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THE PROBLEM OF 'SCIENCE' WITHIN ENGLISH MARXISM

by

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INTRODUCTION

This essay was stimulated, perhaps provoked, by my reading of Perry Anderson's, Arguments Within English Marxism. Arguments discusses contemporary problems, and recalls previous debates between the editors of New Left Review and Edward Thompson. It is, therefore, an entry-point into English Marxism that is exemplary in its tone, coverage and consistency.

I am concerned, however, with one particular aspect of the debate - the specific form of scientific rationalism in Anderson's approach, and to a lesser extent in Thompson's. In choosing to stress this aspect, I am not asking the reader to accept the usefulness of claims to science or reject the notion of science altogether. That would amount to an unhelpful either/or-ism. Instead, I hold that the social and historical context of 'scientific' explanation presents problems, which have too often been overlooked. I am concerned with views of Marxism that assume an integral continuity between bourgeois science and its values and socialist and Marxist derivatives.

Because science and its connected values of a 'higher rationality' have such deep roots in Western civilisation, it has remained difficult to grasp the limits of positive science. I do not argue against science and scientific rationalism per se - indeed they are indispensable as a part of Marxism, and for social transformation. But I prefer to use the word 'science' loosely to mean 'really useful knowledge': knowledge sufficently reflexive to allow other traditions such as feminism parity, because they too are capable of assisting human emancipation in collective struggles. But bourgeois scientific rationalism, through the appearance of neutrality, does generate positions that are too easily accepted as beyond criticism, and become, in effect, ideologies of science. My project is to uncover such ideologies, to realise them for what they are, and move beyond them, in thought and politics. The emphasis on criticizing a certain scientific rationalism should be understood as a tactical position.

Towards the final pages of Arguments Within English Marxism Anderson declares support for a 'moral realism'. This is, indeed, what is required: a combination of subjective and objective poles. But in my view, Anderson's vision is blurred by a particular rational framework that limits his understanding of romantic, utopian and moral values and perspectives. The primary aim of this essay is to develop this argument in some detail.

ANDERSON AND SCIENCE

Arguments is both a theoretical and political intervention. Anderson affirms the importance of Marxist historiography and attempts to show that the study of history is unproductive without scientific theory. He is acutely aware that the Althusserian notions of science and ideology (as the only form of knowledge and its antithesis) are unacceptable. Instead, he affirms the 'canons of modern science' and a kind of analytically superior classification of the tools of historical materialism. We must look more closely, however, at Anderson's definition of science.

Althusser defined historical materialism as the 'science of the history of social formations'. Anderson still wants to maintain that history is a science, but repudiates Althusser's theory of knowledge - both of science and of ideology. Rather, he argues the proper Marxist method of investigation is compatible with that of modern science. Anderson's discussion of historiography gives us two indications of the sources of his approach: the scientific tradition of philosophy, and Popper's philosophy of science.

In the second paragraph of Arguments the claims of scientific philosophy are recalled in a quotation from Lucio Colletti:

> One could say that there are two main traditions in Western philosophy in this respect: one that descends from Spinoza and Hegel, and the other from Hume and Kant. These two lines of development are profoundly divergent. For any theory that takes science as the sole form of real knowledge, there can be no question that the tradition of Hume-Kant must be given priority and preference over that of Spinoza-Hegel. (p.6)

Anderson continues, 'the broad truth of this claim is incontrovertible'. We might ask why Marxists must turn to the tradition of Hume-Kant at all? Colletti provides us with an answer:

> Unless we are to accept dialectical materialism and its fantasies of a 'proletarian' biology or physics, we must nevertheless acknowledge the validity of the sciences of nature produced by bourgeois civilisation since the Renaissance.[1]

Colletti is here referring to the influence of the work of Engels and Plekhanov on the subsequent development of orthodox, and in particular Russian Marxism. Colletti's position (found in his From Rousseau to Lenin) is that Plekhanov was fatally influenced by the germs of an Hegelian cosomology and Spinozian metaphysics, together with a monism derived from both philosophers.[2]

The problem with Colletti's interpretation is that he asks us to accept bourgeois

science as the only alternative to metaphysical dialectics. He is saying, in ef that the necessary scientific basis of Marxism was constructed before Marx. There are important reasons why Colletti and Anderson side with bourgeois science and against interpretations derived from Marx's relation to Hegel. Anderson views the philosophy of Western Marxism in terms of two major opposed tendencies: first, the Hegelian tendency, exemplified by Lukacs, Korsch, and the Frankfurt school; second, th more recent, anti-Hegelian reaction, exemplified by Della Volpe, Colletti, and Althusser. Central to this opposition, according to Anderson, is the question of Marxism as science. For the Hegelians, science tends to be seen as a form of bourgeois alienation; the philosophical critique of bourgeois consciousness tends to displace 'objective' analysis. The anti-Hegelians attack this Hegelian interpretation of Marx, largely on the grounds that Marxism is science. But what does this tell us about Anderson's notion of 'science' as it is derived from Colletti?

The theoreticist conception of science prevalent in the work of Della Volpe, Colletti, and Althusser is founded on the dualistic theory of the source of knowledge. T hese philosophers examine the methodological and logical-structural similarities between Marxism and bourgeois forms of knowledge. For Colletti, Marxist science is concerned with the distinction between thought and reality; while Althusser seeks to distinguish the real object and the object of knowledge. This recurring opposition displaces the dialectical reciprocity of form and content so fundamental to dialectical materialism. Marx castigated such Enlightenment materialism in the Theses on Feuerbach. Knowledge that is separate from the object, from the social context, is a logic that is neither 'about' the world, or 'about' human experience. It has no claim to be called scienctific, if it does not present us with knowledge useful for social transformations.

This view of science has implications for Anderson's account of the history of Marxist theory. In Considerations on Western Marxism he places otherwise diverse theorists (Gramsci and Althusser, Della Volpe and Horkheimer) in the same school. He focusses on their common attributes, diverting attention from their substantial differences. This is a little surprising since he does draw attention to the battle-lines of pro-science and anti-science tendencies. He concludes the section on 'Formal Shifts' in highly theoretical language:

> It is perfectly evident that each individual system in this tradition has received the impress of a plurality of determinations, deriving from different horizons and levels of the social and ideological structures of its own time and the past, producing a wide heterogeneity of theories - inside the parameters of the basic historical conjuncture delimiting the tradition as such.[3]

No attempt is made, however, to relate theorists - empirically-to the social and political context in which they were engaged. After all, the work of Althusser,

Della Volpe, Thompson etc. was marked above all by their relation to political parties and the international climate of the communist movement. It is true that, for Anderson Western Marxism was fatally flawed by the absence of large-scale struggle: a situation that he finds was changed by the 'massive revolutionary upsurge' of May-June 1968. But this large-scale generalisation hardly compensates for the absence of more detailed accounts of the historical contents of theories.

The neglect of context is reinforced by Anderson's conception of science itself. In seeking to maintain a scientific conception of Marxism, Anderson follows Colletti in drawing on bourgeois philosophies of science, in particular the concepts of Popper and Lakatos. The shift from Colletti (a Marxist) to Popper (the avowed anti-Marxist) is not really that surprising. Both advocate, in my view, closed systems of thought and analysis. It is somewhat ironic that Anderson makes use of Popper's epistemological framework which was designed to protect Western liberal 'rationality' from Communism and sweeping social change. The linkage between Popper's anti-communism and his a-social conception of science is no coincidence. One might also note the double irony that Popper wanted to defend the 'open society' with a closed system of thought that denied the possibility of social science.

Anderson criticises Thompson for a 'substantive misunderstanding of the nature of the sciences in general' (p.11). He goes on to assert the importance of the hypotheses found in Popper's The Logic of Scientific Discovery: the principle of falsification - 'that hypotheses were scientific only in so far as they could be falsified, by pertinent empirical testing' (p.12). The claim of falsification and of the empirical testability of theories in closed systems have been seriously undermined in recent years by mounting criticism from non-Marxists and Marxists. While Anderson might be excused his over-sight of the former, one is distressed by the omission of any reference to Bhaskar, Collier or Sayer - Marxists who take epistemological questions seriously but argue against empiricist or positivist norms.

