# Historical Materialism

**A Brief Overview and Left-Libertarian Reinterpretation**

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# Contents

## Introduction

One of the most famous theories forwarded by Karl Marx is that of historical materialism—although Marx himself apparently never used that exact term in his work. To put it succinctly, Merriam-Webster defines historical materialism as "the Marxist theory of history and society that holds that ideas and social institutions develop only as the superstructure of a material economic base."[1] And for about a century after Marx, this has been the defining basis of historical and social analysis for many of those on the radical left. However, as David McNally accounts, in his look back at the work of Edward Palmer Thomas, historical materialism has fallen somewhat out of fashion; "in the name of rejecting 'economism' and 'class reductionism', large numbers of intellectuals have come to believe the idea that society pivots principally around the 'discourses' which organise the way we see the world and act within it."[2] Similarly, in The Utopia of Rules, David Graeber accounts for the prominence of the ideas of Max Weber and Michel Foucault in the social sciences of the postwar United States as being in part because of "the ease with which each could be adopted as a kind of anti-Marx, their theories put forth (usually in crudely simplified form) as ways of arguing that power is not simply or primarily a matter of the control of production but rather a pervasive, multifaceted, and unavoidable feature of any social life."[3] But the goal of the present piece is not to critique or refute this turn towards discourse theory and non-Marxist analyses of power—as they hold immense merit—but rather to make an overview of Marx's conception of historical materialism and its implications for radical politics and then, through the use of dialectics—a central component of historical materialism itself—and the work of various thinkers, to respond to and forward critiques of the theory in a manner that lends itself toward a left-libertarian reinterpretation.

## A Brief Overview of Historical Materialism

Marx's concept of historical materialism emerged as a reaction to German philosophy both historically and during his lifetime. Previously, German thinking had been dominated by idealists who focused largely on the spiritual and theological characteristics of society and the dissemination of ideas and values. This is particularly true of the followers of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who separated into the conservative Old Hegelians and more progressive Young Hegelians. As Marx explains,

> Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human so-

[1] "Historical materialism," Merriam-Webster, accessed April 17, 2020, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/historical%20materialism.

[2] David McNally, "E P Thompson: class struggle and historical materialism," International Socialism, no. 61 (Winter 1993), accessed April 17, 2020, http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj61/mcnally.htm.

[3] David Graeber, The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2015), 30, accessed May 13, 2020, https://libcom.org/files/David_Graeber-The_Utopia_of_Rules_On_Technology_St.pdf.

> ciety) it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness.[4]

However, Marx—although also a student of Hegel—raises the question of where these conceptions, thoughts, and ideas even come from in the first place. Unlike previous German thinkers, he begins his analysis of history not with the emergence of writing, religion, governance, or other great cultural inventions but rather delves into what those thinkers called prehistory.

For Marx, the dawn of history begins with the material world and material needs. He points out that before any semblance of civilization can emerge, human beings must first consider "eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things."[5] Therefore, the genesis of the means of producing these necessities of life becomes the primary differentiation that humans begin to make between themselves and so-called lower animals—as opposed to distinguishing "by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like." But as the basic necessities of life are satisfied by this production, new needs are themselves produced and require greater productive forces and therefore greater numbers of people. So, what starts as simply a relationship to nature also becomes a social relationship. And this socialized production is not neutral upon the configuration of society. As Marx further puts it:

> This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.[6]

What this means is that the production of life's necessities is not somehow separate from that life, but instead becomes an intrinsic part of human social existence, and the characteristics of individuals and their lives within any society are determined largely by that "mode" of production. Or, as Marx writes, "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."[7]

This leads to the primary assumption of Marx's analysis of history: if the mode of production is what primarily determines the form and content of society then the progression of social history is caused by changes in the core elements of the economic system. Marx outlines this conception of historical development in The German Ideology through the identification of three types of ownership found in European history. The first is "tribal [Stammeigentum] ownership," which involves the earliest hunting, fishing, raising of animals, and early agriculture and, because of the latter two activities, often "presupposes a great mass of uncultivated stretches of land." The division of labor required to maintain this is very minimal, so it remains largely within the family

[4] Karl Marx, The German Ideology, 1846, in The Marx-Engels Reader, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 149.

[5] Marx, The German, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 156.

[6] Ibid., 150.

[7] Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. N.L. Stone (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), 11, https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.167007/mode/2up.

and therefore the overall social structures are extensions of the early familial structure—based around patriarchal chieftains and maintaining small numbers of slaves. The second is "ancient communal and State ownership," which emerges when several tribes combine together into cities through agreement or force, pooling their slave populations and uniting into a "spontaneous derived association over against their slaves." In this type, the division of labor is even greater, and the earliest cases of private property begin to emerge but are "abnormal" and "subordinate to communal ownership."[8] Finally, the third type is "feudal or estate property" wherein the heavily laboring division of society is no longer slaves, but serfs and peasants. In feudalism, property consists "on the one hand of landed property with serf labour chained to it, and on the other of the labour of the individual with small capital commanding the labour of journeymen."[9]

But there is quite obviously a fourth type that is not from a previous historical period, and that is the distribution of labor and ownership present in capitalism; and a key demonstration of historical materialism put into practice comes from analyzing the transition from feudalism to the current system. In Capital (Vol. I), Marx asserts that the movement towards capitalism was of course due to changes regarding the means of production, but more specifically it necessitated the rending of the feudal peasant populations from their means of subsistence. He explains:

> The capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realize their labour. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale. The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage labourers.[10]

This separation of immediate producers from the means of production was accomplished through measures such as "the forcible driving [by feudal lords] of the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal right as the lord himself, and by the usurpation of the common lands."[11] The identification of this violent appropriation, known as "primitive accumulation," further reveals the historically false premise of a free and essentially equal market system that emerged spontaneously and exists today by common consent.

It is important to note here that Marx's co-thinker Friedrich Engels attempts to step away from the violence of primitive accumulation as the defining transitional element behind the emergence of capitalism. As Kevin Carson writes,

> Engels, to render the Marxian theory consistent (and to deflect the strategic threat from the market socialists . . . ), was forced to retreat on the role of force in primitive accumulation. (And if we take his word on the importance of Marx's input and approval during his writing of Anti-Dühring, Marx himself was guilty of similar

[8] Marx, The German, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 151.
[9] Ibid., 153.
[10] Karl Marx, Capital, Volume One, 1867, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 432.
[11] Marx, Capital, Volume, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 434.

> backpedalling). In Anti-Dühring, Engels vehemently denied that force was necessary at any stage of the process; indeed, that it did little even to further the process significantly.

Carson argues however that…

> Engels . . . did not show that exploitation was inherent in a given level of productive forces, without the use of coercion. He needed to show, not that parasitism depends on the preexistence of a host organism (duh!), but that it [can] be carried out without force. Every increase in economic productivity has created opportunities for robbery through a statist class system; but the same productive technology was always usable in non-exploitative ways. The fact that a given kind of class parasitism presupposes a certain form of productive technology, does not alter the fact that that form of technology has potentially both libertarian and exploitative applications, depending on the nature of the society which adopts it.[12]

Such a position regarding both the effects of state violence and the autonomy of labor to act and utilize technology in ways contrary to the whims of capitalists continues in many libertarian Marxist traditions such as council communism and autonomism as well as heavily Marxist-influenced strains of syndicalism, platformism, and anarcho-communism.

This point regarding violence (particularly that done by the state and its cronies) having been made, it is important to emphasize that this historical materialist view is not in arbitrary combination with Marx's communist politics, but rather informs and in some ways justifies those goals. For one, it is an implicit component of Marx's work to demonstrate the contingency of any politico-economic arrangement. This is why Marx does not simply speak of a coming revolution but emphasizes the importance of past social change. His outline of the different historical forms of property allows him and Engels to make the point that "[a]ll property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions."[13] And Marx not only demonstrates the contingency of previous social systems, but also systematically identifies the mechanism by which that contingency is brought to bear: the productive forces surpass the relations of production, thereby necessitating a new social system. This can be seen in his and Engels's assessment of the transition from feudalism to capitalism where…

> the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.

[12] Kevin Carson, Studies in Mutualist Political Economy (BookSurge Publishing, 2007), 83, 86, accessed November 27, 2021, http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/kevin-carson-studies-in-mutualist-political-economy.pdf.I spoke to Carson in November 2023 and he agreed that "can" was likely the word he meant to use.

[13] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 484.

And furthermore, this historical account of the transition to capitalism as being brought about by increased productive forces and as necessitating the transformation of the peasantry of Europe into a wage-laboring proletariat itself lays the specific groundwork for the end of capitalism. As they further write, "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working-class."[14]

This identification of this mechanism behind the historical contingency of institutions and particularly that contingency imminent in the very basis of capitalism is particularly relevant for the communist mission because, in spite of the limitations and misinterpretations to be outlined later, it makes Marxists one of the most significant and active movements to be intently focused on how historical economic structures unfolded and how the current economic system might come to an end. Although there was certainly intention involved in the efforts that moved feudalism towards capitalism, these were not conceived of as means to drive history but rather were largely the various efforts of self-interested elite groups. In contrast, the essential Marxist claim is that since, as Marx maintains, people's "social existence determines their consciousness" and that order of that social existence springs from the manner in which the means of production is distributed, seizing the means of production with this understanding would mean that, to put it in Engels's own words, the many "extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history, [will] pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history."[15][16] Though ideas on what future socialism and/or communism may look like vary greatly, such a situation of true social self-governance is core to the goal of the Marxist project and, for many, the only potential alternative to the future barbarism of techno-capitalist feudalism, ecological collapse, and possibly even the extinction of the human species.

