. Arendt later separated in the two action-types of work and labour.

Only with this ingenious conceptual synthesis was Marx, at least to a certain extent, then able to raise the Romanticism in his own work to the level of social theory. For the expressive model of labour forms the conceptual frame of his critique of capitalism as a whole. In his early writings as well as in the mature work, Marx interprets the historical epoch of capitalism as a socio-economic formation which structurally hinders or even precludes the self-identification of labouring subjects in their own products, and so too the possibility of self-realization.²⁸ Class

struggle as the relation of conflict between capital and labour is then the medium through which the forces of self-realization make a renewed attempt to resist the established powers of dead labour. Thus, for Marx the theory of capitalism is always something more than mere social analysis: it is also the historical diagnosis of an alienating relation and the experimental prognosis of a revolutionary overthrow.

I have only recalled these categorial relationships in order once again to stress the overarching claim of the Marxist analysis of capitalism: its romantically tinged concept of labour ensures that the historical process it analyzes entails a dimension of rationality, allowing Marx to perceive an established social order also as a moral relationship of struggle. Now it is just the philosophical-historical overtaking of the concept of labour which for many years has been the focus of Marxist self-criticism. The social changes since Marx's time have first and foremost led to a full awareness of the problematic assertions that tacitly entered into the ingenious conceptual construction of his theory. Two empirical assumptions in particular have gradually come to be cast in doubt.

(a) Firstly, Marx presumes that social labour always represents the decisive condition constituting societies; only by means of this assumption was he able to derive the social order solely from the current organizational form of production and accordingly link the process of species development to progress in the forces of production. Not only have the central achievements of the social sciences after Marx rendered this initial empirical claim problematic;²⁹ social-structural changes in capitalism have themselves revealed to what extent non-instrumental forms of activity are constitutive in the reproduction of societies.³⁰ A tradition of self-critical Marxism thus running from Merleau-Ponty through Castoriadis to Habermas attempts to show that Marx inescapably verged on technological determinism, since he had reduced the developmental history of the species to the single dimension of social production.³¹

(b) Secondly, Marx had to presume that social labour represented the primary source of the formation of emancipatory consciousness; only thus could he establish a systematic connection between the critique of political economy and a practically oriented theory of revolution. True, Marx himself was only able to uphold this second empirical claim by means of further philosophical-historical assumptions; for that reason the inner link between labour and emancipation had always been controversial in the Marxist tradition.³² But, above all, the degradation of labour activity due to the implementation of Taylor's principles of productive efficiency in the years after Marx's death finally made clear that the capitalist forms of labour contain in themselves not

so much the emancipatory forces of social self-consciousness as the destructive potential of psychic immiseration.³³ And so today the second empirical claim entailed in the Marxist category of labour is manifestly questionable; hardly anyone is still convinced of the emancipatory effect of labour as such.

Precisely such troublesome historical experiences as these have in the century since Marx shaken the philosophical-historical foundations of Marxian theory. Even if this is not exclusively the case,³⁴ within Marxism today one finds as a consequence that the labour paradigm has been largely, and finally, discarded. Also participating in Marxism's process of self-enlightenment are those attempts at a redemptive critique which as a whole today represent the counter-movement against the economic functionalism of traditional Marxism; only by letting the labour paradigm recede into the background are they in a position to upgrade other social spheres in relation to production and to make them instead the reference point for an analysis of capitalist society.

To be sure, none of the three approaches take into consideration the consequences of the respective paradigm shifts they comprise. For in taking leave of the labour paradigm one also loses the action-theoretic connection by means of which Marx had been able to link his theory of emancipation to the project of an analysis of society. Because the three versions of a redemptive critique wholly neglect this resultant problem, they also do not have to face the question of what new action-theoretic framework could replace that of the category of labour. Instead, each advances as a basic concept of social analysis that particular type of action which defines the characteristics of the sphere of action they have privileged: thus the game-theoretic approach endorses the strategic actions of individuals, the culture-theoretic approach endorses the expressive action of social groups, and finally the power-theoretic approach endorses the techniques of power embedded in institutions as a basic concept for social theory. In so doing, beyond the special problems arising from their respective paradigms, all three then run into a common difficulty: they can no longer fill the action-theoretic gap that opens up once Marx's concept of labour is sacrificed as the pivotal concept of Marxist social theory; for the concepts of action they offer instead are not sufficiently complex to support the requirements both of a theory of emancipation and an analysis of society. At least two further consequences follow from this:

(a) All three proposals for salvaging Marxism lack a substitute for what Marx called "alienation" or "reification." Since the basic concepts they themselves offer no longer include any aspects of a theory of emancipation, they also lack any criterion with which to gauge failed or suc-

cessful socialization. Hence they can no longer of themselves develop a sensorium with which to ascertain what aspects of capitalism have failed in a non-instrumental sense.