Nevertheless, it is worth recalling Anderson's use of Popper and Lakatos, and some familiar criticisms. The essence of Popper's position on observation statements is that their acceptability is gauged by their ability to survive rigorous tests. Those that fail subsequent tests are rejected, while those that survive all the tests are then tentatively retained. The whole problem, as Popper himself knew, is that the process of acceptance or rejection is a subjective one:

> The empirical basis of objective science has thus nothing 'absolute' about it. Science does not rest upon solid bedrock. The bold structure of its theories rises, as it

> were, above a swamp. It is like a building erected on piles. The piles are driven down from above into the swamp, but not down to any natural or 'given' base; and if we stop driving the piles deeper, it is not because we reached firm ground. We simply stop when we are satisfied that the piles are firm enough to carry the structure, at least for the time being.[4]

It is precisely because observation statements are fallible, their acceptance tentative and open to revision, that the falsificationist position is undermined. This clashes with Popper's later insistance on science as 'a process without a subject' - which is awkwardly reminiscent of Althusser's dictum with reference to history. Anderson, of course, realises the limits of Popper's hypotheses of falsification. He calls upon the most sophisticated non-Marxist philosopher of science, Imre Lakatos. Anderson notes that Lakatos has demonstrated that a scientific theory can survive a number of falsifications, and must be judged by the long-run development or deterioration of its 'research programme', rather than by its immediate pattern of disconfirmations or failures. (p.12).

The difficulty (and the appeal) of Lakatos is that he insists that an objective scientific method exists, without arguing the case for its existence. It is precisely because Lakatos does not know of what his method consists that he cannot recommend any criterion to individual scientists for abandoning their research programmes. He argues that those working in degenerating research programmes will 'know' the kind of thing that they must achieve if their programme is to make a comeback. They must develop their programme in a coherent way that will achieve some novel predictions, which in turn must be confirmed. How individual scientists justify knowledge as sound rests in the end on a quasi-inductive principle. In other words, we are back to the problem of induction and of 'empirical controls' which was one of Thompson's more salient arguments against 'theoreticism' in The Poverty of Theory.[5] According to Lakatos's most sophisticated methodology, there is no methodology.

Anderson's definition of science occurs in his discussion of historical materialism. Weighted as it appears to be towards abstract scientific philosophy and methodological procedures of bourgeois origin, one is forced to ask: how is it possible that a Marxist does not find this problematic? The answer is that Anderson, even before his fascination with Continental Marxism, viewed natural science as ideologically neutral and separate from the social sphere:

> the modern natural sciences are relatively (not, of course, absolutely) asocial in character. They partake of a 'natural objectivity', which is precisely that of the structure of their object.[6]

But even if one takes this statement at face value, how can it be reconciled to Marxist science which is about the relation of consciousness to social reality? Clearly Anderson's leanings towards bourgeois science leads him to completely overlook questions of ideology and consciousness in relation to abstract theoretical concepts. Conversely, for Marx, science is truth of being, not only of thinking:

> It is only when objective reality universally becomes for man in society the reality of man's essential powers, becomes human reality, and thus the reality of his own essential powers, that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, ... i.e. he himself becomes the object.
>
> Hence natural science will lose its abstractly material, or rather idealist, orientation and become the basis of a human science, just as it has already become - although in an estranged form - the basis of actual human life. The idea of one basis for life and another for science is from the very outset a lie.7

ANDERSON ON 'FORCES'

> The echoes of the more classical Marxist tradition are not entirely absent from The Poverty of Theory, but they are increasingly weak and distant. The main score of the text is in another key. It is one which is fundamentally at variance with the mainstream of historical materialism. (p.86)
>
> It is, and must be, the dominant mode of production that confers fundamental unity on a social formation, allocating their objective positions to the classes within it, and distributing the agents within each class. The result is, typically, an objective process of class struggle. To stabilize and regulate this conflict, the complementary modalities of political power, which include repression and ideology, exercised inside and outside the State, are thereafter indispensable. But class struggle itself is not a causal prius in the sustentation of order, for classes are constituted by modes of production, and not vice versa. (p.55)
>
> It is necessary to stress firmly and clearly that the past, which lies beyond any material alteration by the activities of the present, remains nonetheless a perpetual and essential object of knowledge for Marxism, a zone of cognition unimpaired - contrary to the theses on Feuerbach - by absence of transformation. (p.85)
>
> all emphasis in original

These statements from Anderson challenge, rather piognantly, the absence of classical or mainstream historical materialism in Thompson's The Poverty of Theory. It is not my concern to dispute this. But I will argue that Anderson's description of class struggle and the regulating role of ideology bears marks of a linking of an Althusserian notion of instances/levels in a social formation, with an orthodox historical materialism. This perspective, relying as it does on a so-called, scientific analysis of objective factors and determinations, produces knowledge of limited use for social transformation. Because of its artifical separation of the

problem of science from the analysis of ideology and consciousness, it risks producing closed and ideological knowledge.

This separation has deep roots in the linked histories of Marxist thinking and contemorary social movements. It is deeply influenced by the legacies of enlightenment thinking, the re-birth of formal logic, and the incorporation of elements of science into bourgeois technology. What has been lost is Marx's sense - crucial today - of the relation between systematic thought ('science' or 'ideology') and the social conditions of its production and its use.

Marx insisted many times that 'the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general'. He argued that ideological consciousness arose from contradictions within the material mode of production - in the division of labour, mental and manual distinctions, and the emergence of classes. Bourgeois science arose historically out of these contradictions and took two general forms: the domination of dead labour over living labour in the process of production, i.e. machines and technology;[9] and closed a social 'scientific' discourse. These two forms are connected, as Marx began to understand:

> This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract catergories, despite their validity - precisely because of their abstractness - for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historical relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.[10]

The resulting fusion of the material contradictions with their abstract versions has lead to a widespread naturalisation of science and technology as value-neutral. Furthermore, the failure to understand this process historically and dialectically, has lead many Marxists to conflate rationality in general with particular historical entities, like modern science and technology. Moreover, the failure to grasp the role of ideology in the social construction of material entities (e.g. human labour processes) is re-enforced, or more specifically reproduced, by the a-social character of certain Marxist discourses.

These problems appear most clearly in Anderson's statements about class struggle and productive forces, and the relation of ideology to them. He does not fall into the familiar functionalist trap involved in the Althusserian theory of ideology. Within this framework, as Althusser himself found,[11] it is difficult to give a major place to the struggles of classes as a determining historical moment. But Anderson's use of 'class struggle' has rather similar effects. He posits an 'objective process of class struggle' - a process that is conceived as objective, not as subjective praxis. For Anderson it is this historical process that is constitutive. That is why so much emphasis is given to the 1859 Preface, the

classic Marx text for the 'objective' determinants of history, with its formulations about 'forces' and 'relations' and its strongly 'scientific' emphasis.

Perhaps this interpretation of Anderson's historical materialism does less than justice to his linking of objective conditions to political praxis for socialist revolution. He does attempt to marry historical processes, and causal knowledge of them, to a political practice of popular self-determination. (pp. 22,85). But socialist consciousness, on a mass level, is supposedly given by a knowledge of Marxism. It is this which provides 'lines of force for transformation'. (p.98 see also pp. 80 & 22). The subjective side of social action is conceived in terms of a Marxist science being presented to the proletariat from outside. Once more the subject is constituted by the historical process, not, as also, in a popular praxis. Anderson's reply to Thompson over the 'genetics' of this process is worth recalling:

> For far from lacking any explanatory principle of a 'genetic' type, Marx's theory conspicuously possesses one - set out with singular clarity and force in the 1859 Preface: the thesis that the contradiction between forces of production and relations of production is the deepest spring of long-term historical change. (p.81)

Nearly all of Anderson's references to "forces" are interfaced by citation of G.A. Cohen's work whose 'intellectual force supersedes virtually all previous discussion'. (p.72) Sometimes Cohen's work is seen as an improvement on that of Althusser and Balibar:

> There is no doubt that it (Reading Capital et al.) can be, indeed has been improved upon: Cohen's recent re-examination of the components of 'forces' and 'relations' of production alike represents a significant advance. But what is quite undeniable is that the kind of systematic conceptual clarification attempted by Althusser and Balibar was an original and fruitful enterprise ... (p.65)

A few comments, therefore, on why Cohen's work is seen as so important are perhaps in order.

