

Limitations of Methodology in Marxist Theory

ROMAN DUBSKY

The claim to "scientific" status is said to distinguish Marxist theory from other socialist doctrines, indeed from all other theories whose aim is to define the nature of social experience. This was exactly Marx's contention that his theory is based on empirical scientific reasoning — observations of actual life — while, for instance, absolute idealism, as represented by Hegel, offered mere abstract, vague, highly mystifying generalizations, or socialism of his day, with its bagful of optimistic beliefs in a perfect egalitarian society to come by, more or less, mere appeals to rationality and natural goodness of man, was essentially a utopian conception (hence "utopian socialism" in contrast with Marx's own "scientific socialism").

Marx's scientific claims for his theory have had great implications not only for students of social disciplines, but, more significantly, in the context of social and political life. For if it is true, as it insists, that its explanations of social reality are scientific — indeed the only true scientific explanations, Marxism inevitably becomes a universal arbiter of social rightness. From this it should follow that only Marxists have a privileged insight into the nature of ultimate reality, while other observers of social life lack the necessary knowledge that would make their understanding of the world a genuinely scientific experience. Ideally, then, the intelligent or enlightened man would, or should, be a follower of Marxist theory and practice.

The present study is a critical assessment of such Marxist claims to scientific infallibility, an attempt to assess the claims of Marxism to its being a truly scientific theory. As the writer sees it, the problem at issue is essentially a methodological one, namely, to establish whether Marxist claims to scientific knowledge can be upheld in the light of latest scientific developments, particularly in

The author is presently a visiting professor of political science at the University of the Philippines.

the area of methodological thought. Can such claims (we shall ask) be vindicated when exposed to methodological criteria that are applied in other social disciplines? Does Marxist methodology have the necessary precision and soundness that are normally expected from all legitimate scientific methods? It is our hypothesis to be tested that Marxist theory reveals a great many limitations in its methodological aspect, which shows its inadequacy as a truly scientific instrument.

There is abundant literature having to do with our topic, some of excellent quality, such as works by Sir Karl Popper, a British philosopher of science.¹ Still, recent methodological tendencies in the social sciences, in the direction (it seems) of more "pragmatic" criteria of validation, encourage us to consider the claims of Marxian science in a somewhat different — perhaps more favorable and more tolerant — climate than the more "dogmatic" position of the earlier critics, associated with the positivist orientation, tended to do.² It may be recalled that positivist methodology, dominant in the first half of the century, insisted on complete absence of all value-element in scientific judgment, on mere "descriptive" role of science and on strict adherence to empirical "facts", which then tended to be conceived in terms of "hard" criteria of validation, characterizing the physical disciplines. It is also significant that the positivist criticism has been concentrated, for most part, on "orthodox" Marxist theory, which the critics tended to interpret in a rather rigid, deterministic way. The present study, although following in many respects the Popperian-positivist line of argumentation, proposes to extend the boundary of criticism of Marxist theory, to take account of more recent developments in Marxian science, both in Western countries and in Asian Marxist movements.

Marxism as Science and Method

An inquiry into the scientific claims of Marxism demands first the identification of the alleged scientific element and a clear picture of its usefulness or relevance to social life.

Briefly stated, Marxism is a sociological theory defining the social or historical evolution of man and explaining such evolution in economic terms. Reflections on human history and empirical studies, particularly of the early 19th century capitalism in England, convinced Marx that social evolution is a dynamic and teleological process unfolding itself in the direction of increasing perfection from a primitive type of social organization to a fully-developed, fully

rational social order. There are several historical stages in such development (five in all) in a definite sequence, following a definite historical pattern. What pushes such development to ever-higher stages is the dialectic, the logic of oppositions, which Marx identifies with conflicts or struggles between different, essentially hostile social classes. Such conflicts are said to be due to differences in economic or material interests — the consequence of the institution of property or ownership of the means of production. These conflicts change in form as the form of property changes, which in turn is the result of new inventions and new technology. According to Marx, such conflicts are and will be ever-present, until the economic causes underlying these conflicts will have been removed. The final state of perfection is identified with a society that lives in complete mutual harmony and in which man's capacity for self-fulfillment is fully realized: here, in a "classless society", there is no exploitation of one man by another; men are all equal and genuinely free. This, for Marx, is no mere hypothetical reconstruction of past social evolution, but a rational law, a law of nature following, like all laws, a necessary pattern. It may be noted that like a true successor of 18th century rationalism Marx was optimistic that the age of perfection, as he envisaged it, was not long to come, and that, at any rate (as his teleological outlook suggests), progress towards perfection and increased rationality of man and society could not be halted.