(b) But it is not only this diagnostic potential, but also all normative potential that vanishes in these three new approaches to Marxism. Because Marx held labour to be the critical sphere of human self-realization, he could normatively measure a society's degree of justice by the opportunities it afforded for self-realization in labour.³⁵ If the concept of labour is replaced by some other concept of action, lacking any normative component, then the possibility of such a normative critique is unavoidably lost. Thus all three approaches are forced to adopt a moral relativism, since they can no longer of themselves ground the criteria by which contemporary capitalism can be criticized.

The above provides a sufficiently clear sketch of the tasks facing an updating of Marxism today.

III

Each of these attempts at a redemptive critique of Marxism outlined above sets its sights lower than did Marx in his theory of capitalism. On the other hand, Marx's aims can no longer be realized in the way he intended, for the conceptual means he developed have since become questionable. How, then, can we today seek to take up his intentions without systematically falling short of the theoretical aims he set himself? In other words, how can we once again incorporate a concept of emancipation and an analysis of capitalism within the same social theory, given that the Marxian paradigm of labour can no longer serve as the categorial link between the two? In order to at least indicate a first step in this direction, I shall begin by taking another look at Marx's own proposed solution; for the premises on which his concept of labour rests without a doubt permit us to reformulate his intentions at a more abstract level, and thus to render them fruitful once again for the present.

The conviction that a human being can only achieve a satisfactory identity by experiencing the integral accomplishments of his or her own labour is a basic premise underlying the Marxist concept of labour. A person's "dignity" or "respect," terms Marx did not hesitate to utilize at various points in his work, presuppose that through autonomous labour he or she can give visual form to his or her own abilities. It is this "conception of an aesthetics of production" that serves as a normative framework underpinning Marx's diagnosis of alienation and reification. Capitalism alienates the subject from herself because, with its com-

pulsion to accumulate, it creates an economic imperative that destroys just that character of work as accomplishment which is the presupposition of successful identity formation.³⁶ In this regard, Marx does not conceive of the class struggle merely as a strategic conflict over the acquisition of goods or powers of command; rather, it represents a kind of moral conflict in which an oppressed class is fighting to achieve the social conditions for its self respect. Marx does not, therefore, view the unequal distribution of goods and burdens *as such* to be the underlying cause that triggers off the class struggle; rather, unequal distribution only provides such a cause insofar as it results in a one-sided destruction of the conditions for social identity. The philosophical-historical interpretation which provides the overall framework within which Marx's analysis of capitalist class society is embedded thus incorporates a perspective that derives not from the logic of labour but from the logic of recognition (Sorel/Gramsci): under the economic conditions of capitalism the process of mutual recognition among human beings is interrupted because one social group is deprived of precisely those preconditions necessary to obtain respect. This premise—one we would locate today in a theory of intersubjectivity—remains concealed in Marx's own work since he restricts his concept of human identity to a productivist description. It is only because Marx considers the experience of the integral accomplishments of one's own labour to be the central presupposition for one's respect as a human being, that it never becomes clear that his real goal is the social conditions for mutual recognition among subjects.

To make this socio-philosophical perspective fruitful for the present day, we thus have to reverse that concretizing move by which Marx bound the conditions for human identity formation to his concept of labour. For the concrete conditions of respect and recognition among individuals are subject to historical and cultural change; what can be considered an unchanging feature throughout history, however, is the fact that individuals always have to struggle for the social conditions under which they can achieve recognition and respect.³⁷ By means of this more abstract formulation, Marx's intuitions can once again be brought to bear in a contemporary social theory. But in that case we can no longer consider the orthodox core of Marxism to be a specific method, as it was for Lukács, or, for that matter, a certain set of sociological premises. Rather, the core is solely a philosophical-historical perspective: namely, that which views social development from the vantage point of struggles for social recognition. Admittedly, such a basic philosophical-historical thought is more demanding in theoretical terms than would appear at first sight to be the case; it contains at least two theoretical pre-

suppositions for which scientifically established arguments must still be furnished. Firstly, an historically effective morality must be shown to exist in the efforts of subjects to achieve self-respect. The driving force that is at work in practical conflicts and that spurs social development would be this struggle to achieve the conditions of social recognition. In order to be able to assert this, it would, secondly, be necessary to detail the social conditions in the respective societies that lead to damage to self-respect. It must be possible to describe forms of social organization as specific relations of damaged recognition, if it is to prove possible to demonstrate plausibly that it is a struggle for recognition that opens the way for moral progress. An analysis of the feelings of injured self-respect and damaged recognition, feelings which would form the motivational raw material in the struggle to bring about the social conditions for recognition, would form the theoretical link binding the two strands of the approach.³⁸

A paradigm of recognition thus elaborated could, in my view, be a worthy successor, on a more abstract level to be sure, of Marx's paradigm of labour. In it the theory of emancipation and the analysis of society can be connected once more in a theory of action; for the practical contents of such a process of struggle for recognition are constituted by moral norms, norms by means of which capitalism can be criticized as a social relation of damaged recognition.