

[Home](#) > [Sociology of the Quran Part II](#) > [Is History Materialistic in Nature?](#) > [Conclusions](#) > 3. Each historical period is quite different from the other period in character and nature

Is History Materialistic in Nature?

What is the nature of history? Is the real nature of history cultural, political, economic, religious, or moral? Is history materialistic or non-materialistic, or a combination of both? This is one of the main questions related with history. Unless this question is not answered, our understanding of history would not be correct and sound.

It is evident that all the above-mentioned intellectual and material factors have participated in the fabric of history. But the question arises, which of them is the determining factor that plays the most important role and is prior to all others. There has been controversy as to which of the factors represents the real spirit of history and its essence, and which of the factors is able to subordinate and explain the subsidiary role of other factors. Which of them is the base, to which others serve as superstructure?

Usually, history is compared to a machine with many motors, in which every motor is independent of the others. In fact, history is considered to have a complex not a simple nature. But if we regard it as having many motors, then what are we to think of its evolution and its course of development?

It is not possible that many motors, each of them having a specific momentum pushing history in its own direction, could carry history on a specific course of evolution, unless we consider the above-mentioned factors as the moving forces subordinate to a super-force, the spirit of history.

This spirit, by employing various historical forces,. drives it towards a predetermined evolutionary goal. It is this spirit which actually represents the essence of history. But this interpretation is different from the doctrine of monistic view of history. The nature of history is synonymous with the spirit of history, and it cannot be derived from, what are called, the moving forces of history.

In our age, a theory which has attracted many supporters is that of 'historical materialism' or the 'dialectical materialistic theory of history.' Historical materialism, which is an economic interpretation of history and an economic-historical view of man-not a humanistic interpretation of economy or history-explains every human activity from the economic point of view.

In other words, according to historical materialism, history is materialistic in nature and essence and follows a dialectical process. This means that the basis of all historical movements, revolutions, and historical manifestations of every society, is its economic structure.

They are the material forces of production of society and its relations of production which fashion history and give direction to all intellectual manifestations of a society like morality, science, philosophy, religion, law, and culture. These manifestations change with changes in the mode of production and relations of production.

The expression that history is dialectical in nature means that the evolutionary movements of history are dialectical movements caused by a series of dialectical contradictions, which are concomitant with those contradictions. Dialectical contradictions are different from nondialectical ones in the sense that every phenomenon is compelled to give rise to its own negation from within. As a result of a series of changes caused by this inner contradiction, the phenomenon undergoes a radical qualitative change at a higher level, wherein the two lower stages attain perfection through synthesis.

Thus historical materialism is comprised of two basic stands: firstly, that the nature of history is materialistic; secondly, its movements are dialectical movements. Here we shall study the first problem. The second shall be taken up while dealing with the evolution and development of history.

The theory of materialistic nature of history is based on a series of certain philosophical, psychological, and sociological principles that logically lead to other theories of ideological significance. I would like to throw some light on this subject, especially because some Muslim writers claim that although Islam does not approve of the philosophical materialism, it accepts historical materialism.

Consequently they have based their own historical and sociological views on this theory. It is, therefore, essential to discuss this problem in some detail, first expounding the foundations and principles on which this theory is based and then the conclusions which are derived from them. After this exposition we shall evaluate the basis of this theory from the Islamic and scientific points of view.

Basic Principles of Historical Materialism

1. Priority of matter over spirit

Man has body as well as spirit. Human body and its functionings are the subject of biological, physical, and physiological studies. But the spirit and processes related with the soul are the subject of philosophical and psychological studies. Thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires, concepts, and ideologies represent spiritual processes.

The principle of priority of matter over spirit implies that spiritual processes are not independent, but they are only a sequence of reflections of material processes; i.e., they are caused by the influence of the conscious matter on the nerves and the brain.

These processes are significant only to the extent that they form a connecting link between the internal physical forces and the external world, but they can never dominate human existence in the manner in which its opposite forces, i.e. the material forces, do.

For example, the psychical processes may be compared to the headlights of an automobile. An automobile cannot move about without its headlights in the dark hours of night. It finds its way in the light of its headlamp. But what drives it is not the headlamp but its engine.

If these psychical processes, such as thoughts, beliefs, theories and ideologies, participate in the drama of material forces of history, they assist the movement of history, but they in themselves are unable to generate any movement. They can never be compared to the material forces.

Psychical processes are not independent; they depend for their existence on matter. The real forces are those which signify human existence and are identified with material forces, and which are measurable in material terms.

In this way, the psychical processes are not capable of generating movement and directing the course of history, and cannot be considered as a 'lever' for the movement of society. The spiritual values have absolutely no chance to become the motivating force, the source, and the goal of a social movement, unless they serve to support and explain the material values of history and society.

Accordingly, one has to be very careful in interpreting history. This theory emphasizes that we should be cautious not to be deceived by the appearances. Occasionally, at some point in history, it may appear that a thought, belief, or a faith has brought about change in a society, and stimulated it at a particular stage of development.

But if we analyse history correctly, we shall see that such beliefs do not have an independent existence; they are only the mirror-image or reflection of material forces of society. There were actually material forces, which in the guise of those beliefs, moved and changed the society.

Material forces are the progressive, leading force of history. They are represented, technically, by the society's system of production, and, from the humanistic point of view, by the deprived and exploited class of society.

Feuerbach, the famous materialist philosopher, from whom Marx himself has borrowed many of his ideas, raises the following questions:

What is theory? What is praxis? What is the difference between the two?

He himself answers that:

Everything which is confined to the mind is theoretical. Whatever moves the minds of many is practical necessity. It is action which unites many minds together and organizes the masses, and in this manner

finds a place for itself in the world. [1](#)

And Marx, his faithful pupil, writes:

It is obvious that the weapon of criticism cannot replace criticism of weapons. Only the material forces can defeat other material forces.

Marx does not believe in the independence of non-material forces. He, at the most, recognizes their value in relation to material existence: He says: "Theory also, only by taking roots into the lives of the masses, can be transformed into a material force." [2](#)

Priority of matter over spirit, priority of the body over the mind, inessentiality of spiritual forces; and rejection of intellectual and spiritual values as fundamental, are among the basic principles of the philosophy of materialism.

Quite contrary to this philosophy is the other philosophy which is based on the essentiality of spirit, according to which all the fundamental dimensions of human existence cannot be interpreted by means of matter or its modes. In the domain of human existence, spirit is a fundamental reality, and the spiritual energies are independent of the material energies.

In this way, the spiritual forces, i.e. the intellectual forces, faith, belief and emotions, are regarded as independent factors for some movements at the individual level and at the level of society. They serve as 'levers' which can be used for the movement of history. Many of historical movements have ultimately arisen because of these 'levers,' especially those which belong to a higher human plane. The higher individual and collective movements are independently originated by these forces, and derive their sublimity from these very forces.

Psychic forces sometimes strongly influence physical and material powers, not only at the level of voluntary activity, but also at the level of mechanical, involuntary, and physiological activity, and employ them for attaining their own specific purpose. The effects of psychical suggestions for curing physical ailments and the miraculous effects of hypnotism, which belong to the same category, cannot be overlooked.

Knowledge and faith, particularly faith, and specifically whenever these two psychic forces are harmonized, a great and useful force is generated which can create wonders by playing an extraordinarily progressive and revolutionary role in transforming the course of history.

Independence of mind and spiritual powers is one of the fundamental principles of "epistemological realism." [3](#)

2. Primacy and priority of material needs over intellectual needs

Man has at least two types of needs for his social existence. Firstly, there are the material needs, such

as the need for bread, water, shelter, dress, medicine, and other such needs. Secondly, there are the intellectual needs, such as the needs for education, knowledge, literature, art, philosophical speculation, faith, ideology, prayer, morality, and other such things. These two types of needs accompany man in all situations and conditions. But which of them precedes the other? material needs or intellectual needs? Or none of them?

The theory of priority of material needs is based on the notion that material needs are more important and preferable. Their importance is not because of the fact that at the initial stage man is in pursuit of material needs, and when these needs are satisfied, he can divert his attention and energies towards the attainment of intellectual pursuits, but because material needs are also the basis and the source of intellectual needs.