Anyone familiar with Marx and Marxism will no doubt have realized that there has so far been no explicit mention of dialectics beyond the introduction. The dialectical method, which Marx derived largely from Hegel, plays a central role in all of his work—including the formulation of his theory of history—with the most explicit being 'dialectical materialism:' an extensive theory of nature and science positing the primacy of a constantly changing material reality with built-in contradictions independent of the mind.[17] Although historical materialism is distinct from dialectical materialism, the former can be seen as a specifically social and historical application of the latter—with the primary contradictory conflict in human society being that between owning classes and working classes. But dialectics generally, as Chris Matthew Sciabarra describes,

[14] Ibid., 477-78. For Marx and Engels, the truly revolutionary segment of the working class was firmly the proletariat or wage laborers. Mao Zedong later argued for the important revolutionary role that peasant-workers have in particular national contexts (see Mao's Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan); and the Maoist-influenced Black Panthers such as Huey Newton held up a central role for the lumpenproletariat and surplus army of labor (see Newton's 1974 essay "Intercommunalism"). But perhaps the most expansive view on the revolutionary working class—and the one I personally favor the most—comes from autonomist Marxists like Antonio Negri who calls for a multi-class, feminist coalition of all those "who are put to work inside society to create profit;" the "multitude" (see Negri's speech from the 2003 European Social Forum "Multitude or Working Class?").

[15] Marx, A Contribution, 11-12.

[16] Friedrich Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, 1876, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 715-16.

[17] For a more extended outline of dialectical materialism see the Marxist Student Federation's "An Introduction to Dialectical Materialism".

> is the art of context-keeping. It counsels us to study the object of our inquiry from a variety of perspectives and levels of generality so as to gain a more comprehensive picture of it. That study often requires that we grasp the object in terms of the larger system within which it is situated, as well as its development across time.[18]

And instead of delving into dialectical materialism specifically, this broader definition will be used alongside the work of several authors to examine various critiques of historical materialism in order to move towards a left-libertarian reinterpretation of the theory.

## Subjectivity Versus Determinism in Historical Materialism

Common criticisms of historical materialism are that it is materially reductionist and economically deterministic—related claims positing that Marxists give too much import to material economic conditions to the point of subsuming all other social factors and disregarding human agency and subjectivity as a whole. An instance of this on the libertarian left comes from Noam Chomsky who, in a clip apparently featured on television in Greece, testifies that "it's a tragedy and a catastrophe that the left has accepted the idea of humans as historical products, simply reflections of their environment, because what follows from that, of course, is that there's no moral barrier to molding them anyway you like. If humans have no inner nature, they don't have an inner instinct for freedom."[19] He does not specifically name Marx as the originator of this perceived trend, but it seems obvious that this is the case. There is also Murray Rothbard on the libertarian right who, in the second volume of An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought, asserts, "How, then, do historical changes take place in the Marxian schema? They can only take place in technological methods, since everything else in society is determined by the state of technology at any one time." In Rothbard's assessment, if T is the "state of technology," S is "the determined superstructure," and n is "any point of time" then the formula of society is deterministically "Tn → Sn" with historical change only possible through change in technology as represented by "Tn+1 → Sn+1" and by no other means.[20]

If it were true that the Marxist analysis of history was only concerned with strictly material factors and dismissed all other factors including human agency and subjectivity, such a theory would be extremely undialectical, as it would utilize no variance in perspective. However, when delved into, Marx's view reveals itself not as an oversimplifying and deterministic materialism, but rather as a genuinely dialectical integration of both objective and subjective considerations. Firstly, Marx was not only reacting against the German idealists, but also attempting to overcome

[18] Chris Matthew Sciabarra, "Dialectics and Liberty," Foundation for Economic Education, last modified September 1, 2005, accessed April 17, 2020, https://fee.org/articles/dialectics-and-liberty/. For an extensive definition and history of dialectics see "Part One: Dialectics: History and Meaning" in Sciabarra's Total Freedom: Toward a Dialectical Libertarianism (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000). For a defense of this definition of dialectics see Roger E. Bissell's response to critiques of Sciabarra's Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical in Volume 17, Number 2 of The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies from The Pennsylvania State University Press.

[19] "Noam Chomsky – Bakunin's Predictions," video, 6:14, YouTube, posted by Chomsky's Philosophy, November 18, 2017, accessed April 17, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gS6g41m_NU.

[20] Murray N. Rothbard, Classical Economics, 2006 ed., vol. 2, An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought (Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995), 373, accessed April 17, 2020, https://mises.org/library/austrian-perspective-history-economic-thought.

previous materialist philosophies as well. As he discusses in the first and third of his "Theses on Feuerbach,"

> The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

He points out that "[t]he materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself."[21] It is clear from these statements that Marx does not disregard human subjectivity or agency—and such an accusation would be hard to square with his belief in the power of human beings to consciously take control of social forces through the seizure of the means of production—but rather attempts to integrate those very components from idealism into a materialistic understanding of the world.

Furthermore, Marx establishes in Theories of Surplus Value that…

> [m]an himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the subject of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth, of commodities. In this respect it can in fact be shown that all human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence on it.[22]

This illustrates that historical materialism does not discount other factors in the formulation and development of society, but rather attempts to take into consideration all potential influences. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci can be seen as bolstering this expanded dialectical view as he describes "a necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process."[23] This thinking leads him to elaborate upon the concept of superstructure, eventually arguing that revolution is impossible solely through a "frontal attack"—direct assault upon the state and the seizure of the means of production—and that there exists a necessity for a "war of position" whereby revolutionaries either infiltrate cultural institutions and/or create new alternative ones to subvert the bourgeois hegemony that reinforces the state and capitalism.[24]

But this dialectical consistency in the theoretical realm does not necessarily mean that the criticism of historical materialism as materially reductionist and economically deterministic is

[21] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 1845, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 143-44.

[22] Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus Value, trans. Emile Burns, ed. S. Ryazanskaya (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1963), 288, accessed April 17, 2020, http://www.marx2mao.com/PDFs/TSV-Part%201.pdf.

[23] Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London, UK: The Electronic Book Company, 1999), 690-91, accessed April 17, 2020, http://abahlali.org/files/gramsci.pdf.

[24] Ibid., 495-96.

completely without merit. In "The Crisis of Dialectical Materialism and Libertarian Socialism," Mario Cutajar recognizes that when it comes to the Marxist analysis of society and history—and reality in general—the word "materialism" is actually rather misleading, and that Marx attempts "to go beyond idealism and materialism" to recognize simultaneously "the creativity of the human subject and . . . the power of circumstances." However, he observes that…

> starting with the later Engels (and to a smaller extent with Marx himself) the fine balance between idealism and materialism, subjectivity and objectivity, was upset. The original synthesis, delicate because it was a purely theoretical concept, disintegrated when the attempt was made to turn it into a practical, revolutionary doctrine. Whereas the original balance meant that a distinction was made between economic conditions and the meaning assigned to them by the human agent, the new ideology reduced all human acts to their economic foundation.[25]

Cutajar asserts that this dialectical (or rather undialectical) unbalancing can be best understood by applying a contextual—and therefore itself dialectical—lens to Marx and Marxists themselves. In previous eras, many hierarchies and authorities were justified through the religious appeal to a divinely ordained social order, but "[t]he new ruling class however had no place for a deity so it replaced Him with nature, a secular God. The laws that govern billiard balls were thus extended to cover relations between human beings proving once again that things could not be other than they were." This bourgeois form of materialism is identified by both Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre as "naturalism," a worldview defined in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy as "the thesis that everything belongs to the world of nature and can be studied by the methods appropriate to studying that world (that is, the methods of the hard sciences)."[26][27] This was an effective underpinning to the overthrow of pre-capitalist regimes in Europe, and therefore Marxists in that post-Enlightenment context believed that through only slight modification it could in turn be used against the bourgeoisie themselves. However, issues arose when this seed of bourgeois ideology "led to the belief that human behaviour could be reduced to the rigid and 'exact' laws of nature" and "replaced the 'life-world' (the world of actual, human experience) with a lifeless, abstract world composed of mathematical relationships."[28]

Cutajar points to German Social Democracy and Leninism as illustrative of the practical consequences of this naturalist tendency within Marxism. In Western Europe, where capitalism was already broadly developed, the former of these two movements "eventually reconciled itself with the very society it had vowed to overthrow" because "this Marxism had been nothing more than the most radical form of bourgeois ideology." Specifically, this entailed Social Democrats demanding only piecemeal reforms—such as higher wages—which, though beneficial to the daily lives of workers, merely led to a greater equilibrium and stability to the capitalist system. In Russia, where capitalism was extremely underdeveloped, the Leninists—following the naturalist Marxist fixation purely on economic conditions—deemed it necessary to attempt to create the historical conditions from which socialism/communism is supposed to emerge. This necessitated a kind of

[25] Mario Cutajar, "The Crisis of Dialectical Materialism and Libertarian Socialism," Red Menace 2, no. 1 (Summer 1977), accessed April 17, 2020, https://libcom.org/library/crisis-dialectical-materialism-libertarian-socialism.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Marianne Sawicki, "Edmund Husserl (1859—1938)," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed April 18, 2020, https://www.iep.utm.edu/husserl/.

