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Criticism of Historical Materialism

Now that we have dealt with the fundamentals and the conclusions of the theory of historical materialism, the time has come to make a critical appraisal of it.

First of all, I would like to point out that my aim is neither to criticize Marx's views scattered in all of his works, nor to appraise Marxism in its entirety. I only intend to evaluate his materialistic interpretation of history or historical materialism, which is one of the basic tenets of Marxism. Basically, the criticism of Marx's views or Marxism as a whole is a different thing from the criticism of one of its elements such as historical materialism.

The criticism of Marx's theories, i.e. the study of his views in totality based upon the entire bulk of his writings belonging to the different periods of his life, and which are full of many contradictions, is a work that has been done by several individuals in the West. In Iran, as far as I know, the book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, from which I have drawn abundantly and quoted extensively in this chapter, is the best book on this topic.¹

Our purpose here is criticism of historical materialism by analyzing one or more of the fundamental principles of Marxism which in Marx's own view were considered indubitable, and by critically examining one or more principles which Marx himself does not consider as definite, and has occasionally contradicted them in some of his works, but are nevertheless the necessary part of Marxism; since Marx's own contradiction is to be regarded as a kind of deviation from Marxism.

Here I have critically examined certain definite and generally accepted principles of Marxism and the conclusions which necessarily follow from them. Our purpose is not to point out all the occasions when Marx has expressed views contrary to his own principles in his writings, which are replete with contradictions. The real target of my criticism is historical materialism and not the theories of Marx in general.

It is one of the wonders of history that in his philosophical, sociological, and economic writings Marx is more or less preoccupied with the idea of historical materialism, but while analysing and evaluating

certain contemporary historical events, he pays little attention to the principles of historical materialism. Why does he do so? This question has been answered variously.

Furthermore, this attitude is not confined to this issue alone; on several problems of Marxism, Marx's attitude is one of self-contradiction. Theoretically or practically a sort of departure and deviation from Marxism in Marx himself can often be observed. Accordingly, we have to find a comprehensive answer to this question.

Some writers attribute this inconsistency to immaturity and shortcomings which he showed in different periods of his life. But this explanation is indefensible at least from the Marxist point of view; the major part of Marxism which is considered today as constituting the Marxist dogma is related to Marx's youth and the middle years of his life, and the most part of what are considered his deviations, including his analysis of contemporary events, belongs to the later period of his life.

Some other writers attribute this difference to his split personality. They claim that on the one hand he was a philosopher and an ideologue, which naturally requires of him to be inflexible in his dogmas, trying occasionally to interpret actual events, either by hook or by crook, according to his own ideas. On the other hand, he had a scientific temperament and spirit, which always necessitates total acceptance of reality and absence of adherence to any fixed dogma.

Certain other writers make a distinction between Marx and Marxism. They consider Marx and his thinking as only a stage of Marxism. Marxism in itself is considered to be a school of thought in the process of development. There is nothing wrong if Marxism left behind Marx in the course of its development.

In other words, the view that the Marxism of Marx represents the primary stage of Marxism, does not violate the credibility of Marxism as a school. But this group does not explain what in their view which is the essence of Marxism. The main condition for the development of a school is that its basic principles should remain permanent; changes occurring only in secondary matters without affecting the basic principles; otherwise there would be no difference between total rejection and development of a theory.

If we do not consider the permanence of fundamental principles as a condition for its developmental process, then, why not pre-Marxian thinkers, viz. Hegel, Saint Simon, Proudhon or any other thinker of this type, should be considered as stages in the evolution of this school? Why should not Marxism be regarded as a stage in the development of one of these schools?

In my view, the cause of contradictions in Marx is due to the fact that he himself was lesser of a Marxist than the majority of Marxists. It is said that once in a gathering of ardent Marxists where Marx was trying to defend his position which contradicted his earlier position, he said: "I am not so much of a Marxist as you are." It is also said that in his later years Marx said: "I am Marx, not a Marxist."