It is not that man is created with two types of needs and two types of instincts: material needs and material instincts, intellectual needs and intellectual instincts; rather man has been created with only one type of needs and one type of instincts. Intellectual needs are only secondary needs, which serve the sole purpose of gratifying the material needs in a better manner.

This is the reason why the intellectual needs, from the point of view of form, quality, and also essence, are subordinated to the material needs. In every age, man has given a specific form, character, and mode to his material needs, according to the stage of development of the means of production. His intellectual requirements, which originate in his material requirements, correspond in form, mode, and quality to his material necessities.

Hence, there is a twofold relationship of priority between the material needs and the intellectual needs: priority of existence, i.e. intellectual needs are the by-products of the material needs; and the priority of essence, i.e. the form, quality, and nature of the intellectual needs remain subordinated to that of the material needs. In his book Historical Materialism P. Royan quotes from page 92 of Hymen Louis' book Philosophical Ideas:

Man's material course of existence led him to propound theories corresponding to the material needs of the time about his world, society, art, and morality; all intellectual manifestations are the resultant products of material conditions and the mode of production. [4](#)

Accordingly, scientific judgment, philosophical thought, artistic and aesthetic sensibility, moral values, and religious propensities of every human being are subject to his way of life. Applying this maxim,

“Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you think,” which refers to individuals, to the society, it may be said: “Tell me what is the degree of development of the means of production, and what are the economic relations among the members of a society, and I will tell you what ideology, which philosophy and what ethics and religion the members of that society follow.”

Radically opposed to this theory is the theory of independence of intellectual needs. According to it,

although in the individual human being the material needs sprout up early in life—as soon as a child is born he gropes for his mother's breast—the intellectual needs which are hidden inside the human nature, blossom gradually.

During the later stages of his development and maturity, man sacrifices his material needs for the sake of intellectual needs. Or, in other words, the urge of intellectual enjoyment is stronger and more indigenous to human nature than the physical enjoyments and attractions.[5](#)

The greater an individual's education and training, the more he considers his material needs, material enjoyments, and material existence as subordinate to his intellectual needs, intellectual enjoyments—and intellectual existence. Society also follows the same principle.

In primitive societies material needs are more dominant than intellectual needs; but as society advances and becomes more refined, intellectual needs assume more important position and become the goal of human life, while material needs, becoming secondary, are demoted to a lower place as mere means to attain higher ends. [6](#)

3. Priority of action over thought

Man is a being who thinks, understands, and acts. Is action prior to thought or vice versa? Is the essence of man action or thought? Does human nobility depend upon action, or does it depend upon thought? Is man the product of action or thought?

Historical materialism is based on the idea of independence of action and its priority over thought. It considers action as the base, and thought as its offshoot. Ancient logic and philosophy considered thought as the key to action.

According to that logic, thought is divided into concepts and judgments, each of which may be further divided into a priori (self-evident) and theoretic. A priori ideas are acknowledged as the key to theoretical ideas. In that logic and philosophy, the essence of man (the self) is regarded as pure thought. Human perfection and nobility is seen as lying in wisdom. The 'perfect man' is synonymous with the 'man of wisdom.' [7](#)

But historical materialism is established on the principle that action is the key to thought and the criterion of thought. The essence of man is his productive activity. Action is the source of man's identity and it moulds him also. Marx says, "The entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the begetting of man through human labour. [8](#)

And Engels says, "Man himself is the creation of action." [9](#) From the very beginning, man, instead of contemplating over natural calamities, conquered the external environment by means of his hard labour, and in the same way (through revolutionary action) he overpowered the powerful aggressors to establish a society according to his own desires. In the book Marx and Marxism, the author says:

Whereas in the philosophy of being (a philosophy that interprets the world in terms of “being” as opposed to the philosophy of “becoming,” which interprets the world in terms of motion. Marxism belongs to the group of the philosophies of “becoming”) it was customary at first to set forth the ideas and the principles from which practical conclusions are derived; praxis (practical philosophy), on the other hand, regards action as the origin and basis of all thought. It replaces the faith in thought by the philosophy of power.

In agreement with Hegel, it asserts: “The real being of man, in the first instance, is his own action.” In this belief he joins the German thinker who reversed the famous phrase, “In the beginning there was the Word” –in which the Word signifies spirit, for it is through the word that the spirit expresses itself—and declared “In the beginning there was the Act.”[10](#)

This is one of the principles of the materialistic philosophy of Marxism. This principle is known as “praxis” in the Marxist terminology, and is borrowed by Marx from his materialist predecessor, Feuerbach, and his another master, Hegel.

Opposed to this principle is the principle of the philosophy of ontological realism [idealism] that believes in the priority of thought over action and reciprocal interaction of thought and action. In this philosophy, thought is the essence of man (e.g. the self's `knowledge by presence' of itself).

Man has a reciprocal relation with action and work: he creates work and his work in turn moulds him. Man, through his action upon the external world, acquires the data of his knowledge from the external world; until the mind becomes enriched with these primary data, it remains incapable of any intelligent activity.

After collecting this data, the mind reciprocally exercises its powers on the data in various fashions, as by generalization, abstraction, and inference (ratiocination). In this way, it prepares the grounds for the correct understanding of objects.

Understanding is not merely the reflection of external matter in the mind. It is only after the reflection of external matter is transformed inside the mind through a series of mental processes, which originate in the nonmaterial substance of the soul, that understanding becomes possible.

Hence, action is the origin of thought and thought is the origin of action. Action is the test of thought and at the same time thought is the test of action.

This is not a vicious circle. Man's nobility lies in his wisdom, faith, and dignity, and in turn his work is valuable because through it he acquires these virtues. Man is the creator of his work, and, at the same time, he is also its product. This is the distinguishing characteristic of man, which is not found in any other being, and which is derived from a mode of Divine creation special to his species. [11](#)

Mans' creativity in relation to work is inventive and positive, while work's formative power in relation to

man is only quantitative. It means that man actually creates his own work, but work does not really create a man. It is work, exercise, and repetitive practice, which provide the grounds for the making of man from within. Whenever there is a reciprocal relationship between two things which is inventive and positive from one side and quantitative and numerical from the other, the former is prior to the latter.

Hence man, whose essence is consciousness ('knowledge by presence' of his own self), has reciprocal relationship with work. Man creates work and work moulds man. Considering the fact that man is the necessary creative cause of work and work is merely a potential or quantitative cause of man, it may be said that man is prior to work, and work is not prior to him.

4. Priority of the Social Existence of Man Over His Individual Existence, or the Principle of Priority of Sociology Over Psychology

From the biological point of view, man is the most perfect of all animals. He has a kind of capacity for self-improvement which is specific to his kind. Man is endowed with a specific personality whose dimensions form his human Dasein (existence).

As a result of continued experiences and learning, the philosophical and intellectual dimension of man's existence is shaped. And due to the influence of some other factors his existence gains another dimension which is the ethical dimension. It is this dimension which is the source of all values, and basis of the entire moral 'musts' and 'must nots'.

The artistic and religious dimensions are also evolved in a similar manner. Man himself styles a system of intellectual principles which serve as the basis of his thinking within the framework of his philosophical and intellectual dimensions. In the course of his judgments, he arrives at a set of absolute and semi-absolute (comparatively relative) values in the moral and social spheres of life. All these dimensions combined together constitute human existence.

Human dimensions are entirely effects of social factors. At the time of birth, man is devoid of all these dimensions; he is actually like a raw material ready to acquire any form, ideological or emotional, depending upon the factors that exercise influence upon him. He is like an empty pot that has to be filled from outside, like a blank recording tape on which any sound can be recorded. Whatever is recorded on it is retrievable.

To sum up, the actual maker of human personality, and whatever that transforms man from a 'thing' into a 'person,' is nothing but the external social factors, which combined together constitute that which is called social process. Man in himself is purely a 'thing,' which is transformed into a 'person' as a result of the impact of social factors. P. Royan in his *Historical Materialism* quotes from page 42 of Plekhanov's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*:

The characteristics of a social system are determined by the current level of development of the means of production of society. It means that when the stage of development of the means of production is

determined, the characteristics of the social order and the psychology (of the people) related to it, and all the other corresponding relations within the system, on the one hand, and the ideas and the pace of progress, on the other; are also (of their own accord) determined.