[28] Cutajar, "The Crisis."

primitive accumulation in its own right and both the "[s]uperexploitation of Russian labour and autarchic economic development" which ultimately ended in the creation of "a distorted form [of] the Western milieu on which [Marxism] had been originally reared."[29]

But Cutajar maintains that just as these failures can be traced back to the context in which Marxism originally emerged, so too can these failures themselves provide the context to surpass them. A new and more properly dialectical approach must start with Marx's original dialectical synthesis that attempted "to overcome the one-sidedness of materialism while at the same time avoiding the perils of romantic idealism" and therefore does away with the naturalist tendencies within classical Marxism. He points to libertarian socialism as the model this should take as it "is defined first and foremost by the negation of political authoritarianism and theoretical determinism" that can be found in Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach. In this particular piece, Cutajar provides no specific programmatic formulation—particularly in regard to alterations of the material base of society—of what he sees libertarian socialism as entailing, beyond the transcendence of the overly materialistic tendencies in Marxism—and, as he briefly outlines, the overly idealistic tendencies in anarchism.[30] Perhaps a libertarian socialist approach to altering the economic base in a non-deterministic manner that takes into account subjective factors would be some combination of two distinctions drawn by opponents of private property: private property versus possession (utilized largely by individualistic libertarian socialists) and private property versus personal property (utilized often by communistic libertarian socialists as well as by many non-libertarian socialists and communists).

The former distinction—derived largely from the work of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—is one most commonly associated with mutualists and North American individualist anarchists such as Benjamin Tucker and Josiah Warren, who argue against the absolute ownership of private property in favor of the principle of occupancy and use (otherwise known as 'usufruct'). As Clarence Lee Swartz clarifies, mutualists…

> propose to recognize conditional titles to land, based on occupancy and use by the owner; and they engage to defend such titles against all comers, so long as the owner complies with those sole conditions of occupying and using the land of which he claims the ownership. Under these terms there can be no monopoly of land, and no one who desires land for occupancy and use may go landless. Since no vacant land may then be held out of use if anybody desires it, each person may, in the order of the priority of his selection and according to his requirements and occupation, have equality of opportunity in the selection of land.[31]

Or as George Crowder—expanding upon this principle beyond just land-tenure—explains,

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid. It should be noted that, elsewhere in the same issue of Red Menace that Cutajar's piece appears in, Ulli Diemer and Tom McLaughlin do further outline the concept of libertarian socialism in their respective pieces "What is Libertarian Socialism?" and "Libertarian Socialism."

[31] Clarence Lee Swartz and The Mutualist Associates, "What Is Mutualism?," (1927), The Anarchist Library, last modified January 24, 2019, accessed March 25, 2021, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/clarence-lee-swartz-in-collaboration-with-the-mutualist-associates-what-is-mutualism. For more information and thought on the principle of occupancy and use see Center for a Stateless Society's November 2015 Mutual Exchange Symposium Discourse on Occupancy and Use: Potential Applications and Possible Shortcomings.

> The ownership [opposed] is basically that which is unearned . . . including such things as interest on loans and income from rent. This is contrasted with ownership rights in those goods either produced by the work of the owner or necessary for that work, for example his dwelling-house, land and tools. Proudhon initially refers to legitimate rights of ownership of these goods as 'possession,' and although [in his later work] he calls this 'property,' the conceptual distinction remains the same.[32]

In comparison, as Shawn P. Wilbur asserts, "the distinction so frequently made [by communists] between 'personal' and 'private property' is not, as is so often claimed, the same as Proudhon's distinction between 'simple property' and 'simple possession.'"[33] In most communist theories of property, private property consists of capital and the means of production (productive property) and personal property consists of consumer and non-capital goods and services. The former is rejected as exploitative in favor of a social ownership of the means of production.

Interestly, Carl Gustav Rosberg assesses the matter of property inheritance in the Soviet Union as such: "It is true that accumulation of material possessions from one generation to the next is somewhat minimized, since it is difficult to accumulate personal property that is productive. Children can inherit nonproductive personal property (money, houses) but not productive property, the 'means of production' (factories, machines)."[34] But the mention of "personal property that is productive" should raise some confusion considering the previously established definition. This complication would seem to emerge from the subjective uses of any kind of property and therefore the difficulty in defining what is productive and what is nonproductive property. Caspar Oldenburg points out that…

> [o]ne could . . . think of goods commonly seen as consumer goods (personal property) that, to some clever person, would also be a factor of production (private property). While many socialists consider a motor vehicle to be personal property, to an entrepreneurial car-owner it may be a production good, as he can use it to deliver pizzas to those who value extra time spent on their couch or with their family over driving to the pizzeria. If the entrepreneur bakes fabulous cakes that all the neighbors love and are willing to trade some wealth to consume, his oven is a factor of production to him, even if it is the same model found in every other house in town. Even something as lowly and seemingly insignificant as a broom is a production good to someone who can sweep with twice the efficiency of the other members of society.[35]

And as William Gillis puts it (using the term "possession" in place of what is generally termed "personal property"): "There's a history of semantic baggage around the term 'property' and

[32] George Crowder, Classical Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 85-86.

[33] Shawn P. Wilbur, "Limiting Conditions and Local Desires," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified November 10, 2015, https://c4ss.org/content/41502.

[34] Carl Gustav Rosberg, African Socialism, ed. William H. Friedland (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), 25, accessed March 26, 2021, https://archive.org/details/africansocialism00frie.

[35] Caspar Oldenburg, "On Socialist Distinctions Between Private and Personal Property," Mises Christ!, last modified April 18, 2014, accessed March 26, 2021, https://miseschrist.com/2014/04/18/socialist-distinctions-private-personal-property/.

many communists prefer to re-label things like personal toothbrushes 'possessions' instead." But this "1800s era distinctions between for example things and things that help make other things (commodities versus capital) seem very silly and arbitrary, a highly contextual framework that is rapidly dissolving with modern technological developments."[36]

In real world socialist experiments, personal versus private distinction have proven extremely hard to draw and enforce. For example, Slavic studies researcher Hiroshi Kimura outlines how, in the Soviet Union, "every collective farm household . . . in addition to its basic income from the collective-farm [kolkhoz], is allowed to run a personal subsidiary enterprise, in the form of a 'private garden plot'" and "in order to farm the garden plot[,] . . . the kolkhoz household needs to own such articles of personal property as may be necessary to this purpose, including certain of the means of production, such as agricultural implements, productive livestock, etc." Similarly, "[i]nhabitants of city peripheries are also allowed to run a personal subsidiary enterprise on their private garden plot and, consequently, to own the means of production necessary to farm it."[37] This proved deeply problematic to the distinction between personal and private property, as the farm households and those on the periphery of cities owned productive property individually or familially. A resolution of sorts can be found in the conclusion that the Soviet definition of personal property being "social or socialist, and, consumptive or non-exploitative" was more fundamentally derived…

> from a "Marxist-oriented" principle, namely, the abolition of sources of unearned income. And this criterion of 'unearned income' seems to be even more important than the distinction between the means of production and the means of consumption. In the first place, the latter distinction is only a relative criterion for the classification of property, in the sense that one and the same item can be both a means of production and a means of consumption, according to the given circumstances (recall the example of the automobile) Furthermore, if the ultimate Marxist goal is the elimination of the "exploitation of man by man," then the question of whether or not a certain item is used as a source of unearned income is more important than the question whether it is a means of production or a means of consumption."[38]

What begins to appear in this analysis is that possession and personal property are extremely similar in their opposition to the social relation of private property whereby owners are able to extract profit from that which they do not directly occupy or contribute toward. A fusion of these two theories opposing private property might resemble occupancy and use with an progressive quantitative-to-qualitative distinction—as opposed to a simple qualitative one—between personal and private property. That is: individuals could occupy and use the superficially paradoxical "personal property that is productive" mentioned earlier until that production reaches a certain scale where an 'absentee' owner begins extracting rent, collecting interest, and/or accumulating surplus value from the labor of those actually occupying and using that productive property. This

[36] William Gillis, "The Organic Emergence of Property From Reputation," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified November 29, 2015, accessed March 26, 2021, https://c4ss.org/content/41653.

[37] Hiroshi Kimura, "Personal Property in the Soviet Union, with Particular Emphasis on the Khrushchev Era : An Ideological, Political and Economic Dilemma (II)," □□□□(Slavic Studies) 14 (1970): 70, accessed March 26, 2021, https://eprints.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2115/5004/1/KJ00000112923.pdf. The word "kolkhoz" is converted here from the original Russian lettering for formatting purposes.

[38] Ibid. 81.

is a standard trifecta of unacceptable mechanisms of wealth acquisition identified by individualist anarchists such as Laurence Labadie and Dyer Lum who argue, respectively, that they are the "three main forms of usury" and "the triple heads of the monster against which modern civilization is waging war."[39][40] This is not even to delve into the fourth scourge of taxation levied directly by the state against wage laborers and small-scale independent producers alike.

Thus, when these parasitic relationships emerge, the property around which they are based would, from a left-libertarian ethical perspective, become forfeit to the collective property rights of the actual workers. Roderick Long describes this notion of collective property claim from a Lockean perspective of labor-mixing homesteading through the example of a village's path to a lake:

> Consider a village near a lake. It is common for the villagers to walk down to the lake to go fishing. In the early days of the community it's hard to get to the lake because of all the bushes and fallen branches in the way. But over time, the way is cleared and a path forms — not through any centrally coordinated effort, but simply as a result of all the individuals walking that way day after day. The cleared path is the product of labor — not any individual's labor, but all of them together. If one villager decided to take advantage of the now-created path by setting up a gate and charging tolls, he would be violating the collective property right that the villagers together have earned.[41]

A non-Lockean variation on this logic can be drawn out as a collective form of occupancy and use of productive property, resulting in something akin to the 'formalizing' of the practice of 'occupying and recovering' factories—where workers seize and place factories under workers' democratic control—and the broadening of this strategy to all productive property of a contextually appropriate upward scale. A real-world example of this practice is the Zanon tile factory in the Neuquén province of Argentina, now known as FaSinPat—short for Fábrica Sin Patrones (Factory Without Bosses). As an interviewer from the German communist group Wildcat accounts:

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[39] Laurance Labadie, "Anarchism Applied to Economics," The Anarchist Library, last modified September 22, 2019, accessed November 27, 2021, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/laurence-labadie-anarchism-applied-to-economics.

[40] Kevin Carson, "May Day Thoughts: Individualist Anarchism and the Labor Movement," Mutualist Blog: Free Market Anti-Capitalism, last modified April 29, 2005, accessed November 27, 2021, http://mutualist.blogspot.com/2005/04/may-day-thoughts-individualist.html. I cannot find the original source of this quote.

[41] Roderick T. Long, "In Defense of Public Space," (1996), Panarchy, accessed March 26, 2021, https://www.panarchy.org/rodericklong/publicspace.html. In his piece "Are We All Mutualists?," Kevin Carson points out that "in practice, the fact that standards for constructive abandonment would be to a large extent a matter of local convention, with a wide range of possible thresholds for abandonment from the most liberal to the most stringent, means that Lockeanism and occupancy-and-use really differ only in degree rather than in kind. Or to put it another way, Lockeanism is occupancy-and-use, but with somewhat more lenient occupancy requirements for maintaining ownership than most explicit occupancy-and-use advocates call for." Thus, Lockean homesteading based on labor-mixing and mutualist possession based on occupancy and use are different almost entirely in the "stickiness" of their theories of land-tenure. However, a note in favor of the primary logic of the latter theory is Proudhon's comment from What is Property?: An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government that "[n]early all the modern writers on jurisprudence, taking their cue from the economists, have abandoned the theory of first occupancy as a too dangerous one, and have adopted that which regards property as born of labor. In this they are deluded; they reason in a circle. To labor it is necessary to occupy, says M. Cousin" (p. 65).

> In 2000 the workers went on strike. The employer implemented a lock out and the workers responded by occupying the factory. In October 2001, the workers officially declared the factory to be 'under worker control'. By March 2002, the factory fully returned to production. In April 2003, the courts ordered the police to forcibly take the factory out of the hands of the workers. In response the workers developed a broad based campaign and as the police began to move in over 3000 citizens of Neuquén formed a picket in front of the factory. During the period of worker control, the number of employees has increased from 300 to 470, and wages have risen by 100 pesos a month, and the level of production has increased.

And although the interviewer explains that at the time the "the workers of Zanon are currently demanding that the provincial and national governments officially recognize the factory as a workers cooperative under state ownership," this appears to be largely a tactic of necessity, as…

> occupiers are supposed to give themselves a legal framework, to act according to the logic of economy and to recognize private property. Because at the end of the day they are supposed to buy the company from the owner once they [manage] to get it running. A lot of occupiers rely on this form of legalisation, because thereby at least they can avoid the pressure of eviction.[42]

Imagine the scale at which and varieties whereby this could be accomplished without the intertwined forces of state regulation, police authority, and the regime of private property. And this process even follows natural resolution of thought problems left behind by mutualist thinkers regarding land tenure rules. In response to Tucker's version of land tenure, a writer going by the pseudonym Egoist asks, "…if production is carried on in groups, as it now is, who is the legal occupier of the land? The employer, the manager, or the ensemble of those engaged in the cooperative work?" The answer from this perspective, as it is for Egoist, is that "the latter" appears as "the only rational answer."[43]

This standardization of worker-owned enterprises within a market system would, according to Phillip O'Hara, constitute a form of social ownership of the means of production. He writes in Vol. 2 of the Encyclopedia of Political Economy: "In order of increasing decentralisation (at least) three forms of socialised ownership can be distinguished: state-owned firms, employee-owned (or socially) owned firms, and citizen ownership of equity."[44] So, essentially, by taking into account the subjective elements of the material base, it becomes possible to glimpse a libertarian socialism with a polycentric—and therefore deeply non-deterministic—variation on the historical materialist transcendence of private property and goal of social ownership of the means of production. And an approach such as this is not without precedent in the Marxist canon. Marxian

[42] Steven, "Zanon factory occupation – interview with workers," Libcom, last modified November 10, 2006, accessed March 26, 2021, https://libcom.org/library/zanon-factory-occupation-interview-with-workers. It should be noted, as the folks at Libcom have, that although this piece is "a bit old, it still contains unique insights into the situation, hopes, difficulties and dynamics of the occupation process and many personal interviews."

[43] Benjamin Tucker, "The Distribution of Rent.," Instead Of A Book, By A Man Too Busy To Write One (1893/1897), accessed November 27, 2021, http://fair-use.org/benjamin-tucker/instead-of-a-book/the-distribution-of-rent.

[44] Phillip O'Hara, Encyclopedia of Political Economy (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), 2:71, accessed November 27, 2021, https://archive.org/details/encyclopediaofpo02ohar.

economist Richard Wolff argues that the key element of capitalism or any other economic system is "not primarily how productive resources are owned" (state vs private) "nor how resources and products are distributed" (command vs market). "Rather, the key definitional dimension is the organization of production." He therefore argues for (perfectly market-friendly) worker-owned enterprises to replace…

> the current capitalist organization of production inside offices, factories, stores, and other workplaces in modern societies. In short, exploitation—the production of a surplus appropriated and distributed by those other than its producers—would stop. Much as earlier forms of class structure (lords exploiting serfs in feudalism and masters exploiting slaves in slavery) have been abolished, the capitalist class structure (employers exploiting wage laborers) would have to be abolished, as well.[45]

Marx himself, at least at certain points in his life, did speak favorably of similar producer cooperatives. In "The Civil War in France," he says, in reference to the Paris Commune of 1871, that…

> [i]f co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production – what else . . . would it be but communism, 'possible' communism?"[46]

And in "Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council. The Different Questions," he acknowledges "the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism;" and holds it up as a demonstration "that the present pauperising, and despotic system of the subordination of labour to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of free and equal producers."[47]

But, admittedly, the question then arises, what is to ensure such social standards regarding property? In light of this question, Carson argues that "[a]ny decentralized, post-state society, following the collapse of central power, is likely to be panarchy characterized by a wide variety of local property systems."[48] And, in such a situation, Bill Orton explains how…

> for the dispute at hand [between syndicalist workers and a dispossessed capitalist], the property theories of the disputants are different, so "who is the aggressor" is at issue. By the usufruct theory, the returning capitalist is the aggressor; by the sticky theory the syndicalist workers are the aggressors. There can be no internal theoretical resolution. To avoid violence, some kind of moderation or arbitration is almost

[45] Richard Wolff, Democracy at Work: A Cure for Capitalism (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2012), 90, 12.

[46] Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France" (1871), 27, accessed November 27, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/civil_war_france.pdf. (from Marxist Internet Archive). See David L. Prychitko's Marxism and Workers' Self-Management(Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991) for an in-depth consideration of Marxism and cooperatives.

[47] The International Workingmen's Association and Karl Marx, "Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council. The Different Questions.," Marxists Internet Archive, accessed November 28, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1866/instructions.htm.

[48] Carson, Studies in Mutualist, 182.

> certainly necessary. The disputants could agree upon a wise arbiter, one without bias for or against either type of property system, to settle the issue. E.g. Wolf De Voon, who has made it clear that he thinks property amounts more or less to what the neighbors will allow. He would probably judge based on local custom and expectations of the parties involved. E.g. If the factory were located in an area where sticky property dominates, where the capitalist had reasonable expectation of sticky ownership, where the local people expect the same, and the syndicalist workers came in from a 'foreign' culture expecting to pull a fast one, then he'd probably judge in favor of the capitalist. OTOH If the factory were located in an area where usufruct dominates, and virtually all the locals expect and act in accordance with usufruct, and the capitalist, representing the 'foreign' culture, was trying to pull a property coup, then he would probably rule in favor of the syndicalist workers.[49]

However, there are extenuating circumstances in a non-statist market system that will encourage cooperatives and other non-capitalist enterprises. Anna Morgenstern makes the points that "due to the rising cost of protecting property [without state intervention via policing and military], there comes a threshold level, where accumulating more capital becomes economically inefficient, simply in terms of guarding the property" and "without a state-protected banking/financial system, accumulating endless high profits is well nigh impossible." And "[w]ithout concentration of capital, wage slavery is impossible."[50] According to Carson, Graeber holds a similar…

> skepticism that anything like anarcho-capitalism could exist for very long on a significant scale, with a large number of people willingly working as wage laborers for a minority, so long as access to the means of production is relatively easy and there are no cops to exclude people from vacant land. After all, Robinson Crusoe's 'master' relationship over Friday depended on him having already 'appropriated' the entire island and having a gun.[51]

Further, as Gary Elkin explains, without the aforementioned monopolistic banking/financial system…

> so-called Individualist anarchism is not only compatible with workers' control but would in fact promote it. For if access to mutual credit were to increase the bargaining power of workers to the extent that [Tucker] claimed it would, they would then be able to (1) demand and get workplace democracy, and (2) pool their credit buy

[49] Bill Orton, "Re: On the Question of Private Property," Anti-State.Com Forum, August 30, 2003. www.anti-state.com Captured April 30, 2004. Reproduced with brackets in Carson's Studies in Mutualist Political Economy (p. 151-52).

[50] Anna Morgenstern, "Anarcho-'Capitalism' is Impossible," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified September 19, 2010, accessed November 27, 2021, https://c4ss.org/content/4043.

[51] Kevin Carson, "Anarchism Without Adjectives," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified February 2, 2015, accessed November 27, 2021, https://c4ss.org/content/35425. For a dialectical exploration of Robinson Crusoe's place in socialist analyses of and debates about violence, see Yves Winter's "Debating violence on the desert island: Engels, Dühring and Robinson Crusoe" in *Contemporary Political Theory* 13(4).

> and own companies collectively. This would eliminate the top-down structure of the firm and the ability of owners to pay themselves unfairly large salaries.[52]

And of course, a page can be taken from Gramsci in setting out on a widespread counter-cultural and counter-institutional project to build worker solidarity and ingrain the primacy of workers over capitalists in contests of ownership; a movement helped along by the circumstances Carson writes of where, "[i]n an economy of distributive property ownership[,] . . . all consumption, present or future, would be beyond question the result of labor."[53]

## Contextuality Versus Acontextuality in Historical Materialism

Dialectics can also be used to scrutinize, to a briefer extent, another issue in the Marxist formulation of historical materialism: acontextuality. One form this problem takes is "utopianism" which, in Marx, Hayek, and Utopia, Sciabarra identifies—through the work of Friedrich Hayek—as entailing "proposals for a new society [that] are constructed in an abstract manner, external to the sociohistorical process. In attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice, it demands that all human actors adhere to a non-contextual, ahistorical model."[54] Marx and Engels are highly critical of utopianism among socialists—such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier—who, according to Engels, sought "to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda, and, wherever it was possible, by the example of model experiments."[55] This is a wholeheartedly undialectical project as it attempts firstly to remove thinkers themselves from their context like omniscient deities in order to reshape society and secondly because it divorces all potential social change from any genuinely historical process. Thus, historical materialism is so essential to Marxism because it dialectically critiques the idea that human beings can be separated from their historical circumstances and demonstrates the historical trends and mechanisms from which a new society can emerge. For Marx, "[c]ommunism is . . . not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence."[56] However, he himself falls into an undialectical utopian trap in his conception of how historical materialism can be consciously utilized in the formulation of a new society.

Sciabarra acknowledges that "Marx's vision does not pose as a constructivist design" and that he "views communism as a spontaneous, emergent product of historical development, immanent to the capitalist system itself."[57] But, in spite of this, "Marx argues that once people have reached the highest stage of communism, the social process is neither spontaneous nor the product of unintended consequences. It is consciously directed by a highly efficacious collective humanity."[58] Sciabarra believes that this itself is a utopian failure within Marx's own work as it is an attempt to

[52] Gary Elkin, "Benjamin Tucker — Anarchist or capitalist?," The Anarchist Library, accessed November 27, 2021, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/gary-elkin-benjamin-tucker-anarchist-or-capitalist.

[53] Carson, Studies in Mutualist, 74.

[54] Chris Matthew Sciabarra, Marx, Hayek, and Utopia, SUNY Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 48.

[55] Engels, Socialism: Utopian, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 687.

[56] Marx, Capital, Volume, in The Marx-Engels Reader, 434.

[57] Sciabarra, Marx, Hayek, 89, 85.

[58] Ibid., 90.

step outside of one's own context in order to reshape society. He contrasts this with what he sees as Friedrich Hayek's "more general, dialectical approach," which "recognizes the organic unity of an evolving, spontaneous order" but "objects to the illusory notion that people can rise above their society to judge and control it."[59] For Hayek, because individuals are bound to the limited knowledge of their specific contexts, they are unable to grasp the totality of the whole order. This therefore necessitates competition (though not as mutually exclusive from cooperation) within a market system to generate price information that is then dispersed and "utilised by many different individuals unknown to one another, in a way that allows the different knowledge of millions to form an exosomatic or material pattern. Every individual becomes a link in many chains of transmission through which he receives signals enabling him to adapt his plans to circumstances he does not know."[60] Similar then to sociologist Jürgen Habermas's reconstruction of historical materialism to emphasize the positive role of communicative action—cooperative action undertaken by networks of individuals based on deliberation and argumentation—this market-based perspective emphasizes the features of and restrictions on the ways information is communicated through social networks like pricing systems.[61]

Markets and consequently their pricing mechanisms are generally argued from a Marxist point of view as being fundamentally alienating, conducive toward monopoly, and drawn toward crisis. To attempt to respond to all of the complex critiques of markets would go far beyond the scope of this piece. There are, however, perspectives on markets using or responding to a Marxist lens to conceptualize a situation that presents a very different breed of market than what Marxists tend to critique. The Soviet economists Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky differentiate between markets and capitalism as such:

> The mere existence of a commodity economy does not alone suffice to constitute capitalism. A commodity economy can exist although there are no capitalists; for instance, the economy in which the only producers are independent artisans. They produce for the market, they sell their products; thus these products are undoubtedly commodities, and the whole production is commodity production. Nevertheless, this is not capitalist production; it is nothing more than simple commodity production. In order that a simple commodity economy can be transformed into capitalist production, it is necessary, on the one hand, that the means of production (tools, machinery, buildings, land, etc.) should become the private property of a comparatively limited class of wealthy capitalists; and, on the other, that there should ensue the ruin of most of the independent artisans and peasants and their conversion into wage workers.[62]

[59] Ibid., 96.

[60] Friedrich August Hayek, The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism, ed. W. W. Bartlry, III, The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek 1 (London, UK: Routledge, 1988), 84, accessed April 19, 2020, https://mises.at/static/literatur/Buch/hayek-the-fatal-conceit.pdf. See also: Sciabarra, Marx, Hayek, 93.

[61] Jürgen Habermas, "Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism," Theory and Society 2, no. 3 (1975): 288, 294, accessed November 7, 2023, https://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/socio/files/3514/0533/6053/Habermas_1975.pdf.

[62] Nikolai Bukharin and Evgenii Preobrazhensky, The ABC of Communism (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1969), 27-8, accessed December 15, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1920/abc/ABC-of-Communism.pdf.

Not only is a situation such as this highly unlikely in a stateless system for all the reasons in the prior section, but, in response to Marxist critiques of "a form of socialism centered on cooperatives and non-capitalist markets," Carson writes that…

> in the flexible production model, is that there's no reason to have any permanent losers. First of all, the overhead costs are so low that it's possible to ride out a slow period indefinitely. Second, in low-overhead flexible production, in which the basic machinery for production is widely affordable and can be easily reallocated to new products, there's really no such thing as a "business" to go out of. The lower the capitalization required for entering the market, and the lower the overhead to be borne in periods of slow business, the more the labor market takes on a networked, project-oriented character—like, e.g., peer production of software. In free software, and in any other industry where the average producer owns a full set of tools and production centers mainly on self-managed projects, the situation is likely to be characterized not so much by the entrance and exit of discrete "firms" as by a constantly shifting balance of projects, merging and forking, and with free agents constantly shifting from one to another.[63]

Unfettered competition amongst these cooperatives would also conceivably help drive down costs and socialize goods. Carson acknowledges that new innovators may receive "a large profit" early on "as a reward for being first to the market." But…

> as competitors adopt the innovation, competition drives these profits down to zero and the price gravitates toward the new, lower cost of production made possible by this innovation. . . Only when the state enforces artificial scarcities, artificial property rights, and barriers to competition, is it possible for a capitalist to appropriate some part of the cost savings as a permanent rent.

Carson concludes that such "free market competition in socializing progress would result in a society resembling not the anarcho-capitalist vision of a world owned by the Koch brothers and Halliburton, so much as Marx's vision of a communist society of abundance."[64]

More must be said about the establishment of such an economic system, but, having loosely established the basis of non-capitalist markets, one can, as an anti-capitalist, critique the undialectical utopianism of real-world 'socialist' command economy. Sciabarra grants that "Marx would have probably dismissed contemporary Communism as historically premature" and goes on to use Hayek's dialectical insights to poke holes in the theoretical plans for even 'non-premature' communism, however, it is important to—and Sciabarra does—point out how this critical insight applies to real-world attempts at implementing Marx's ideas.[65] Consider that, in Dialectical and Historical Materialism, Joseph Stalin claims…

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[63] Kevin Carson, The Homebrew Industrial Revolution: A Low-Overhead Manifesto(BookSurge Publishing, 2010), 202-03, accessed December 15, 2021, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/kevin-carson-the-homebrew-industrial-revolution.pdf.

[64] Kevin Carson, "Who Owns the Benefit? The Free Market as Full Communism," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified September 12, 2012, accessed November 16, 2023, https://c4ss.org/content/12561.

[65] Sciabarra, Marx, Hayek, 96.