Marx's departure from Marxism in some of his views is because of the fact that Marx was too intelligent

and ingenious to be a hundred percent Marxist. It needs some measure of stupidity in order to be a staunch Marxist.

Historical materialism, which is a part of Marxism and the subject of our present study, as explained earlier, consists of certain fundamentals and corollaries, which neither Marx the scholar could impose upon himself for ever, nor Marx could the philosopher and the thinker accept to be permanently saddled with. Now we propose to critically evaluate this theory.

1. Baselessness

The first objection is that this view is not more than a mere `theory' without any proofs. A philosophical theory of history ought to be based upon observation of contemporary events and historical facts, and should be applicable to other times also. Either it should be formulated on the basis of historical evidence, being in addition applicable to events of the present and the future, or it should have been deduced and inferred from a priori premises based upon a series of scientific, philosophical, and logical principles.

The theory of historical materialism does not fulfil the conditions of any of the above mentioned methods. Neither the historical events of the times of Marx and Engels can be explained on its basis (as Engels himself has admitted. Engels says that he and Marx made a mistake in emphasizing the importance of the economic factor in some of their works.

But, he adds, they were saved from this error in case of their analysis of contemporary events where they were confronted with historical reality itself), nor the historical events that occurred during thousands of years of human history confirm this theory.

It is amazing to read the writings of some followers of Marxism who dogmatically try to explain the past history in the light of historical materialism, and read their master's opinions into the pages of history, for instance in the book History of the Ancient world.²

2. Revision of Views by Its Founders

I have repeatedly mentioned that Marx terms economic foundation of society the `infrastructure; and other of its constituents as the `superstructure.' This interpretation is evidently enough to show one-sided dependence of all the other structures on the economic base.

Moreover, Marx explains in many of his writings quoted earlier, that the influence in this relationship is unilateral; i.e. the economic factors are always the influencing factors, while all other social modes are passively influenced. The economic factors act independently and other factors are dependent on them.

No matter in whatever way Marx interprets his basic thesis, his theories always affirm the priority of matter over soul, the priority of material needs over intellectual needs, the priority of human sociology

over human psychology, and the priority of action over thought.

But Marx, in many of his writings, has raised another issue on the basis of dialectical logic, which may be regarded as a revision of his view and also a kind of departure from absolute historical materialism. That issue is related to the problem of reciprocal causation.

According to the principle of reciprocal causation, the cause-effect relationship should not be regarded as a one-sided process. If 'A' is the cause of change in 'B', in the same way 'B' also in its turn becomes the cause of 'A'. According to this principle, there is a kind of reciprocal causal relation between all parts of nature and all parts of society.

For the time being I am not concerned here with the validity or invalidity of this dialectical principle interpreted in this form. But we may say that, according to this principle, the suggestion of priority of one thing over the other is meaningless with regard to causal relation between two things like matter and spirit, or action and thought, or economic base and all other social institutions.

Because if two things are interrelated and dependent upon each other for their existence, and the existence of one is conditioned by that of the other, the question as to which is prior or fundamental, is meaningless.

Marx, in some of his statements, considers all social processes, essential or nonessential, as based upon economic factors, and has not suggested the effect of superstructure on the infrastructure, as referred to earlier.

However, in some of his statements he accepts a reciprocal cause-and-effect relationship between the infrastructure and the superstructure, but maintains that the basic and ultimate role is played by the base. In the book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, two works of Marx, *The Capital* and *The Critique of Political Economy*, are compared. The author, while stating that in both the works Marx regards the economic base as unilaterally determining the entire social structure, says:

In spite of this, Marx, consciously or unconsciously, has added a new dimension to this definition by stating that superstructures, despite primacy of the base over superstructures, can play an essential role in society. 3

The author further asks: What is the difference between the predominant function or 'determining role' that the economic infrastructure always plays and the 'essential role' played by the superstructures?

It means that if the superstructure occasionally plays the essential role, it becomes the main determining and governing factor. In such cases, it may even be said that what we call the superstructure is not a superstructure but is really the infrastructure or the base, and what we call the infrastructure is the superstructure.