A number of theorists have followed in the space opened up by Althusser, in debates on culture, ideology and, characteristically, 'discourse'. Much of this work is of value to Marxism, although I take the view that we should be careful in assimilating new insights. Nevertheless, this kind of work, together with the growing importance of feminist ideas, has provoked a kind of reaction. Cohen's intervention moves in this direction. It marks a return to a more orthodox conception of Marxism. Perhaps it is precisely because Cohen seems to ignore the wider and even pluralist context of Marxist discussion that his work on historical materialism is seen as so important.

More specifically, why does Anderson frequently mention Cohen in support of his view of historical materialism? Cohen's approach is very analytical: his aim is to clarify Marx's texts, remaining as close as possible to Marx's own view. It discusses any number of possible interpretations of language and meaning.

Cohen's preferred interpretation of Marx possesses, however, two main features, features characteristic, we have argued, of a scientific rationalism. Cohen lays great stress on the technical and deterministic features of Marx's theory of history, to the marginalisation of 'social' features: productive forces, for example, are described as 'material' and 'non-social'.[12] Secondly, his whole method of reading conforms to that of a rationalistic philosophy - that same 'hard', 'definitive' and 'scientific' reading which, as we have seen, Anderson also presents as his preferred way of working.

THOMPSON'S DEFENCE OF HISTORY AND REASON

A number of the criticisms of Anderson's notion of 'science' made earlier might give the impression that my views are close to Edward Thompson's. Certainly, The Poverty of Theory makes several similar points: that Althusser's 'science' is a self-enclosed system; that Althusser resembles Popper; that subjective factors are submerged under 'ideological domination' in a way evident in much of Western Marxism. While these points of convergence may place me closer to Thompson than Anderson, I shall argue that the former remains very much within an older framework of scientific rationalism, and that certain consequences follow from this. My point of departure is best understood through what I take to be strengths and weakness's of several connected topics that have concerned Thompson: (i) Empiricism and History, (ii) Political Economy and Culture/Agency, (iii) Science and Rationality. These topics are choosen because they highlight significant and radical antinomies in Thompson's thought. In each case I shall argue that Thompson's general position is progressive in relation to Anderson's, (and also the orthodox tradition), but that this direction, which gives his work its strength, vigour and weight, also poses problems.

For more than twenty years, the militant socialist writings of Edward Thompson have taken a principled opposition to elitest intellectualism:

> Always life is more unexpected, arbitrary, contradictory than the thoughts of the philosophers who abstract and make conceptual patterns ..... Imaginative and intellectual faculties are not confined to a 'superstructure' and erected upon a 'base' of things (including men-things); they are implicit in the creative act of labour which makes man man..(Letter to the Philistines, 1957 p.129, 131)

> To reduce class to an identity is to forget where agency lies, not in class, but in men (Peculiarities of the English, 1965. p.358).
>
> People are not so stupid as some structuralist philosophers suppose them to be. (Whigs and Hunters, 1975, p. 262)
>
> There is no mark more distinctive of Western Marxism, nor more revealing as to their profoundly anti-democratic premises. Whether Frankfurt School or Althusser, they are marked by their very heavy emphasis upon the ineluctable weight of ideological modes of domination - domination which destroys every space for the initiative or creativity of the mass of the people - a domination from which only the enlightened minority of intellectuals can struggle free.
>
> (Poverty of Theory, 1978, p. 377)

Thompson's coupling of 'intellectualism' with anti-democratic theoretical premises is accompanied by the respect and humility he observes for the feelings or motives of the labouring classes. Thompson complains that the essential rationality and cultural autonomy of the 'lower classes' has too often been shackled in historical study or some a prieri system, imposed upon them from 'above'.

This consistent position in Thompson's work stems at least from his counterposing of Socialist Humanism to Stalinism in The New Seasoner, and probably earlier: Stalinism is socialist theory and practice which has lost the ingredient of humanity The first New Left, of which Thompson was a founder, is humanist because it places once again real men and women at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration, instead of the resounding abstractions - 'the Party, Marxism-Lenism Stalinism, the Two Camps, The vanguard of the Working-Class - so dear to Stalinism'[13]. Thompson's disposition to find a radical left alternative led him to stress the resources of "English empiricism, romanticism, and traditionalism".[14] While it is extremely important to find a more popular location for socialist theory and aspiration refracted through the best national and democratic traditions, it is a mistake to assume that they can be unproblematically built on to Marxism. This is the root of the radical antinomies in Thompson's thought. It is precisely because English Marxism itself developed in co-existence with elements of bourgeois scientific rationalism (see section five) that Thompson's principled opposition to one form of science and reason is derived from another that limits its usefulness for socialists.

Thompson's defence of 'real history' and its study through a method of 'historical logic' is also rooted in the notion that the empirical method (developed over hundreds of years) is a form of human reason opposed to overbrief meta-historical rationality. Thompson is rightly aware that the explanatory and interpretative modes of Marxism - as heavy meta-systems - have resulted in evolutionism ('progress'), historicism (the determinist schema of 'history' being on our side), and structuralism (the self-regulating social formation). But Thompson seems completely to miss the point that history can, and for a Marxist ought, to be used

as a testing ground for scientific/philosophical investigation. The object here not some so-called historical truth, but a continuous testing of particular and competing paradigms and theories, each necessarily implicated in political options.[15]

Historical realism is, of course, an extremely direct and accessible means of communicating ideas, values and experiences. For instance, the Making of the English Working Class or Whigs and Hunters are what one might call 'realist texts' that are popular not because of any explanatory schema of historical forces and actors; rather they are widely read for their rich detail and incident. The assumptions of historical materialism are implicit rather than forced on the reader through abstract categories. Nevertheless, I must view this strength with some scepticism, since although the affirmation and renewal of deep historical values is important if socialism is to be won through consent, such values cannot be tacitly accepted as unproblematic or unreified. In other words, historical traditions do not exist in a vacuum. Neither are 'facts' equivalent to theory and comparable categories: facts can neither stand on their own, or 'speak' for themselves. Thus the modes of presentation of empirical 'realist' history hold a meta-physical space that closes the possibility of transforming or radically re-defining social and historical values.

In the Poverty of Theory Thompson restated many of the reservations he has long held concerning the relation between political economy and culture/agency in Capital and the Grundrisse:

> For Marx has moved across an invisible conceptual line from Capital (an abstraction of Political Economy, which is his proper concern) to capitalism ("the complicated bourgeois system"), that is, the whole society, conceived of as an "organic system". But the whole society comprises many activities and relations (of power, of consciousness, sexual, cultural, normative) which are not the concern of Political Economy, which have been defined out of Political Economy, and for which it has no terms. Therefore Political Economy cannot show capitalism as "capital in the totality of its relations": it has no language or terms to do this.
>
> (The Poverty of Theory, 1978, p. 254)

Thompson's point is not so much aimed at Marx, but at the intellectual autonomy of economic and social science. The connections with modern positivism and scientific philosophy are self-evident. In this sense, Thompson is making an important argument.

He appears, however, to take the view that Marx was caught up in mid-nineteenth century intellectual system-building. This view unfortunately, obscures the fact that Marx's critique of political economy was levelled at the 'vulgar' bourgeois economists for erecting an ideological system under the guise of 'science'.