In the same book, it is further stated that:

When psychology, through the means of production, is determined, ideology too, which is deeply rooted in the psychology of the people, is also consequently determined. But as the ideology at a particular historical stage is the product of social requirements, and as it always continues to protect the interests of the ruling class, it necessarily strengthens and perfects the existing social structure.

Hence the social structure in class-societies, which comes into existence for protecting the ruling class and propagating its ideology, is in reality the result of the social order and its requirements, and, in the last analysis, is the product of the character of the modes and the means of production.

For instance, the church and the mosque are for preaching of the religious beliefs, which in all the religions are based upon the faith in the final judgment or resurrection. The belief in resurrection is the logical outcome of the particular social order that is based upon the division of society into classes, which in its turn is the product of a particular stage of development of the means of production. Hence, belief in resurrection is the product of the means of production (at a particular stage of social development).

In contrast to this principle is another anthropological principle which is based upon the view that the foundation of human personality, from which man's intellect and higher ideals arise, is itself inherent in human nature, ingrained in him by the agents which are responsible for his creation. It is correct that man, contrary to the well-known theory of Plato, is not born with a ready-made and finished personality, but the real foundation of his personality is inborn, not acquired from the society.

If we want to interpret this idea in philosophical terms, we shall have to say that the real source of the human dimensions of man's existence—including the moral, religious, philosophical, artistic, scientific, literary, and emotional dimensions—have their origin in his rational self, which is man's distinguishing characteristic, and is bestowed upon him by the process of creation itself. Society fosters man, nurtures him, or distorts him according to his individual aptitudes. At first the rational self is potential, and then it gradually attains actuality.

In this way, man, according to the basic principles of thought, and also according to the principle governing his material and intellectual inclinations and aptitudes, is like all the other living beings, whose all faculties are potential in the beginning, and as a result of a series of mutational movements (harakat jawhariyyah) gradually actualize, develop, and attain perfection.

Man, under the influence of external factors, nourishes and cultivates his innate personality and attains perfection, or sometimes he deviates from the normal course and distorts it. This is the same principle

which in Islamic writings is called the “principle of nature,” and is regarded as the mother principle in Islamic teachings.

On the basis of the principle of nature, human psychology is prior to human sociology. Sociology itself originates in human psychology. According to this principle of nature, although at the time of birth man possesses neither perception nor imagination, neither the power of judgment nor human aptitudes; he however is born with some existential dimensions besides his animal dimensions.

It is because of the same dimensions that he gradually evolves a sequence of abstract ideas and judgments (in philosophical and logical terms, the ‘secondary concepts’) which form the real foundation of human thought, and without which any kind of logical reasoning is impossible. The same dimensions develop a series of sublime aspirations in man, and are considered to be the foundation of human personality.

According to the theory of priority of human sociology over human psychology, man is merely a passive receiver, not an active seeker. He is a raw material which is indifferent to any form given to him, a blank tape on which any song can be recorded. In it there is no kind of inherent movement towards any fixed preordained form.

Whatever form is given to it is accepted without causing any distortion; because it neither has any form of its own, nor is any form alien to it. The tape does not require any particular song, because of its ability to receive any song without being alienated or estranged from its own essence or nature. The relation of this raw material to all forms, the relation of the tape to all songs, and the relation of the pot to whatever fills it, are similar and of the same kind.

But according to the principle of nature and the principle of priority of human psychology over human sociology, although in the beginning man lacks actual understanding and actual inclinations, from within he moves in a dynamic way towards a series of primary judgments, which are called a priori or primary principles. He also moves towards a series of higher, sublime values which constitute his ideals of humanity.

After that a set of simple ideas, which are the primary elements of thought (and are called in philosophical term ‘primary concepts’), enters into his mind from outside; those principles emerge in the form of a system of theoretical or practical judgments, and the innate human inclinations gradually assume definite form in the course of time.

According to the first theory, man, under the existing conditions, believes for example, that the arithmetical formula, $2 \times 2 = 4$, as being absolutely true for all times and places. But actually this belief is a product of specific conditions; which means that it is due to the prevailing conditions which make it true, and it is just possible that under different conditions and a different environment the judgment would be quite different, such as $2 \times 2 = 26$.

But according to the second theory, although the external conditions help man to arrive at the idea of numbers 2, 4, 8, 10 and so on, but the calculations like $2 \times 2 = 4$ or $5 \times 5 = 25$ are essential products of the human mind, and it is impossible for them to have different forms: Similarly the perfectionist tendencies of human nature are also inseparably essential characteristics of man's mind or soul. [12](#)

5. Priority of Material Aspect of Society over its Intellectual Aspect

Society is comprised of different strata, classes, and structures: economic, cultural, administrative, political, religious, legal, etc. From this angle, a society seems to be quite similar to a complete house where a family dwells and which consists of a drawing room, bedroom, kitchen, toilet etc.

One of the different social structures is that which serves the purpose of the base or the foundation of the whole structure, upon which stands the system and the superstructure. If it is disturbed or collapses, the whole structure is necessarily bound to fall. It is the economic structure of the society. The social structure of the society consists of whatsoever is related with its system of material production, such as tools and means of production, sources and relations of production.

Tools of production, which comprise the most important part of the social structure, are themselves always changing and developing. Every stage in the development of the tools of production, necessitates a specific system of relations of production which negates all that existed prior to it in the society.

The type of relations of production existing in a society depends upon particular laws and conditions concerning the institution of ownership, which really means the laws and conditions that govern the members of society and their conventional relationship with the sum. total of the product of society. With inevitable changes in the relations of production, the basis of all legal, intellectual, moral, religious, philosophical, and scientific principles is bound to change. In one sentence: economy is the foundation of society.

In the book Marx and Marxism, a passage from Marx's preface to his work *The Critique of Political Economy* is quoted:

In the social production of their life, men enter into specific relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life—process in general. It is not the consciousness of man that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. [13](#)

In the same book Marx's letter to Annenkov is also quoted:

Assume a particular state of development in the productive facilities of man and you will get a corresponding form of commerce and consumption. Assume particular degrees of development of production, commerce, and consumption and you will have a corresponding organization of the family, or orders or of classes, in a word a corresponding civil society. [14](#)

Peter explains Marx's view in the following words:

In this fashion Marx has compared the society to a building, the base and foundation of which are the economic institutions, whose superstructure (the building itself) is comprised of political, religious, and legal patterns, customs and norms.

As in the case of a building, it depends upon the position of its base and foundation, the economic forms (relations of production) and technical modes are also dependent upon and associated with the modes of thinking, the political system and the customs, and each of them is subject to economic conditions. [15](#)

The same book quotes from Lenin's *Marx–Engels Marxism* a passage reproduced from the third volume of *The Capital*:

The mode of production manifests itself in the human activity in relation to nature and, following that, in social conditions and intellectual patterns resulting from them. [16](#)

The same book quotes further from the Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:

My investigations led to the result that the legal relations as well as forms of the state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called-general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of lifethe anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy. [17](#)

Marx, in his book *The Poverty of Philosophy*, has written:

Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces, men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand mill gives you a society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, a society with the industrial capitalist. [18](#)

The theory of the primacy of material structure of society in relation to other social formations corresponds to the theory of priority of action over thought. The theory of priority of action over thought is applicable to the individual level, and the theory of priority of material aspect over other social aspects is actually based upon the theory of priority of action over thought but at the level of society.

Since the advocates of this view also advocate the theory of priority of human sociology over human

psychology, hence the priority of individual action over individual thought is a form and result of the theory of priority of material aspect over other social aspects.

Contrarily, if human sociology is considered to be prior to human psychology, the priority of material aspect of society over its other aspects would be considered as the effect and result of the priority of individual action over individual thought.