Engels, in a letter written in his later years to one Joseph Bloch, writes:

...According to the materialist conception of history, ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life.⁴ More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.⁵

The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure: political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary.⁶

Strangely enough, if the view that “the economic element is the only determining one” is a meaningless, abstract, and senseless phrase, this phrase has been uttered by no other person than Marx himself.

Moreover, if the elements of superstructure “in many cases preponderate in determining historical struggles,” it means that the determining and decisive element is not the economic one. After saying this, there is no need to believe that “the economic movement, amid all the host of accidents, asserts itself as necessary.”

It is more amazing that Engels, in the later part of the same letter, accepts that he himself and Marx may be held responsible for this mistake (or in his own words, twist). He says:

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into light. ⁷

But some other people offer quite the opposite explanation of this excessive emphasis by Marx and Engels on the economic elements. They say, this overemphasis is not meant for their opponents in the other camp, but aimed at disarming the rival supporters of this view in their own camp.

In the book *Revisionism from Marx to Mao*, the author, after-pointing out that in the Critique of Political Economy Marx has emphasized the unilateral role of the economic factors more than in any other work—and I have already quoted the well-known passage from the preface to that book—explains Marx's reasons for compiling the Critique:

Another cause of writing the Critique of Political Economy, was the publication of a book by Proudhon, *Manuel du Speculateur de la Bourse*, and another book by Darimon, the follower of Proudhon. When Marx saw that his rivals in the camp of Proudhon from one side, and the followers of Lassalle from the other side were relying upon the economic element in a reformative (not revolutionary) way, he

endeavored to seize this weapon from their hands and used it for the purpose of revolution. This necessitated a rigidity suited to the purpose of popularizing his beliefs.⁸

Mao has reinterpreted the meanings of historical materialism and economic base according to the requirements of Chinese conditions. His new interpretation was aimed to explain his own role as the leader of the Chinese Revolution also.

His interpretation of historical materialism reaches a point that one finds this theory and its emphasis on the economic base, and as a consequence the so-called scientific socialism whose basis is historical materialism, reduced to mere play of words and nothing else.

Mao, in his treatise on contradiction, under the title, "The Principal Contradiction and the Principal Aspect of Contradiction," says:

...The principal and the non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other and quality of a thing changes accordingly. In a certain process or at a certain stage in the development of a contradiction, the principal aspect is A and the non-principal aspect is B, at another stage of development or in another process of development, the roles are reversed change determined by the extent of the increase or decrease in the strength with which each of the two aspects struggle against the other in the development of a thing.⁹

He further says:

Some people think that this is not the case with certain contradictions. For example in the contradiction between productive forces and the relations of production, the productive forces are the principal aspect; ... in the contradiction between the economic foundation and its superstructure, the economic foundation is the principal aspect and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the view of mechanistic materialism.

True, the productive forces, practice, and the economic foundation generally manifest themselves in the principal and decisive roles; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But under certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory, and superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role; this must also be admitted. When the productive forces cannot be developed unless the relations of production are changed, the change in the relations of production¹⁰ plays the principal and decisive role.

As Lenin put it, without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. The creation and advocacy of the revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role.... When the superstructure (politics, culture and so on) hinders the development of economic foundation, political and cultural reforms become the principal and decisive factors. By saying this, are we running counter to materialism? No.

The reason is that while we recognize that in the development of history as a whole it is the material essence of things that determines spiritual things, and social existence that determines social consciousness, at the same time we also recognize and must recognize the reaction of spiritual things and social consciousness on social existence, and the reaction of superstructure on economic foundation. This is not running counter to materialism; this is precisely avoiding mechanistic materialism and firmly upholding dialectical materialism.¹¹

Whatever Mao says contradicts historical materialism. When he says, “if the relations of production hinder development and progress of the productive force,” or when he says “a revolutionary movement requires a revolutionary theory,” or when he says, “the superstructure hinders the development of economic foundation,” he asserts something which can and should occur always.

