

In defense of Engels's revolutionary Marxism: An anti-critique

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If therefore Barth supposes that we deny any and every reaction of the political, etc., reflexes of the economic movement upon the movement itself, he is simply tilting at windmills. He has only got to look at Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which deals almost exclusively with the *particular* part played by political struggles and events; of course, within their general dependence upon economic conditions. Or *Capital*, the section on the working day, for instance, where legislation, which is surely a political act, has such a trenchant effect. Or the section on the history of the bourgeoisie. (Chapter XXIV.) Or why do we fight for the political dictatorship of the proletariat if political power is economically impotent? Force (that is state power) is also an economic power.¹

¹ Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Conrad Schmidt, October 27, 1890", in *Marx and Engels Correspondence*, translated by Donna Torr, International Publishers, 1968, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_10_27.htm.

The disappointment for Marxism caused by the bankruptcy of the Second International's reformism during the First World War turned into a new hope with the October Revolution. Marxism got its reborn from its ashes with the Third International under Lenin's leadership. In the area of philosophy, these developments prompted the young intellectuals of the West into seeking an answer to the question of the philosophical foundations of Lenin's Marxist approach that made this revival possible. The most prominent names among these intellectual militants were Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and Antonio Gramsci.² The early Lukács found in Engels's thought, the roots of the degeneration in Marxism that culminated in the Second International. According to early Lukács, Engels distorted Marx's philosophy of praxis, which was historically and critically dialectical, by dogmatically interpreting it as the universal science of the laws of motion of matter and treating both matter and society in the same form of causality, without considering the unique character of praxis. The early Lukács tried to save Marx's Marxism from Engels's so-called vulgarization (in which early Lukács asserted that the dialectics of the subject and the object is absent), through a Hegelian reading.³

In the period after World War II, Engels was to be turned into a scapegoat, this time as the source of the Stalinist degeneration. After Khrushchev's secret speech, (February 25, 1956) Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt (October 1956), and the Russian invasion of Hungary, (November 10, 1956) a new trend emerged, defined as the "new left".⁴ This trend found the philosophical source of Stalin's terror in Engels. During this period, many commentators such as Norman Levine, Frederic Bender, Terrell Carver, Gregory Claeys, Zbigniew A. Jordan, Sven-Eric Liedman, Tom Rockmore, Jonathan Sperber, Gareth Stedman Jones, Paul Thomas, Robert Tucker, Andrzej Walicki renewed the claim that Engels had distorted Marx's thought.⁵ The roots of the Stalinist degeneration in the USSR were linked to the Russian Marxists' Engelsian interpretation of Marxism during the Cold War period.⁶

In the area of political economy, after the Cold War, Michael Heinrich put forward his "new reading of Marx" against Engels's "world view Marxism" as he called it.⁷ Heinrich argues that in his edition of the third volume of *Capital*, Engels vulgarized Marx's much more sophisticated approach, especially on the crisis, by

2 Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study*, University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago, 1995, p. xiii.

3 Chad Kautzer, "Marx's Influence on The Early Frankfurt School", in Michael J. Thompson, *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2017, p. 50.

4 Paul Blackledge, *Friedrich Engels and Modern Social and Political Theory*, State University of New York Press: Albany, 2019, p. 1.

5 Blackledge, *ibid.*, p. 1. It must be pointed out that there are also people who stand against this trend including names such as J. D. Hunley, David Hillel Ruben, Sebastiano Timpanaro, Steve Rigby, Perry Anderson, and Alvin Gouldner.

6 Blackledge, *ibid.*, p.1-2.

7 Sam Williams, "Michael Heinrich's 'New Reading' of Marx— A Critique, Pt 1", <https://critique-ofcrisistheory.wordpress.com/michael-heinrichs-new-reading-of-marx-a-critique-pt-1/>.

shifting the emphasis of Marx's presentation about the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and turned it into a rapid breakdown theory of capitalism.⁸ According to Heinrich, any theory of breakdown ultimately led to political fatalism because of its excusatory function.⁹

In the area of politics, Eduard Bernstein, who refuses the breakdown tendency of capitalism, and also identifies the collapse of capitalism with the victory of socialism, had claimed that socialists must abandon their goal of overthrowing capitalism for a reformist strategy dependent on elections. To legitimize his view he cited Engels's "Introduction to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*" and later on Marxists such as Karl Kautsky, Ralph Milliband, Santiago Carrillo, and Michael Harrington followed in his track.¹⁰ After the Stalinist degeneration in the USSR, Stalinists started to orient communist parties all around the world to reformist policies on a perspective that identified the process of the collapse of capitalism with the automatic march of socialist construction in a gradual process of evolution. It was claimed that this perspective was inspired by Engels, who distorted Marxism by schematizing history through a linear conception of progress with his rigid and mechanical interpretation of Marxism in which a conception of revolutionary praxis is absent.

As a result, according to anti-Engelsian thinkers, Engels eliminated Marx's unique vision of revolutionary praxis with his mechanical materialist theory of philosophy, the economic theory of breakdown, and reformist political strategy. Therefore, the claim that, unlike Marx, Engels did not include revolutionary praxis in his understanding of Marxism, appears as the central thesis put forward by critics of Engels at the philosophical, economic, and political levels. In this article, we will respond to the criticisms which claimed that Engels denies revolutionary subjectivity in his theory. In this context, we will elaborate on why Engels, rather than denying revolutionary subjectivity, more firmly grounded it at the levels of philosophy, political economy, and politics, which we believe, complement each other.

1) Engels, philosophy and revolutionary subjectivity

In this section, we will respond to the philosophical criticisms of Engels that are related to the assertion that he dismisses revolutionary subjectivity. We will try to make explicit what is implicit in Engels's thought. We will argue that according to Engels's materialist understanding of dialectics, there is a unity in difference

8 Regina Roth, "Karl Marx's Original Manuscripts in the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA): Another View on *Capital*", in Riccardo Bellofiore and Roberto Fineschi, *Re-reading Marx: New Perspectives After the Critical Edition*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2009, p.43-44.

9 Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, translated by Alexander Locascio, Monthly Review Press: New York, 2012, p. 178.

10 Doug Enaa Greene, "Engels Against Reformism in Germany and France", *MR Online*, 28.11.2020, <https://mronline.org/2020/12/04/119739/>.

between matter and thought. In this context also, we will demonstrate that the laws of the materialist dialectic, as formulated by Engels, can manifest themselves through special laws in every stratum. The world has an ontologically stratified structure and that the form of relationship between different strata is asymmetric internal relations. In this framework, we will argue that while the lower strata are a necessary-internal component of the higher-order strata, the higher-order strata are contingently-externally related to the lower-order strata. Social life itself is reconstructed through a causality qualitatively different from that of nature and the higher-order strata create a mutual interaction between the strata by transforming the lower-order strata formwise with a dialectical reversal. Finally, in this section, regarding subjectivity, we will argue that Engels's understanding of freedom in the ethical sense aims to gain an autonomy through the formwise transformation of the laws with a dialectical reversal.

a) Engels and Marx's materialist dialectics

According to Engels, philosophy plays the role of an “underlaborer” for the sciences to sum up the most general results of the historical development of humanity. While the special sciences explain the universe from different vantage points, the remaining mission of philosophy is to lay down the laws of thinking as formal logic and dialectics.¹¹ For both Marx and Engels, philosophy is the theoretical knowledge of the most general laws of the evolution of being and thought that help us to arrange the historical-empirical data rationally to practically transform the world. Engels qualifies Marx's ontological position as materialist dialectics, whereas commentators like Tom Rockmore opposed this view with the claim that Marx is an idealist “as referring to the idea that the subject in some sense produces its world and itself”,¹² Shlomo Avineri¹³, and Kevin Anderson¹⁴ contend that Marx was positioned ontologically through a synthesis of materialism and idealism. Engels handles the basic problem of philosophy as the relation between being and thought.¹⁵ Engels's point of departure here is the critique of Hegel's theory of the identity of being and thought.

But the question of the relation of thinking and being has yet another side: in what relation do our thoughts about the world surrounding us stand to this world itself? Is our thinking capable of cognition of the real world? Are we able in our ideas and notions of the real world to produce a correct reflection of reality? In

11 Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 25*, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 26.

12 Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002, p. 70.