Gouldner had put this point well:

> There is thus implicit in the Marxist concept of ideology an understanding of a very special way in which ideology and science were mutually implicated; specifically, for Marx, ideology was failed science, not authentic science. Implicit in his critical rejection of ideology was an image of true science that was to be a standard". [16]

Gouldner also notes that Marx never classified the main anti-scientific and anti-Enlightenment nineteenth century strand of thought, Romanticism, as "ideological". This is a point of some significance in considering Thompson's perspective that romantic and utopian thought was rejected by Marx, and must therefore be added to Marxism.

Thompson does have a point, however, in arguing that Marx's analysis of capital tends to leave aside the social fabric of capitalism. Certainly the relation of ideology to culture is only present in Capital as a kind of sub-text.[17] It is almost impossible to establish how culture as 'the general level of civilisation' (i.e. the habits, customs, traditions, values, etc) relates to the theme of ideology in Capital. Thompson is therefore right in drawing attention to the lack of a sustained analysis of the culture/ideology matrix in Marx.

From his defence of socialist humanism, to the debates with Anderson and Nairn over 'English ideology', to his quarrel with Althusser's "theology" of science, Thompson has taken a consistent stand on the 'defence of reason itself'. At issue in these debates are a number of claims and counter claims about what is science, and what is ideology. Thompson finds that much of what is passed off as 'science' is really ideology. In this category he includes 'end of ideology' empiricism, and rigid conceptual abstractions - the two poles of empiricism and rationalism that exclude social questions: It was the oldest error of rationalism to suppose that by defining the non-rational out of its vocabulary it had in some way defined it out of life.[18] But what of the notion of science or reason which Thompson himself holds?

Thompson's view of the relation of Marxism to 'reason' is probably most evident in his Peculiarities of the English (1965) and Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski (1973). These texts are well known for the attempt to find an alternative to the errors of orthodox Marxism, to determinism, economism and reductionism. In particular, Thompson wanted to pose a position that allowed an autonomy to social consciousness within a context which, in the final analysis, has always been determined by social being'.[19] Thus, in overcoming the mechnical features of 'base and superstructure', he argued for an autonomous space for thought, morality, mathematics, logic, scientific discovery alike:

> The error of reductionism consists not in establishing these connections but in the suggestion that the ideas or events are, in essence, the same things as the causative context - that ideas, religious beliefs, or works of art, may be reduced (as one reduces a complex equation) to the "real" class interests which they express. 20

This holding of a non-ideological space outside or above the social sphere is really very close to Anderson's position. The main difference is that Anderson claims that Marxism as 'science' is objective, and produces non-ideological knowledge, while Thompson claims that the empirical, intellectual tradition is the only sound basis for real knowledge. The discussion over Charles Darwin's place in the British historical heritage shows that for both Thompson and Anderson Darwin was a 'pure' scientist. For Thompson, the English intellectual tradition was responsible for Darwin, who was the protagonist of an inherited empirical habit.[21] Anderson makes a sharp distinction between Darwin's scientific achievement and his ideological impact:

> Darwin's discoveries were not, of themselves, ideological: it was their use which was - and about this he [Thompson] says nothing at all. Yet Darwinism is probably the most dramatic case in history of a scientific theory giving immediate birth to a social ideology. No other scientific discovery was ever as rapidly 'politicized' as this. 'The survival of the fittest' and 'the natural law of selection' became a ruthless celebration of Victorian racism and imperialism: these axioms provided a benison for class society, and a mystique for militarism. They did so in the name of a natural destiny inscribed in the course of things. 22

The implication of these writings is that either there is no connection between science and ideology, or that natural science can be (mis) used as ideology. Such positions claim, in effect, that science is neutral and value-free.

Underlying Thompson's recoveries of 'man's intellectual heritage', of humanist values, and of empirical historical logic, is a fundamental separation between the natural and the social, and between the rational and the ideological. Although it is sometimes claimed that Thompson was defending the 'progressive' features of bourgeois civilisation against the danger of a kind of anarcho ultra-leftism, the inner core of these values are presumed to be neutral, and free from ideology. The following passage in which Thompson is both quarrelling and agreeing with Kolakowski, are crucial:

> "Certain formulations of Marx", you allow, "suggest that he believed in the particular class character of the culture as a whole". But these were, evidently, mistaken formulations and not the true Marx. For Marxism's "fundamental presuppositions" conceive of socialism "as a continuation of the spiritual work of mankind", and "as the inheritor and not the destroyer of the existing bourgeois culture". And the existing bourgeois becomes, very soon, a synonym for man's universal culture, indeed perhaps for rationality itself. The idea that mankind should 'liberate' itself from its intellectual heritage and create a new 'quantitatively different' science or logic is a support for obscurantist despotism.23

> And so indeed it is. But we pass in that sentence between two different propositions. Science and logic are carefully chosen words: and, I agree, liberation from these leads to obscurantism. But man's "intellectual heritage" is not so simple a unified concept; "man" has many heritages, and the living do not inherit so much received property; they select, they use, they transform. And I see no necessary contradiction between Marx's formulation as to ideology, or as to bourgeois culture; and his presuppositions as to the universalist values of rationality.

Thompson here attacks Kolakowski for defending uncritically a bourgeois or high-cultural view of intellectual heritage. But he too wishes to preserve large parts of an inherited culture. Sensitive to the connection between culture and class in general, he exempts 'science' (and 'logic') from any such determination. Indeed, the attempt to find a radical, even socialist conception of science, culture and knowledge is taken to be an outlandish perversion of Reason itself.

Thompson arrives at this position precisely because of his conscious movement away from economic categories, and a rejection of the rigid formulas of dialectical materialism and more recent abstract conceptions of scientific Marxism. In closing this section it is useful to compare the affirmations of reason found in Thompson and Anderson's work. The former grasps reason as procedures of thought - it is an expression of his libertarian and nonconformist challenge to authority and dogma. It eschews system-building and theoreticism, and instead reason is connected to <u>subjective</u> notions such as moral development and spiritual attainment.

For Anderson, reason (the theoretical form) often seems embodied in its concrete content. Marxism as science is the highest form of truth because the Promethean strand of Marx, the development of 'forces' themselves, is the development of scientific reason itself. Thus, for Anderson, the capitalist system of regulation is opposed as irrational (while capitalism itself is basically rational). Thompson calls upon an equally inviolate rationality in affirming reason against the irrationality of capitalism itself. These positions are very close. They are none-the-less problematic from a socialist perspective. Both contain elements that subsume and retain bourgeois ideology within Marxism, and negate the possibility of genuine human emancipation through a more conscious and egalitarian socialist project. They retain, at the heart of the argument, a largely unreconstructed notion of 'the scientific'.(24)

SOME ROOTS AND FORMS OF ENGLISH MARXISM

Contemporary Marxism is distinguished from classical Marxism by its plural and diffuse character. One immediately thinks of structuralism, cultural materialism, critical theory, and the growing number of positions on the left that try to synthesize elements of these problematics. The plurality of Marxisms is in part a reaction to new conditions of crisis for which classical Marxism has no visible answers. Another stimulant has been the critique of the ideological maintainance of the social order in studies, for example, of education and the media. A notable feature of these perspectives has been a borrowing of concepts and categories from other traditions and disciplines. In essence, an often implicit claim is made that the intellect (and therefore the intellectual) has a certain autonomy from social and material reality. This is often presented as some 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure; cultural values cannot be reduced to, or be strictly determined by the base. I do not want to argue that such work is misconceived or not important to socialists. But it does seem to me that this whole tendency brings with it an uncritical acceptance of certain intellectual traditions/methodological procedures etc. If a space is created which has no social determination, no class content, or historical linkage to the society and its social arrangements, an idealist continuity is created with bourgeois values, including the values of science. Contemporary Marxist problematics may be radical, even revolutionary compared to conservative ideology. But as Marxists we should also be aware that radical thought is not only formed in opposition to the existing society and its arrangements, but dialectically by that social order as well. If we want to move beyond theoretical practice to social transformation we must change the presupposition that products of the mind can reveal to us the real world without any reciprocal

conditioning derived from outside ourselves.