But according to historical materialism, the development of the productive force necessarily transforms the relations of production, and revolutionary theory necessarily emerges spontaneously. As a result, the superstructure is necessarily transformed with change in the base.

But Marx has emphatically stated in his preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*:

At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production; or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution, with the change of economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.¹²

Such notions as the change in relations of production prior to the development of productive forces in order to pave the way for the progress of productive forces, the formulation of revolutionary theories prior to spontaneous birth of revolutionary ideas, the notion that transformation of superstructure transforms the base—all imply priority of thought over action and priority of spirit over matter. They imply the essentiality and independence of political and intellectual aspects with respect to the economic aspect, and this contradicts historical materialism.

Mao's statement that if the process of effect and action is accepted to be one-sided, dialectical materialism is negated is correct. But what is to be done if the basis of so-called scientific socialism rests upon this very principle of unilateral effect, and contradicts dialectical logic, i.e. the doctrine of unity of opposites, which is one of the laws of dialectics?

We are forced to discard either the so-called scientific socialism and reject dialectical logic, or we have to uphold dialectical logic and reject 'scientific' socialism and historical materialism, upon which it is based.

In addition to this, what does Mao mean when he says “... we recognize that in the development of history as a whole it is the material essence of things that determines spiritual things, and social

existence that determines social consciousness”? Doesn't his own admission that superstructure can reciprocally act on the base, imply that sometimes productive forces determine relations of production and sometimes vice versa, .i.e. the process is reversed?

Sometimes revolutionary movement produces revolutionary theories and sometimes vice versa? Sometimes politics, culture, power, religion, etc. are the factors responsible for bringing about a change in the economic foundation of society and sometimes the process is reversed? sometimes, it happens that material things decide spiritual matters and social existence determines social consciousness, and sometimes the process is quite reversed?

Actually, Mao's statement that “the principal and non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other” is made to justify his Maoist viewpoint—which practically goes against Marxist historical materialism—not to explain the Marxist theory of historical materialism, despite the claim that he does so.

Mao too, like Marx, has practically demonstrated that he is too intelligent to remain a Marxist forever. The Chinese Revolution under Mao's leadership practically violated scientific socialism and historical materialism, and, consequently, Marxism.

Under the leadership of Mao, China overthrew the feudal regime of old China by means of an agricultural revolution to establish a socialist regime in its place. Though according to the theory of scientific socialism and historical materialism a country that is at the stage of feudalism should first pass through industrialization and capitalism.

When industrialization reaches its climax, it can proceed towards the goal of socialism. According to historical materialism, as an embryo cannot pass through two stages within one leap, similarly a society also cannot enter into the final stage without passing through the intermediate successive stages. But Mao has practically demonstrated that he is one of those midwives who can bring forth a four-month old embryo in healthy and sound condition.

He has proved, contrary to Marx's claims, that all the factors which are regarded by him as elements of consciousness such as leadership, partisan training, political organizations, revolutionary ideology, social awareness, which do not have concrete existence according to Marx and are regarded by him as part of the superstructure and not the base, can transform the relations of production to make a country an industrial one. In this way the Chinese Revolution has practically ignored the doctrines of so-called scientific socialism.

Mao has also contradicted the Marxist theory of history in another way. According to the Marxist theory though the peasant class fulfils the first and the second conditions of being revolutionary, i.e. they belong to the exploited class and are without property, they cannot fulfill the third condition which demands unity, cooperation, mutual understanding, and awareness of their own power.

Hence the peasant class can never take any initiative for bringing about a revolution. The most they can do is to participate in the revolution by following the revolutionary proletariat class in a semi-agricultural and semi-industrial society. Marx sometimes even calls them “the wretched who are reactionary by nature” and “completely lacking in any type of revolutionary initiative.”¹³

“In his letter to Engels, dealing with the uprising in Poland, Marx wrote about peasants, “The wretched peasants, reactionary by nature... must not be called to struggle.”¹⁴ But Mao created a revolutionary class out of the same wretched people who are advised not to be called to struggle. This very class overthrew the old regime of China.