> an instance in which the relations of production completely correspond to the character of the productive forces is the socialist national economy of the U.S.S.R., where the social ownership of the means of production fully corresponds to the social character of the process of production, and where, because of this, economic crises and the destruction of productive forces are unknown.[66]

Stalin at least rhetorically utilizes historical materialism—although it could perhaps be argued this is disingenuous propaganda—to argue that the Soviet Union had a greater conscious control over the forces that previously shaped humans from without, but the historical falsehood of this claim must be obvious. Sciabarra points out that, due to a "static and arbitrary price policy," Soviet planners could not properly coordinate the economy and instead "generated grotesque misallocations, inefficiencies, and bureaucratization." In fact, the very survival of the Soviet economy rested largely upon "a de facto market process of bribery, corruption, under-the-counter-sales, hoarding, and black-market entrepreneurship."[67]

Another critique of acontextual Soviet planning can be found in James C. Scott's book Seeing Like a State. Scott does not formulate his critique as explicitly dialectical or necessarily pro-market—he is actually rather skeptical of Hayek's notion of the modern market as genuinely spontaneous—but instead focuses on an ideological tendency he calls "high modernism."[68] He defines this as "a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws."[69] For Scott, the

[66] Joseph V. Stalin, Dialectical and Historical Materialism, transcr. M. (1938), accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.htm (from Marxist Internet Archive).

[67] Sciabarra, Marx, Hayek, 95.

[68] James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, Yale Agrarian Studies Series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 388. In the endnotes of Seeing Like a State, Scott accounts that "Karl Polanyi has convincingly shown" that "the market in the modern sense is not synonymous with 'spontaneous social order,' but rather had to be imposed by a coercive state in the nineteenth century" (p. 388). The general premise of the market being originally a product of the state does not, however, overtly preclude the goals of the anti-statist pro-market left who primarily distinguish their ideal version of markets from capitalism by the respective absence and presence of interference by the state. As Graeber writes in Debt, "States require markets. Markets require states. Neither could continue without the other, at least, in anything like the forms we would recognize today [emphasis added]" and "markets, when allowed to drift free from their violent origins, invariably grow into something different, into networks of honor, trust, and mutual connectedness" (pp. 71, 386). These comments would seem to open up the possibility for understandings of markets wholly divorced from their formulation in relation to the state. The beginnings of such an idea might be found in his descriptions of the "free-market ideology" of medieval Islamic society in which, summarizing the views of the Persian thinker Tusi, the market "is simply one manifestation of this more general principle of mutual aid, of the matching of abilities (supply) and needs (demand)" and "is itself an extension of the kind of baseline communism on which any society must ultimately rest" (pp. 278, 280). A more modern conception can be seen in Charles W. Johnson's essay "Markets Freed from Capitalism" from the anthology Markets Not Capitalism in which he argues that "a fully freed market" should not be understood solely as a cash nexus or even fundamentally as a sphere of exchange but rather as "the space of maximal consensually-sustained social experimentation" (pp. 61-62). Such considerations are obviously beyond the scope of this piece but are worth mentioning because the history of markets is essential to understanding their context and the relationship between—and possibility of separation of—market and state is itself an issue of dialectical consideration, as it is treated in Johnson's essay "Liberty, Equality, Solidarity: Toward a Dialectical Anarchism" and "Part Two: Libertarian Crossroads: The Case of Murray Rothbard" from Sciabarra's Total Freedom.

[69] Scott, Seeing Like, 4.

Soviet Union's approach to rural agriculture is a profound case of its application. In the early 1930s—arguably as part of the Soviet style of primitive accumulation—Stalin worked to forcibly collectivize Russian agriculture into sovkhoz (state farms) and kolkhoz in order to maximize the production of grain and foodstuffs in general for the industrializing workforce in urban centers. But Scott points out that the Soviet officials "were operating in relative ignorance of the ecological, social, and economic arrangements that underwrote the rural economy." This lack of contextual knowledge led to the immense failure of the entire project. The conscious alteration of the productive forces and relations of production did not totally recreate social organization—specifically the abolition of "cultural difference between the country and the city"—nor did it create fundamentally "new men and women." Instead, "[f]or the next half-century, the yields per hectare of many crops were stagnant or actually inferior to the levels recorded in the 1920s or the levels reached before the Revolution." Thus, the practical usage of the historical materialist analysis led to catastrophe because it ignored the existing social, natural, and economic context. In fact, Scott argues that the only great victory of the Soviet agricultural project "was to take a social and economic terrain singularly unfavorable to appropriation and control and to create institutional forms and production units better adapted to monitoring, managing, appropriating, and controlling from above."[70]

Whether it is the utopian problems inherent in Marx's theories or the command economy and high modernist tendencies of the Soviet Union, what these examples demonstrate is that it might be necessary to abandon the notion that a conscious understanding of reality through historical materialism can lead to a totalizing control over history and society, and that one should emphasize—in a dialectical fashion—the important limitations of context. A good place to start might be in Scott's contrasting between Vladimir Lenin's authoritarian, high modernist socialism—the same project that eventually led to the failure of Russian agriculture—and Rosa Luxembourg's more bottom-up and open-ended socialism, particularly as they envision the practice of revolution.[71] According to Scott, "Lenin proceeded as if the road to socialism was already mapped out in detail and the task of the party [was] to use the iron discipline of the party apparatus to make sure that the revolutionary movement kept to that road." This is an unsurprising interpretation considering the manner in which dialectical and historical materialism are often propagated as exact sciences. An alternative vision is presented by Luxembourg, who recognizes the importance of spontaneity, creativity, improvisation, and the direct influence of the working class. As Scott accounts, for her, "[t]he openness that characterized a socialist future was not a shortcoming but rather a sign of its superiority, as a dialectical process, over the cut-and-dried formulas of utopian socialism" and therefore such a future could not be administered wholly from above by a vanguard or small group of intellectuals.[72] A distilled version of this Luxembourgian insight, when applied specifically to historical materialism, might take the form of a particular application of Alfred Korzybski's famous dictum, from his book Science and Sanity, that "[a] map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness."[73] In practice, this means realizing that the insights of historical ma-

[70] Ibid., 202-03.

[71] Ibid., 204.

[72] Ibid., 175.

[73] Alfred Korzybski, Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics, 5th ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Institute of General Semantics, 1994), 58, accessed April 22, 2020, https://ilam3d.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/alfred-korzybksi-science-and-sanity.pdf.

terialism are incredibly relevant to an understanding of the progress of history and the shape of society and, even more pertinently, how one might influence those things, but that it is at its core a model and not the actual reality of the situation and should never be mistaken as such.

This would seem to be also the attitude taken by Graeber regarding the concept of revolution—the sort of events that Marx would attribute to the productive forces surpassing the relations of production thereby necessitating the end of a particular social system. For Graeber, the concept of revolution, as it is usually formulated, assumes that all radical change must take on the same form as scientific revolutions, like the shift from a Newtonian universe to an Einsteinian one, where there is a "clear break, a fundamental rupture in the nature of social reality after which everything works differently, and previous categories no longer apply." But through this view "[h]uman history thus becomes a series of revolutions: the Neolithic revolution, the Industrial revolution, the Information revolution, etc., and the political dream becomes to somehow take control of the process; to get to the point where we can cause a rupture of this sort, a momentous breakthrough that will not just happen but result directly from some kind of collective will."[74] From the assessment given earlier in this piece, this would seem to apply quite well to Marx's vision of historical materialism as applied to European history and as it pertains to the fate of the current era.[75] The problem with this vision though, according to Graeber, is that these abstracted totalities are products of the human mind and the actual reality of things is substantially messier and more complicated. This is not an argument that one should abandon these totalities "even assuming this were possible, which it probably isn't, since they are probably a necessary tool of human thought. It is an appeal to always bear in mind that they are just that: tools of thought."[76] If one applies Graeber's insights to historical materialism—much like when one does so with Luxembourg's—perhaps the conclusion is that, once again, it is incredibly helpful for understanding social change, but should not be mistaken for the actual reality of the world and do not therefore lead to totalizing control, understanding, or a 'clean' break in terms of history and society.

Similar observations to these are not lost on orthodox Marxist thinkers even beyond Luxembourg and her German comrades. In On Practice, Mao Zedong outlines a dialectical materialist concept of knowledge gathering that emphasizes the primacy of reality over theoretical formulations.[77] Although this expresses an extremely dialectical re-emphasis on context and reality, the history of Mao's revolution in China must make obvious that this is not the same point that Graeber is making. Instead, he points towards not thinking of a single revolution but more generally of revolutionary action—any collective effort that rejects power or domination.[78] This approach aligns with Graeber's criticism of the concise Marxist outline of historical progression as elucidated in Debt in which he critiques what he refers to as "mythic communism" or "epic communism" which holds that…

[74] David Graeber, Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology, Paradigm 14 (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 43-4.

[75] This piece foregoes discussion of the underdeveloped Marxist concept of the 'Asiatic mode of production.'

[76] Graeber, Fragments of an Anarchist, 44.

[77] Mao Zedong, On Practice, On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing (1937), accessed April 25, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm.

[78] Graeber, Fragments of an Anarchist, 45.

> [o]nce upon a time, humans held all things in common—[whether] in the Garden of Eden, during the Golden Age of Saturn, or in Paleolithic hunter-gatherer bands. Then came the Fall, as a result of which we are now cursed with divisions of power and private property. The dream was that someday, with the advance of technology and general prosperity, with social revolution or the guidance of the Party, we would finally be in a position to put things back, to restore common ownership and common management of collective resources.