Marx was satisfied that this sociological-historical scheme was a truly scientific scheme, in the sense that it had all the ingredients which all legitimate science is supposed to have. It involved a systematic approach, was a fully rational system, implied universality and was based on empirical experience, being related to man's economic or material existence. More specifically, the theory may be said to have had the two principal elements that mark all scientific endeavor, namely: empirical basis and predictability.

The empirical element, as Marx saw it, was present in such aspects as, for example, the emphasis on material existence, the means of production, technology, class struggle, social dynamism (provided by the dialectic) and in the overall scheme explaining the working of history, all of which, on Marx's reasoning, could well be put to the test of empirical experience. The element of predictability was then derived from Marx's historical scheme. This lent itself as a formula not only for analyzing the given social conditions of the past or the present, but also for the prediction of future events. Such capacity of his theory to predict the course of future development of

society was, indeed, one of the crucial factors which, in Marx's view, differentiated his social scheme from the "unscientific" social theorizing of his age, which failed to capture the dynamism or vitality that social reality manifests, managing merely to put a seal of scientific approval on the existing social situation (such as in Hegel's identification of the actual with the rational, i.e., necessary).

The last element of Marxism, the ability to predict future events, leads us directly to another central feature of this theory, namely, its "activism", Marx's insistence on the supreme relevance of the theory to practical social life. For him, a scientific theory should not merely "interpret" the world (as Hegel was doing, in following mere shadows of Universal Reason); rather it should help us to "change" it. Marx was a revolutionary thinker who saw his historical mission as one to transform the world for better. And science gave him exactly the necessary knowledge of what form and direction such social change will — indeed must — take.

Viewed as a program for action, Marxian science offered superior insight into the working of social forces and so to see social reality objectively, allowing the enlightened man to act wisely, while the uninstructed man would persist in acting foolishly. As Marx put it in *The Communist Manifesto*, "the communists . . . have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantages of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions and the ultimate general result of the proletarian movements!"³ It was, furthermore, Marx's conviction that such superior knowledge of social objective existence would not turn man into a passive, complacent being, merely resigning himself to the inevitable forces of Providence. On the contrary, like the Stoics of the ancient world, he was convinced that it is a man's duty, once he has attained a state of enlightenment, to cooperate with providential forces. The enlightened man should, each in his own peculiar way, contribute to the fulfillment of "historical necessity." In that way the process of historical evolution would, presumably, be hastened and with it man's liberation from his enslaved, alienated condition that marks his present existence. Thus, science was to be put to revolutionary uses.

Viewed from this perspective, Marxist science becomes a practical instrument, a guide to successful revolutionary action. Indeed, this has been frequently said to be the main value of Marxism for social and political action, to serve as a scientific methodological device, as a method of analysis with the view of revolutionary action. In Popper's words, "Marxism is primarily not

so much a doctrine as a method."⁴ If so, the presence of "scientific method" may be said to be at the heart of Marxist theory. In sum, such a method allows us to "read" social reality in an objective way, whether this concerns the past, the present or the future. In the last respect, it allows us to predict what will happen next in the historical sequence and so enables us to act in a scientific way. This method appears to place the issue of social change or revolution into a convincing objective social context and to endow our revolutionary conceptions and planning with a sound scientific sanction.

Marxist Assumptions

Our critical exposition is concerned with assessing the value of Marxism as a methodological scheme. Does this scheme enjoy the necessary workability and objectivity, the soundness and precision of procedure that is generally expected today from all legitimate methods in social disciplines? In the first part of our critical argument we have singled out five major weaknesses that Marxist methodology appears to reveal. We shall start with a criticism of Marxist assumptions.