13 Shlomo Avineri, *The Social & Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 69.

14 Anderson, *ibid.*, p. 9.

15 Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 26*, p. 365.

the language of philosophy this question is called the question of the identity of thinking and being, and the overwhelming majority of philosophers answer it in the affirmative. In Hegel, for example, its affirmation is self-evident: for what we cognise in the real world is precisely its thought content—that which makes the world a gradual realisation of the absolute idea, which absolute idea has existed somewhere from eternity, independent of the world and before the world. But it is manifest without further proof that thinking can cognise a content which is from the outset a thought content. It is equally manifest that what is to be proved here is already tacitly contained in the premise. But that in no way prevents from drawing the further conclusion from his proof of the identity of thinking and being that his philosophy, because it is correct for his thinking, is therefore the only correct one, and that the identity of thinking and being must prove its validity by mankind immediately translating his philosophy from theory into practice and transforming the whole world according to Hegelian principles. (...) According to him, nature, as a mere “alienation” of the idea, is incapable of evolution in time—capable only of extending its manifoldness in space, so that it displays simultaneously and side by side all the stages of evolution comprised in it, and is condemned to an eternal repetition of the same processes. This absurdity of evolution in space, but outside of time—the fundamental condition of all evolution—Hegel imposes upon nature just at the very time when geology, embryology, the physiology of plants and animals, and organic chemistry were taking shape, and when everywhere on the basis of these new sciences brilliant presentiments of the subsequent theory of evolution were appearing (for instance, Goethe and Lamarck). But the system demanded it; hence the method, for the sake of the system, had to become untrue to itself.¹⁶

Engels proposes a realist ontology in which being exists independent of our consciousness. Hegel argued that he sublated materialism and idealism, but this sublation is established on the plane of idealism. On the other hand, according to the understanding of dialectical materialist ontology, as Engels emphasized, even though thought is a phenomenon that occurs in the process of evolution of matter, it is different from it, the relationship between the two is unity in difference.¹⁷ Hegel's system (as a justificatory contemplative philosophy) is of a cyclical character eternally repeating itself, starting from thought and returning to thought through the moments of idea, nature and spirit. On the other hand, Marx and Engels's materialist appropriation of Hegel's dialectical method (as a vehicle of practical transformation) is based on the (helezonically) improving conceptualization of practical activity, starting from the evolutionary process in nature through moments of society and thought. The more humanity's knowledge coincides with material reality, the more we can transform it appropriate to our will. The more humanity can transform the material reality, the more our knowledge coincides with reality. Thus, although the world as it is and the world as we conceive it do not converge absolutely, they tend to converge more and more in the historically relative meaning.¹⁸ As Engels

16 Ibid., p. 367, 370, 371.

17 Sean Creaven, *Emergentist Marxism: Dialectical Philosophy and Social Theory*, Routledge: London and New York, 2007, p. 48.

18 One of the most frequently directed criticisms to Engels is that the theory of reflection defended by him is incompatible with Marx's approach. Those who put forward this point out that Engels's

indicated:

The identity of thought and being, to express myself in Hegelian fashion, everywhere coincides with your example of the circle and the polygon. Or the two of them, the concept of a thing and its reality, run side by side like two asymptotes, always approaching each other yet never meeting. This difference between the two is the very difference which prevents the concept from being directly and immediately reality and reality from being immediately its own concept. But although a concept has the essential nature of a concept and cannot therefore *prima facie* directly coincide with reality, from which it must first be abstracted, it is still something more than a fiction, unless you are going to declare all the results of thought fictions because reality has to go a long way round before it corresponds to them, and even then only corresponds to them with asymptotic approximation.¹⁹

As shown in the following sections, Engels handled the dialectical interaction between being and thought on a materialist level and defended materialism against an idealist-constructivist ontological conception. In the “Theses on Feuerbach”²⁰ which was reached thanks to Engels, and *The German Ideology* which is co-written by Marx with Engels, Marx clearly shows that he handles the dialectical interaction between being and thought on a realist and materialist plane. According to Marx’s point of view, humanity, who appears as a causal result of the evolution of matter, can humanize the world by transforming that causality through conscious and purposeful activity. Here, Marx not only emphasizes that humanity is actively transforming and constructing the world but also claims that humanity is conditioned by that world.

Humanity emerged as a product of biological evolution, dependent on the inorganic and organic conditions of life. While humans change nature through labor depending on the technical level in a given period, they have to establish material relations with each other. These material relations develop the social division of labor within the framework of new historical needs. As the social division of labor develops in the historical process and the social structure becomes more complex, people tend to become more conditioned by the objective-causal world they created. Therefore, Marx and Engels scientifically studied not only the subjective dialectics of the subject in a voluntarist manner, but the natural and social objective factors

reflection theory of knowledge is based on the claim that the subject passively receives the truth, bypassing the constructive activity of the subject which is foreign to Marx’s own epistemology. However, the reflection theory advocated by Engels is not a return to Lockean empiricism as asserted. Engels demonstrated how the subject can arrange complex empirical data about the objective world within the framework of the unity of sensory and rational moments in the acquisition of knowledge. As Engels pointed out: “Marx summarises the actual content common to things and relations and reduces it to its general logical expression. His abstraction therefore only reflects, in rational form, the content already existing in the things.”, See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Engels to Karl Kautsky, September 20, 1884” in *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers: Moscow, 1975. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/letters/84_09_20.htm.

19 F. Engels, “Engels to Conrad Schmidt, March 12, 1895”, *ibid.*.

20 Karl Marx, “Theses On Feuerbach”, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 5*, p. 3-5.

that condition and constrain the activity of the subject and the interplay between these factors and the activity of the subject.

The thesis of unity in difference²¹, which is valid for the relationship between matter and thought as the main problem of philosophy, also implies that the different strata of being, form a unity with each other, but are relatively autonomous from each other. These strata emerged as a result of the evolution of matter and society in successive stages of the historical process and constitute the stratified, differentiated, and non-reductive ontology of the present world. That is, Engels does not treat events as an infinite series of mechanical causes, in what the critical realist approach describes as flat ontology.

Matter and thought interact through a series of mediations based on human activity, and within this framework, they form relatively autonomous and hierarchically related totalities. Engels's ontology, in harmony with critical realist theory, deals with the world through three structures: natural substructure, base (economic structure), and superstructure.²² The natural substructure consists of physical, chemical, and biological strata, the base (structure) consists of productive forces and production relations, and the superstructure consists of legal, political, and ideological strata.²³ Each stratum emerges from the underlying stratum and is the root of the stratum above it. In this depth-realist model, each stratum has its own unique generative mechanisms, as well as an interaction with the higher-order and lower-order in an open system. As Creaven states:

Engels' dialectical concepts are successful in historicizing stratification and emergence. That is to say, they allow us to grasp the dynamics or processes through which higher-order levels of the material world develop out of lower-order levels, not as 'radical contingencies', but as integral aspects of a continually evolving totality of interrelated systems.²⁴

According to Engels, the world is a hierarchy of forms of motion in which the higher-order strata emerged historically from the lower-order strata and the lower-order strata are structurally subsumed by the higher-order strata. As Engels

21 Engels formulated the general laws governing the difference in this unity as the law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa, the law of the interpenetration of opposites and the law of the negation of the negation. As the evolution of matter progresses, the general laws in question manifest themselves in the form of laws specific to the newly emerged strata. That is to say, Engels never claimed that the general laws of dialectics explain everything in the universe. These laws are abstractions that only guide us as we examine our concrete object of investigation through empirical generalizations allowed by the development of science. What is crucial is to be able to explain theoretically by which special laws these general laws operate in the object of investigation.

22 Creaven, *ibid.*, p. 161-162.

23 See also Andrew Collier, "Stratified Explanation and Marx's Conception of History", in Margaret Archer et.al., *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, Routledge: London and New York, 1998, p. 262-270.

24 Creaven, *ibid.*, p. 111.

explained regarding the relation between the base and the superstructure, although there is a reciprocal determination between different strata, the rooted strata have greater effect on the emergent strata in an unequal way:

It is the interaction of two unequal forces: on one hand the economic movement, on the other the new political power, which strives for as much independence as possible, and which, having once been established, is also endowed with a movement of its own. On the whole, the economic movement gets its way, but it has also to suffer reactions from the political movement which it established and endowed with relative independence itself, from the movement of the state power on the one hand and of the opposition simultaneously engendered on the other... What these gentlemen all lack is dialectic. They never see anything but here cause and there effect. That this is a hollow abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites only exist in the real world during crises, while the whole vast process proceeds in the form of interaction (though of very unequal forces, the economic movement being by far the strongest, most elemental and most decisive) and that here everything is relative and nothing is absolute – this they never begin to see.²⁵

In this article, we will defend that in Engels's thought, although in an implicit form, the stratum at the lower level in the mentioned stratification is connected with the stratum above it, (which derives from it), through asymmetric internal relations. Asymmetric internal relations (or in other words, external-within-internal relations) are relations in which although one part of the relation is dependent on the other necessarily, the other part exists independently of the former, and its effects on the former are contingent.²⁶ In other words, if two things are internally related, it means that they are inherent in each other's conceptual definitions. If two things are externally related, it means that they are not inherent in each other's conceptual definitions. If there were purely internal relationships between strata, it would be impossible to identify the distinctive forms that different strata take and separate them from each other. It would also be impossible to interpret history in a non-teleological way. If there were purely external relationships between strata, it would be impossible to conceive the interaction between them and it would also be impossible to interpret history in a non-mechanical way. As Creaven states, there are different kinds of relationships in Marx's and Engels's ontology:

Not only in Marx, but also implicit in Engels, is the idea that internal structural contradictions do not exhaust reality and are not the only mechanisms of thoroughgoing change, though these are identified as necessary for organically generated self-development and transformation of systems, the key insight of Marxian dialectic. Engels' Marxism, for instance, identifies logical contradictions (in the philosophy and politics of adversaries), and internal and external contradictions built into the structures of reality – i.e. between life and consciousness (external relations), between structure and superstructure and different elements of the superstructure (contingent or external-within-intrinsic relations), and between forces of production and relations of production and social

25 F. Engels, "Engels to Conrad Schmidt, October 27, 1890", *ibid.*

26 Andrew Sayer, "Abstraction: A Realist Interpretation", in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, p. 127.

classes (internal and transformative relations) – all of which have explanatory significance. The fact that these are implicit rather than explicit does not mean that they are absent. I would say that a 'materialist diffraction of dialectic' is to be found in the work of all the major thinkers of classical Marxism.²⁷

For instance, although nature is a necessary condition of society, society is not a necessary condition of nature which means that the effect of society on nature is contingent. This means that the natural strata are an internal part of the social strata, while the social strata are externally related to the natural strata. As Ruben contends:

This, then, provides us with our dialectic of 'unequals', for we have now found our importantly or relevantly asymmetric relation. The existence and essential structural properties of nature, or of naturally occurring things, are independent of praxis, even if the other forms they can be given are not so independent, and this praxis-independence is asymmetric, since neither the existence of praxis nor any of its properties is independent of nature. There could be no praxis without a material world in which it existed. Praxis affects nature and nature affects praxis, and thus our view is dialectical. But praxis does not affect nature in just the symmetrically same way, in just the same connection, in which nature affects it. Our dialectic permits asymmetries, and because essential independence is on one side only, one can see the point of saying that it is nature which is in some way primary or basic. There is an asymmetry. Even under full communism, where man's power over nature has reached its fullest extent, a realm of necessity remains. Nature remains to limit and condition the praxis of man. Praxis and nature constitute a dialectic of 'unequals'. Man depends for his existence on nature, but the favour cannot be reciprocated.²⁸

As Lucien Sève claims, the laws of the lower-order strata can be formwise changed by the higher-order strata, which means that although the higher strata's laws are dependent on the lower one, they also can change the form those laws manifest themselves as a formwise possibility. This means there is a reciprocal relation between vertically positioned strata in which a dialectical reversal can occur, "in which the general determination of the superior by the inferior has to accommodate itself to a particular determination of the inferior by the superior."²⁹

Consequently, contrary to criticisms, Engels in no way identified the subjective

27 Creaven, *ibid.*, p. 56.

28 David Hillel Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism: A Study in the Marxist Theory of Knowledge*, The Harvester Press Limited: Sussex, 1977, p. 126-127.

29 Lucien Sève, "Dialectics of Emergence", in Bertell Ollman and Tony Smith, *Dialectics for the New Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p.89. As Sève further explains: "For, as Marx pointed out, if the laws of nature cannot be abolished, the form under which they manifest themselves can change. Every law expresses a certain necessity, but it is a universal necessity that doesn't prescribe by what singular processes and under what unique conditions it will be realized. In other words, the law only circumscribes a range of both formal possibilities and real impossibilities. This is why a given level of organization of matter, while respecting the laws of the lower level(s) on which it rests, will nonetheless superimpose its own logic on the lower level (s) and select what actually takes place out of the formal possibilities that are available."

dialectic of society with the objective dialectics of nature.³⁰ Likewise, society forms a unity in difference with nature. The effect of the base of society on the substructure as nature can be possible by transforming the laws that nature is subject to in the formwise meaning. However, the special social laws that can change the formwise operation of the laws of nature, operate not by blind necessity, but by conscious choices. The necessity that determines social life arises from the contradiction between desired aims of individuals and its unconscious results in the history of society.

In one point, however, the history of the development of society turns out to be essentially different from that of nature. In nature—in so far as we ignore man's reverse action upon nature—there are only blind, unconscious agencies acting upon one another, out of whose interplay the general law comes into operation... But this distinction, important as it is for historical investigation, particularly of individual epochs and events, cannot alter the fact that the course of history is governed by innate general laws. For here, too, on the whole, in spite of the consciously desired aims of all individuals, accident apparently reigns on the surface. What is desired happens but rarely; in the majority of instances the numerous desired ends cross and conflict with one another, or these ends themselves are from the outset impracticable or the means of attaining them are insufficient. Thus the conflicts of innumerable individual wills and individual actions in the domain of history lead to a state of affairs quite similar to that prevailing in the realm of unconscious nature. The ends of the actions are desired, but the results which actually follow from these actions are not desired; or when they do seem to correspond to the desired end, they ultimately have consequences quite other than those desired... Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, in that each person follows his own consciously desired end, and it is precisely the result of these many wills operating in different directions and of their manifold effects upon the world outside... that constitutes history. Thus it is also a question of what the many individuals desire... we have seen that the many individual wills active in history for the most part produce results quite other than those desired—often quite the opposite; that their motives, therefore, in relation to the total result are likewise of only secondary importance.³¹

Capitalism moves through the externalities as side-products that individuals cause for each other. The development of technology and the socialization of production set an example for positive externality and crises for negative externality.

30 Engels's work, *Dialectics of Nature* offers the opportunity to grasp the interaction with the substructure as the nature, on which the social strata rises, from the perspective of the practical activity. In this sense, the ecological crisis we are experiencing confirms the necessity of such an understanding. With his study of the *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels did not establish a contemplative philosophy in which he regarded the social as identical with the natural. On the contrary, he built a practical philosophy that treats the natural as a necessary element of the social activity to guide subjectivity. See also: John Bellamy Foster, "Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* in the Anthropocene" *Monthly Review*, 01.11.2020, <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/11/01/engels-dialectics-of-nature-in-the%20anthropocene/>.

31 Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 26*, p. 387.

But as long as these results are provided with conscious activities, unlike natural laws they can be transformed under suitable conditions with revolutionary praxis.

b) Engels's ethical vision of freedom

Another criticism directed at Engels is that he did not leave room for freedom in his philosophy in ethical terms. As we mentioned above, Engels does not exclude subjectivity, only emphasizes the unity of subjectivity with the objective ground in which it expresses itself. As Engels defines freedom in his expressions below:

Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. Therefore the freer a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, the greater is the necessity with which the content of this judgment will be determined; while the uncertainty, founded on ignorance, which seems to make an arbitrary choice among many different and conflicting possible decisions, shows precisely by this that it is not free, that it is controlled by the very object it should itself control. Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development... The laws of his own social action, hitherto standing face to face with man as laws of nature foreign to, and dominating him, will then be used with full understanding, and so mastered by him.³²

Man's own social organisation, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action. The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself.

Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history—only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.³³

In this framework, according to Engels, the ethical goal of subjective activity is to control the natural and the social laws that limit the subjective activity itself. Engels asserts that freedom is a historical accomplishment of humanity that shows the level of mastery over our inner and outer nature.³⁴ Behind Engels's ability to formulate this argument in such a simple way is the original understanding of the historical humanism that Marx put forward in his early works, in which Marx proposes an anthropological notion of freedom depending on the realization of one's potentialities.³⁵ This understanding expresses that the self-realization of humanity can only be possible by gaining autonomy and that the only way to gain autonomy

32 Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 25*, p.105-106.

33 *Ibid.* p. 270.

34 James Rourke, *The Problem of Freedom in Marxist Thought: An Analysis of the Treatment of Human Freedom by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Contemporary Soviet Philosophy*, D. Reidel Publishing Company: Dordrecht and Boston, 1974, p. 51.

35 Rourke, *ibid.*, p. 53-54.

is to overcome the alienated relationships in which man is trapped in his historical relations with nature and himself. As O'Rourke puts in summarized form, contrary to being in a dichotomy with determination, Engels's conception of freedom was closely linked with it:

By way of summary, we might summarize Engels' position as follows: (1) freedom as a historical category means the actual control over nature that man has won; this is accumulated in the form of machines, production methods, technological advances, etc.; (2) freedom as a characteristic of individual human activity describes a chain of action, beginning with (a) the comprehension of the laws of nature, passing to (b) the formation of some practical judgment on the basis of this knowledge, and issuing in (c) an act in which this judgment is realized in the practical order. The results of this act thus become an addition to freedom in the first sense.³⁶

Those who ignored the ethical implications of Engels's thought declared him as a defender of rigid economic determinism. However, Engels points out the opposite:

According to the materialistic conception of history, the production and reproduction of real life constitutes *in the last instance* the determining factor of history. Neither Marx nor I ever maintained more. Now when someone comes along and distorts this to mean that the economic factor is the *sole* determining factor, he is converting the former proposition into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis but the various factors of the superstructure – the political forms of the class struggles and its results – constitutions, etc., established by victorious classes after hard-won battles – legal forms, and even the reflexes of all these real struggles in the brain of the participants, political, jurial, philosophical theories, religious conceptions and their further development into systematic dogmas – all these exercise an influence upon the course of historical struggles, and in many cases determine for the most part their *form*. There is a reciprocity between all these factors in which, finally, through the endless array of contingencies (i.e., of things and events whose inner connection with one another is so remote, or so incapable of proof, that we may neglect it, regarding it as nonexistent) the economic movement asserts itself as necessary.³⁷

Thus we see that Engels does not have an economically deterministic approach as claimed by the critics. According to Engels, while the content of the historical movement gives the economic base, it is the superstructure that determines how this content will be formwise shaped. Just as the base is the area in which objectivity manifests itself, the superstructure appears as the area where subjectivity manifests itself. As Engels wrote:

Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the *cause and alone*

36 Rourke, *ibid.*, p. 58.

37 Friedrich Engels, "Engels to J. Bloch, In Berlin, September 21, 1890 ", translated by Sidney Hook, *New International*, Vol.1 No.3, September-October 1934, p.81-85, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21a.htm.

active, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which *ultimately* always asserts itself.³⁸

In other words, the objective dynamics of history are realized not automatically but through praxis. People can formwise transform via a dialectical reversal the conditions that give the content of their praxis. So, freedom is the ability of humanity to formwise transform the laws that are subject to the objective dynamics that condition it.