The question of cultural autonomy is often viewed as an expression of working-class resistance to capitalist relations and ideology. In opposition to this view, Anderson and Nairn have argued that British working class politics and culture has been formed in an endlessly corporate mode.(25) In my view, the 'Peculiarities of the English' debate, from which these arguments are taken, is connected to much larger questions: what was the significance of the intellectual consequences of the English Revolution? How did the rise of industrial capitalism and its elites establish a new social order and the ideology that helped to sustain it? Why do such notions as 'man's conquest of nature' which are found in Bacon's New Atlantis have such a strong resilience in socialist ideology? To answer these questions from a socialist or Marxist perspective is problematic if we do not recognise their connection and entanglement with the development of socialist and Marxist thought. This in turn implies what I regard as the key question: What exactly are the discontinuities between bourgeois thought/capitalist society and socialist society? And of course, the obverse of this question: What specifically is to be retained for socialism of bourgeois origin? Socialism cannot be made to represent a complete break with the historical past; such an effort would reflect an a-historical utopianism.

In section four I argued that both Thompson and Anderson take a narrow and one-sided view of the relation between rationality and capitalism. I shall briefly summarise these view-points because I want to argue that in order to comprehend the roots and form of English Marxism we need to approach this from a position that I shall call 'cultural mediation'. On the one hand, Thompson tends to associate the 'rationality' of the labouring classes in opposition to capitalist subordination with critical intellectual traditions. The implicit assumption here is that collective association and humanitarian/egalitarian values are de facto oppositional forces against the evils of capitalism, which remain unaffected by bourgeois ideology. On the other hand, Anderson asserts that working-class politics has, by and large, been accommodated and incorporated into bourgeois hegemonic ideology. It is the capitalist system of regulation, and its political and ideological superstructure which for Anderson must be removed. According to Anderson, capitalism is itself rational, and together with Marxist science creates the possibility for socialism.

certainly, as Weber recognised, capitalism does embody a specific rationalising tendency.(26) But the problem with both Thompson's and Anderson's perspectives is that the dialectical and historical interrelation of thought and reality, science and society, ideology and the material base is not grasped. Even 'critical' thinking, with or without a working-class association, is subject to this condition.

One way of uncovering the forms of English Marxism in a way that discloses its connections and compatibilities with bourgeois thought is to challenge the ideological assumptions, so prevalent on the left, concerning science and technology. We have already seen that, in different ways Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson have been influenced as Marxists by various forms of rationalism which I describe as 'ideologies of science'. This label is not accidental, because the main form of continuity between Marxism and bourgeois thought derives from the so-called scientific principle of separating 'facts' from 'values', science from society, and therefore Marxism from its social origins. Similarly, ideas of scientific and technological progress as 'necessary' for the transition to the socialist commonwealth have been a sustaining factor of continuity between mainstream Marxism and social democracy (e.g. Croslandite socialism) both of which have their origins deep in the intellectual and cultural roots of capitalist society. How then do we break theoretically with this continuity, and the implicit ideologies of science without relapsing into an a-historical utopianism?

The common assumption on the left has been to focus almost entirely on the impact of technology on society - thereby separating the formative development of capitalist technology from its social and cultural context. However, we must first analyse the question of the extent to which that technology was a material reflection, embodiment, or reification of dominant cultural values. This question is not a new one. It was raised by Lukacs in his review of Buhkarin, and by Gramsci in his fragment on Taylorism and Fordism.(27) Fleron, in outlining his mediation theory of technology states: 'the essential element is that technology as one of the artifacts of culture embodies the dominant values contained in that culture'. Further:

> As a product of its particular historical circumstances, the technology that developed under capitalism is a reification and concrete material manifestation of the dominant capitalist idea of maximizing control over labour in order to maximize profits. This control function is reflected not only in the machine itself, but also in the accompanying forms of technical rationality and technical infrastructure.(28)

The mediation theory of technology posits the conception that the dominant cultural values manifest themselves materially in the productive forces (both internally in machines and externally in labour's subordination in the process of production). As Gramsci wisely noted, under capitalism the superstructures have become increasingly 'dense' because of the long-term interpenetration of capitalist productive forces and cultural forms. (29) But Gramsci also saw the dangers of interpreting this in a deterministic way. As the Prison Notebooks repeatedly stressed, material forces acquire meaning only through human definition and engagement, which includes a variety of possible experiences and individual perspectives. If dominant cultural forms contribute to metaphysical assumptions around science, this does not mean that the dialectic between our views of the world and the world itself operates in mechanical fashion. We must take into account the problem of cultural residues and the transmission and further synthesis of diverse values at all layers of society. We should not, in other words, identify as 'bourgeois' all the forms of consciousness in capitalist society, some values of bourgeois origin, moreover, are very important if we are able to transform them into the basis of a democratic and socialist ethos. (30)

Probably the most important meshing together of intellectual assumptions surrounding science, rationality, democracy and socialism in English Marxism occurred during the 1930's. Contemporary assumptions concerning a socialist approach to science and technology, and consequently even the nature of 'Socialism' are in many ways related to the particular synthesis that came into being at that time. A brief explanation of the events that acted as catalysts for this development, the form it took, and why it has been sustained almost until the present will provide several insights. The peculiar events of capitalism in crisis, the rise of fascism, the Popular Front and the relationship of the left to the Soviet Union (in political and theoretical terms) are the essential background factors, and to these we could add the upsurge in scientific and technological development in the lead-up to, and during the Second World War.

A particularly influential group of Communist Party scientists, including amongst other J.D. Bernal, saw the crisis of capitalism as the fettering of productive forces (viewed mainly as technology) by capitalist relations of production. A not- uncommon view, derived from this notion, was that capitalism was about to collapse under the weight of its contradictions, and that science

and technology would be instrumental in ushering in the new order. The Soviet Union was seen as a kind of model of the scientific and technocratic socialist future.[31] Features of the period such as rearmament the use and fear of the bomber which caused havoc and destruction, and finally the atomic bomb at the conclusion of the war were conceived as capitalist evils of a war for gain. Science was being misused in the West while (despite later rumours of the deformation of Lysenko) science was still conceived as fundamental to social progress in the Soviet Republic. This dichotomy, or more correctly, blinkered vision of fetished science under capitalism and pure unproblematic science under Socialism, is still a prevalent view amongst some sections of the left. The challenge to this view that the Polish union 'Solidarity'[32] is presently mounting may assist the rupture of such ideological assumptions.

The rise of fascism and the connected defence of democracy was also an extremely important motif of the period. The Marxist left conceived these developments as a titanic historical clash of the forces of darkness (chaos and irrationality) against civilisation and the forces of truth (order and reason). Left intellectuals of this period linked fascism with dogma and reactionary ideology. Thus for Benjamin Farrington, history showed obscurantism and persecution among the handmaidens of religion'.[33] Freethought became associated with the development of reason in a way that was almost synonymous with democratic values. In this framework, the Communist Party historians drew on English traditions not only in subject matter but intellectually as well. This assisted the formation of an intellectual niche in which Marxists favoured empiricism and a more implicit notion of the ideological neutrality of science. This all occurred in part as a reaction to the abstract system-building of the 'Diamat'. Because political events were so pressing, all these strands were mutually reinforcing in their impact on Marxist intellectuals in a short space of time. There resulted a tight alignment of political positions and intellectual outlooks, the cornerstone of which was the idea that science and reason were the tests of civilisation and that these were threatened by a surge of unreason - fascism as a kind of Hegelian historical spirit manifested as tyrannical physical force. I think Edward Thompson's approach to, and understanding of Marxism must be seen in the general context of the scientific rationalism of the 1930's. The criticisms or reservations to which I have referred in discussions of his position should be placed in this wider context. All the main features that crystalised and became constitutive of English Marxism during the 1930s and 40's are prevalent in his outlook: English traditionalism, popular democracy, empiricism, anti-theoreticism, a

privileging of intellectual heritage and a view of natural science as non-ideological.