Our first criticism concerns the Marxist assumption about the essential economic nature of social life. Marxism is said to have reduced all social phenomena to one dominant factor and to the idea of class struggle, which is said to accompany the economic factor. This appears to be but another version of the classical concept of the "Economic Man", now freed from its hedonistic motivational associations and expressed in firmly sociological, even deterministic, terms. Such an economic explanation of social life may be rejected as too narrow in scope and as strictly unobservable by empirical means. Social reality takes many shapes and there is no agreement even among experts on social life on such a thing as one ultimate causative factor. Some even explicitly deny that there can be such a thing. It is significant that Engels himself found it necessary in his later years to deny the omnipresence of economic considerations in human actions. In a famous letter to Mehring (written in 1893),⁵ he admitted his, and Marx's error, in neglecting "formal side . . . for the sake of the content," i.e., over-emphasizing the economic factor and not giving sufficient credit in social evolution to the role of ideas. To clarify his present position, he asserted that indeed ideological notions do have a definite effect in history, that the dialectic process of thinking should not be conceived in purely mechanistic ways (as mere reflection of matter) but rather as taking a form of interaction

(as a dialog of thought and matter). Elsewhere the usual Marxist "modified" version is that the economic factor may be crucial "in the last resort", not necessarily all the time. Still, this introduces an element of uncertainty into the neat Marxian scheme, making this scheme a questionable scientific guide.

Our criticism of Marxist economic interpretation of history may go even further. It may be asked whether certain historical events or periods could not be more meaningfully explained by noneconomic factors. Thus, the spread of Islam or the wars during the Reformation could be better explained by religious factors or motives. Even more: could not any single larger factor in history be selected *a priori* to serve the one-factor-only interpretation of history? The empirical veracity of the theory of class struggles appears similarly vulnerable. It may be contended, for instance, that social harmony, not social struggle, is the basic reality of social life, that class conflicts are not the rule but an exception in the history of societies. For without fundamental agreement on values, societies could hardly survive for long. Moreover, it seems that some cultures of the world, such as in India and in China, have existed for a thousand of years without major social upheavals or class struggles.

The second criticism concerns certain assumptions Marxist methodology makes about history. One such assumption is that the historical process moves inevitably in a unilinear way and in the direction of increasing perfection. Another optimistic assumption is that what comes later in history is generally better. Now such broad generalizations can hardly be proved, nor disproved for that matter, by ordinary evidence. On the contrary, history itself appears to question their validity. There has been, for example, not only progress but also decline of civilizations, periods of regress. It is interesting to note that the Greeks with their cyclical view of history, as against the Marxian linear view, believed exactly the opposite, likewise believing in historical objectivity, if not inevitability.

Marxist Predictions

Predictions, another important element of the scientific method, are similarly vulnerable to criticism in Marxist theory. Manifestly, this theory has often failed on the side of predictions: it does not appear to work well in practice; it has been periodically disproved by events. The Marxian scheme does, presumably, allow predictions as to what will happen next — indeed must happen — in the historical sequence. Yet again and again, Marxist

predictions, including those of the founders of Marxism itself, have failed to materialize. Some of Marx's predictions that did not occur are, for instance, the imminent collapse of capitalism in advanced industrial countries (instead Marxist communism established itself in backward Russia) or the increased impoverishment and proletarianization of human society. In practice, then, this methodology appears unable to predict with reasonable certainty when any *particular* event — even if it is to be of some magnitude, a new trend — is to happen or what form it is likely to assume. This restricts undoubtedly the practical usefulness of Marxist methodology, makes it a dubious instrument for what it is intended to be, namely, for exact calculations of revolutionary strategy or action.

Here, it may, of course, be objected that no theory, or method for that matter, can be invalidated by *particular* events alone, by the absence of particular events to conform to such a theory or method. There are many conceivable reasons why the events predicted on this theory failed to come true. Such failures may simply be ascribed to faulty reading or misrepresentation of such theory, in our case as due to "subjective" elements having crept into Marxist science. Or some failures are sometimes written off, being ascribed to "unexpected developments" that have taken place since the latest official ideological formulation, especially when predictions or the reputation of such great communist figures as Marx or Lenin should be at stake.

The soundness of the argument of misrepresentation cannot be denied, and has indeed been often invoked. Yet, certain doubts about it remain, for if taken seriously, this argument would seem to reduce Marxist methodology to an essentially abstract scheme of explanation, with the question of the possibility of its correct application largely unsolved. Yet this does not appear to be the position which Marxists normally take. Thus, whatever they themselves say in their attempt to explain away failures of their predictions, it is clear that they have few reservations about this issue in their political practice. As we have noted, they view their methodology not as mere thought construction but as a working instrument for practical action. In practice, then, Marxist methodology is regarded as objectively applicable, not only to suggest general historical trends, but as a guide to particular actions as well. Thus Marxist parties throughout the world act daily on the assumption that a correct interpretation of Marxist general theory is indeed possible. Hence, it should only be fair to suggest that, if such

predictions fail to materialize, Marxist methodology has only itself to blame.