As Sean Creaven explains, criticism of Engels has two dimensions. The first of these is Engels's claim that there is an external causality between the base and the superstructure (although the two are interpenetrated and presuppose each other), while the second is the claim that economics unilaterally determines socio-historical consequences. Creaven points out that both criticisms are invalid. Engels states that being and thought come into contact with each other through a hierarchical order of social emergent structures. In this framework, matter and thought are intertwined to different degrees in the social strata in Engels's ontology. Moreover, both structures and different strata are in relation to each other. However, this relationship consists of what Creaven calls "a reciprocal but unequal relationship". In other words, socio-historical results are formed in the context of a plurality of socio-cultural mechanisms over a horizontally structured dialectic dependent on praxis. Engels thus avoided economic determinism and did not fall into the trap of pluralism.³⁹

Consequently, according to Engels, base and superstructure are dependent on each other. Just as the base conditions and limits the superstructure, the superstructure either reproduce the base or transform it within their means. Unlike the natural reality, the social reality is person-dependent and subject to conscious transformative practice. Within the transformative practice, the laws of motion of the capitalist economy can be modified in a form through a dialectical reversal within the political activity as a superstructural factor.

2. Engels, Marx's critique of political economy, politics, and revolutionary subjectivity

In this section, we will elaborate the critics' point of view toward Engels in the scope of political economy and politics that are related to Engels's so-called negation of revolutionary subjectivity. In the first part, the focus will be on the point that while the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall lays the groundwork for socialism through developing technology and socializing production, on the other

38 Friedrich Engels, "Engels to Borgius, January 25, 1894", translated by Donna Torr, *Marx and Engels Correspondence*, International Publishers, 1968, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894/letters/94_01_25.htm.

39 Sean Creaven, *Marxism and Realism: A Materialistic Application of Realism in the Social Sciences*, Routledge: London and New York, 2000, p. 65-66.

hand, it lays the groundwork for barbarism based on the destruction of productive forces and the mutual destruction of both classes during economic crises. We will also assert that this tendency, with its interaction with countervailing tendencies, is the cause behind the capitalist cycles and while downward swings of capitalist cycles are subject to an internal-endogenous causality in the law of value, upward swings occur due to a causality external-exogenous to the law of value. While the tendency of profit rates to fall is subject to endogenous causation, countervailing tendencies are subject to an exogenous causation and dependent on a causality often mediated through the superstructure of the society. In this context, the next point we will argue is that the revolutionary subjectivity of the proletariat is based on its formwise political transformation of the laws of the economy through a dialectical reversal. Finally, we will establish the differences in the approach of Engels's Marxism, which relates subjectivity and objectivity dialectically, from the mechanical materialist approaches of reformism and Stalinism.

a) Engels and the dialectics of objectivity and subjectivity in Marx's Capital

As Christian Fuchs indicates, various representatives of the school of "The New Reading of Marx" claim in an unfair attitude that Engels interpreted Marx's critique of political economy mechanically:

Authors such as Backhaus (1997) argue that Engels in his preface to and materials accompanying the third volume of *Capital* argues incorrectly that Marx in the ... value form analysis describe a historical development from simple commodity production to capitalism (for this discussion, see also Hecker 2018, 189-206). In reality, Marx would have provided an analysis of the logic of capital. Engels' misunderstanding would have grounded an evolutionary and mechanistic interpretation of Marx typical for Soviet Marxism, in which the identity of the historical and the logical moment of capital(ism) implies that the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism that is part of its antagonistic logic results in its natural law-like historical breakdown and the rise of communism. Marx certainly provides an analysis of capital(ism)'s dialectical logic, but he sees capital as historical system whose development is shaped by praxis, many historical examples form part of the analysis (see also Haug 2003). Engels's interpretation in prefaces and accompanying materials do not imply that he is the inventor of Stalinist and revisionist evolutionism.⁴⁰

Marx and Engels showed in *Capital*, the overlap between the historical development of commodity, money, and capital as social forms and their logical order in capitalism within the framework of the historical-logical method. As Engels explained:

40 Christian Fuchs, "Engels@200: Friedrich Engels in The Age of Digital Capitalism. Introduction", p.8, in *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, Vol: 19, No: 1, 27.11.2020, <https://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/1233>.

Even after the determination of the method, the critique of economics could still be arranged in two ways — historically or logically. Since in the course of history, as in its literary reflection, the evolution proceeds by and large from the simplest to the more complex relations, the historical development of political economy constituted a natural clue, which the critique could take as a point of departure, and then the economic categories would appear on the whole in the same order as in the logical exposition. This form seems to have the advantage of greater lucidity, for it traces the actual development, but in fact it would thus become, at most, more popular. History moves often in leaps and bounds and in a zigzag line, and as this would have to be followed throughout, it would mean not only that a considerable amount of material of slight importance would have to be included, but also that the train of thought would frequently have to be interrupted; it would, moreover, be impossible to write the history of economy without that of bourgeois society, and the task would thus become immense, because of the absence of all preliminary studies. The logical method of approach was therefore the only suitable one. This, however, is indeed nothing but the historical method, only stripped of the historical form and diverting chance occurrences. The point where this history begins must also be the starting point of the train of thought, and its further progress will be simply the reflection, in abstract and theoretically consistent form, of the historical course. Though the reflection is corrected, it is corrected in accordance with laws provided by the actual historical course, since each factor can be examined at the stage of development where it reaches its full maturity, its classical form.⁴¹

As Zelený contends:

It is one of the characteristics of Marxian analysis that theoretical work constantly touches on the facts of historical reality. That is an important point. The continuous oscillation between abstract dialectical development and concrete historical reality pervades the whole of Marx's *Capital*. At the same time it must be emphasized that the Marxian analysis detaches itself continually from the sequence and superficialities of historical reality and expresses in ideas the necessary relations of that reality. Only thus could Marx grasp historical actuality, only by forming his scientific account as the inner arrangement, somewhat idealized and typified, of the historical actuality of capitalist relations. This 'detaching' is not accomplished in the interests of distance from historical reality, and it is no idealist flight from reality. Rather it arises in the interests of approaching reality... Without that 'ideal' procedure, in merely sticking to real history, it would be impossible to explain the character and essence of capitalism.⁴²

The forms of commodity, money, and capital are internally asymmetric related forms in which the relations of production manifest themselves, and their development did not follow a mechanical course. On the contrary, they were formed as a result of the mutual interaction of endogenous and exogenous factors. For example, capital attained its logically highest state in terms of form in capitalism

41 Frederick Engels, "Karl Marx: Critique of Political Economy", Review of Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* *Das Volk*, No's. 14 & 16, August 6 & 20, 1859, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/appx2.htm>.

42 Jindřich Zelený, *The Logic of Marx*, translated by Terrell Carver, Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1980, p. 36.

at the end of the superstructure-mediated process of primitive accumulation. That is, the logical hierarchy or stratification of the capitalist mode of production has historically been formed as a result of a process in which contingencies, as well as necessities, play a role, and the superstructure, as well as the economic base, are involved. Moreover, while the evolution from the commodity to capital is a process in which previous forms are sublated, communism points beyond this progress as a process in which these forms are transformed and eliminated. Subsequently, just as the communist mode of production cannot arise in a teleological way from the form of capital, the form of capital did not emerge in a teleological way and internally from the form of money, nor the form of money from the commodity, although the form of money presupposes the commodity, the form of capital presupposes both money and commodity forms.