The main counterpoint to these themes, especially in the work of Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams, is the stress on utopian and romantic traditions. Yet, in the next section, I want to argue that this recovery of another aspect of our cultural resources, has been rather contradictory. Utopian and romantic elements have been seen as something to be added to a Marxism which is flawed or as something which is in a contradictory tension even with Marxism's best side.(34) Against this I wish to argue that Marxism incorporated these elements in its original paradigms.(35) The following section will discuss this issue, starting out from Thompson's and Anderson's views of romantic thought.

UTOPIAS AND ROMANTICS

> Neither Marxism nor socialism have anything to gain from traffic with it ('desire'), unless it is given what in this irrationalism it is so expressly constructed to refuse - a clear and observable meaning. (p.162).
>
> The difficulty of developing a materialist ethics, at once integrally historical and radically non-utilitarian, it is this difficulty that Thompson underrates. Overlooking the good reasons why Marx and Engels rejected the 'ethical socialism' of the Utopians before them and Luxemburg or Lenin resisted the 'ethical socialism' of Bernstein or Hardie after them, the argument of The Poverty of Theory tends towards an extrapolation of moral values from the historical past... (p.98).
>
> For historical materialism at its strongest has always been defined by its supercession of the anti-thesis between Romanticism and Utilitarianism which News from Nowhere, for all its splendour, reiterates...This sense of the dialectical complementarity of Utilitarianism and Romanticism is what distinguishes classical Marxism from the many attempts by socialists at one time or another to construct an opposition to capitalism from either standpoint: denunciation of its irrationality or inhumanity alone (p.169).

Almost all the above quotations are from the 'Utopias' section of Perry Anderson's Arguments. It is evident that Anderson wants to take issue with Thompson's defence of utopian and romantic thought found in his Postscript to William Morris - Romantic to Revolutionary (1977). A prescriptive, and over-simplified view might claim that Anderson seeks to marginalise ethical/moral values and romantic traditions - privileging instead knowledge and rationality; while the converse would seem to be Thompson's position. Such a view presents us with what I take to be a false dichotomy. If Anderson

is understood as representing Second International Marxism, and its reliance on such classical texts as the Manifesto and Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, then we have a position that excludes utopian and romantic thought. In Thompson's case these strands of thought must be added to Marxism. In other words, they both view these questions from within what I have called a framework of scientific rationalism. The problem is, at a deeper level, the same in either case: whatever the evaluation of romanticism, its themes are seen as being external to Marxism, to be rejected or incorporated from this (different) Marxist standpoint. Even in his most succinct and sympathetic formulation, this tension remains for Thompson:

> To define Morris's position as a Socialist it has proved necessary to submit Marxism itself to self-criticism: and in particular to call in question the scientific/utopian antinomy. (36)

The over-arching problem has been that Utopian and romantic thought has often been labelled 'idealist' and 'subjective' by the classical Marxist tradition. Accordingly, it is often inferred that Marxism has superceded Utopian Socialism and romantic criticism of capitalism with a scientific and objective perspective. But we need not look very far, even in the context of English Marxism, to recall that deep controversies have always existed regarding the antinomies of consciousness/reality and subject/object. The widely differing views expressed concerning Caudwell's Illusion and Reality in the 1940's is a case in point.(37) Nor was it an accident that Page Arnot wrote his Vindication of Morris in the 30's, and Thompson similarily in the 50's along with A.L. Morton's The English Utopia - all these works were coloured by their contemporary political content.(38) But even though these were expressly written to retain a visionary conception of the communist future as a part of a living tradition (and in part to escape the perils of the present) they were still allied to the main motifs of the orthodox tradition. Thompson himself recognised in his Postscript that his original view of News from Nowhere was that it was a 'Scientific Utopia' (39). The perception of English Marxists of the utopian and romantic traditions has generally (and until more recently) been through the prism of a mainly orthodox view-point.

Because of this difficulty it is useful to note the work of a Marxist who has seen things differently. Ernst Bloch perceptively held that Marxism had historically taken up and 'incorporated' elements of utopian and romantic perspectives, and although these had generally remained frozen within orthodoxy, their reactivation was required if Marxism was not to become static and doctrinaire. According to Bloch, 'there has been a somewhat too great

progress of socialism from utopia to science, with the result that not only the clouds of utopia but also its pillar of flames have been liquidated'[40]. This sentence has unmistakable romantic connotations. But it would be entirely incorrect to assume that Bloch was an abstract thinker - his Utopianism was concrete in that it traced the connections existing in the present with the objective possibilities of the 'not-yet' in the future. The notion of the 'not-yet' is a kind of prefigurative utopia introjected into the present. In this way a dynamic hope of the future was linked with concrete praxis.

Although the above is an exceedingly condensed account of Bloch's 'Utopian Marxism', the main differences between his position and that of the English Marxists are three-fold: firstly, his utopianism has a definite and concrete relation with present strategy and politics; secondly his Marxism is relatively open and reflexive - seeking to avoid what he calls the 'cold stream', i.e. blind empiricism, positivism and Produktionsvernunft;[41] thirdly, and here he differs even from Thompson, utopianism is claimed for Marxism, not as part of an alternative tradition. These points need further clarification, but at this point I want to look more directly at the problem of interpreting utopian/romantic thought for socialism, and thus of distinguishing it from bourgeois ideology.

One of the most compelling aspects of Marx's early work (1843-4) is its fusion of the utopian/romantic and Englightenment standpoints into a single vision, grasping modern scientific, cultural and industrial technique as both liberating and imprisoning forces. With some important exceptions, Englightenment thinkers and their nineteenth-century Utilitarian heirs stressed the former view, Romantics the latter, Utopians occupying a vacillating and enigmatic space in between. In Marx's early writings all these elements were harmonised: the belief in the emancipatory power of industry is contained within a radical critique of the alienation of labour in industrial production - a critique linked to his great eschatological vision of a redemption of the alienated through their own revolutionary action. In my view, all of these elements still retain an essential harmony in Marx's later work, although some commentators, perhaps not unjustly, claim that the Enlightenment root displaced the Utopian/Romantic elements. What is problematic to say the least, is the way in which these elements have generally been driven out, as Marxism became an

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authoritative paradigm against other competing systems: the rational/romantic and scientific/utopian antinomies were still retained within Marxism.

It is important to consider the way scientific rationalism has been ideologically connected to utopian/romantic thought. Neither are necessarily 'bourgeois' or 'Marxist' ipso facto. One way of viewing this problem is to recall that the Enlightenment embodied a specific form of knowledge containing certain values. Similiarly, Romanticism was another form of knowledge embodying specific ethical/moral values as opposed to 'purely' rational ones. However, it would be a mistake to hold that these differing perspectives constitute 'Two Cultures'.(42) Although science and reason have been predominant in both 'bourgeois' and 'marxist' cultures and belief-systems, scientific and technological advance has often been legitimated through aesthetic, humane and moral claims. At a deeper level, science and rationality have often infused romantic/utopian thought - particularly in connection with socialism (for example, in the works of H.G. Wells and J.D. Bernal).(43) Indeed, many feminist writers have argued that the romantic/utopian heritage has been marginalised, tamed and coerced by modern society. So in general, the complexity and density of these inter-connections presents a real problem in trying to supercede these positions and move toward a new synthesis.

A starting point is given by Edward Thompson through his recognition that one conceptual framework should not be privileged over another. This occurs in his discussion of William Morris as a Marxist and as a Utopian:

> We may say, and should say, that Morris was a Marxist and a Utopian, but we must not allow either a hyphen or a sense of contradiction to enter between the two terms. Above all, the second term may not be reduced to the first. Nor can we allow a condescension which assumes that the "education of desire" is a subordinate part. (44)
>
> Moreover, it should now be clear that there is a sense in which Morris, as a Utopian and moralist, can never be assimilated to Marxism, not because of any contradiction of purposes but because one may not assimilate desire to knowledge, and because the attempt to do so is to confuse two different operative principles of culture... The motions of desire may be legible in the text of necessity, and may then become subject to rational explanation and criticism. But such criticism can scarcely touch these motions at their source. (45)

Anderson cites the latter quotation and finds that it is wrong because it 'substitutes an ontological for an historical explanation of the record of relations between Morris and Marxism' (p160). He follows this by attempting to associate Thompson's use of 'desire' with Parisian philosophic irrationalism. In the following chapter Anderson stresses his 'historical explanation' of the Morris-Marxism relation with a very impressive view of Morris as a revolutionary strategist. There is an acute danger here of falling back into a rigid antinomy between Morris the revolutionary and Morris the utopian. Instead, it would be more advantageous to view Morris from something like the perspective of Bloch's Utopian Marxism. In this way revolutionary and utopian aspects are combined, and a distinctive accent is placed on the transformation of human and social relations in the movement toward the creation of a material class opposition.

Anderson should be credited for recognising the problematic aspect of developing an 'ethical socialism', and of focussing too much on what he calls the 'ontological' side of romantic/utopian thought. But in referring to Bernstein or Hardie he notices only those socialists that were particularly inhibited from developing more incisive values of social transformation. Unlike Thompson,he is never really able to go beyond the Enlightenment root of Marxism, and this is clearly seen in his criticism of News from Nowhere. Anderson claims that 'Morris's vision is effectively an inversion of the present' - it is a return to feudal times, and an 'impulse towards simplification' (p.167). Is this view tenable? Firstly, it is evident that Anderson wants to reject those views of Morris that are incompatible with a modernist, highly-organised, scientifically-based socialist system. He therefore quotes Raymond Williams to give the impression that Morris's utopian vision was divorced from his revolutionary practice. In referring to the discontinuity of the Romantic tradition (and its submergence into a predominantly rationally based utopian/romanticism), Williams asserts that:

> ..... what the representation of discontinuity typically produces is a notion of social simplicity which is untenable. The extent to which the idea of socialism is attached to that simplicity is counter-productive. It seems to me that the break towards socialism can only be towards an unimaginably greater complexity (46)

Certainly, the notion of the socialist future as one of 'social simplicity' is untenable. But although Williams's discussions of News from Nowhere in his recent Problems in Materialism and Culture (pp. 204-8) are very close in general terms to Anderson's own account, it seems to me that he does recognise a 'fundamental tension' between a Stalinist privileging of technology and production, and the revolutionary socialism of Marx and Morris that stressed distinctively new social, human and material relations. I want to suggest that Anderson's reading of Morris's Utopianism dislodges it theoretically and practically from an important linkage between the present and the future. Morris was concerned above all to create the possibility of real revolutionary change; his awareness of the destructiveness of commodity-production was central to this concern. Like Marx, Morris saw that the agency and creativity of the working class was central not only to the proletarian revolution - but to a social and cultural revolution as well. In this way it is possible to view Morris's Utopianism as connecting the necessary revolutionary strategy of the present with the inspiration and energy of social/human trans-formation which links the practice of the present with the hope of the future.

Unfortunately, Anderson's account of Morris is divided into chapters on 'utopias' and 'strategies' - a categorical division that in effect submerges the possibility of reconstituting 'Morris the Utopian' and 'Morris the revolutionary' into a unified perspective. It would of course be naive to claim that Morris's Utopia was not a rejection of European civilisation. Anderson claims that this sets him apart 'even within the Romantic tradition he shared, whose real revulsion was from the Industrial Revolution' (p.168). But Morris need not be interpreted as an irrational dreamer in this respect, because the project of genuine social and cultural revolution must uncover the roots of class and intellectual dominance. This means not only a radical critique of the horrors of early industrialism - but the cultural and ideological roots of bourgeois society itself. It is indeed surprising that Thompson and Anderson have largely ignored the work of Christopher Hill which clearly argues that we must go back to the period of the English Revolution if we are to understand the intellectual foundations of bourgeois society. (47)

However, I do not want to push this argument too far, because in the final analysis Morris's plea for a future of social simplicity is probably

derived from Rousseau rather than Marx. Rousseau's perspective is ultimately pessimistic, for it is not possible to return to pre-industrial life; while the Communist Manifesto contains a viable hope of the future beyond the dominance of the product over the producer. I think it is possible to conceive of Morris's romantic Utopianism as grasping a profound Marxian historical insight into the problem of capitalist state power. Corrigan has argued that[48] the State is not separate from or above society, but is internally related to the material (including technological) production of capitalist commodities, and to the social reproduction of capitalist state-forms through 'regulation' and 'orchestration' of ideology and culture. In this sense then, the Morrisian rejection of the capitalist ethos and its structures of ideological dominance amounts to more than mere romantic criticism. It is an insight of tremendous significance.

The teleological notion that a communist future is beyond capitalist industrialism is of course deeply rooted in the Marxist tradition. It is also found in a work that Perry Anderson holds in high regard - Bahro's The Alternative in Eastern Europe. Indeed Anderson's comments (found at the end of his section on Utopias) are significant and deserve careful attention. For Anderson, the Alternative 'represents a departure from previous utopian traditions' and it presents a 'socialist figuration of the future beyond the anti-thesis between Romanticism and Utilitarianism' (p.174). These comments are well put, but I want to suggest that a radical interpretation of Morris is more applicable to our situation to-day than Anderson's reading of Bahro. Firstly, the Alternative takes as its premise the 'backward' nature of Eastern European social formations and consequently a reliance on the State as the institution of civilisation, and the taskmaster of society for technical and social development. Much of Bahro's critique is concerned with the problems that are thought to arise out of these premises: the heavy economism of the hunt for better efficiency and higher productivity, the problem of bureaucratization, the need for experts, and the passivity of the population. Bahro's programme for transformation is one of Cultural Revolution seen primarily as changes in the forms of economical-political organisation. Anderson correctly notes that this utopian vision is not speculative - but an extrapolation of idealisations on the strength of a concrete analysis of the real world. While I am in agreement with this approach and particularly his attempt to move beyond romantic and utilitarian emphases, certain ambivalences remain.

It is noticable that while Bahro accepts the revolutionary role of modern science and technology he wants to distance himself from its technocratic organisational forms and alienating effects:

> What we are dealing with today is precisely a highly complex technology and organisation of the reproduction process, which is not seriously disturbed simply by political changes, but which materially incorporates relations of super- and sub-ordination of the most far-reaching kind, as well as extreme differences in psycho-physical requirement. (49)

In my view, Bahro's synthesis remains too closely associated with an acceptance of Western civilisation, industrialism, and State-Forms. The ideological assumptions implicit in them should be exposed if socialists are to create a real alternative. If these premises are taken on board then the project of Cultural Revolution will limit itself to modifications of bourgeois forms. Is it significant that since leaving the DDR Bahro has shifted to an ecological perspective on socialism which is really closer to a radical interpretation of William Morris's Socialism? (50)

CONCLUSION

In viewing Anderson's Arguments Within English Marxism I have tried to provoke an awareness of the need to move beyond existing positions. The perspective adopted here is somewhat unusual for a Marxist in that I view English Marxism as not only a critique of the capitalist system and bourgeois society, but also as being historically formed by it. This does not mean that Marxism is somehow deformed or that I am plunging us into a new relativism. On the contrary, this is a tactical approach to uncover the ideologies of science that have traditionally been present within the classical heritage.

Finally, I think it important to stress that the argument of this essay is not just about questions of science as a matter of epistemology or of method. Perhaps the most pervasive and healthy reaction to Althusserianism on the left has been to recognise the link between epistemology and political form. Ian Craib seems to echo Edward Thompson's reservations:

> A Marxism that presents itself in terms of a radical choice between unfounded science and ideology to be rejected will have an inbuilt tendency to different organisational forms, and a different political effectivity, to a Marxism that attempts to transform an ideology by working with it. And a politically isolated and ineffective Marxism or a Marxism rigidified in fixed institutional forms will tend towards a different conception of its own knowledge-producing activities than a Marxism engaged in a living interaction with the class whose experience it is theorising.(51)

The possibility of producing socialist knowledge is closely connected to the resolution of 'abstract' or 'philosophical' questions. These need not be viewed as a-political concerns. Indeed, I have tried to place our philosophical assumptions on an agenda of political debate. Obviously, whatever my findings, further contributions and practice are needed to open up these questions. To that extent, the writers discussed serve a positive function. They are part of a living tradition. Consequently, to present a neat 'conclusion' would be problematic, and a rash and unmarxist thing to do.

Footnotes

1. L.Colletti, 'A Political and Philosophical Interview', Western Marxism: A Critical Reader, (London NLB) 1977 p. 326.

2. L. Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin, (London, NLB) 1976, pp 69-72.

3. P. Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism, (London, Verso) 1979, pp 73-4.

4. K. Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery, (London,1968) p. III.

5. One of Thompson's arguments was to establish a connection between 'rigour' in the so-called 'realm of theory' and the opportunistic and unprincipled practices of Stalinism: "because of the denial of experience and the repudiation of empirical controls - the practice can lead to anything and justify everything'. The Poverty of Theory, p.378.

6. P. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', NLR 35 (Jan-Feb, 1966).

7. K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 352-3,5 in Early Writings, (ed. L. Colletti, London, Penguin 1975).

8. cf. N. Geras, 'Marx and the Critique of Political Economy', in R. Blackburn (ed.) Ideology in Social Science, (London, 1973) p. 284-305; J. Mepham, 'The Theory of Ideology in Capital', in Radical Philosophy 2, (Summer 1972) pp 12-19. For readers who want to go further: J. Larrain's The Concept of Ideology, (London, Hutchinson 1979) provides a useful account of the shifts in the concept of ideology in the Marxist tradition.

9. I refer here to the human organisation of the production process.

10. Marx, Grundrisse, (Harmondsworth, 1973) p.105.

11. In his Essays in Self-Criticism (G. Lock trans. London, NLB 1976), Althusser recognised that his previous insistance on theory led him to overlook practice in his supposed opposition between science and ideology. His 'corrective' to this rationalist deviation was to allow class intervention in the sphere of 'philosophy'.

12. See the review essay on G.A. Cohen's Karl Marx's Theory of History - a Defence, and W. H. Shaw's Marx's Theory of History, by H. Laycock in the Canadian Journal of Philosophy, vol. 2/2 (June 1980) pp 335-356.

13. See 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', The Reasoner No 3, 1956 and 'Socialist Humanism', The New Reasoner, No I, 1957.

14. E.P. Thompson, 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', in The Poverty of Theory, (London, 1978), p. 104.

15. I will give two of the better known examples of using history as a testing ground for theory, one from sociology of science and one from philosophy of science: the strategy of sociological relativism associated with Barry Barnes at Edinburgh university (cf. B. Barnes and S. Shapin (eds), Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture, (London, 1979 Sage) and the most striking example in philosophy of science proper, Paul Feyerabend's Against Method.

16. A. Gouldner, The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology, (London, 1976) p.9.

17. Particularly, Capital vol I (London, 1976) pp. 375, 719-23, 615-7, 620-1.

18. E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p.269.

19. E.P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', p.81 in PoT.

20. ibid., p.80.

21. ibid., p.61.

22. P. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', NLR No. 35, (Jan-Feb, 1966) p.20

23. E.P. Thompson, ibid., p.178.

24. I would like to thank Philip Corrigan for helpful clarification of the Anderson-Thompson comparison in this paragraph. The usual disclaimers apply.

25. See P. Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis' and T. Nairn 'The Nature of the Labour Party' in Towards Socialism, (Fontana/NLR, 1965).

26. See the chapter Marx in the light of Weber's clarification of method in J.I. Loewenstein, Marx against Marxism, (trans. H. Drost, London, 1980).

27. G. Lukacs, 'Technology and Social Relations' in Marxism and Human Liberation: Essays on History, Culture and Revolution (E.San Juan Jr. ed., N.Y. Dell, 1973) see also New Left Review, 39, (1966) pp 27-34; Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Hoare and Smith eds., London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971) pp 277-316.

28. F. Fleron, Technology and Communist Culture, (Praeger, N.Y. 1977) p.[illegible].

29. Gramsci, op cit. pp. lxvi and 238.

30. I think it is possible to find in the writings of the early revolutionary communists like Korsch an opening toward a radical distinction within bourgeois values: between those that may assist the extension of human creativity and collective co-operation for socialism through the enhancement of democracy; those values that favour the status quo and relations of paternalism and meritocracy. This distinction is one that must be made in practice. See my paper, 'Poland and the Duality of Marxism' which argues that Solidarity are practically coming to terms

with the idea of holding some bourgeois values, while negating others. (Available with other papers from the conference Trade Unions, Self-management and Socialism: the Polish Experience, Ruskin College, Oxford 17th October, 1981, from SERA, 9 Poland Street, London W1.)

31. See G. Werskey, The Visible College, (London, 1978) and his introduction to the reprint of N.I. Bukharin et al., Science at the Crossroads: Papers presented to the International Congress...1931 by the delegates of the U.S.S.R., (Frank Cass, 1971) pp. xi-xxix.

32. See Mike Cooley and Mike Johnson, 'Solidarity and Science' Science for People No. 50, Winter, 1981/82, pp 23-4.

33. B. Farrington, Science in Antiquity, (London, 1936) p.238.

34. At a weekend school in Bristol in 1975 Thompson and Williams both agreed that romanticism needed to be added to Marxism. See also Williams' forthcoming pamphlet, Ecology and Socialism which reiterates his position that romantic, and therefore environmental concerns are not a constitutive component of socialism, but must be added to it.

35. The best analysis of this from a dialectical perspective is A. Gouldner, The Two Marxisms, (Macmillan, 1980). Also my review of Gouldner in the Marx Memorial Library Bulletin, Nos. 96/97, October, 1981.

36. E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, (London, 1955and 1977). Later ed. with postscript, p.792.

37. George Thompson viewed Illusion and Reality asthe first comprehensive attempt to work out a Marxist theory of art', while Bernal viewed Caudwell's work as formulations that were 'those of contemporary bourgeois scientific philosophy...and not those of Marxism'. (found in R. Williams, Culture and Society, (Penguin, 1977) p.269.)

38. The political and social events of the 1930's through to the mid-50s are well known and need not be recalled here. But it is notable that a wide spectrum of socialists who tried to develop a more English rather than Soviet Marxism still saw the future as a scientific utopia.

39. Thompson, ibid., p. 787 and footnote 67.

40. Found in D. Gross, 'Marxism and Utopia: Ernst Bloch', in Towards a New Marxism (ed)(Grahl and Piccone) Telos papers, 1970, p.86.

41. ibid., p.96.

42. I refer to an important debate between C.P. Snow and F.R. Leavis. Leavis' work should not be overlooked by Marxists. For example, it should not be forgotten that the traditions which he draws on, characterised variously - and invariably disparagingly - as romantic, Luddite, utopian and reactionary, have been concerned to question the implications of material progress and innovation for human life and social well-being.

43. See G. Werskey, 'Science, Socialism and Utopia', New Statesman, 19/9/80.

44. Thompson, ibid., p.791

45. Thompson, ibid., p. 807

46. R. Williams, Politics and Letters, (London, 1979), pp. 188-9.

47. C. Hill's recent Intellectual Consequences of the English Revolution, 1979, is particularly relevant.

48. P. Corrigan (ed.), Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory, (Macmillan 1980.)

49. R. Bahro, The Alternative in Eastern Europe, NLB (1978) pp. 149-50.

50. See Bahro's Socialism and Survival (Heretic Books, 1982)

51. Ian Craib, 'Lukacs and the Marxist Criticism of Sociology', Radical Philosophy, 17 (Summer, 1977), p.36.