Ideology and Non-Empirical Assumptions

Marxist methodology may be said to suffer from at least two other serious difficulties. The first is the excessive generality of Marxian scientific claims. With its insistence on the knowledge of the "laws of nature," of the ultimate nature of social existence, of the meaning of history and the like, this methodology tends to explain all particular events as part of an all-encompassing cosmical scheme. It is holistic in scope, and so abstract and vague in practice. This appears to be contrary to current approaches in the methodology of social science, which tends to regard only the more humble technical or "piecemeal" activity as manageable for the purpose of science and to reject traditional grand generalizations or model-making about social life as contrary to the spirit of empirical science.⁶

Marxian methodological holism is, of course, rooted in Marxist ideological position. This ideological dimension of Marxist science has important consequences on the pursuit of scientific inquiry. In brief, Marxist ideology claims to be true (and the only true) explanation of social reality now and in the future. Hence all our explanations of social life are of necessity subordinated to its ideological ends and must be in conformity with such ends. Those ideas that fail to fit in with this ideological scheme are simply discarded as wrong.

There are, at least, two unwanted consequences of this Marxist preoccupation. The first, as Popper has contended,⁷ is loss of specificity in scientific theories. Popper claims that Marxist generalizations are so general, so wide in their scope that they may be said to cover "everything" — all instances of social life. However, seemingly contradictory to them actual events or facts may be, Marxist theory can always be suitably reinterpreted to accommodate such events or facts. This makes Marxist theory virtually irrefutable; for it cannot be meaningfully denied. At the same time, Popper contends it is methodologically near worthless, for it is so vague in practice that its explanatory and predictive power is practically nil. Thus this theory lacks the necessary specificity which we have come to associate with scientific generalizations. The second unwanted consequence is the distortion which the ideological orientation occasions and the restrictions which it places on the free pursuit of science. It distorts,

we have noted, social reality to suit its peculiar ideological ends. It is conducive to what Popper calls a "closed" or "totalitarian" system of thought and methods; it is adverse to "open" or "liberal" or "democratic" attitudes and methods, and as such it may be regarded as contrary to the spirit of science, which is said to entail free scientific inquiry. Hence, it stands in the way of scientific advancement.

The second major difficulty from which Marxist methodology suffers is that it fails to follow the normal procedures and principles of social science. For one thing, the Marxist claim for the empirical character of Marxism has not elicited a universal assent among practising social scientists; in fact Marxism has failed, at least in non-Communist states, to establish itself as a genuine empirical science. For another thing, this methodology appears too intimately bound up with certain *a priori* ideological beliefs or dogmas and in that sense follows deductive rather than inductive methods, which is contrary to the practice of modern science. Thirdly, it claims absolute truth for itself, which is more than scientific methods normally claim. Modern science claims mere probability. Lastly, this methodology makes use of the Hegelian dialectic logic and explanations, which involve qualitative changes, while modern science is essentially mechanistic and causal in approach, concerned with quantitative changes.

Cornforth's Position

Our exposition so far has been somewhat incomplete and one-sided for we have focused our arguments upon criticism of the "orthodox" Marxist scientific method and omitted more recent methodological developments in Marxist theory. It has also applied somewhat "hard" criterion of validation, disregarding the "softer" criteria that are frequently found acceptable in contemporary social science. In our second critical part, we shall, accordingly, focus upon more recent developments in Marxist theory, which in one way or another have affected our issue of Marxist methodology.

One such recent development is associated with Maurice Cornforth, a Western theorist of Marxism. Directing his attack on the positivist-type of criticism, particularly on Popper,⁸ Cornforth defends Marxism as an "open philosophy" and refutes the positivist arguments as largely superficial and irrelevant. According to him, such argument is conducted from outside the framework of the Marxian system and is based on faulty appreciation of contemporary

Marxist position. On Cornforth's own position, Marxism is an essentially flexible scientific tool for interpreting reality. True, it contains a metaphysical or absolute element, but at the same time this is not contrary to the findings of modern science. Rather, its absolute element is confined primarily to its ideological-metaphysical sphere, which refers only to certain most fundamental, most general laws of social life. But as a science Marxism need not be regarded as asserting absolute scientific claims. Thus contemporary Marxist methods may be viewed as "open" methods; Marxism as such may be viewed as an "open" philosophy of social life.