According to Marx, peasants are not only incapable of leading a country toward socialism, but also they cannot participate in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The class that can lead a society in the transition from feudalism to capitalism and has a revolutionary character at that historic moment is the bourgeois class, not the peasantry. But with the help of the same wretched class reactionary by nature, Mao made a historic leap by traversing two stages in one step, i.e. from feudalism to socialism.

Hence Mao, with the kind of departure he had to make from Marxism, was justified in raising the Maoist idea of “transformation of the principal and non-principal aspects of a contradiction into each other.”¹

Instead of proclaiming deviation from Marxism he pretends to follow Marxist theory of historical materialism and scientific socialism by offering a new scholarly interpretation.

Mao learnt the lesson from his trusted predecessor, Lenin, that a Marxist necessarily deviates in practice from Marxism.” Before Mao, Lenin brought about a revolution in Russia which was then still a semi-industrial state and founded a socialist state for the first time.

Lenin realized that he could not hope to live to wait patiently for the Czarist Russia to become fully industrialized and to wait for capitalism and exploitation of workers to reach the ultimate stage so that a spontaneous revolution may occur with a dynamic and conscious movement of its own. He saw that he could not wait for the mother to complete her period of pregnancy.

Accordingly, he started from the superstructure and made full use of such things as party politics, revolutionary ideology, the war, and armed struggle, and converted the semi-industrial Russia of those days into the Soviet Socialist Republic of today. Lenin practically realized the meaning of the proverb: a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

3. Contradiction of Necessary Correspondence between Base and Superstructure:

According to the theory of historical materialism there is always a sort of correspondence between superstructure and base in societies, to the extent that one can identify the base by means of the

superstructure and one can know the superstructure by knowing the base.

Whenever the base is changed, the correspondence between the base and the superstructure is affected, disturbing the social equilibrium and giving rise to crisis, followed sooner or later by a necessary deterioration of the superstructure. And if the base remains in its original state, the superstructure also necessarily remains permanent and unchanged.

Contemporary historical events have practically disproved this Marxian thesis. Taking into consideration a series of economic crises from 1827 to 1847 accompanied with a series of social and political revolutions, Marx and Engels concluded that the social revolutions were necessary and inevitable consequences of economic crises.

But, in the words of the author of Revisionism from Marx to Mao:

It is the irony of history that there has not been any economic crisis accompanied with a revolution in industrialized countries since 1848. In the very lifetime of Marx before his death four times forces of production rebelled against relations of production without bringing about any revolution... later, some economists like Joseph Schumpeter have gone to the extent of naming these crises caused by technical innovation as 'gales of creative destruction,' and as safety valves for reestablishing economic equilibrium and economic growth.

Countries like England, Germany, France, and America have made great industrial advancement taking capitalism to its peak; but contrary to Marx's prophecy that these countries would be the first and foremost to experience the workers' revolution and to be converted into socialist states, they have not changed politically, legally, religiously or in other aspects which are termed as constituents of superstructure. The baby whose birth Marx was awaiting has not been delivered despite the lapse of more than ninety years, and there is little hope of it in the future.

Of course, these regimes shall sooner or later be overthrown, but the revolution that is expected can never be the revolution brought about by the working class and the Marxist theory of history shall not be realized. The regimes of so-called socialist countries of today shall also be overthrown, and would not remain as they are now. But the future regime will certainly be not a capitalist one.

On the other hand the countries of East Europe, Asia, and South America have become socialist despite the fact that they have not yet attained the stage of giving birth to a socialist state. We see that there are certain countries quite similar in respect to the (economic) base, but different from one another regarding their superstructure.

Two superpowers, U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., are the best example of this phenomenon. America and Japan also have the same type of economic regime (capitalistic) but with regard to such aspects as politics, religion, morality, etiquette, manners, and art they are quite different.