The material aspect of society, which may be also termed as the economic structure or economic base, consists of two constituents: firstly, the tools of production, which are the product of man's relation with nature; and, secondly, the economic relations of the members of society on the grounds of distribution of wealth, which are sometimes termed as the “relations of production.” Often both of them are referred to as “the means of production” or “the mode of production.” [19](#)

It should be noted that these terms used by the founders of historical materialism are not free from ambiguity, and are not well defined and specific.[20](#) When they say that economy is the base and the material aspect of society is prior to other social aspects, they mean the whole system of production, but generally refer to the—tools of production and relations of production.

Special attention should be paid to an important point fully explicit in the writings of the founders of historical materialism that the base itself is two—tiered; a part of it acts as the base for the other part, which is built upon it. The basis, the real foundation at the bottom of the structure consists of the tools of production, i.e. the physical labour materialized. It is the physical labour which creates and posits particular economic relations according to the distribution of wealth.

These relations, which reflect the degree of the development of the tools of production, are not only in harmony with the tools of production, but are also considered to be their incentive and motivating force. It means that the specific economic relations in a society are the means of deriving the greatest benefit from the tools of production. They are like a garment tailored to fit the body, i.e. the means of production.

But the tools of production in themselves are subject to development. Any change in the tools of production can disturb the harmony between the two constituent parts of the system of production. The productive and economic relations, i.e. those laws which were evolved to suit the earlier tools of production, become outdated in the same manner as a child's dress does not fit the fully grown—up man, and hinders his free movement.

Similarly the primitive tools do not suit a more developed society and obstruct its growth by creating contradiction between the two tiers of production structure. The new tools of production are inevitably established and the base, i.e. the economic structure of society, is totally transformed and, in consequence of this change, the legal, moral, philosophical, and religious superstructure is also overthrown.

Keeping in mind the primacy of collective labour, i.e. labour materialized which is represented by the

tools of production, and also considering the fact that Marx is one of those sociologists who regard sociology as being prior to psychology, who also considers man qua man as a social being or in his own words "sui generic", the philosophical role of labour according to Marxism—which is the essence of the Marxist philosophy and to which little attention has been paid becomes clear.

Marx gives the same importance to human labour in the context of human existence that Descartes gives to the rational being of man, Bergson to the dynamic aspect of human existence, and Jean Paul Sartre to man's feeling of guilt.

Descartes says, "I think, therefore I am" (Cogito ergo sum). Bergson says, "I have continuity, therefore I exist." Sartre says, "I feel—guilty, therefore I exist." Marx would have said, "I work, therefore I exist."

Apart from these diverse modes of existence (thought, continuity, guilt etc.), none of these thinkers tries to posit human existence or 'ego' in absolute terms. Some of them even maintain that man's existence cannot be conceived beyond and apart from one of these specific modes. Moreover, everyone of them wants to define man's essence and reality of human existence in these terms only.

For instance, Descartes intends to say, "My existence is synonymous with the existence of my thought; eliminate thought, and I am nothing."

Bergson intends to say, "Human existence is identical with continuity and time (duration)."

Sartre also intends to say that "man's essence and actuality of his existence lies in the sense of guilt; take away guilt from human nature, and man is nothing."

Marx also in his turn intends to say, "The whole of man's existence and his actual being is work. Work is the essence of humanity; I labour, therefore I am. It is not in this sense that work is the proof of the existence of my self, but in the sense that work itself is identical with the existence of my self; work is my actual existence."

Marx says, "For a socialist person the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but begetting of man through human labour."²¹ He distinguishes human consciousness from man's real existence, and says, "It is not the consciousness of man that determines his being, but his social being that determines his consciousness."²²

He further says that the premises with which we start are not self-willed or absolute, but are derived from real individuals, their actions, and from material conditions of existence. He explains the term "real individual" in the following words: "But the real individuals act not according to the whims which cross their imagination... but according to what they materially produce and make; i.e. they act on the basis of definite material conditions and certain limitations—conditions which are independent of their will."²³

Engels says: "Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert... but it is infinitely more than this. It is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this is true to such an extent that, in

a way, we should say that it is labour which has created man himself.”²⁴ All these extracts from the writings of the founders of Marxism indicate their emphasis on the role of labour.

However, Marx and Engels have borrowed this idea regarding the role of labour from Hegel, who said, “The real being of man, in the first instance, is his action.” ²⁵

Hence, according to Marxism, existence of man is primarily social and not individual. Secondly, the social existence of man is synonymous with his materialized labour, i.e. collective labour. All individual modes like feelings and emotions, or all social modes such as morality, philosophy, art, religion etc. are only expressions and manifestations of man's real being; they are not identical with his being itself:

Accordingly, the actual evolution of man is identical with the development of collective labour. But intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development or evolution of the social system is only a manifestation and reflection of the real development and not the development itself. The material development of a society is the criterion of its intellectual development.

As action is the criterion for judging thought, truth or falsity of an idea is also judged through action and not by intellectual or logical standards. In the same way, the measure of intellectual development also is material development.

Hence, if the question arises as to which school of philosophy, morality, religion or art is more progressive, the intellectual and logical standards cannot provide the answer to this question. The only criterion should be to see what are the conditions of which that particular school of thought is the product and manifestation, and at which stage of development of social labour or tools of production it has emerged.

This type of thinking is, of course, very strange to people like us who consider the real existence of man as his own ‘self’ and this ‘self,’ too, an immaterial substance and a product of mutational movements of nature and not the product of society. But for one like Marx, who thinks in material terms and does not believe in the immaterial substance, is bound to interpret the essence of man and his actuality from a biological point of view, and say that the essence of man is identical with the physical constitution of his body, as the ancient materialists, like the materialists of the eighteenth century, believed. But Marx has rejected the mechanistic view of life and has claimed that the being of man is grounded in society not in nature. Whatever has been formed by nature is the potential human being, not the actual one.

Furthermore, either Marx should regard thought as the essence of humanity, and work as the manifestation and expression of thought or, on the contrary; he should consider labour as the essence of humanity and thought as the manifestation and expression of labour.

Marx, being a materialist, not only does approve of the primacy of matter in the individual, but also rejects the idea of any supra material essence besides the individual's material existence. In the context of society and history also, he accedes to the priority of matter. As a result he has to adopt the second

alternative.

Here a basic difference between the point of view of Marx and that of other materialists concerning the nature of history comes to light. Every materialist, since he considers man and other manifestations of his existence as material, inevitably tends to regard history also as materialistic. But what Marx says is more than this. Marx tries to say that history is essentially economic in character, and in economics, too, the economic relations of production occupy the most important place.

Since he considers the economic and production relations, i.e. the relation of workers with the products of their labour, as essential and necessary, derived from the stage of development of the tools of production, Marx's viewpoint is— that history is determined by the tools or instruments of production.

Merely to say that history is materialistic in nature, or to say that history is economic in nature, is not enough to define the Marxian viewpoint. We should notice that according to Marx the essence and nature of history is “instrumentalist.” I, in some of my works,[26](#) have termed Marx's historical materialism as an “instrumentalist theory,” which is opposed to my own “humanistic theory” of history.

Actually, the manner in which Marx is absorbed in his philosophy of labour and conceives the idea of ‘social labour,’ shows that human beings as he conceives them are not the same as those who walk in the streets and think and resolve, but as if they are, in fact, like tools and machines in factories. Human beings who walk, talk, and think are seen as images of the ‘real’ human beings conceived by Marx.

Marx's view of social labour and tools of production seems to advance a view according to which man is a being who acts blindly and mechanically without any resolution and will. He is merely a shadow of man, not man himself, whose development and progress is determined strictly externally and who has no will or purpose of his own, and is forced to follow a predetermined path blindly.

It may be said that whatever Marx has said regarding the priority of collective labour over the conscious mind and human will sounds to be quite similar to the views expressed by some of the religious thinkers about the unconscious functionings of human organs, such as the functioning of digestive system, heart, liver etc., which are considered to operate under the influence of a hidden single will.

According to these thinkers, desires, wishes, ‘oughts’ and ‘ought not,’ and consequently the matters which are related to the practical aspect of the mind, i.e. the lower, functional, and physiological sides of the human self, which appear on the surface of the conscious mind and without its knowing their origin, are reflections of a series of compulsive natural needs originating from the subconscious. It is similar to what has been termed by Freud as the subconscious or the unconscious, which dominates the conscious mind.