On Cornforth's position, Marxist ideology need not be regarded as a rigid, inflexible thing. On the contrary, we may admit — without apparent harm to Marxist theory as such — that such aspects of Marxism as its epistemology, ethical system, etc., are not strictly scientific in the sense of being based on empirical evidence. Or it may be admitted that Marxism or Marxist formulations are of necessity being modified by changing social conditions and new critiques of social life, so that rigid dogmas are out of place. And, finally, the role of the dialectic, the metaphysical element in Marxism, must be properly appreciated, not dismissed off-hand as irrational mysticism. It may be argued that the presence of the metaphysical element does not in any way negate the scientific nature of Marxist theory. Rather, the inclusion of metaphysics and dialectic may be conceived within the context of interaction of science and life: life manifesting itself in terms of antagonistic force, science trying to provide the general rationale for such forces in the usual empirical manner. The inclusion of the metaphysical element should, thus, make our sociological explanations not a mere mechanical account of social reality but should make such explanations more comprehensive, more dynamic and more imaginative, in short, more reflective of what social life is really like.

It is obvious that Cornforth's view of Marxist methodology opens the way for a more direct dialogue between the Marxian metaphysical and vitalist elements, both important features of Marxian science, and non-Marxist methods. Cornforth tends to underplay the metaphysical streak in Marxist thought, to extricate Marxism from a more extreme holistic position and to introduce an element of non-dogmatism into Marxist theorizing. His methodological approach appears to imply a great deal of ideological — and methodological — tolerance.

It may be added that it is, perhaps, this "openness" of Cornforth's argument that makes his argument suspect ideologically-speaking. Communist historical practice indicates that the limits of ideological tolerance among the Marxists have been notoriously narrow (with exceptions such as for temporary strategic reasons), which gives rise to the intriguing question to what extent the position of a "liberal" Marxist like Cornforth would be acceptable as authentic Marxism to, say, Russian or Chinese ideological purists. The tendency on the part of dominant Marxist parties, particularly when these are in political power, has always been to repress, often ruthlessly, the "subjective" elements (however defined, to permit only the official Marxist line as the "objective" line, as methodologically "safe" and correct.⁹

Mao Tse-tung

The ideological position of Mao Tse-tung is frequently said to have revolutionized some of the sacred dogmas and practices of orthodox Marxism, at any rate to have brought Marxism more in line with social reality, especially in the countries of the Third World. If so, this may conceivably affect our interpretations of Marxian science and so also on Marxist methodology. These claims deserve careful examination.

Here, reference is made to such ideas as Mao's theory of revolutionary peasantry, his emphasis on the possibility of cooperation, in China, between the proletariat and the bourgeois elements, his concept of the revolutionary struggle by political and military means centered upon the village or countryside rather than the cities, his paternalistic view of political leadership, his moralistic ethical teaching in the classical Chinese tradition, his emphasis on education of the masses and on a dialogue with the masses and the like. These ideas, although not new in Marxist theory, appear to have introduced a fresh element into Marxist thought, more in line with the realities of contemporary social and political life. Thus Mao appears to have succeeded in injecting a new flexibility into Marxist interpretations, a new sense of earth-bound realism, so conspicuously absent in the highly abstract Marxism of the orthodox variety, inherited from the deterministic formulae of German followers of the Master.

However innovative, the Maoist "realistic" communist strategy does not appear to have succeeded in overcoming many of the methodological problems that we have raised in our first critical part. We shall mention briefly three such problems. First, like orthodox

Marxism, Maoism is essentially a holistic position, ideological and totalitarian in its general outlook. Again, this implies treating science not as an essentially empirical discipline, but rather as a metaphysical position — a super-science so to speak, to subject all social explanations to proper ideological reinterpretations and to repress all major forms of dissent from the "orthodox" Maoist position. Maoism leads again to a "closed" system of science, not a free social inquiry.

Second, several Maoist tenets have been challenged on grounds of deviation from Marxist orthodoxy, which should place the Maoist claim to scientific universality in question. Such Maoist ideas as, for example, his advocacy of harmonization of different class elements for the sake of the revolutionary struggle or his virtual elevation of the peasantry to the place of the principal revolutionary class in China in place of the industrial proletariat are viewed by many as of dubious orthodoxy, if not downright heresy. As Schwartz has pointed out, for some twenty years the Chinese Communist Party existed without any significant connection with the industrial proletariat, the lifeblood of Marxist revolution, which, he adds, "casts a doubt on the whole organic conception of the relation of party to class."¹⁰ This has introduced an element of ambiguity into the neat Marxist scientific scheme and has weakened the usefulness of Marxism as a methodological device.