In the same way certain countries having similar superstructure, i.e. political regime, religion, etc., are different in respect of economic base. All these cases conclusively prove that the notion of necessary correspondence between superstructure and base as upheld by historical materialism is nothing but a mere illusion.

4. Nonconformity of Ideological and Class Bases

As stated earlier, according to the theory of historical materialism, the superstructure cannot precede the base at any point of history. On the basis of this doctrine the consciousness of every epoch is necessarily associated with that age. With the lapse of every particular period, the corresponding consciousness also expires. Ideas, philosophies, plans, predictions, religions—all are by-products of needs of a certain period and cannot be applicable to those of other periods.

But practical evidence goes against this hypothesis. There are a number of philosophies, personalities, ideas and outlooks—leave alone religions and religious ideologies—which are ahead of their times and their own class interest. There are many ideas that were the products of the material needs of a specific period which still remain alive even after the passage of a considerable time, and shine as stars over the horizons of human history.

What is striking is that in this regard, too, Marx in some of his statements departs from Marxism. In *German Ideology*, he says:

Consciousness sometimes is seen to precede the contemporary empirical relations, to the extent that it is possible to find the evidence for the conflicts of a later age in the writings of theoreticians of the preceding age.¹⁵

5. Independence of Cultural Developments

According to the theory of historical materialism, cultural and scientific temperament of a society like all the other aspects, viz. political, legal, and religious, is related to its economic mode. It cannot develop in independence from economic development. The development of science follows the development in the means of production and the economic base of society.

First, of all, it should be noted that the means of production are not capable of developing automatically without human intervention. The means of production develop in the context of man's relationship with nature and his curiosity, inventiveness, and endeavor.

The development in the means of production is accompanied by the growth of science and technology. But the question arises as to which of them comes first: Whether man first invents something and then utilizes it in practice, bringing industry into existence, or if industry comes into existence and then man tends to invent something. It cannot be denied that the second alternative is correct.

It is evident that the discovery of scientific laws and technological methods is made as a result of human inquisitiveness and experimentation. Without contact with nature, inquiry, research, and experimentation, man can neither discover any scientific law nor perfect any technique.

No one can challenge this view. The question arises only with regard to the priority of man's inquisitiveness, experimentation and growth of his scientific knowledge over tools of technology: whether man first develops his scientific knowledge and then externalizes his knowledge to invent technological tools or vice versa? The validity of the first part of the statement cannot be doubted.

Moreover, it is to be noted that meaning of expressions such as 'evolution' and 'growth' is literal in the context of human beings, and figurative in the context of technological and productive implements. 'Evolution' and 'growth' are literal in the case of a real entity which passes from a lower to a higher stage.

The use of 'evolution' in the figurative sense applies to an objective entity which does not go through actual evolutionary stages, but which becomes either non-existent or obsolete and is replaced by another entity which is different from it.

In the process of the growth of a child, for example, the development is real. Now, taking another example, if a teacher teaching a class is replaced by another more qualified and competent, in this case to say that the level of instruction has improved and developed, is a figurative application of the word 'development.'

In fact the human progress in manufacture of production tools is a real progress. It is man who develops and progresses intellectually; but the term industrial progress is used in a figurative sense, when what is meant is that every year a more sophisticated, improved, and better equipped model of an automobile comes into the market.

In this type of development there is no objective entity that rises from a lower to a higher stage. The automobile of the last year has not become more developed and perfect, but is discarded and becomes obsolete, and a new automobile takes its place.

In other words, in this kind of development, a deficient individual or object becomes obsolete and is replaced by another which is better and improved; not that the same individual has attained perfection in the course of time. Wherever real development and figurative development take place side by side, it is quite obvious that the real development is to be considered the principal development and the figurative development is secondary.