The views of those ancient thinkers and that of Freud, however, relate to a part of the conscious mind and to the influence of a concealed consciousness. Besides, whatever they talk about is not external to human existence; but what Marx says is external to human existence.

Careful observation shows that Marx's theory is quite astonishing from the philosophical point of view.

Marx compares his own discovery with the well-known biological discovery of Darwin. Darwin has proved that a process quite external to the animal's will and consciousness gradually and unconsciously causes biological changes in the course of time. Marx also claims that a blind process (identical with the real existence of man) gradually and unconsciously causes the formation of the social structure, i.e. all the things named by Marx as superstructure, and even a part of the base also, i.e. the socio-economic relations.

He says, "Darwin has called the attention of scientists towards the history of natural selection, the formation of organs in plants and animals corresponding to the means of production necessary for their survival. Isn't the history of generation and formation of organs producing the social human being, i.e. the material basis of all types of social organizations, worthy of such a treatment? ...Natural selection lays bare the modes of human action vis-à-vis nature; the mode of production lays bare man's material existence, and as a result, the source of social relations, thought, and intellectual products that spring from it." [27](#)

It is quite obvious from all that we have said about the theory of historical materialism that it is based on several other theories, some of which are psychological and others are sociological, some philosophical and others anthropological.

Conclusions

The theory of historical materialism itself leads to a series of conclusions which are influential in practical social strategy. Historical materialism is not merely a theoretical and intellectual approach without relevance to social behaviour and social choice. Now we have to see what sort of conclusions can be drawn from it.

1. The first conclusion is related to the problem of study of society and history

On the basis of historical materialism, the best and the most reliable way to study and analyse historical and social events is to investigate their economic basis. Without studying the economic foundation of historical events, their correct understanding is impossible; because it is presumed that all social changes are materialistic in essence, even-though they may appear to have an independent cultural, religious, or moral essence.

It means that all these changes are reflections of the economic and material conditions of society, being their effects. Ancient thinkers also claimed that knowledge of objects by means of identification of their causes is the most reliable and the best way of understanding them.

Hence, if we assume that the root cause of all social changes is the economic structure of society, the best way of studying history is socio-economic analysis. In other words, as the cause has priority over

its effects, at the stage of study, also, priority lies with it. Hence, the priority of economic base exists not only at the level of external reality, but it is also to be observed at the level of intellectual inquiry and study.

In the book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, this problem has been discussed as follows:

For analysing social revolutions, one must not judge social conflicts in political, legal, or ideological terms; on the contrary, they are to be interpreted in terms of the contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production. Marx has seriously warned us of the dangers of such a judgment, firstly because such a judgment is not realistic, for it replaces the cause, which economic changes and contradictions are, by the effect, i.e. political, legal, and ideological forms, which are the effects.

Secondly, such an interpretation is superficial; as instead of probing deeply into the real causes, it only touches upon the surface, and what is apparent reality is considered to be sufficient for explanation. Thirdly, it is illusory; because the superstructures, which are on the whole ideological, are nothing but inaccurate images of the reality. Depending on inaccurate images instead of a realistic analysis of the problem under study, will no doubt lead us into confusion and error. [28](#)

Here the author quotes from the selected works of Marx and Engels:

As in the case of an individual mere self-introspection does not help us to make any judgement, in the same way, during the period of disturbance and chaos, the ideas of that period should not be treated as helpful for judging its character. [29](#)

Marx makes an attempt to reject the role of consciousness, thought, and innovation, which is generally considered to be a basic agent of development. For instance, Saint Simon, from whom Marx has borrowed a number of ideas, writing about the role of creativity in the process of evolution, says:

Societies are governed by two moral forces which are equally strong and operate alternately. One is the force of habit or custom, and the other is inclination towards innovation and creativity. After some time customs necessarily become evilAt such times, the need for something new begins to be felt. It is this need which really constitutes the revolutionary situation. [30](#)

Proudhon, another of Marx's teachers, says about the role of ideas and beliefs in the evolution of societies:

Political forms of nations have been the manifestations of their beliefs. Movement of the forms, their transformation and annihilation are the tests which reveal the value of the underlying ideas, through which an absolute and unchangeable reality is revealed to us gradually. But we see that all political institutions necessarily seek adjustment with the existing social conditions in order to be saved from inevitable death. [31](#)

Despite all this, Marx claims that every social revolution, more than anything else, is a socio-economic

necessity. It is caused by the process of polarization of civil social structure, the forces of production and social relations.[32](#)

Marx tries to say that it is neither inventiveness and creativity nor revolutionary ideas and beliefs that are instrumental in the process of social change, but it is socio-economic necessity that makes men develop and embrace new revolutionary beliefs and ideologies. Hence if we try to apply the conclusions of historical materialism for analysing certain historical events such as the wars of Persia and Greece, or the Crusades, or the Islamic conquests, or the Renaissance in the West, or the constitutional movement in Iran, it would be a mistake to study and evaluate them from the viewpoint of superficial forms of these events, which are occasionally political, religious, or cultural.

It would not be right to accept even the views of the revolutionaries, who might have regarded those movements as religious, cultural, or political as a criterion. We should concentrate our attention on the real substance of those movements, which is economic and material in essence, in order to arrive at correct conclusions.

Nowadays we see that the contemporary Marxists, while trying to explain any historical movement, snatch some rudimentary facts from here and there, and without having any authentic and conclusive information about it discuss the economic conditions of the past events and movements.

2. The law governing history is deterministic, inviolable, and external to human will

In previous chapters, I have already discussed whether a series of binding causal laws rules history. I have also explained that some people in the name of accidents, and others on account of the freedom of human will, have rejected the law of causation and consequently negated the existence of certain necessary permanent laws for society and history.

But I have proved that such a theory is baseless. The law of causation, and consequently the necessary relation between cause and effect, governs history in the same manner as it governs other natural phenomena.

In addition to it I have also proved that society and history have an organic unity and objective existence, and, therefore, possess a specific nature, whose laws are necessary and universal. Hence according to the previous statement, a series of general and necessary laws govern history and society. We shall term this type of necessity as 'philosophical necessity.' This necessity is responsible for directing the course of history according to a series of definite and necessary laws.

But the Marxist notion of historical determinism means economic determinism. It is a unique interpretation of philosophical necessity. This theory synthesizes two different theories. The first one is the conception of philosophical necessity, which holds that no accident can occur without a cause. Occurrence of every historical phenomenon is made inevitable and certain due to presence of particular causes responsible for bringing it into existence. No accident can occur in absence of its causes.

The second theory is that of the primacy of material foundation of society as against other foundations. This theory has already been discussed earlier. The necessary corollary of these theories is materialistic determinism of history, i.e. dependence of the superstructure on the base is necessary and inevitable. Any change in the base necessarily brings about change in the superstructure. Without a change in the base, any change in the superstructure is absolutely impossible.

That which, according to the Marxist claim, makes Marxist socialism 'scientific,' and makes it assume the garb of a natural law like other natural laws, is the very principle of historical determinism. According to this principle the tools of production, which are the most fundamental part of the economic structure, continue to develop according to a system of natural laws.

Their development is similar to the evolution of animals and plants which in the course of several hundred million years continued their gradual development, attaining new forms at every stage. As changes in species and evolution in animals and plants are independent of their own will and desire, the process of development and evolution of the tools of production also takes place automatically.

In the course of their gradual development, the tools of production pass through certain stages. At every stage they cause irresistible transformation in all social modes, and this process is irresistible. Before it reaches a specific stage of development, the possibility of initiative changes in the superstructure of the society does not exist.

The socialists, and in general the advocates of a just social order, who do not pay much attention to the possibilities realized through the development of the tools of production, and merely cherish the desire for social justice and socialism on sentimental grounds, cannot achieve anything; they waste their time and energy in futile daydreaming. Karl Marx, in his preface to the first German edition of *The Capital*, says:

The country that is more developed industrially only shows to the less developed the image of its own future.³³... And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement ultimately ...it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth pangs.