Lastly, the new self-confidence of Chinese communism under Mao Tse-tung has resulted in China gaining for itself a leading place in the communist world hierarchy and in the new self-assertion of China in the international community of nations. This has, in turn, led to periodic collisions of self-interest, even with other communist nations, especially Soviet Russia. Frictions having to do with power or national interest have tended to spill over into the ideological sphere. Here, the current Russian-Chinese controversy on the rightness of their respective ideological line and frictions involving national interests, have deeply affected the whole communist world, inflicting fresh wounds on former "monolithic" communism, further weakening the hold upon the communist world of Marxist theory as a universal scientific scheme.

Pragmatic and Strategic Approach

More pragmatic and strategic approaches have also become one of the prominent features in contemporary Marxist methodological theory and practice. The methodological difficulties encountered by

Communist leaders like Lenin and Stalin have made it convenient, if not necessary, to extend the boundaries of Marx's original teaching and to develop more pragmatic approaches for interpreting social and political reality. On this position, traditional Marxist dogmas are, of course, not simply dropped as so many ideological frills, of no deeper relevance to actual life as we know it. Rather, they have been suitably "modified" to make them adaptable for contemporary revolutionary action, such as revolution-making.

Here, the consideration of strategy has been of overwhelming importance and the relevance of the old Marxist dogmas has been judged on a somewhat selective basis as these suit new revolutionary situations. To this category belong perhaps Lenin's contributions to Marxism, such as his emphasis on the political rather than the economic nature of communist struggles, on the dictatorship of the proletariat, his insistence on the superiority of the party in organizing revolutions and the like.¹¹ Perhaps most of the current communist political jargon involves a strategy-oriented outlook. The prevalence in the current communist vocabulary of such expressions as capitalist exploitation, colonialism, imperialism, struggle for national liberation, familiar in developing countries, attests to the widespread use of this peculiar methodological approach in Marxist theory.

The advantage of this approach, it seems, is that it allows fairly easy manipulation of ideological ideas, without the necessity of going too much into the more basic ideological concepts or principles or assumptions. It tends to make one forget to look critically at the claims of Marxism to being a science and to give us the illusion that we are viewing social life in a "matter-of-fact," "objective" and "ideologically neutral" way. It distracts our attention from more basic issues of Marxist theory and gives us a false impression of methodological security. This methodological approach has frequently been rejected as vastly incomplete and as avoiding to tackle the more basic principles of Marxian science.

Power and Mystique

There are certain other charges that not only tend to seriously weaken the credibility of Marxist methodology as an authentic scientific method, but appear to make the present methodological discussion somewhat irrelevant. There are at least two such charges. The first is the serious charge that in spreading communism what

counts most is not Marxist science but other powerful factors. This implies the superficiality of Marxist scientific explanations; there are said to be possible alternative explanations. It is contended that many of the claims Marxists make to successful predictions (when these work) attributed by them to the scientific character of their methodological theory can, in fact, be attributed to other causes as well. At any rate such claims are frequently viewed as largely spurious by Western theorists of social science. One such alternative explanation of successful predictions may be simply by way of normal process of power politics. They may be attributed to successful application of political and military power. Needless to say, such explanations have little to do with the intricacies of the neatly defined methodological theories of Marxism, but they have a great deal to do with naked power or force. For they appear to reduce the question of political action to a game for political dominance, and so to make the consideration of methodology of doubtful direct relevance. In cases like these, the so-called scientific character of Marxist methodology may hardly be said to come into the picture.

It is significant that many non-communist experts of Marxism have come to view Marxist theory and practice exactly in this way, that is primarily in terms of struggle for political and military dominance. Although they admit that ideological considerations are preserved as a valuable aspect of the communist apparatus, they see such aspects as subordinated to immediate political ends — be it increase in power or national influence. An example here is Russia's constant efforts at increasing her international standing and prestige as a "super-power", often, ironically, even at the cost of abandoning other communist movements, such as in certain Arab countries. Another example is Russia's ruthless suppression by military means of the "spring of freedom" in Hungary and in Czechoslovakia, when she felt herself threatened in her East European area of interest. This act, incidentally, the Russians justified by reference to necessary sacrifice for the sake of all-communist unity, but many observers of Soviet communism, including communists themselves, have come to view it as an act of Russia's political hegemony.