As a representative of the German school of the “New Reading of Marx”, Michael Heinrich developed a criticism of Engels’s editorial process in Volume 3 of *Capital*. According to Heinrich, the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall was ambiguous, improvable, and Engels seriously distorted Marx’s views of the law. Besides, Marx became sceptical that the law was the cause of the crises, and he abandoned it for a new theory to address the problems of credit, the interest rate, and the realization.⁴³ But the final point of this criticism is that Engels’s theory of crisis is a mechanical theory of the breakdown of capitalism that depends on an illegitimate inference about the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. As

43 Michael Roberts, “Michael Heinrich, Marx’s Law and Crisis Theory”, <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2013/05/19/michael-heinrich-marxs-law-and-crisis-theory/>. According to Roberts, Heinrich claims that a systematic treatment of crisis theory cannot follow immediately from the “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall” before the categories of interest-bearing capital, credit and realization problem have been developed. According to Heinrich, the theoretical position for crisis theory suggested by Engels’s editorship is definitely wrong, although it has been extremely influential. (Michael Heinrich, “Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx’s Studies in the 1870s”, in *Monthly Review*, 01.04.2013, <https://monthlyreview.org/2013/04/01/crisis-theory-the-law-of-the-tendency-of-the-profit-rate-to-fall-and-marxs-studies-in-the-1870s/>) As Kliman and his friends emphasize, if Marx was still in the middle of the research and theory-building process that should precede the presentation, as Heinrich claims, Marx would not have used the expression of “in their entirety” he used concerning the work in his letter, because Marx would not publish the first volume of *Capital* until its entirety was finished. As Kliman and his co-authors point out, while Engels is concerned about combining Marx’s notes with the most effective presentation strategy possible to reveal the theory of crisis, Heinrich is concerned about ignoring these notes to unmake it. (See Andrew Kliman et al., “The Unmaking of Marx’s *Capital*: Heinrich’s Attempt to Eliminate Marx’s Crisis Theory”, 22.07.2013, https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/48535/1/MPRA_paper_48535.pdf.) Also, as Roberts points out, Jerrold Seigel claimed that Engels pointed to the declining trend of profit rates as a weaker trend than Marx emphasized in his notes on this trend, contrary to what Heinrich claimed. Thus even if there were a distortion, it would have been the opposite of Heinrich’s claim. As Roberts pointed out: ‘So, as Seigel puts it: “Engels made Marx’s confidence in the actual operation of the profit law seem weaker than Marx’s manuscript indicates it to be.” This is hardly an edit that suggests Engels was determined to defend a law that Marx had dropped.’ (See Michael Roberts, “Engels Distorted Marx’s Law?”, in *Engels 200: His Contribution to Political Economy*, Lulu.com: London, 2020, p. 106-111.)

Fuchs further explained:

Heinrich argues that Engels' substitution of the term "Klappen" (folding) by "Zusammenbruch" (breakdown, collapse) enabled Henryk Grossman and others to claim that Marx saw "immanent breakdown tendencies" (translation from German) of capitalism. Heinrich (2006, 359 [translation from German]) writes that Engels "exacerbated" ("verschärft") Marx's formulations...In the English language, according to the Oxford Dictionary one of the meanings of the verb "to fold" is that something economic is ceasing "trading or operating as a result of financial problems". Engels's editorial change is feasible and does not change the meaning of the sentence. Neither Engels's edition of the passage nor Marx's original wording imply that capitalism automatically collapses because the key point is that Marx says that there are counteracting tendencies so that there is a dialectic of the tendency of breakdown and the tendency of stabilisation in the capitalist economy. This dialectic results in crises, from which capitalism can recover if the capitalist class manages to succeed in class struggles against the proletariat by various measures (that Marx calls "countervailing tendencies", "entgegenwirkende Ursachen") such as lowering wages, increasing the rate of exploitation, cheapening constant capital, etc.⁴⁴

To give a detailed explanation of this tendency, it must be stated that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is the most concrete form of the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value. The contradiction between use and exchange values in the commodity form manifests itself as the contradiction between the role the form of money plays as the measure of the value, and the means of payment and, in the form of capital, as the contradiction between the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and counter-tendencies. From the forms that the relations of production, the form of money provides its reproduction at the expense of magnifying the internal contradictions of the commodity form, just as the form of capital enables its reproduction at the expense of magnifying the internal contradictions of the form of money.

Throughout the entire history of humanity, the generative mechanism of the social strata is based on the law of harmony of the productive forces with the relations of production and the base with the superstructure. The generative mechanism that conditions the contradiction between productive forces and production relations in capitalism is the law of the tendency of profit rates to fall. Communism as a mode of production ends the contradiction of capitalist production relations with productive forces by abolishing it without preserving the contradictions of capital. In this sense, the dialectical interaction between the law of the tendency of profit rates to fall and the countervailing tendencies against the law is of key importance for the establishment of the ground of socialism, in terms of its effect on the productive forces.

According to the law of the tendency of profit rates to fall, the average rate of profit falls because the organic composition of capital, that is, the ratio of constant capital to variable capital, rises more intensely than the rate of surplus-value tends to

⁴⁴ Fuchs, *ibid.*, p. 8-9.

rise. But there are also counter tendencies against this tendency, such as the increase in the rate of exploitation, the cheapening of constant capital, the depression of wages below their value, relative overpopulation, foreign trade, and the growth of stock capital.

Marx states that wages rise as the level of unemployment decreases because of the negative correlation between supply and demand of the labor power. Against this, capitalists invest in labor-saving technologies. But this time too, the organic composition of capital rises.⁴⁵ This tendency reduces the rate of profit, as Marx formulated in the third volume of *Capital*. To overcome this obstacle, capitalists apply ways such as increasing the rate of exploitation or investing in capital-saving technologies that will cheapen the constant capital. At the abstraction level of many capitals, the laws of motion of capital impose themselves on individual capitalists through competition. As the capitalists tend to lower the costs of production to get an advantage over other capitalists, they tend to use new technologies that increase the productivity of labor. However, these capitalists can benefit from this advantage for a short time because other capitalists start to use the same technologies which decrease the values of each individual commodity. Each capitalist tends to buy more components of constant capital to appropriate the total surplus value they command, which subsequently raises the technical composition of the capital and finally raises the value composition of the capital. Nevertheless, as the organic composition of capital raises the ratio of constant capital to variable capital in each individual commodity, the rate of profit falls.⁴⁶ So there appears a contradiction between the production and the reproduction of life in capitalism through the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

The tendency of the rate of profit to fall shows its effects on the economy in a cyclical way. The capitalists who cannot afford to acquire the new technologies go bankrupt and the capitalists who survive in the face of competition can obtain the capital of the capitalists who go bankrupt, cheaper than their value. Subsequently, the capitalists who can survive can continue to accumulate capital with high rates of profit. From this vantage point, creating the conditions of a potential upward swing in the cycle, crises show themselves as internal mechanisms of the accumulation process. This means that as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall causes crises, the crises prevent the tendency of the rate of profit to fall to cause a breakdown of capitalism totally by creating the ground of a revival of the economy through countervailing tendencies.

The law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall refers to neither a mechanical collapse nor an automatic restoration of capitalist accumulation:

So to say that there is a mechanism in capitalism which necessarily generates a

45 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital, Volume: 1*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 35*, p. 607-703.

46 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Capital, Volume:3*, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 37*, p. 209-266.

tendency of the rate of profit to fall, is not to say that the rate of profit will fall no matter what else happens, any more than a doctor who says a patient is out of danger is saying that that patient can safely step in front of a bus. Of course, it is necessary to say what the other mechanisms are which co-determine events, if one wishes to explain why the rate of profit is falling here and rising there; but just such conjoint explanation is what we need and all we can hope for, unless we could reduce all economic laws to a single one, and isolate economic from non-economic processes; the former has not been one, and the latter is demonstrably impossible.⁴⁷

As Kliman also emphasized while criticizing Heinrich:

According to Heinrich, “Marx assumes that the fall in the rate of profit, derived as a law, in the long term outweighs all counteracting factors. Yet Marx does not offer a reason for this.” However, the reason is simple and obvious: the fall in the rate of profit “was considered an empirically confirmed fact.” If it is indeed a fact, and if Marx’s law explains it correctly, then it must be the case that the tendency for the rate of profit to fall has in the long run outweighed the counteracting factors. In the same manner, the current (quantum-mechanical) laws of physics are probabilistic, and therefore do not rule out the possibility that a coin flipped into the air will float away instead of falling to the ground. But if it does fall to the ground, and if the laws of physics are correct, then it must be the case that the attractive force of gravity has outweighed all counteracting factors.⁴⁸

There is an asymmetric internal relation between endogenous processes, which are internal to the operation of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and exogenous processes, which are external to the operation of the same law. As Ernest Mandel, inspired by the multi-causal explanation offered by Trotsky, states, capitalist accumulation endogenously tends to create crises; however, whether the crisis will be transcended or not and if it will be transcended, in what form (socialist revolution or a new capitalist cycle) it will be transcended depends on exogenous factors such as politics, wars, innovations... and so on.⁴⁹ So the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall does not necessarily imply any social automatism that grounds politically fatalist approaches. The logic of capitalist cycles triggered by the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall can also be evaluated as the cycles of the class struggle.⁵⁰ What is crucial here is that Trotsky is influenced by Engels about his statements regarding the logic of the capitalist cycles and their relation to political struggles. Trotsky quotes the following passage from the “Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*”:

“If events and series of events are judged by current history, it will never be possible to go back to the ultimate economic causes. Even today, when the specialized press provides such rich material, it still remains impossible even in England to follow day by day the movement of industry and trade on the world

47 Collier, *ibid.*, p. 277-278.

48 Kliman et al., *ibid.*, p. 6.

49 Ernest Mandel, “Long Waves, Technological Revolutions, and Class Struggle Cycles”, in *Long Waves of Capitalist Development: A Marxist Interpretation*, Verso, 1995, p. 28-48.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 28-48.

market and the changes which take place in the methods of production in such a way as to be able to draw a general conclusion for any point in time from these manifold, complicated and ever-changing, factors, the most important of which, into the bargain, generally operate a long time in realms unknown before they suddenly make themselves forcefully felt on the surface. A clear overall view of the economic history of a given period can never be obtained contemporaneously, but only subsequently, after the material has been collected and sifted. Statistics are a necessary auxiliary aid here, and they always lag behind. For this reason, it is only too often necessary in current history to treat this, the most decisive factor as constant, and the economic situation existing at the beginning of the period concerned as given and unalterable for the whole period, or else to take notice of only such changes in this situation as arise out of the patently manifest events themselves, and are, therefore, likewise patently manifest. So here the materialist method has quite often to limit itself to tracing political conflicts back to the struggles between the interests of the existing social classes and fractions of classes caused by economic development, and to demonstrate that the particular political parties are the more or less adequate political expression of these same classes and fractions of classes.

It is self-evident that this unavoidable neglect of contemporaneous changes in the economic situation, the very basis of all the processes to be examined, must be a source of error.”⁵¹

Engels also gives an early form of Trotsky’s thesis in his letter to Conrad Schmidt, in which he emphasized the vital role played by factors exogenous to production during the economic cycles such as the political superstructure:

The reaction of the state power upon economic development can be one of three kinds: it can run in the same direction, and then development is more rapid; it can oppose the line of development, in which case nowadays state power in every great nation will go to pieces in the long run; or it can cut off the economic development from certain paths, and impose on it certain others. This case ultimately reduces itself to one of the two previous ones. But it is obvious that in cases two and three the political power can do great damage to the economic development and result in the squandering of great masses of energy and material.⁵²

The upward and downward fluctuations of the capitalist cycles in no way determine the political course of the class struggle automatically but direct it as its content. Political struggle, on the other hand, as a superstructural element, determines the fate of business cycles with a dialectical reversal. As Trotsky says:

The reciprocal relation between boom and crisis in economy and the development of revolution is of great interest to us not only from the point of theory but above all practically. Many of you will recall that Marx and Engels wrote in 1851-when the boom was at its peak that it was necessary at that time to recognize that the Revolution of 1848 had terminated, or, at any rate, had been interrupted until the

51 Cited by Leon Trotsky, “The Curve of Capitalist Development”, Fourth International, Vol.2 No.4, New York, May 1941, p.111-114, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1923/04/capdel.htm>.

52 F. Engels, “Engels to Conrad Schmidt, October 27, 1890”, *ibid.*

next crisis. Engels wrote that while the crisis of 1847 was the mother of revolution/ the boom of 1849-51 was the mother of triumphant counter-revolution. It would, however, be very one-sided and utterly false to interpret these judgments in the sense that a crisis invariably engenders revolutionary action while a boom, on the contrary, pacifies the working class. The Revolution of 1848 was not born out of the crisis. The latter merely provided the last impetus. Essentially the revolution grew out of the contradictions between the needs of capitalist development and the fetters of the semi-feudal social and state system. The irresolute and half-way Revolution of 1848 did, however, sweep away the remnants of the regime of guilds and serfdom and thereby extended the framework of capitalist development. Under these conditions and these conditions alone, the boom of 1851 marked the beginning of an entire epoch of capitalist prosperity which lasted till 1873.

In citing Engels it is very dangerous to overlook these basic facts. For it was precisely after 1850, when Marx and Engels made their observations, that there set in not a normal or regular situation, but an era of capitalist Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) for which the soil had been cleared by the Revolution of 1848. This is of decisive importance here. This storm-and-stress era, during which prosperity and the favorable conjuncture were very strong, while the crisis was merely superficial and short-lived-it was precisely this period that ended with revolution. At issue here is not whether an improvement in the conjuncture is possible, but whether the fluctuations of the conjuncture are proceeding along an ascending or descending curve. This is the most important aspect of the whole question.⁵³

As Trotsky also explained:

Oscillations of the economic conjuncture (boom-depression-crisis) already signify in and of themselves periodic impulses that give rise now to quantitative, now to qualitative changes, and to new formations in the field of politics. The revenues of possessing classes, the state budget, wages, unemployment, proportions of foreign trade, etc., are intimately bound up with the economic conjuncture, and in their turn exert the most direct influence on politics. This alone is enough to make one understand how important and fruitful it is to follow step by step the history of political parties, state institutions, etc., in relation to the cycles of capitalist development.

By this we do not at all mean to say that these cycles explain everything: this is excluded, if only for the reason that cycles themselves are not fundamental but derivative economic phenomena. They unfold on the basis of the development of productive forces through the medium of market relations. But cycles explain a *great deal*, forming as they do through automatic pulsation an indispensable dialectical spring in the mechanism of capitalist society. The breaking point of the trade-industrial conjuncture bring us into a greater proximity with the critical knots in the web of the development of political tendencies, legislation, and all forms of ideology.

But capitalism is not characterized solely by the periodic recurrence of cycles otherwise what would occur would be a complex repetition and not dynamic development. Trade-industrial cycles are of different character in different periods. The chief difference between them is determined by quantitative interrelations

53 Leon Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International: Volume 1*, Pathfinder Press, 1972, p. 269-270.

between the crisis and the boom period within each given cycle. If the boom restores with a surplus the destruction or constriction during the preceding crisis, then capitalist development moves upward. If the crisis, which signals destruction, or at all events contraction of productive forces, surpasses in its intensity the corresponding boom, then we get as a result a decline in economy. Finally, if the crisis and boom approximate each others force, then we get a temporary and stagnating equilibrium in economy. This is the schema in the rough.⁵⁴

As Woods claims, Trotsky emphasized in *The Curve of Capitalist Development* that the development of capitalism cannot be reduced only to the problems of economic cycles, although the economy is ultimately determinant, and it is influenced by other factors. For instance, as one of the most important of these factors, the superstructure can affect the economic base in many different ways. The important point here is Engels's "Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*" which constitutes the starting point of Trotsky's analysis. Trotsky's determination that history is a complex sequence of events affected "not only by the internal forces of the productive system but also by the external factors" such as the superstructure, and that humans are not the toys of the economic forces, finds its source in Engels.⁵⁵

Capitalism cannot automatically pass from a downward phase to an upward phase, and whether capitalist accumulation will continue or a socialist revolution will occur is determined by exogenous factors. So Marx and Engels do not explain the laws of motion of capitalist production to contemplate history but to transform it based on its objective tendencies. On the one hand, with its tendency to centralize and concentrate capital, capitalism socializes production with high technology, on the other hand, the anarchy of production causes crises in which an inestimable proportion of the forces of production are destroyed. Thus, this contradiction both constructs the germs of a socialist society as well as the signals of the death of capitalism. While capitalism develops productive forces and socializes production, on the other hand, it drags humanity into barbarism with crises that are getting worse. These conditions force the proletariat to make a socialist revolution by transforming via a dialectical reversal the laws of capitalism in a formwise sense.

Unfortunately, those who support different versions of under-consumption theory as the crisis theory of Marxism unwittingly encourage interpretations that form the basis of a reformist policy based on increasing wages. This crisis theory cannot explain why crises emerge necessarily periodically with increasing intensity and with destroying the forces of production which threaten the existing bourgeois society while creating the objective and subjective conditions of a socialist revolution. As Engels comments:

But unfortunately, the under-consumption of the masses, the restriction of the consumption of the masses to what is necessary for their maintenance and

54 Trotsky, "The Curve of Capitalist Development", p. 111-114.

55 Alan Woods, "Marxism and The Theory of Long Waves", 21.02.2020, <https://www.marxist.com/marxism-theory-long-waves-kondratiev141100.htm>.

reproduction, is not a new phenomenon. It has existed as long as there have been exploiting and exploited classes. Even in those periods of history when the situation of the masses was particularly favourable, as for example in England in the 15th century, they under-consumed. They were very far from having their own annual total product at their disposal to be consumed by them. Therefore, while under-consumption has been a constant feature in history for thousands of years, the general shrinkage of the market which breaks out in crises as the result of a surplus of production is a phenomenon only of the last 50 years; and so Herr Dühring's whole superficial vulgar economics is necessary in order to explain the new collision not by the new phenomenon of over-production but by the thousand-year-old phenomenon of under-consumption.⁵⁶