Marx himself has expounded certain points in the latter part of his statement, which either have been ignored or underestimated. He is actually trying to answer a possible question and objection.

Someone might have said: "The step-by-step development of society follows irresistibly the orderly step-by-step development in nature only, as long as man does not understand this process and fails to discover it. But as soon as man understands it, it comes under his control and domination. It is said that as long as man does not understand nature, it dominates him, but as soon as he understands it, nature becomes his obedient servant. For example, a disease remains uncured as long as its causes and cures are unknown, but as soon as it is understood, it becomes curable and is eradicated. In the same manner

cyclones and other natural calamities may be prevented.”

To elaborate the above-quoted statement, what 'Marx wants to say is this: The orderly step by step movement of society is a kind of organic change. It is the type of automatic internal movement of things, like the growth of animals and plants.

It is a kind of motion which is not mechanical. But changes brought about in things by means of external factors, like all technical and industrial changes, and other changes imposed on nature by applying external pressures, such as killing of insects by insecticides or elimination of bacteria by means of drugs, are mechanistic. When the knowledge of natural laws is employed by man to subjugate nature, the relation between man and nature is mechanical.

In the case of organic transformations and internal and essential movements of things, the utmost role that human knowledge and consciousness can play is to act in accordance with them, and to apply his knowledge for extracting the greatest benefit from them.

Man, by discovering the laws governing the growth and evolution of plants and animals—and of these are the laws governing the growth of embryo inside the animal's womb—also discovers the necessity and unchangeability of those irresistible laws.

Marx means to say that, social development of man, which is subject to development in the tools of production, is a kind of organic, autogenetic, essential, and spontaneous evolution from within, that cannot be controlled by knowledge or consciousness. Man is compelled to pass through the specific stages of a determined social evolution, just as an embryo has to undergo a definite course of development inside the womb. Any idea of changing that course is nothing but futile.

It is not possible for society to reach the highest stage without passing through certain intermediate stages. It is also impossible for a society to reach the highest stage by adopting a course different from the paths determined by history.

The Marxist conception of social evolution as a spontaneous, unconscious, or involuntary, natural, and necessary process resembles the Socratic conception of human mind, according to which ideas are inborn. Socrates used the dialectical method in his teachings. He believed that if the questions were asked step-by-step in a systematic way with an accurate knowledge of the workings of the mind, it finds the answers automatically and naturally without any external guidance.

Socrates was the son of a midwife. He used to say that he performed the same duty with minds as his mother performed in regard to pregnant women. A midwife does not give birth to a child. It is nature which makes mother deliver the child at a certain time. In spite of this she needs the services of the midwife, who takes care that any untoward incident does not happen which may endanger the life of the mother or the child.

From the Marxist point of view, though the knowledge of the laws of sociology and philosophy of history does not cause a social change, yet the knowledge of sociology and philosophy of history is valuable. And scientific socialism is nothing but the discovery of these laws. The least service it can render is to liberate minds from the influence of utopian socialism and sentimental advocacy of justice.

The laws of dynamics, on the contrary, although they are unchangeable and permanent, their knowledge offers an advantage, i.e. they are useful in predicting the future course. In the light of scientific sociology and scientific socialism the pattern of every society can be investigated. We can discover its present stage of development and predict its future course.

Consequently, one can know in which stage of embryonic development is the baby of socialism in the womb of society. At every stage one must expect only what it is right to expect of that stage, avoiding all undue expectations. A society which is still in the stage of feudalism should not be expected to enter into the phase of socialism; because, a four-month-old embryo cannot be expected to be born immediately as a fully developed baby.

Marxism makes an attempt to identify the natural-dynamic stages of society, and discover such inviolable laws of evolution of societies which are applicable to the transition of society from one epoch to another.

According to Marxism, all societies have to pass through four phases of development in order to reach the stage of socialism, viz. the period of primitive communism, the period of slavery, the period of capitalism, and the period of socialism. Sometimes instead of four periods five, six, or even seven, periods are enumerated, which means that the periods of slavery, capitalism, and socialism may be further divided into two sub-periods.

3. Each historical period is quite different from the other period in character and nature

As the process of evolution changes one species into another, in case of historical epochs the same thing happens. Every period of history has its own specific laws; the laws belonging to an earlier period or any of the latter periods can never be applied to a certain period of history.

Water, as long as it is water, follows the laws governing liquids; but when the same water is converted into steam, it does not follow those laws but becomes subject to the laws of gases.

Society also follows this principle; for example, as long as it is in the stage of feudalism it has to follow the laws peculiar to feudalism, but as soon as it leaves back that stage and reaches the stage of capitalism, any effort to retain the laws belonging to feudalism would be absurd.

Accordingly, a society cannot have any eternal and absolute laws. According to the theory of historical materialism and the doctrine that economy is the base, all the laws that are claimed to be 'eternal' are

actually dependent upon the base and so transient.

One of the basic differences between historical materialism and religion, specially Islam, is that religion firmly believes in the eternity of a set of (Divine) laws. The book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, quotes from an appendix to the second edition of *The Capital*:

Every period of history has laws of its own... accordingly as life passes from one stage to another stage, it evolves and is governed by a new set of laws. Economic life, in the course of its historical development, brings forth a phenomenon that we come across in various branches of biology... social organisms are distinguished from one another in the same way as animal and plant organisms are differentiated. [34](#)

4. From the dawn of history, it is development in the tools of production that is responsible for giving rise to private ownership and dividing society into the two classes of the exploiters and the exploited. These two main classes have represented the two basic poles of society from the beginning of history to the present day.

There has been, and always there shall be, a struggle and antagonism between these two poles of society. But bipolarization of society does not mean that all groups are either exploiters or exploited. Possibly there may be certain groups who are neither exploiters nor exploited. What is meant is that the important groups that influence the fate of society are these two groups which form the two basic poles of society. Other groups are dependent on one of these two main groups.

In *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, the author writes:

We find two different patterns of division of society according to classes and their conflicts; according to Marx and Engels: one is bipolar, and the other is multipolar. Definition of class also differs in both the patterns.[35](#) In the first pattern it is an imaginary class, while in the other it is a real class. The rules regarding the divisions of classes are also different. Engels, in his preface to *The Peasants' War in Germany* tries to reconcile these two patterns by evolving a uniform standard for class division. He distinguishes various classes in society, and, within each class, he differentiates various subgroups. But according to his belief, there are only two classes who accomplish a definite historic mission: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; because they form the really opposite poles of society.[36](#)

According to the philosophy of Marxism, as it is impossible for the superstructure of a society to precede its infrastructure, similarly it is also impossible for society to be considered as unified whole at the level of superstructure despite its being divided at the level of the base (social and economic relations, and property relations) into two poles of the exploiters and the exploited. Social consciousness. itself is also, in its turn, to be analysed into two types, i.e. the consciousness of the exploiters and the consciousness of the exploited.

Thus two types of world outlooks, two ideologies, two moral systems, and two types of philosophy

emerge in society. Social and economic conditions of each class inspire a specific type of thinking, a specific social point of view, a particular taste, and a particular social attitude and approach in each class.

It is not possible that a class's consciousness, taste, and manner of thinking should precede its economic situation. The only things that are not bipolar and which are specific to the class of exploiters are religion and state.

Religion and state are invented by the exploiting class for the surrender and subjugation of the exploited. As the exploiting class is the owner of all material resources of society, they impose their own culture and their religion on the oppressed.

In this manner the culture of the ruling class, i.e. the world outlook of the ruling class, their ideology, their morality, their tastes, their sensibility, and more than everything, the religion of the rulers, is predominant; and the culture belonging to the oppressed remains always dominated like themselves, obstructing their progress. In German Ideology Marx says:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal

The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas, hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance..

The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an historical epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range; hence among other things they rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of epoch.[37](#)

The class of the rulers and exploiters is by nature reactionary, conservative, traditionalist and obscurantist. Its culture, which is imposed by force is also reactionary, traditionalist, and obscurantist. But the oppressed and the victimized class is by nature revolutionary, anti-traditionalist, progressive, and futurist.