The second charge on this level of argument is the charge that Marxism contains a potent irrational element, which should make its "scientific" claims relatively unimportant, despite Marxist assertions of its inevitability. It has been increasingly realized that much of the appeal of Marxism rests in its quasi-religious mystique and is due to responses that are essentially of moral and humanitarian origin and

perhaps have little to do with the Marxist scientific argument. Indeed, (many observers of Marxism maintain) Marxist theory may be said to possess all the elements which militant Christian religions possess: it is motivated by a moral ideal (a good, just and rationally ordered society); it holds a belief in the fall of man (explained here as the consequence of the emergence of the institution of property, resulting in the subsequent alienation of man); it professes ultimate salvation and redemption (a classless society); and it offers the means for attaining such ultimate perfection (the instrument of class struggles). Such frequent Marxist attitudes as its ideological puritanism, its obsession with orthodoxy, its abhorrence of heresy or deviation from orthodoxy and its fanaticism can perhaps likewise be attributed to a form of Marxist-type religious impulse.

Not surprisingly, Marxism is often regarded today as less rational in spirit than its originators themselves believed it to be. It is interesting to note that contemporary literature on Marxism abounds with references to this quasi-religious, non-rational, if not mystical element, implying that Marxism is a form of militant secular religion. This is, for instance, the message which Robert Tucker has derived from his study of Marx, entitled significantly *Philosophy and Myth in Marx* (1961). For him, Marx was an essentially religious thinker whose philosophy and sociology were subordinated to, in Kamenka's phrase, a "Promethean futurology."

Resistance to Criticism

One peculiar characteristic of Marxist methodology appears to be its resistance to criticism. It is submitted that, once accepted, Marxist explanations will resist all criticism, indeed may remain utterly impervious to change. This can perhaps be explained in three possible ways. The first is by way of usefulness of Marxist explanations. Whatever their limitations in the scientific respect, their usefulness as a valuable ideological and psychological device cannot be doubted. Unlike the dry and uninspired theories of "Western" methodology professing probability and scientific neutrality, Marxist methodology is a "committed" methodology, professing scientific certainty, even security, and the ultimate salvation of man. This may be its major weakness in the eyes of non-communist social science, but this may also be a source of its appeal in the eyes of certainty-seeking men. For this method appears to give a reasoned explanation in absolutist terms of, and a seal of approval to, human actions, while the

"normal" methods of science have none of such psychologically and ideologically satisfying qualities.

It is evident that the mere absence of a sound methodological foundation would not necessarily discourage Marxist worshippers from holding fast to their Marxist dogmatic position. On the contrary, not the least reason for people turning to Marxism, as we have suggested, is its moral and religious appeal, the Marxian characterized by the brotherhood and complete equality of all men and perfect freedom conceived as liberation of humanity from all forms of servitude.

The second reason for resistance to criticism of Marxist methodology comes from within the Marxist movement itself. Here, as Marxists themselves see it, Marxism cannot be measured by the yardstick of "normal" scientific procedures, such as are utilized in the natural sciences. "Normal" science is after all too mechanical and misses the vitalist, Hegelian elements of qualitative changes as well as the dialectic. Even worse, from the perspective of its social content, it is essentially a "bourgeois" science typical of our contemporary decadent bourgeois outlook and values, containing, moreover, an element of exploitation. It may be added that on this reasoning all possibility of criticism of Marxist science has been eliminated by definition as superficial or irrelevant and at the same time, it is believed, the cause of Marxian methodology has been strengthened.

Finally, resistance to criticism of Marxist methodology is simply repressed, particularly in communist-dominated countries. In this case, however, Marxist claims to the superiority of their methodology may well be questioned as to their truth and sincerity. The general acceptance of Marxist methodology in such countries seems to indicate, not so much a general consensus among theorists of social science, but rather the exclusive monopoly of communist thought in them. It is evident that the ruling communist party gives an exclusive patronage to this form of methodology and suppresses all methodological alternatives. In this way, when firmly in power, the Marxists ensure that the "truth" of their own methodological position should prevail.

Methodological Dialogue

Our argument has revealed the presence of a great many methodological limitations in Marxist theory. Despite apparent successes to its credit, Marxist methodology appears to be an insecure, frequently erratic guide for analyzing the social present and

for predicting the future course of social development with a degree of assurance that we have come to expect from genuine science. It remains to consider whether there is a place for new developments in Marxist methodology which would, conceivably, remove at least some of the methodological difficulties mentioned in this study and would bring Marxist methodology more in harmony with developments in the social sciences outside the sphere of its own ideological influence.