And while his argument that this means thinking of communism as not having "anything to do with ownership of the means of production" is obviously not the conclusion this piece is attempting to reach, a left-libertarian perspective would agree that this vision "has inspired millions; but it has also done enormous damage to humanity" and that it should therefore be abandoned.[79] Historical materialists can turn instead to Marxist scholar Bertell Ollman's understanding of Marx's Hegalian-influenced historiography as "studying history backwards;" whereby one looks to "where the situation under hand comes from and what had to happen for it to acquire just these qualities" and, in turn, "projecting existing tendencies and contradictions into the future." Ollman's interpretation then transcends the simple feudalism-to-capitalism-to-socialism "periodization of history," as he refers to it, taken as a given and placed on top of all societies by some vulgar Marxists without thought to actual context and instead asks students of Marx to start fresh with the present and historical economic conditions and contradictions around them.[80]

Such a utilization of the Marxist methodology while at least acknowledging a non-epochal vision of history can lend itself to analyzing economic aspects of medium-scale (in comparison to total global revolution) initiatives like that of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (better known as Rojava). Although critics such as the International Communist Tendency have argued that, as they say, Rojava's "people's war is not class war" and not truly "an autonomous class movement," among many other major accomplishments, the region has rejected the Syrian regime's policies in favor of total economic autonomy.[81] The regime, Maksim Lebsky writes, "deliberately took steps to keep the local industry from developing" and, according to A Small Key Can Open a Large Door, the now autonomous region is chartering its own course in economic development and working to establish a "People's Economy" based on the three major concepts of "commons, private property based on use, and worker-administered businesses."[82][83] Such a reorganization as this points to the sort of 'non-exploitation principle' approach to profit/rent/interest/taxes discussed in the previous section. And these efforts are also deeply contextual, as Rojava's system emerged from pre-autonomy councils, neighborhood assemblies, and meetings, in addition to numerous pre-existing cultural practices[84]. And the Rojavan conceptual-

[79] David Graeber, Debt: The First 5,000 Years (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2012), 92, accessed December 15, 2021, https://libcom.org/files/__Debt__The_First_5_000_Years.pdf.

[80] Bertell Ollman, Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 118, 124, 120.

[81] Internationalist Communist Tendency, "In Rojava: People's War is not Class War," The Internationalists, last modified October 30, 2014, accessed November 7, 2023, https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2014-10-30/in-rojava-people's-war-is-not-class-war.

[82] Maksim Lebsky, "The Economy of Rojava," Co-operation in Mesopotamia, last modified March 17, 2016, accessed April 25, 2020, https://mesopotamia.coop/the-economy-of-rojava/.

[83] Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, A Small Key Can Open A Large Door: The Rojava Revolution (Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, 2016), 25.

[84] Lebsky, "The Economy," Co-operation in Mesopotamia.

ization of "social economy," as described by Ahmed Yousef, "is not a centrally planned economy" and "the market is a main part of social economy, but the use-value must be greater than the exchange-value, and there is no stock market."[85]

But this also means focusing on small-scale (at least currently) economic restructurings like the incredible work of Cooperation Jackson, which focuses on the long-term goal of developing a cooperative network centered in Jackson, Mississippi. Their "basic theory of change is centered on the position that organizing and empowering the structurally under and unemployed sectors of the working class, particularly from Black and Latino communities, to build worker organized and owned cooperatives will be a catalyst for the democratization of our economy and society overall."[86] Of particular interest from a historical materialist perspective is their Community Production Initiative which seeks "to turn Jackson into an innovative hub of sustainable manufacturing and fabrication" through "community production." They define this as "industrial manufacturing and fabrication based on a combination of 3rd and 4th generation industrial technology, namely the combination of digital technology and automated production with 3-D printing and quantum computing, that is collectively owned and democratically operated by members of geographically and/or intentionally defined communities."[87] Like Rojava, Cooperation Jackson's efforts are acutely contextual, as they work to specially address the unique socio-economic issues of communities in Mississippi and draw from historical efforts in that region like the Freedom Farm Cooperative and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund.[88][89] Obviously all of this is contained within the larger (but generally unfree and overtly capitalist) market economy of the United States, and although, as Alex Aragona argues, "[u]ltimately, we live within systems of state-capitalism with small pockets of free market activity, rather than the reverse," Carson maintains that "[m]uch as capitalist production started out in tiny islands inside the larger feudal economy and later became the core of a new, dominant social formation, commons-based peer production is the core around which the post-capitalist economy will eventually crystallize."[90][91]

Both Rojava and Cooperation Jackson, being autonomous socialist projects within statist systems, constitute forms of "dual power"—a concept originating in Marxist-Leninism. As Lenin describes the situation in pre- to mid-revolutionary Russia, "Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of bourgeoisie, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies." But this "is an entirely different kind of power from the one that generally exists in the parliamentary bourgeois-democratic republics. . . .

[85] Ahmed Yousef, "The Social Economy in Rojava," Co-operation in Mesopotamia, last modified May 26, 2016, accessed May 14, 2020, https://mesopotamia.coop/the-social-economy-in-rojava/. Perhaps an anti-statist and non-capitalist stock market system could be conceived of through a libertarian interpretation of the coupon-based market socialism found in John E. Roemer's A Future for Socialism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[86] "Who We Are," Cooperation Jackson, accessed April 25, 2020, https://cooperationjackson.org/intro.

[87] "The Community Production Initiative," Cooperation Jackson, accessed May 10, 2020, https://cooperationjackson.org/the-community-production-initiative.

[88] "Overview: Why Cooperatives? Why Jackson, Mississippi?," Cooperation Jackson, accessed April 28, 2020, https://cooperationjackson.org/overview.

[89] "The Story of Cooperation Jackson," Cooperation Jackson, accessed April 28, 2020, https://cooperationjackson.org/story.

[90] Alex Aragona, "Imagining State-Capitalism," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified June 21, 2021, accessed November 29, 2021, https://c4ss.org/content/54977.

[91] Carson, "Who Owns," Center for a Stateless Society.

> The fundamental characteristics of this [government] are: (1) the source of power is not a law previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas—direct "seizure", to use a current expression; (2) the replacement of the police and the army, which are institutions divorced from the people and set against the people, by the direct arming of the whole people; order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants themselves, by the armed people themselves; (3) officialdom, the bureaucracy, are either similarly replaced by the direct rule of the people themselves or at least placed under special control.[92]

This process of establishing a bottom-up and popular alternatives to the existing state has in turn been adopted by anarchists and other libertarian socialists. As the Libertarian Socialist Caucus of the Democratic Socialists of America describe, "Dual power is a strategy that builds liberated spaces and creates institutions grounded in direct democracy. Together these spaces and institutions expand into the ever widening formation of a new world 'in the shell of the old." Specifically, this…

> is comprised of two component parts: (1.) building counter-institutions that serve as alternatives to the institutions currently governing production, investment, and social life under capitalism, and (2.) organizing through and confederating these institutions to build up a base of grassroots counter-power which can eventually challenge the existing power of capitalists and the State head-on. In the short term, such a strategy helps win victories that improve working people's standard of living, helps us meet our needs that are currently left unaddressed under capitalism, and gives us more of a say over our day-to-day lives. But more excitingly, in the long run these methods provide models for new ways of organizing our society based on libertarian socialist principles. They create a path toward a revolutionary transition from a capitalist mode of production.[93]

This—as with Rojavan economy and Cooperation Jackson—often takes the form of attempting, as Wesley Morgan describes, "to create 'dual power' through the creation of cooperatives." Morgan disapprovingly terms this "market syndicalism" and critiques it for simply creating "units in a market economy" and still relying "upon access to the market."[94] However, this opinion does not take into account the unification of this praxis within broader pushes for anti-statist autonomy such as large-scale community self-defense that, like in Rojava, are creating space for non-capitalist markets.[95] Such a method is not be dissimilar to the call by Samuel Edward

[92] Vladimir Lenin, "The Dual Power," trans. Isaacs Bernard, 1917, in Lenin Collected Works (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1917), 24. accessed December 12, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/09.htm (from Marxist Internet Archive).

[93] "Dual Power: A Strategy To Build Socialism In Our Time," DSA Libertarian Socialist Caucus, last modified December 21, 2018, accessed December 14, 2021, https://dsa-lsc.org/2018/12/31/dual-power-a-strategy-to-build-socialism-in-our-time/.

[94] Wesley Morgan, "Building Dual Power: Where They Retreat, We Must Advance," Black Rose Anarchist Federation, last modified May 10, 2018, accessed December 14, 2021, https://blackrosefed.org/retreat-advance-dual-power/.

[95] For more information on large-scale community self-defense in Rojava see Nazan Üstündağ's "Self-Defense as a Revolutionary Practice in Rojava, or How to Unmake the State.

Konkin III for "agorist protection and arbitration agencies" and "protection company syndicates" to defend markets growing counter to the state-capitalist economy and contain "the State by defending those who have signed up for protection-insurance."[96]

And the role of those examining these efforts from outside their specific context should not be that of an authoritarian planner dictating how they should work. Instead, an alternative can be found in Graeber's formulation of an anarchist social theory which rejects vanguardism in favor of an approach that more resembles ethnography—the practice defined by The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology as such[97]:

> Anthropology is an academic discipline that constructs its intellectual imaginings upon empirical-based knowledge about human worlds. Ethnography is the practice developed in order to bring about that knowledge according to certain methodological principles, the most important of which is participant-observation ethnographic fieldwork.[98]

He therefore proposes that "radical intellectuals" should "look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts."[99] In this manner, the insights of historical materialism in shaping society can be shared, but always with an overt premise of context-keeping—a respect for the evolution of local practices, market or market-like spontaneity, and overall unintended change and growth. In fact, similar practices have already been undertaken over the last several decades in the form of Marxist and Marxist-influenced anthropology, a diverse family of thought which, according to cultural anthropologist Amanda Zunner-Keating, "emerged as part of anthropology's critique of colonialism in the 1960's and 1970's" and, among other features, rejects the idea that "capitalism [is] inevitable and eternal" and instead "examines the historical events and ideas that produce the

[96] Samuel Edward Konkin, III, New Libertarian Manifesto, 4th ed. (Huntington Beach, CA: KoPubCo, 2006), 30, 18, accessed February 14, 2022, https://usa.anarchistlibraries.net/library/samuel-edward-konkin-iii-new-libertarian-manifesto#toc10.

[97] Graeber, Fragments of an Anarchist, 12.

[98] Signe Howell, "Ethnography," The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology, last modified February 18, 2018, accessed March 27, 2021, https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/ethnography. It feels important to at the very least briefly note the deeply rooted problems in ethnography and the field of anthropology as a whole, especially stemming from their entanglement with imperialism and colonialism. As Joseph G. Jorgensen and Eric R. Wolf write in their 1970 piece "A Special Supplement: Anthropology on the Warpath in Thailand," the issue that "has dogged anthropologists from the inception of the discipline" is that "European conquest and colonialism . . . provided the field for anthropology's operations and, especially in the nineteenth century, its intellectual ethic of 'scientific objectivity.' But 'scientific objectivity,'. . . implies the estrangement of the anthropologist from the people among whom he works." But they recognize that anthropology is still a "revolutionary discipline" as it "radically [questions] the pretensions to superiority of Western civilization, while seeking alternative visions of man." They ultimately believe that it must disengage itself from its connection with colonial aims or it will become intellectually trivial. The future of anthropology, its credibility, depends upon sustaining the dialectic between knowledge and experience. Anthropologists must be willing to testify [on] behalf of the oppressed peoples of the world, including those whom we professionally define as primitives and peasants." But even this is deeply problematic as such things as 'testifying on behalf of others' and 'professionally' defining anyone as 'primitive' still present immense barriers in making anthropology a genuinely liberatory discipline. Two areas to look toward with this goal in mind are Indigenous archaeology (see Fiona Cohen's article "The Ins and Outs of Indigenous Archaeology") and activist ethnography (see the California Institute for Integral Studies' program in Anthropology and Social Change).

[99] Graeber, Fragments of an Anarchist, 12.

institutions of any given society;" particularly those relating to property distribution and class structures.[100] This more scholarly approach may seem like an extremely watered-down version of historical materialism which reduces the more absolutist implications of the "orthodox" Marxist formulation. But this shift should be appealing to left-libertarians because a respect for local practices and a denial of the possibility of totalizing control would seem to preclude the ability for the method to be used in an authoritarian manner as it was in the Soviet Union.

## Conclusion and Additional Thoughts

As must be obvious, this piece is only a cursory attempt at a left-libertarian formulation of historical materialism, and the critiques outlined are also certainly not exhaustive. From opposite sides of the anti-statist spectrum, Graeber makes the point that the very concept of modes of production is under-formulated, and Rothbard, in a similar claim, holds that both the ideas of productive forces and relations of production—the elements that make up the mode of production—are overly vague.[101][102] Bas Umali, an anarchist activist in Manila, argues that the Marxist dialectical analysis of history is fundamentally hierarchical, Eurocentric, and inapplicable to the types of stateless communities of the Indigenous archipelago (today called the Philippines).[103] These and many more insights must be taken into account in formulating any, but in particular a left-libertarian, reinterpretation of historical materialism. But the main point to keep in mind from this particular piece is the rejection of (at least the hindering excesses of) naturalism, utopianism, and high modernism, in favor of a historical materialism that is truly dialectical in its balancing of objective and subjective factors (particularly revolving around property), its non-deterministic view of both individuals and societies as a whole, and its commitment to recognizing the crucial limitations of context.

Finally, this piece would seem incomplete without some mention of two well-known figures in the history of anarchism and libertarian socialism: Mikhail Bakunin and Murray Bookchin—the latter of which is a significant influence on many of the efforts in Rojava, largely through Abdullah Öcalan, a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (or PKK).[104] Bakunin, a contemporary of Marx, was also a firm materialist, writing in God and the State, "Yes, facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as Proudhon said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence. Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social,

[100] Amanda Zunner-Keating, "Marxism and Anthropology," tied to Beliefs: An Open Invitation to the Anthropology of Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion, by Amanda Zunner-Keating and Madlen Avetyan, ed. Ben Shepard (Pressbooks, 2020), accessed November 7, 2023, https://amanda-zunner-keating.medium.com/marxism-and-anthropology-b8172d55a101.

[101] David Graeber, "Turning Modes of Production Inside Out: Or, Why Capitalism is a Transformation of Slavery," Critique of Anthropology 26, no. 1 (March 2006): 62-64, accessed April 28, 2020, http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/dcrawford/graeber_2006a.pdf.

[102] Rothbard, Classical Economics, 372, 375.

[103] Bas Umali, "Dialectical Historical Materialism: An Effective Tool for Authoritarian Politics, Dominance and Control in the Archipelago," Etniko Bandido Infoshop, last modified January 22, 2018, accessed April 28, 2020, https://etnikobandidoinfoshop.wordpress.com/2018/01/22/dialectical-historical-materialism-an-effective-tool-for-authoritarian-politics-dominance-and-control-in-the-archipelago/.

[104] Joris Leverink, "Murray Bookchin and the Kurdish resistance," ROAR, last modified August 9, 2015, accessed May 13, 2020, https://roarmag.org/essays/bookchin-kurdish-struggle-ocalan-rojava/.

is but a reflection of its economic history."[105] But, again much like Marx, he is not a reductionist by any means and is rather an eminently dialectical thinker. Brian Morris attests, in Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom, that despite his "stress on social and natural determinism" he places "an important emphasis on the individual as a creative agent, both determining as well as being determined by natural and social conditions." Additionally…

> [i]n Hegelian fashion, Bakunin sees human history as a world process, as the progressive move towards greater freedom, first with the development of life, then, with human culture and consciousness, humans establish a degree of autonomy from the world of nature, finally, with the potential establishment of a truly human society, the freedom of the individual. Human freedom for Bakunin can only be in nature and society, not something independent from the world.[106]

Interestingly as well to this left-libertarian reinterpretation is that Bakunin served as a direct inspiration to Tucker—the grandfather of left-libertarianism.[107]

Bookchin—a more contemporary dialectician—is, in his piece Listen, Marxist!, contextually critical of the "historically limited, indeed paralyzing, shackles" of Marx's theories, but acknowledges the importance of many of his ideas like "[t]he Marxian dialectic," "the many seminal insights provided by historical materialism," and "above all the notion that freedom has material preconditions." But in his assessment, "Marx was occupied above all with the preconditions of freedom (technological development, national unification, material abundance) rather than with the conditions of freedom (decentralization, the formation of communities, the human scale, direct democracy)."[108] He also articulates an ecological and anti-hierarchical philosophy of "dialectical naturalism," which seeks to overcome both "Hegel's empyrean, basically antinaturalistic dialectical idealism and the wooden, often scientistic dialectical materialism of orthodox Marxists" and "does not terminate in a Hegelian Absolute at the end of a cosmic developmental path, but rather advances the vision of an ever-increasing wholeness, fullness, and richness of differentiation and subjectivity."[109] And just as Bakunin inspired Tucker, so too does Bookchin inspire Carson—one of the fountainheads of contemporary left-libertarianism.[110] With all this in mind, perhaps Bakunin and Bookchin can serve as counterposing figures to Marx in the elaboration on and expansion of a left-libertarian version of historical materialism.

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[105] Mikhail Bakunin, God and the State (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1970), 9, accessed April 28, 2020, https://libcom.org/files/Bakunin%20-%20God%20and%20the%20State.pdf.

[106] Brian Morris, Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom (Montréal, Quebec: Black Rose Books, 1993), 80-82.

[107] Shawn P. Wilbur, ed., "Benjamin R. Tucker on Bakunin (1881)," The Libertarian Labyrinth, last modified April 11, 2015, accessed February 16, 2022, https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/bakunin-library/benjamin-r-tucker-on-bakunin-1881/. Tucker also helped translate Bakunin's God and the State into English.

[108] Murray Bookchin, Listen, Marxist!, transcr. Jonas Holmgren (Anarchos, 1969), accessed May 13, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/archive/bookchin/1969/listen-marxist.htm(from Marxist Internet Archive).

[109] Murray Bookchin, The Philosophy of Social Ecology: Essays on Dialectical Naturalism, 2nd ed. (Montréal, Quebec: Black Rose Books, 1996), 15, 20, accessed May 13, 2020, https://libcom.org/files/ThePhilosophyofSocialEcology.pdf. A critical examination of Bookchin's thought in relation to markets—a thoroughly dialectical matter as it has been presented in this piece—can be found in Prychitkos's "Expanding the Anarchist Range: a critical reappraisal of Rothbard's contribution to the contemporary theory of anarchism."

[110] Kevin Carson, "Libertarian Municipalism: Networked Cities as Resilient Platforms for Post-Capitalist Transition," Center for a Stateless Society, last modified January 20, 2018, accessed February 16, 2022, https://c4ss.org/content/50407.

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