Their culture, which is oppressed like them, is a revolutionary, rebellious, and progressive culture. The condition of being-oppressed is the essential condition for being revolutionary, i.e. this is the only class which is capable of being revolutionary.

In the book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, after the passage which I have quoted from Engel's prefatory note to *The Peasants' War in Germany* is written:

One year after the publication of this prefatory note, (prefatory note to *The Peasants' War in Germany*) the Congress of the German Socialists has written in its Gotha Program that all classes form a reactionary front against the labour class.

Marx severely criticized this statement. But if we are logical, we should admit the fact that since these miserable socialists could not possibly differentiate between his bipolar or multipolar patterns after what Marx had written in the Manifesto.

In the Manifesto (Manifesto of the Communist Party), Marx presents the class conflicts of those days as the war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. He writes: "Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a revolutionary class."[38](#)

In some of his remarks, Marx has himself said that the only class that fulfils all conditions and qualifications of being a revolutionary class is the proletariat, and these conditions mean:

1. The condition of being oppressed; they should be productive also.
2. The condition of being propertyless (the peasants also fulfil this and the first condition).
3. Organisation, which requires centralization and solidarity (the class of proletariat, who work together inside the factories, alone fulfil this condition, while peasants, who work on fields scattered in different lands, do not).

Regarding the second characteristic Marx says: "The worker is free in two ways: free to sell his labour, and free of every kind of property." And regarding the third characteristic he says in the Manifesto, "With the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number, but it also becomes concentrated in greater masses. Its power increases, and it becomes conscious of that power."[39](#)

The above-mentioned doctrine can be termed as 'the doctrine of correspondence between the ideological foundation and the class and social foundation.' On the basis of this doctrine, every class produces a certain type of thought, ideas, morality, philosophy, art, and poetry which fulfil the requirements of its life-style, economic conditions and interests. We can also name it 'the doctrine of correspondence between the source of every thought and its direction.'

It means that all types of thought and all kinds of moral and religious systems originating from a particular class will suit the interests of that class only. It is not possible that a system of thought originating from a certain class should aim to serve the interests of the other class, or a system of thought evolved by a particular class may serve the interests of humanity without having a particular class orientation.

Thought can become humanistic and can transcend the class only when the development in the tools of production reaches a stage which affirms the abolition of all classes. It means that by negating class contradictions, ideological contradictions are also negated, and by negating the basis of ideological

contradictions, the contradictions between different currents of thought are also negated.

Marx, in some of his earlier works written in young age (Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right), was more interested in the political aspect of classes (the rulers and the ruled) than the economic aspect (exploitation and the exploited). He considered class conflicts as wars for independence and freedom from bondage. He suggested two stages of these wars: the first as the partial and political stage, and the second as the total and humanistic stage.

He stated that the proletarian revolution is the last stage of the revolution of the enslaved of history. A revolution is the basis of total emancipation of man from all sorts and forms of domination and servitude. Marx has tried to solve the problem as to how a class transcends its class character and proceeds forward to attain a goal which is universal and human, and at the same time to reconcile this notion with the laws of historical materialism.

He explains that as subordination of this class is a fundamental fact, its revolution also is of basic significance. This class has not been subjected to any particular injustice, but the very essence of injustice itself is imposed upon it, thus stimulating it to aspire for the ideals of justice and human freedom.

This explanation, if poetic, is by no means scientific. What does Marx mean by the “essence of injustice” itself being imposed upon a class? Is it so that the exploiting class before assuming that role had to adopt this course according to a different logic and indulged in the acts of tyranny for the sake of tyranny, not for exploitation, and pursued the acts of injustice for the sake of injustice, not with the purpose of exploitation, as a consequence of which the proletariat reacted to obtain justice for itself? Moreover, the assumption that the exploiting class reaches this position during the period of capitalism, is quite contrary to the doctrine of historical materialism, and a kind of idealism.

The doctrine of correspondence between the ideological and class bases requires that there should be correspondence between the source of a thought and its orientation. It also requires that there should be a relation between the inclination of an individual and the particular school of thought which is the product of his own class; i.e. the natural propensity of every individual is towards the ideology which originates in his own class and is useful for the interests of his own class.

From the viewpoint of Marxist logic, this principle is of extraordinary sociological usefulness in understanding the nature of ideologies and the aspirations of social classes.

5. The fifth conclusion is about the limited role of ideology, guidance, propaganda, exhortation and other such things, as they are matters associated with the superstructure in directing the society or social classes. Ordinarily it is presumed that ideology, propaganda, logical argument, education and upbringing, indoctrination and exhortation are capable of moulding and changing human thinking in accordance with preferred ends.

Keeping in mind the fact that the consciousness of every individual and every group is the product of their social and class character and is necessarily bound to reflect it, it is also impossible for them to take a lead over or lag behind their class consciousness.

The notion that the superstructure, and various phenomena related to it, is a source of social change is an idealistic conception of society and history. It means that the movement of the forces of the intelligentsia, reformers and revolutionaries is self-propelling.

In fact, it is frustration and deprivation of the class which from within inspires the intelligentsia and motivates the spirit of reform and revolution, not any external factors like education, training, etc., or at least it is the class character which is responsible for preparing ground for these matters automatically.

The maximum role of ideology, leadership, and other enlightening activities is only to the extent that they help in awakening the consciousness of contradiction between classes, giving rise to self-consciousness in the oppressed class; or it helps in transforming a 'class-in-itself,' into a 'class-for-itself,' i.e. a class unconscious of its class character into a class possessing class consciousness.

Hence the sole intellectual factor that can mobilize a particular class in a class society is awakening of consciousness to its condition of being exploited. But other so-called universal humanitarian approaches such as love of justice and mankind cannot play any role in a class society divided into two groups of the exploiters and the exploited who are alienated from their own selves, and in which social consciousness has been split into two parts. It is true that with the development in the tools of production a proletarian government is established, abolishing class-distinctions, and man is restored to his original classless existence.

Human consciousness divided on the basis of ownership is again unified. At that time the approach of universal humanitarianism, reflecting the communistic pattern of ownership of the tools of production, can play an effective role. Socialism, which is in fact a superstructure for a specific period of history, cannot be arbitrarily produced beforehand in any earlier period (as the Utopian Socialists desired.)

Also, in any particular historical epoch in which society is divided into two classes, the consciousness of a specific class can in no way be imposed on the other class, there is nothing like common human consciousness.

In class societies, therefore, any general and universal ideology without a class alignment cannot emerge. Every ideology that appears in class societies inevitably possesses a specific class character.

Even if such an impossibility should occur, it could not play any practical role. Accordingly, all the claims of religion, or at least that which in the form of guidance, preaching, moral advice, and exhortation addresses the whole humanity in the name of universal justice and equality for all, if not entirely deceptive, should at least be considered utopian.

6. The other conclusion we should infer is that all revolutionary figures, leaders, guides, and heroes essentially arise from the exploited class.

After demonstrating that it is only the exploited class that has the aptitude for enlightenment, reform, and revolution—only the condition of being oppressed and exploited can produce this aptitude, and at the most the super-structural factors may be credited for awakening class antagonism and self-consciousness—it becomes obvious that those prominent individuals who come forward to make the ideas of enlightenment instrumental in awakening class consciousness should themselves be fellow sufferers belonging to the same class and sharing its class consciousness.

As it is historically impossible for a super-structural pattern to precede its base, and for a class to have a social consciousness that precedes its class character; in the same way it is not possible that a person as a 'leader' may precede his class, demanding more than what is required by his own class. Similarly, it is also impossible for a person belonging to the exploiting class of society to stand against his own class in the interests of the exploited class.

In the book, *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, the author says:

Another original contribution of *The German Ideology* is analysis of class

consciousness. Here Marx, contrary to his earlier works,⁴⁰ regards class consciousness as the product of the class itself; it does not come from without. The real consciousness is nothing but an ideology, because it is bound to give a generalized form to the interests of a particular class. But it does not exclude the fact that this consciousness, which is based upon the awareness of its own conditions, strengthens the interests of the class. In any case, the class cannot attain maturity without producing its specific class consciousness.