There are, indeed, certain signs that indicate that Marxist methodology need not remain unresponsive to further methodological developments or to "new approaches" on the level of its scientific base. In the first place, we have noted not only the presence of "official" Marxism, a rather rigid, doctrinaire and disciplinarian theory, but also other developments, which suggest the possibility of development from within Marxism itself. In the second place, such developments should, indeed, be a "necessary" feature of Marxian science. If the Marxian dialectic involves a form of dialogue, as the Marxists themselves claim, the Marxian scientific ego cannot surely remain blind to social and scientific changes that keep occurring around it. Thirdly, the Marxian moral instinct appears on the right methodological tract, that is when viewed from the perspective of recent tendencies of non-Marxian social science. Such tendencies suggest heightened recognition that the old positivist idea of value-free, "pure" science is not only impossible to achieve, but even undesirable for many reasons.¹² A need is widely acknowledged for a more value-committed social science, implying more emphasis on ends rather than means in our decision-making, not mere instrumental social science. Hence, incidentally, the moral idealism underlying Marxian science might do much for the development of moral control and rationality in the area of social life, to allow man ultimately to materialize the old Baconian idea of man's mastery of nature.

A possible path of methodological development in Marxist theory may be suggested that would, conceivably, make Marxist methodology more in harmony with advanced methodological thought in the non-communist world. Such development would presumably be away from overemphasis on the strictly "scientific" element, which really has meant in the past scientific dogmatism and determinism, to be in the direction of the "human" element in Marxian science. This could in turn affect profoundly the Marxian outlook, leading, among other things, to reaffirmation of the

humanitarian impulse in Marxian teaching and a new concern for personal freedom of the Marxian man.

Some such ideas, had indeed, been periodically asserted by the founders of modern communism themselves. A good example in this respect is Marx's reaction against undue dogmatism in Marxism, which he once expressed by his disclaiming of being himself a "Marxist", in the sense of excessive emphasis on the deterministic element at the cost of the Hegelian vitalist element and diversity of human experience. The great Marxist philosophers seem to have never lost sight of the ultimate message of Marxian science, which is humanism and freedom for man. It can, thus, be contended that in pursuing such ideas, Marxist methodology would be true to its own basic program.

It is interesting to note that the development in the methodology of Marxist theory proposed in this study has been paralleled by recent developments in non-communist social science. As we have suggested, the tendency in contemporary social science is in the direction of recognition of the beneficial effect of the value-element in scientific judgment and to minimize the limitations of traditional methodological dogmatism in science, identified particularly with the positivist orientation. This, incidentally, appears very similar, in many respects, to Marxian dogmatism in science. With a new emphasis on "open" science, however, and new methodological developments in social science, suggesting more procedural rigor on the one side and more pragmatism in application of methods on the other side, there appears a place for a measure of convergence of methodological interest on the part of both the Marxist and non-Marxist parties. A methodological dialogue between them might, it seems, do much not only to remove some of the mutual hostility between the Marxist and the non-Marxist orientation in science, but could, conceivably, also stimulate advancement of science in new and perhaps more exciting directions.

NOTES

¹See, for instance, Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* (London, Routledge and K. Paul, 1961). This work, among other things, is a devastating criticism of Marxism on methodological grounds. Several points developed in the subsequent argument follow closely Popper's powerful critical exposition.

²See the writer's article "Limitations of Methodology in Social Science" in the *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* (October 1973).

³Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Section II.

⁴Popper, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁵Reproduced in A. Fried and R. Sanders (eds.), *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History* (New York, Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1964), pp. 324-327.

⁶See R. Dubsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-416.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 403

⁸Maurice C. Cornforth, *The Open Philosophy and the Open Society: A Reply to Dr. Karl Popper's Refutations of Marxism* (London, Laurence and Wishert, 1968).

⁹For the position on the "subjective" and "objective" elements in Marxist thought, see the writer's article "Tactics and Its Ambiguities in Communist Theory" in the *Journal of the Historical Society of the University of Malaya* (1969).

¹⁰B. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 191.

¹¹See R. Dubsky, "Lenin and the Essence of Leninism" in the *Journal of the Historical Society of the University of Malaya* (1970).

¹²See, for instance, R. Dubsky, "Limitations of Methodology in Social Science," *op. cit.*, pp. 399-414.