Moreover what we have said applies only to technical knowledge and know-how. In other sciences like medicine, psychology, sociology, logic, philosophy, and mathematics, there is not even the possibility of such a unilateral correlation. Progress in these sciences depends to the same extent or more or less upon the material and economic conditions as the material and economic conditions depend upon the

growth of sciences. K. Schmoller, in his refutation of Marxism says:

No doubt, the material and economic conditions are essential for the attainment of higher culture, but to the same extent it is also undoubtedly true that intellectual and moral development follows an independent course.¹⁶

If we ignore a defect in August Comte's point of view which confines man and humanity to the mind, which is only a part of human faculties and only half of the essence of man, his theory regarding social development is far more valuable than that of Marx. August Comte claims:

Social phenomena are subject to a strict determinism which operates in the form of an inevitable evolution of human societies—an evolution which is itself governed by the progress of the human mind.¹⁷

6. Historical Materialism Contradicts Itself

According to historical materialism, all thought, all philosophical and scientific theories, and all ethical systems represent certain material and economic conditions, and are inseparably connected with their own specific objective conditions. Hence their value and validity are not absolute, but dependent upon a specific period.

With the lapse of a particular period and changes in the material, economic, and social conditions, which are necessary and inevitable, every idea or thought, every philosophical or scientific theory or ethical system is invalidated and is ultimately bound to be replaced by a different idea, thought or theory.

According to this principle, historical materialism, too, is subject to this universal law. Because if it is not subject to this universal law and is an exception, it would mean that there are some scientific and philosophical laws which are fundamental and independent of any kind of economic base; and if historical materialism is subject to the general law, its value and validity are confined to one period and it is applicable to that period alone which has given rise to it. It is not relevant to an earlier or later period. Thus, in both cases, historical materialism is contradicted by itself.

It means that historical materialism as a theory, as a philosophical point of view or as a part of superstructure, either applies to itself or it doesn't. If it does not apply to itself, it contradicts itself. If it is governed by itself, it is valid for a limited period only; it cannot be applied to other periods from which it excludes itself.

This objection is also valid in the case of dialectical materialism, which considers the principle of dialectical movement and the principle of unity of opposites applicable to the whole reality including scientific and philosophical laws.

In the *Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism* (Vol I, II) I have dealt with these problems. But it is clear that the claim that the universe is the playground of the forces of dialectical materialism

and society that of historical materialism is absolutely baseless.

Certain other objections are also valid against historical materialism. For the time being we refrain from mentioning them. But I cannot conceal my amazement as to how such a baseless and unscientific theory could become famous as a scientific theory. The art of propaganda is indeed capable of working wonders!

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1. This book was first written in French and then translated into Persian by the author, Dr. Anwar Khomeini. He has exhibited profound scholarship in the treatment of the subject and praiseworthy capacity for evaluation and analysis of the problems involved. He himself has been once an ardent supporter and exponent of this school for many years.
 2. Publisher's note: here the author, Martyr Mutahhari, had left a blank space of several lines in the original manuscript to quote a passage from the book *The History of the Ancient World*, which was not accessible to the publishers.
 3. Anwar Khomeini, op. cit., p. 222.
 4. As the author says, Engels uses the phrase, "production and reproduction of real life," – instead of "material and economic production," in his book *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Engels says that production is dependent not only on the means of subsistence alone, but also on human reproduction. Implicitly, he does not consider the economy alone as the determining factor, but also believes in the role of such factors as sex and family. This is another deviation from the basic position of historical materialism.
 5. Here the author adds in parenthesis: "revisionism, plain and simple!"
 6. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. II, p. 443.
 7. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 444; Apology is worse than crime. In fact it is a kind of obstinacy and, at the very least, equivalent to sacrificing truth for the sake of personal interest..
 8. Anwar Khomeini, op. cit., p. 219.
 9. Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works*, "Four Philosophical Treatises," (London, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. 1954), vol. II, p. 38.
 10. By the means of superstructural factors, such as military, political and educational
 11. Mao Tse-Tung, op. cit., pp. 40–41.
 12. Andre Peter, op. cit., p. 243.
 13. Anwar Khomeini, op. cit., p. 368.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 348
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
 17. Raymond Aron, op. cit., vol. I, p. 78.

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