Marx's view affirms the division of labour within the working class itself, i.e. the intellectual work (the ideological work, leadership) and manual work. Some individuals become thinkers or ideologues of the class, while others rather passively accept and act upon the ideas and concepts provided for them. ⁴¹

In the same book, while discussing Marx's philosophy with reference to the *Manifesto and Poverty of philosophy*, the author says:

In this way, awakening class consciousness and organizing it in the form of a 'class-for-itself' is the task of the proletariat and also the result of its self-fuelled economic battle. This upheaval is neither brought about by any intellectual theory which is alien to the workers' movement, nor by any political party.

Marx condemns Utopian socialists who despite their proletarian inclination do not see the historical self-propulsion of the proletariat and their specific political movement ...and try to replace with their fancies the gradual and self-motivated organization of the proletariat into a class.⁴²

This principle is particularly important for understanding the Marxist viewpoint about society and social inclinations, and the Marxist criteria for evaluating individuals, especially leaders and social reformers.

From whatever has been said above, it is obvious that Marx and Engels did not believe in any independent groups of intellectuals free of and above classes. That is, there is no room in the principles of Marxism to allow for the existence of such a class of intellectuals. If Marx occasionally makes statements contrary to this, it is because he himself does not remain a Marxist.

And such occasions, as we shall discuss later, when Marx has contradicted himself, are not rare. Now, the question arises as to how Marx and Engels explain their own position with regard to intellectuals in the light of the principles of Marxism. None of them belonged to the proletariat class. Both of them were philosophers, not workers, yet they have produced the greatest theory of labour and working class.

Marx's answer to this question is interesting. In the book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, the author says:

Marx has spoken little about the intellectuals. He apparently does not regard them as a special stratum of society, but a part of certain other classes, particularly the bourgeoisie. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx considers academics, journalists, university teachers, and lawyers as the part of the bourgeois class, like priests and army men.

In the Manifesto, when he wants to mention the names of the theorists of the working class who by origin do not belong to it—like Engels and himself— he does not call them intellectuals, but regards them as 'groups of people from the ruling class...', who have embedded themselves amongst the proletariat,' and 'have brought many elements for the education and training of that class.'[43](#)

Marx does not offer any explanation as to how he and Engels tumbled down from the skies of the ruling class to the depths of the subject class, and how they could manage to bring with them those precious gifts for the teaching and training of the downtrodden and the “*dha matrabah*” ‘*The destitute*’ as the Quran calls them (90:17).

In reality, whatever Marx and Engels could attain—and through them the lower and the downtrodden class of the proletariat could not be attained by Adam, the father of mankind, who according to the religious tradition, fell from heaven to earth. Adam could not bring such a gift along with him.

Marx does not explain as to how the ideology which can liberate the proletariat takes shape in the minds of the ruling class. In addition to this, he offers no explanation as to whether this descent or declassing is especially reserved for only these two persons, or if it is possible for others too.

He also does not throw any light on the matter that if sometimes, though in exceptional cases, the doors of heaven are opened to earth, whether it is the 'descent' alone that takes place and the members of the heavenly class come down to the level of the earthly class, or if it is possible the other way round too?

Is the 'ascension' also sometimes possible in which the members of the downtrodden class attain the

lofty heights of the ruling class? Perhaps, even if that were possible, they could hardly carry with them such gifts as may suit the heavenly ones.

Basically, it is meaningless to carry gifts from the earth to the heaven; but if one were blessed with the opportunity of ascension and were not merged into the heavenly class, he might return to earth, like Mr. Marx and Mr. Engels, with heavenly gifts for the earthly.

[1.](#) Andre Peter , op. cit., p. 39.

[2.](#) Ibid.

[3.](#) "Allamah Tabataba'i, Murtada Mutahhari, Usul-e falsafeh wa rawish-e riyalism, "Principles and Method of the Philosophy of Realism," vol. I and II. (Translator's note: The term "realism" is used by the author in the specific sense of epistemological realism not metaphorical realism.)

[4.](#) P. Royan, Historical Materialism, p. 37.

[5.](#) Ibn Sina, in part 8 of his al-Isharat, has discussed this subject with great insight.

[6.](#) Murtada Mutahhari, Qiyam wa inqilab-e Mahdi, "The Uprising and Revolution of al-Mahdi."

[7.](#) The following definition of the purpose and end of philosophy has been given

صَيْرُورَةُ الْإِنْسَانِ عَالِماً عَقْلِيّاً مُضَاهِياً لِلْعَالَمِ الْعَيْنِيِّ.

(The purpose of philosophy) is to transform man into a rational microcosm analogous to the external macrocosm.

[8.](#) Andre Peter, op. cit. pp. 40,41.

[9.](#) Ibid.

[10.](#) Ibid., p. 39.

[11.](#) See Murtada Mutahhari, Shinakht, "Epistemology."

[12.](#) For further elaboration see `Allamah Tabitaba'i, Usul-e falsafeh wa rawish-e riydlism, particularly Chapter V, ("The Source of Plurality in Impressions"). Also refer to `Allamah Tabataba'i, al-Mizan, vol. XVI, (Persian Translation), p. 190, for discussion on `the Divine Covenant'; also see vol. XXXI, p. 303, for the discussion on the meaning of natural religion. Also refer to other brief comments scattered through this exegesis.

[13.](#) Andre Peter, op. cit. p. 246, Appendix III- See also Raymond Aron, op. cit., p. 163. See also Anwar Khomeh'i , Tajdid-e nazar talabi az Marz ta Mao, "Revisionism from Marx to Mao," p. 153.

[14.](#) Andre Peter, op. cit., p. 247, Appendix III.

[15.](#) Ibid., p. 33.

[16.](#) Ibid., p. 248.

[17.](#) Ibid., p. 32.

[18.](#) Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, (Moscow), p. 122.

[19.](#) See P. Niketin, Elements of Economics, Persian translation by Nasir Zarafshan, page iii, P. Royan, Historical Materialism, (chapter on-production).

[20.](#) Anwar Khomeh'i, Tajdid-e nazar talabi az Marz ta Mao, "Revisionism from Marx to Mao," p. 253.

[21.](#) Marx, Engels, Selected Works, "Preface to the Critique of Political Economy."

[22.](#) Ibid.

[23.](#) Anwar Khomeh'i , op. cit., p. 167.

[24.](#) Fredrik Engels, Labour in Transition from Ape to Man.

[25.](#) A. Peter, op. cit., 39.

[26.](#) Murtada Mutahhari, Qiyam wa inqilab-e Mahdi.

[27.](#) Anwar Khomeh'e, op. cit., p. 223, quoted from Marx and Engels, Selected Works.

[28.](#) Ibid., p. 155.

[29.](#) Ibid.

[30.](#) Ibid., p. 181.

[31.](#) Ibid., p. 198.

[32.](#) Ibid., p. 183.

[33.](#) That is, technology and industry and as a result the social superstructure of the industrialized countries advance on a fixed and determined course. The course of movement of societies is a one-dimensional movement. The industrialized countries in every aspect represent the models of what the underdeveloped countries will become at some time in the future, and have not yet reached that stage. The possibility that the underdeveloped countries may reach this stage of development without passing through the stages covered by the industrialized countries of today, is non-existent.

[34.](#) Anwar Khomeini, op.cit., p. 225.

[35.](#) By a 'real class' what is meant is a group of people whose economic life, and profits and losses are common. An imaginary class on the other hand is supposed to consist of people leading diverse types of social existence but following a single ideology.

[36.](#) Anwar Khomeini, op. cit., p. 345.

[37.](#) Karl Marx, German Ideology, p. 67.

[38.](#) Anwar Khomeini, op. cit., p. 347.

[39.](#) Ibid., p. 357.

[40.](#) Karl Marx, German Ideology, pp. 308-309.

[41.](#) Anwar Khomeini, op. cit., p. 314.

[42.](#) Ibid. pp. 319-320.

[43.](#) Ibid., p. 340.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol1-n4/sociology-quran-part-ii-murtadha-mutahhari/history-materialistic-nature#comment-0>