However, the law of the tendency of the profit rates to fall successfully explains why crises are necessarily intensified and threaten the existence of the bourgeois society by destroying the productive forces. As Kliman and his co-authors contend regarding the cause of the present crisis:

In our view, the theory explains the present crisis in a way that is both scientifically legitimate and considerably better than the alternatives currently on offer from the Marxist left. A central mechanism of today's economic crisis is the fact that the rate of profit in the U.S., UK and several other advanced capitalist countries is now falling, and has been falling since the early years of the postwar boom. The theory explains the cause of this fact: the accumulation of invested capital has outstripped the growth of employment, which tends to depress the rate of profit; and the various "counteracting factors" have failed to offset this tendency over any but short periods.⁵⁷

Moreover, as we have already pointed out, the contradiction between capitalist production relations and productive forces arises through crises triggered by the falling rate of profit. That is, through the crises arising from the law of the tendency of the profit rates to fall, the contradiction between the socialized character of production and the capitalist form of appropriation finds its most concrete expression. The law of the tendency of profit rates to fall shows that capitalism has historically been a temporary mode of production and has become an obstacle to the development of the productive forces. The relevance of this point to our subject matter is that if capitalism does not act as a barrier in the way of the development of the forces of production with an increasing intensity, the revolutionary struggle could not go beyond a moralistic and utopian line. That is, the law of the tendency of the profit rates to fall is not a mechanical theory of collapse invented by Engels, but it provides the historic justification of socialism against barbarism.

To sum up, Engels successfully interpreted and presented Marx's theory of crisis, without getting stuck with either mechanical materialism or idealism in a philosophical sense and without laying the groundwork for either fatalism or voluntarism in the political sense. In line with the principles of historical

⁵⁶ Marx and Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, *ibid.*, p. 272.

⁵⁷ Kliman et. al., *ibid.*, p. 2-3.

materialism, the objective dynamics of capitalism take it towards its historical end. But the factor that will determine whether this end will lead to barbarism or socialism is the revolutionary will. Capitalism can survive by overcoming its endogenous tendencies to collapse through exogenous factors but at the cost of barbarism. Thus, whether barbarism or socialism will shape the future will be determined due to how we formwise transform the laws of the capitalist economy in political terms with a dialectical reversal.

b) Engels, reformism and Stalinism

Another controversial subject about Engels's legacy is his attitude towards reformism in politics. Bernstein, asserted that capitalism's tendency to polarize the classes within more intensified crises ceased and it became possible to reform the system within democratic processes. The revisionist thesis of Bernstein presupposes that Marx's thesis about revolution is based on the tendency that necessarily drags capitalism to its collapse. In such a manner, by his theoretical effort to refute the so-called breakdown theory of capitalism, Bernstein legitimized his revisionist reinterpretation of Marxism. Contrary to the Stalinist reformism which grounded its reformist policies on the so-called inevitability of the collapse of capitalism, and socialist triumph, Bernstein grounded his reformist policy on the refutation of the historical limits of capitalism. But both approaches share the same premise that capitalism will either automatically transform into the socialist mode of production or socialist revolution cannot be realized. Or in other words, they identify the collapse of capitalism and automatic transition to socialism without considering barbarism as a historical possibility.

Some thinkers, such as Manfred Steger, find the origin of Bernstein's revisionism in Engels. According to Steger's argument, the mature Engels disrupted the dialectical relationship between evolution and revolution in favour of evolution by turning to political gradualism.⁵⁸ To those who are in line with Steger, proof of this is the introduction written by Engels to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France*.⁵⁹ Engels stated there:

58 Blackledge, *ibid.*, p. 229. As Blackledge further explains: "Manfred Steger has argued that Engels opened the door to Bernstein's interpretation because of the ad hoc way in which he attempted to square his commitment to the politics of The Communist Manifesto on the one hand with his embrace of political "gradualism" on the other. Steger claims that his interpretation of Engels's mature politics improves over previous attempts at this because it is situated within the political context rather than operating as a simple history of ideas (Steger 1999, 182) But this argument is fundamentally problematic. To justify the (at least partial) validity of Bernstein's interpretation of Engels, Steger implicitly accepts the revisionist interpretation of the "dramatically changed political situation" in which the latter wrote. Indeed, his claim that Engels confused the distinction between evolution and revolution while simultaneously compromising Marxism's unity of theory and practice is dependent upon conflating Marx and Engels's politics with the kind of one-dimensional conception of revolutionary politics that Engels and Marx had spent their lives criticizing."

59 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

History has proved us wrong and all others who thought similarly. It has made clear that the status of economic development on the Continent was then by no means ripe for the abolition of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has affected the entire Continent and has introduced large industry in France, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and, more recently, in Russia, and has made of Germany an industrial country of the first rank—all this upon a capitalist basis which, reckoning from 1848, implies great expansive capacity. But it was just this industrial revolution that has everywhere introduced clarity in regard to class relations, which has eliminated a mass of hybrid forms taken over from the period of manufacture and, in Eastern Europe, even from guild handicraft, which has produced a real bourgeoisie and a real industrial proletariat and forced both into the foreground of social evolution... And if this powerful army of the proletariat has not yet reached the goal, if, far from winning the victory by one fell blow, it must gradually proceed by hard, tenacious struggle from position to position, it proved once for all how impossible it was in 1848 to bring about the social transformation by a sheer coup de main.⁶⁰

However Engels' statement contained self-censorship in highly oppressive conditions and was also distorted by the fear of anti-socialist laws and the rectification of any statement that implied revolution under Liebknecht's editorship, to which Engels reacted as follows:

I was amazed to see today in the *Vorwärts* an excerpt from my 'Introduction' that had been *printed without my prior knowledge* and tricked out in such a way as to present me as a peace-loving proponent of legality [come what may]. Which is all the more reason why I should like it to appear in its entirety in the *Neue Zeit* in order that this disgraceful impression may be erased. I shall leave Liebknecht in no doubt as to what I think about it and the same applies to those who, irrespective of who they may be, gave him this opportunity of perverting my views and, what's more, without so much as a word to me about it.⁶¹

The political climate, in which Engels lived while writing this text should also not be overlooked. Likewise, Engels wrote the text in a non-revolutionary period after a political defeat. Being highly skilled in military science, Engels considered in this text how to use the legal channel as a tactical withdrawal in terms of "orienting a future revolution in a non-revolutionary context" (without forgetting the final goal).⁶² We can see the beginnings of a theory of the cycles of class struggle in Engels's attempt to tactically retreat in the conditions of a non-revolutionary situation. Engels has demonstrated an example of tactical thinking in the cycles of class struggle. But this does not mean that Engels was not aware of the danger of opportunism in which the long term goals of the movement is overshadowed by the short term goals:

60 Friedrich Engels, "Introduction to Marx's Class Struggles in France", in *The Revolutionary Act. Military Insurrection or Political and Economic Action?* with an Appendix by Daniel De Leon, translated by Henry Kuhn, The New York News Company (Socialist Labour Party), 1922, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/intro.htm>.

61 Cited by Doug Enaa Greene, *ibid.*

62 Blackledge, *ibid.*, p. 229-232.

...opportunism, which is gaining ground in a large section of the Social-Democratic press. Fearing a renewal of the Anti-Socialist Law, or recalling all manner of over-hasty pronouncements made during the reign of that law, they now want the party to find the present legal order in Germany adequate for putting through all party demands by peaceful means. These are attempts to convince oneself and the party that “present-day society is developing towards socialism” without asking oneself whether it does not thereby just as necessarily outgrow the old social order and whether it will not have to burst this old shell by force, as a crab breaks its shell.... This forgetting of the great, the principal considerations for the momentary interests of the day, this struggling and striving for the success of the moment regardless of later consequences, this sacrifice of the future of the movement for its present, may be “honestly” meant, but it is and remains opportunism, and “honest” opportunism is perhaps the most dangerous of all!⁶³

Another political criticism directed at Engels is that he laid the intellectual foundations of Stalinism. Of particular interest to us here is to question the alleged link between the economic reductionist and the teleological approach of Stalinism, which negates revolutionary subjectivity by roughly scheming history and Engels’s Marxism. As Blackledge points out, Stalin vulgarized many crucial aspects of Engels’s thought such as Engels’s critique of socialism in one country, his socialist vision about the withering away of the state, or his claim about the abolishment of the law of value in socialism.⁶⁴ In connection with our subject, Stalin also distorted

63 Paul D’Amato, “Marxists and Elections”, in *International Socialist Review*, <https://isreview.org/issue/13/marxists-and-elections>; Friedrich Engels, “A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891”, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Vol. 27*, p. 226-227.

64 Contrary to the Stalinist conception of communism, Engels clearly stated that the state itself will wither away in communism, which is one step beyond the democracy that would at first come into being in the transition society through a workers’ state. Stalin’s so-called theory of socialism in one country represents a break with Marx’s and Engels’s and Lenin’s internationalism, both in terms of the objective and subjective conditions of the socialist revolution. When we evaluate it in terms of objective conditions, we see that capitalism connects all national economies through the world market it creates, socializes production throughout the world, and develops productive forces within the international division of labor in the world. For this reason, the productive forces created by capitalism can only be appropriated at the world-level. Under the subjective conditions of the revolution, the socialist revolution can only be realized by the progressive seizure of power by the working class on a world scale. For this reason, the working class should be organized not in disconnected states, but as components of a single state with the same integrated interests. As Engels stated:

“Question 19: Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?”

Answer: No. Large-scale industry, already by creating the world market, has so linked up all the peoples of the earth, and especially the civilised peoples, that each people is dependent on what happens to another. Further, in all civilised countries large-scale industry has so levelled social development that in all these countries the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have become the two decisive classes of society and the struggle between them the main struggle of the day. The communist revolution will therefore be no merely national one; it will be a revolution taking place simultaneously in all civilised countries, that is, at least in England, America, France and Germany. In each of these countries it will develop more quickly or more slowly according to whether the country has a more developed industry, more wealth, and a more considerable mass of productive forces. It will

all the revolutionary implications of Engels's thought and offered a rigid historical schema with an economic determinist interpretation.⁶⁵

While Stalinism depicts the subject of history, which it reduces to a simple schema, as productive forces, it conceals that man is the most important productive force. Unlike Stalin, Engels does not transform history into a subject:

History does nothing, it "possesses no immense wealth", it "wages no battles". It is man, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; "history" is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve its own aims; history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his aims.⁶⁶

Stalin, ignoring the qualitative differences between nature and society, considers socialism through a model of causality that is scientifically identical to the causality in nature. In this model, history progresses in linear fashion to socialism. Stalin eliminated the negation of the negation from the laws of dialectics, despite the importance that Engels gave to the law. Within this framework, Stalin ignored the leap in the history of nature the social life creates and the vital role that conscious and social activity played for Marxist theory. While Engels's dialectic examines nature and society in their differences from the perspective of praxis, Stalin's so-called dialectic excludes praxis by identifying society with nature. As Fuchs puts it:

For Stalin, socialism as science does not mean a science of society that is different from the natural sciences, but deterministic and mechanical social laws of nature operating in society. The implication is for Stalin that history develops in a linear manner, it is for him a "process of development from the lower to the higher"... Stalin argues that the Soviet Union followed capitalism and therefore was a socialist system: "[T]he U.S.S.R. has already done away with capitalism and has set up a Socialist system" (Stalin 1945, 119). His implication was that anyone critical of him was bourgeois and anti-socialist. The mechanical interpretation of the dialectic legitimated Stalin's terror against his opponents. The concepts of *Aufhebung* (sublation) and the negation of the negation are missing in Stalinist dialectics. They are however key features of Engels's dialectics. Stalin referred to Engels, but Engels's interpretation of dialectics was other than Stalin's not based on mechanical and deterministic concepts. Engels is not to be blamed for Stalinism (see

therefore be slowest and most difficult to carry out in Germany, quickest and easiest in England. It will also have an important effect upon the other countries of the world, and will completely change and greatly accelerate their previous manner of development. It is a worldwide revolution and will therefore be worldwide in scope." (See, Friedrich Engels, "Principles of Communism", *Collected Works Volume 6*, p. 351-352.) And so forth, Engels's emphasis that socialist praxis can only take place on a world scale is in line with his goal of building revolutionary activity on the necessities of the capitalist economy. Engels argues that revolutionary praxis can be distinguished from utopianism only if it takes place within the framework of necessary objective conditions, and the laws of motion of capitalism operating on a world scale can only be controlled on a world scale by a world-wide subject.

65 Blackledge, *ibid.*, p. 12-14.

66 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family, in Marx & Engels, Collected Works Volume 4*, p. 93.?

Liedman 2018, 467-525). For Engels, dialectics operates in nature, consciousness, and society. These dialectics are connected but not the same. In society, there are conscious human actors who act and struggle based on intentions and interests that cannot always be realised as planned because society is complex and dynamic. For Engels just like for Marx, history is the history of class struggles. “In modern history at least it is, therefore, proved that all political struggles are class struggles, and all class struggles for emancipation, despite their necessarily political form – for every class struggle is a political struggle – turn ultimately on the question of economic emancipation” (Engels 1888, 387-388, 391). Scientific socialism does not mean for Engels that society develops based on natural laws and mechanical determinism. Rather, society has its own dialectical logic. It is one of the laws of society that change happens through human practices and that in class society, class struggle is the decisive practice of transformation.⁶⁷

Another reflection of this attitude is the negative attitude of Stalinism regarding democracy. Likewise, to the extent that history is mechanically determined by the laws of economic movement, it is not possible to develop a political strategy beyond preparing the society for communism through an evolutionary process, which will be its inevitable consequence. However, for Marx and Engels, history is not a subject that directs us, and communism is not an inevitable result of it. In this context, the communist struggle requires the active participation of those people in this process for the first time in history, and therefore an expanded democracy incomparable with bourgeois democracy, to the extent that it is a process in which people take action to dominate their fate self-consciously and voluntarily.

Conclusion

In this article we attempted to respond to the criticism that Engels distorted Marx’s thought in a mechanical and highly deterministic interpretation and excluded revolutionary subjectivity in Marxist theory. In the first part, we tried to answer criticisms directed to Engels, that he denied revolutionary subjectivity with a mechanical and overly-deterministic view in his philosophical contributions. In this context, we claimed that Engels interpreted the materialist dialectic based on the unity in difference between matter and thought and that social mediations through which matter and thought interacted constitute a stratification. In this stratification, we argued that the higher-order strata emerges from the lower-order strata and presupposes it. We also argued that Engels stated that the general laws of dialectics manifest themselves differently in special laws on different strata and that determinations of society emerge as by-products of conscious choices different from those in nature. In this stratified ontology, it was suggested that the lower order strata are positioned as an internal component of the higher-order strata, while the higher-order strata are externally related to the lower order strata. We tried to emphasize that via a dialectical reversal on the axis of asymmetric internal relations, the higher-order strata, which is ultimately determined by the content of the lower-order strata, could always create a counter effect by transforming the

⁶⁷ Fuchs, *ibid.* p. 6.

lower-order strata formwise. We argued that Engels's approach to ethics, which rises on these ontological premises, is built on the perspective of controlling the tendencies that determine objective conditions that condition and limit subjective activity to gain autonomy. We reached the conclusion that, without embracing economic determinism, Engels developed a formulation of praxis that would take shape through superstructures.

In the second part of the article, as a result of Engels's contributions to his critique of political economy, we responded to the claims that identifies Engels's Marxism with a mechanical theory of collapse, as well as we tried to answer the claims that it laid the groundwork for reformism and Stalinism in a political sense. First, we examined Engels's interpretation of the method of *Capital* in which the criticisms made for his association with the historical and the logical, and that he developed a mechanical theory of collapse by distorting Marx's original interpretation in terms of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the editorial process of the third volume of *Capital*. We argued that Engels analyzed the historical development process of capitalism through the dialectical interplay of endogenous and exogenous factors and that there are asymmetric internal relations between base and superstructure. In this sense, we claimed that the law of the declining tendency of profit rates, which determines the dynamics of crisis that create conditions of barbarism is not based on the assumption that capitalism linearly developed and will collapse and transform into socialism automatically. In the context of the dialectical interaction of the law in an endogenous sense, we tried to expose with the countervailing tendencies determined by the superstructural exogenous factors, the contingent character of the fate of capitalism. We argued that socialism emerged as a historical possibility thanks to the productive forces and socialized production that capitalism developed through a dialectical reversal. Finally, we argued that Engels made important contributions to understanding cycles of class struggle on the tactical level, unlike the reformist and Stalinist currents that identified the so-called collapse process of capitalism with the socialist construction process. We proposed that as Engels did not crudely schematize history in any way, he emphasized that, for the first time in history that throughout the communist struggle the masses should take the responsibility of self-determination by controlling the historical laws which govern them self-consciously and democratically.

Engels may have focused on objective factors in his theory against the subjectivist tendencies that arise in the particular conjuncture he was in. But bending the theory a little in the axis of objective factors does not make him an objectivist in no way denying the importance of subjectivity. As Engels expressed:

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle *vis-à-vis* our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction. But when it came to presenting a section of history, that is, to making a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error was permissible. Unfortunately, however, it happens only too often that people

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think they have fully understood a new theory and can apply it without more ado from the moment they have assimilated its main principles, and even those not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent “Marxists” from this reproach, for the most amazing rubbish has been produced in this quarter, too....⁶⁸

As a result, Engels is a significant Marxist, who has been consistently at both the philosophical, economic, and political levels, and loyal to Marx’s teachings, who has succeeded in directing praxis by remaining conscious of the conditions that limit it, without being stuck with either idealism or mechanical materialism, nor fatalism or voluntarism.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Engels, “Engels to J. Bloch, In Königsberg, September 21, 1890”, in *Historical Materialism (Marx, Engels, Lenin)*, Progress Publishers, 1972 p. 294 – 296, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm.