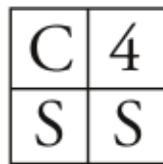


# Historical Materialism: A Brief Overview and Left-Libertarian Reinterpretation

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

Marx’s concept of historical materialism emerged as a reaction to German philosophy both historically and during his lifetime. Previously, German thinking had been dominated by idealists who focused largely on the spiritual and theological characteristics of society and the dissemination of ideas and values. This is particularly true of the followers of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who separated into the conservative Old Hegelians and more progressive Young Hegelians. As Marx explains in *The German Ideology*, “Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society) it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> However, Marx—although also a student of Hegel—raises the

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1 “Historical materialism,” Merriam-Webster, accessed April 17, 2020, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/historical%20materialism>>.

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

3 David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2015), 30, accessed May 13, 2020, <[https://libcom.org/files/David\\_Graeber-The\\_Utopia\\_of\\_Rules\\_On\\_Technology\\_St.pdf](https://libcom.org/files/David_Graeber-The_Utopia_of_Rules_On_Technology_St.pdf)>.

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

In *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), Kojin Karatani explains that apparently the Japanese philosopher Wataru Hiromatsu, in his edited translation of *The Germany Ideology*, “conducted an elaborate text critique and showed that the text on Feuerbach was mostly written by Engels; Marx’s participation was limited to some crucial revisions here and there; and furthermore, comparing the earlier writings of both, he proved that Engels had conceptualized historical materialism first” (p. 323, 139). (*Continued on next page.*)

question of where these conceptions, thoughts, and ideas even come from in the first place. Unlike previous German thinkers he begins his analysis of history not with the emergence of writing, religion, governance, or other great cultural inventions but rather delves into what those thinkers called pre-history.

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

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

What this means is that the production of life's necessities is not somehow separate from that life, but instead becomes an intrinsic part of human social existence, so the characteristics of individuals and their lives within any society are determined largely by the mode of production. Marx writes in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, "The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."<sup>7</sup> This leads to the primary assumption of Marx's analysis of history: if the mode of production is what determines the form and content of society—down to even individual lives—then the progression of history is caused by changes in the basic elements of the economic system.

Marx outlines this conception of historical development in *The German Ideology* through the identification of three forms of ownership found in European history. The first is "tribal

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I cannot find an English version of this nor can I read Japanese, so I cannot attest to this summary, but it seems relevant to mention primarily for the possibility of a more accurate identification of authorship and the origins of historical materialism, but also because it does help lead Karatani to the assertion that "[i]n order to take the capitalist economy into account, one has to, once and for all, discard historical materialism's framework of infra/superstructures" (p. 140). However, that final statement will not be addressed here.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, *The German*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 156.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

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

[*Stammeigentum*] ownership," which involves the earliest hunting, fishing, raising of animals, and early agriculture and, because of the latter two activities, often "presupposes a great mass of uncultivated stretches of land." The division of labor required to maintain this is very minimal, so it remains largely within the family and therefore the overall social structures are extensions of the early familial structure—based around patriarchal chieftains and maintaining small numbers of slaves. The second is "ancient communal and State ownership," which emerges when several tribes combine together into cities through agreement or force, pooling their slave populations and uniting into a "spontaneous derived association over against their slaves." In this form, the division of labor is even greater, and the earliest cases of private property begin to emerge but are "abnormal" and "subordinate to communal ownership."<sup>8</sup> Finally, the third form is "feudal or estate property" wherein the heavily laboring division of society is no longer slaves, but serfs and peasants. In feudalism, property consists "on the one hand of landed property with serf labour chained to it, and on the other of the labour of the individual with small capital commanding the labour of journeymen."<sup>9</sup>

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

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

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8 Marx, *The German*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 151.

9 *Ibid.*, 153.

10 Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, 1867, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 432.

Graeber, in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* <[https://libcom.org/files/\\_\\_\\_Debt\\_\\_The\\_First\\_5\\_000\\_Years.pdf](https://libcom.org/files/___Debt__The_First_5_000_Years.pdf)>, contests the interpretation of *Capital* as being centrally a study of historical and social reality and posits that it is rather a demonstration "that even if we do start from the economists' utopian vision, so long as we also allow some people to control productive capital and . . . leave others with nothing to sell but their brains and bodies, the result will be in many ways barely distinguishable from slavery, and the whole system will eventually destroy itself."

He holds that "Marx was well aware that there were far more bootblacks, prostitutes, butlers, soldiers, peddlers, chimneysweeps, flower girls, street musicians, convicts, nannies, and cab drivers in the London of his day than there were factory workers. He was never suggesting that that's what the world was actually like" (p. 354). He argues that the image of "workers who dutifully punch the clock at 8:00 a.m. and receive regular remuneration every Friday on the basis of a temporary contract that either party is free to break off at any time" was actually, as said before, a "utopian vision" that "was only gradually put into effect even in England and North America, and has never, at any point, been the main way of organizing production for the market, ever, anywhere" (p. 353).

(Continued on next page.)

And this separation of immediate producers from the means of production was accomplished through measures such as “the forcible driving [by feudal lords] of the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal right as the lord himself, and by the usurpation of the common lands.”<sup>11</sup> The identification of this process, known as primitive accumulation, further reveals the historically false premise of a free and essentially equal market system that exists today.

This historical materialist view is not in arbitrary combination with Marx’s communist politics, but rather informs and in some ways justifies those goals. For one, it is an implicit component of Marx’s work to demonstrate the contingency of any political and economic arrangement. This is why Marx does not simply speak of a coming revolution but emphasizes the importance of past social change. His outline of the different historical forms of property allows him and Friedrich Engels to make the point in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that “All property relations in the past have continually been subject to historical change consequent upon the change in historical conditions.”<sup>12</sup> And Marx not only demonstrates the contingency of previous social systems, but also systematically identifies the mechanism by which that contingency is brought to bear: the productive forces surpass the relations of production, thereby necessitating a new social system. This can be seen in his and Engels’s assessment of the transition from feudalism to capitalism where...

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

And furthermore, this historical account of the transition to capitalism as being brought about by increased productive forces and as necessitating the transformation of the peasantry into a wage-laboring proletariat itself lays the specific groundwork for the end of capitalism. As they further write, “The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working-class—the proletarians.”<sup>13</sup>

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On top of this, he asserts that “all elements of financial apparatus that we’ve come to associate with capitalism—central banks, bond markets, short selling, brokerage houses, speculative bubbles, [securitization], annuities—came into being not only before the science of economics . . . but also before the rise of factories, and wage labor itself.” If accurate, this all certainly complicates the historical materialist analysis because, as Graeber writes, “We like to think of the factories and workshops as the ‘real economy,’ and the rest as superstructure, constructed on top of it. But if this were really so, then how can it be that the superstructure came first? Can the dreams of the system create its body?” (p. 345).

11 Marx, *Capital, Volume*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 434.

12 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 484.

13 *Ibid.*, 477-78.

This identification of the mechanism behind the historical contingency of social institutions and particularly that contingency imminent in the very basis of capitalism is particularly relevant for the communist mission because—if this account of historical change is true—it makes Marxists the first group to be genuinely conscious of how past history has unfolded and how the current era might come to an end. Although there was certainly intention involved in certain efforts that moved feudalism towards capitalism, these were not conceived of as means to drive history but rather were the various efforts of self-interested elite groups. In contrast, the essential Marxist claim is that since, as Marx maintains, people's "social existence determines their consciousness"<sup>14</sup> and the order of that social existence springs from the manner in which the means of production is distributed, seizing the means of production with this understanding would mean that, to put it in Engels's own words, the many "extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history, [will] pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history."<sup>15</sup> If the Marxists are correct in their analysis of history, they hold the key to reshaping all of society—from the most complex political structures to the manner in which people live and think on a daily basis.

Anyone familiar with Marx will no doubt have realized that there has so far been no explicit mention of dialectics beyond the introduction. The dialectical method, which he derived largely from Hegel, plays a central role in all of Marx's work—including the formulation of his theory of history—with the most explicit example being 'dialectical materialism'—an extensive theory of nature and science positing the primacy of a constantly changing material reality independent of the mind.<sup>16</sup> Although historical materialism is distinct from dialectical materialism, the former can be seen as a specifically social and historical application of the latter. But dialectics generally, as Chris Matthew Sciabarra describes,

is the art of context-keeping. It counsels us to study the object of our inquiry from a variety of perspectives and levels of generality so as to gain a more comprehensive picture of it. That study often requires that we grasp the object in terms of the larger system within which it is situated, as well as its development across time.<sup>17</sup>

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

A common criticism of historical materialism is that it is materially reductionist and/or economically deterministic—related claims posit that Marxists give too much import to material economic conditions to the point of subsuming all other social factors and disregarding human

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<sup>14</sup> Marx, *A Contribution*, 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 1876, in *The Marx-Engels Reader* 715-16.

<sup>16</sup> For a more extended outline of dialectical materialism see the Marxist Student Federation's "An Introduction to Dialectical Materialism," <<http://marxiststudent.com/an-introduction-to-dialectical-materialism/>>.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Matthew Sciabarra, "Dialectics and Liberty," Foundation for Economic Education, last modified September 1, 2005, accessed April 17, 2020, <<https://fee.org/articles/dialectics-and-liberty/>>.

For an extensive definition and history of dialectics see "Part One: Dialectics: History and Meaning" in Sciabarra's *Total Freedom: Toward a Dialectical Libertarianism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000).

agency and subjectivity as a whole. An example of this on the libertarian left comes from Noam Chomsky who, in a clip apparently featured on television in Greece, testifies that "it's a tragedy and a catastrophe that the left has accepted the idea of humans as historical products, simply reflections of their environment, because what follows from that, of course, is that there's no moral barrier to molding them anyway you like. If humans have no inner nature, they don't have an inner instinct for freedom."<sup>18</sup> He does not specifically name Marx as the originator of this perceived trend, but it seems obvious that this is the case. There is also Murray Rothbard on the libertarian right who, in the second volume of *An Austrian Perspective on the History of Economic Thought*, writes, "How, then, do historical changes take place in the Marxian schema? They can *only* take place in technological methods, since everything else in society is determined by the state of technology at any one time." In Rothbard's assessment, if  $T$  is the "state of technology,"  $S$  is "the determined superstructure," and  $n$  is "any point of time" then the formula of society is deterministically " $T_n \rightarrow S_n$ " with historical change only possible through change in technology as represented by " $T_{n+1} \rightarrow S_{n+1}$ " and by no other means.<sup>19</sup>

If it were true that the Marxist analysis of history was only concerned with strictly material factors and dismissed all other factors including human agency and subjectivity, such a theory would be extremely undialectical, as it would utilize no variance in perspective. However, when delved into, Marx's view reveals itself not as an oversimplifying and deterministic materialism, but rather as a genuinely dialectical integration of both objective and subjective considerations. Firstly, Marx was not only reacting against the German idealists, but also attempting to overcome previous materialist philosophies as well. As he writes in the first and third of his "Theses on Feuerbach," "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the *active* side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such" and "[t]he materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and change upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself."<sup>20</sup> It is clear from these statements that Marx does not disregard human subjectivity or agency—and such an accusation would be hard to square with his belief in the power of human beings to consciously take control of social forces through the seizure of the means of production—but rather attempts to integrate those very components from idealism into a materialistic understanding of the world.

Furthermore, Marx establishes in *Theories of Surplus Value* that,

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18 "Noam Chomsky - Bakunin's Predictions," video, 6:14, YouTube, posted by Chomsky's Philosophy, November 18, 2017, accessed April 17, 2020, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gS6g41m\\_NU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gS6g41m_NU)>.

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

20 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 1845, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 143-44.

[m]an himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the *subject* of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth, of commodities. In this respect it can in fact be shown that *all* human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence on it.<sup>21</sup>

This illustrates that historical materialism does not discount other factors in the formulation and development of society, but rather attempts to take into consideration all potential influences. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci can be seen as bolstering this expanded dialectical view as he describes "a necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructure, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process."<sup>22</sup> This thinking leads him to elaborate upon the concept of superstructure, eventually arguing that revolution is impossible solely through a "frontal attack"—direct assault upon the state and the seizure of the means of production—and that there exists a necessity for a "war of position" whereby revolutionaries either infiltrate cultural institutions and/or create new alternative ones to subvert the bourgeois hegemony that reinforces the state and capitalism.<sup>23</sup>

But this dialectical consistency in the theoretical realm does not necessarily mean that the criticism of historical materialism as materially reductionist and economically deterministic is completely without merit. In "The Crisis of Dialectical Materialism and Libertarian Socialism," Mario Cutajar recognizes that when it comes to the Marxist analysis of society and history—and reality in general—the word "materialism" is actually rather misleading, and that Marx attempts "to go beyond idealism and materialism" to recognize simultaneously "the creativity of the human subject and ... the power of circumstances." However, he argues that,

starting with the later Engels (and to a smaller extent with Marx himself) the fine balance between idealism and materialism, subjectivity and objectivity, was upset. The original synthesis, delicate because it was a purely theoretical concept, disintegrated when the attempt was made to turn it into a practical, revolutionary doctrine. Whereas the original balance meant that a distinction was made between economic conditions and the meaning assigned to them by the human agent, the new ideology reduced all human acts to their economic foundation.<sup>24</sup>

Cutajar asserts that this dialectical (or rather undialectical) unbalancing can be best understood by applying a contextual—and therefore itself dialectical—understanding to Marx and Marxists

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

22 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London, UK: The Electronic Book Company, 1999), 690-691, accessed April 17, 2020, <<http://abahlali.org/files/gramsci.pdf>>.

23 Ibid., 495-96.

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



themselves. In previous eras, many hierarchies and forms of authority were justified through the religious appeal to a divinely ordained social order. But "[t]he new ruling class however had no place for a deity so it replaced Him with nature, a secular God. The laws that govern billiard balls were thus extended to cover relations between human beings proving once again that things could not be other than they were."<sup>25</sup> This bourgeois form of materialism is identified by both Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre as "naturalism," a worldview defined in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as "the thesis that everything belongs to the world of nature and can be studied by the methods appropriate to studying that world (that is, the methods of the hard sciences)."<sup>26</sup> This was an effective underpinning to the overthrow of pre-capitalist regimes in Europe, and therefore Marxists believed that through slight modification it could in turn be used against the bourgeoisie themselves. The central issue is that this seed of bourgeois ideology "led to the belief that human behaviour could be reduced to the rigid and 'exact' laws of nature" and "replaced the 'life-world' (the world of actual, human experience) with a lifeless, abstract world composed of mathematical relationships."<sup>27</sup>

Cutajar points to German Social Democracy and Leninism as illustrative of the practical consequences of this naturalist tendency within Marxism. In Western Europe, where capitalism was already broadly developed, the former of these two movements "eventually reconciled itself with the very society it had vowed to overthrow" because "this Marxism had been nothing more than the most radical form of bourgeois ideology." Specifically, this entailed Social Democrats demanding only piecemeal reforms—such as higher wages—which, though beneficial to the daily lives of workers, merely led to a greater equilibrium and stability to the capitalist system. In Russia, where capitalism was extremely underdeveloped, the Leninists—following the naturalist Marxist fixation purely on economic conditions—deemed it necessary to attempt to create the historical conditions from which socialism (or communism) is supposed to emerge. This necessitated a form of primitive accumulation in its own right and both the "[s]uperexploitation of Russian labour and autarchic economic development" which ultimately ended in the creation of "a distorted form [of] the Western milieu on which [Marxism] had been originally reared."<sup>28</sup>

But Cutajar maintains that just as these failures can be traced back to the context in which Marxism originally emerged, so too can these failures themselves provide the context to surpass them. A new and more properly dialectical approach must appear that starts with Marxism's original dialectical synthesis that attempted "to overcome the one-sidedness of materialism while at the same time avoiding the perils of romantic idealism" and therefore does away with the naturalist tendencies within classical Marxism. He points to libertarian socialism as the form this should take as it "is defined first and foremost by the negation of political authoritarianism and theoretical determinism" that can be found in Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach. In this particular piece, Cutajar provides no specific programmatic formulation of what he sees libertarian socialism as entailing, beyond the transcendence of the overly materialist tendencies in Marxism

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Marianne Sawicki, "Edmund Husserl (1859—1938)," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed April 18, 2020, <<https://www.iep.utm.edu/husserl/>>.

<sup>27</sup> Cutajar, "The Crisis."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

— and, as he briefly outlines, the overly idealistic tendencies in anarchism.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, one could perhaps choose to interpret it in the form that Winona Rachel of the Libertarian Party of Minnesota does, principally defining it by the differentiation of personal and private property—rejecting the latter as exploitative—and opposition to any “control of labor, whether that be top-down control of the means of production or explicit slavery.”<sup>30</sup> And this is all underpinned by the fundamental belief “that communities and individuals should be free to determine the political system they live under as long as it is free from exploitation and oppression. This leaves room for voluntary individualism, collectivism, and everything in between.”<sup>31</sup> If elaborated upon with this particular intention, this understanding of libertarian socialism could conceivably combine the understanding of the importance of ownership and other relations of production as is demonstrated in historical materialism with a deeply nondeterministic commitment to human freedom and subjectivity.

Dialectics can also be used to scrutinize another issue in the Marxist formulation of historical materialism: acontextuality. One form this problem takes is “utopianism” which, in *Marx, Hayek, and Utopia*, Sciabarra identifies—through the work of Friedrich Hayek—as entailing “proposals for a new society [that] are constructed in an abstract manner, external to the sociohistorical process. In attempting to bridge the gap between theory and practice, it demands that all human actors adhere to a noncontextual, ahistorical model.”<sup>32</sup> Marx and Engels are highly critical of utopianism amongst socialists—such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier—who, according to Engels, sought “to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda, and, wherever it was possible, by the example of model experiments.”<sup>33</sup> This is a wholeheartedly undialectical project as it attempts firstly to remove thinkers themselves from their context like omniscient deities in order to reshape society and secondly because it divorces all potential social change from any genuinely historical process. Thus, historical materialism is so essential to Marxism because it dialectically critiques the idea that human beings can be separated from their historical circumstances and demonstrates the historical trends and mechanisms from which a new society can emerge. For Marx,

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29 Ibid.

It should be noted that, elsewhere in the same issue of *Red Menace* that Cutajar’s piece appears in, Ulli Diemer and Tom McLaughlin do further outline the concept of libertarian socialism in their respective pieces “What is Libertarian Socialism?” <<https://libcom.org/history/what-libertarian-socialism>> and “Libertarian Socialism” <<https://libcom.org/library/libertarian-socialism>>.

30 A brief and somewhat humorous outlining of the difference between personal and private property can be in found in Bhaskar Sunkara’s article “End Private Property, Not Kenny Loggins,” <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/socialism-marxism-private-property-person-lennon-imagine-kenny-loggins/>> and for a more extensive consideration of the matter one should look to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* <<https://libcom.org/files/Proudhon%20-%20What%20is%20Property.pdf>>.

31 Winona Rachel, “What is Libertarian Socialism?,” Libertarian Party of Minnesota, last modified January 2, 2020, accessed April 18, 2020, <<https://www.lpmn.org/libertarian-socialism-winona-rachel/>>.

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

33 Engels, *Socialism: Utopian*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 687.

[c]ommunism is ... not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.<sup>34</sup>

However, he himself falls into an undialectical utopian trap in his conception of how historical materialism can be consciously utilized in the formulation of a new society.

Sciabarra acknowledges that "Marx's vision does not pose as a constructivist design" and that he "views communism as a spontaneous, emergent product of historical development, immanent to the capitalist system itself."<sup>35</sup> But, in spite of this, "Marx argues that once people have reached the highest stage of communism, the social process is neither spontaneous nor the product of unintended consequences. It is consciously directed by a highly efficacious collective humanity."<sup>36</sup> Sciabarra believes that this itself is a utopian failure within Marx's own work as it is an attempt to step outside of one's own context in order to influence society. He contrasts this with what he sees as Friedrich Hayek's "more general, dialectical approach," which "recognizes the organic unity of an evolving, spontaneous order" but "objects to the illusory notion that people can rise above their society to judge and control it."<sup>37</sup> For Hayek, because individuals are bound to the limited knowledge of their specific contexts, they are unable to grasp the totality of the overarching order. This therefore necessitates competition within a market system to generate price information that is then dispersed and "utilised by many different individuals unknown to one another, in a way that allows the different knowledge of millions to form an exosomatic or material pattern. Every individual becomes a link in many chains of transmission through which he receives signals enabling him to adapt his plans to circumstances he does not know."<sup>38</sup>

When it comes to empirical evidence of this undialectical utopianism within Marxism, Sciabarra grants that "Marx would have probably dismissed contemporary Communism as historically premature" and goes on to use Hayek's dialectical insights to critique the theoretical plans for non-premature communism.<sup>39</sup> However, it is important to—and Sciabarra does—point out how this critical insight applies to real-world attempts at implementing Marx's ideas—in particular the U.S.S.R. as the grandest failure of these. Consider that in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Joseph Stalin claims that "an instance in which the relations of production completely correspond to the character of the productive forces is the socialist national economy of the U.S.S.R., where the social ownership of the means of production fully corresponds to the social character of the process of production, and where, because of this, economic crises and the destruction of productive forces are unknown."<sup>40</sup> Stalin at least rhetorically utilizes historical materialism—although it could perhaps be argued this is disingenuous propaganda—to argue that

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34 Marx, *Capital, Volume*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 434.

35 Sciabarra, *Marx, Hayek*, 89, 85.

36 Ibid., 90.

37 Ibid., 96.

38 Friedrich August Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, ed. W. W. Bartlry, III, *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek 1* (London, UK: Routledge, 1988), 84, accessed April 19, 2020, <<https://mises.at/static/literatur/Buch/hayek-the-fatal-conceit.pdf>>.

39 Sciabarra, *Marx, Hayek*, 96.

the Soviet Union had a greater conscious control over the forces that previously shaped humans from without. But the historical falsehood of this claim must be obvious, and Sciabarra points out that, due to a "static and arbitrary price policy," Soviet planners could not properly coordinate the economy and instead "generated grotesque misallocations, inefficiencies, and bureaucratization." The very survival of the Soviet economy in this view rested largely upon "a de facto market process of bribery, corruption, under-the-counter-sales, hoarding, and black-market entrepreneurship."<sup>41</sup>

Another critique of acontextual Soviet planning can be found in James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State*. Scott does not formulate his critique as explicitly dialectical or necessarily pro-market—he is actually rather skeptical of Hayek's notion of the modern market as genuinely spontaneous—but instead focuses on an ideological tendency he calls "high modernism."<sup>42</sup> He defines this as "a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws."<sup>43</sup> For Scott, the Soviet Union's approach to rural agriculture is a profound example of its application. In the early 1930s—arguably as part of the Soviet form of primitive accumulation—Stalin worked tirelessly to forcibly

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40 Joseph V. Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, transcr. M. (1938), accessed April 19, 2020, <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.htm>>.

41 Sciabarra, *Marx, Hayek*, 95.

42 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies Series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 388.

In the endnotes of *Seeing Like a State*, Scott accounts that "Karl Polanyi has convincingly shown" that "the market in the modern sense is not synonymous with 'spontaneous social order,' but rather had to be imposed by a coercive state in the nineteenth century" (p. 388). I have not read Polanyi's work, but the general premise of the market being originally a product of the state does not overtly preclude the goals of the anti-statist pro-market left who primarily distinguish their ideal version of markets from capitalism by the respective absence and presence of interference by the state.

As Graeber (who does differentiate between markets and capitalism but principally by their circuits of commodity trade: C-M-C' versus M-C-M') writes in *Debt*, "States require markets. Markets require states. Neither could continue without the other, at least, in anything like the forms we would recognize today [emphasis added]" and "markets, when allowed to drift free from their violent origins, invariably grow into something different, into networks of honor, trust, and mutual connectedness" (pp. 260, 71, 386). These comments would seem to open up the possibility for understandings of markets wholly divorced from their formulation in relation to the state. The beginnings of such an idea might be found in his descriptions of the "free-market ideology" of medieval Islamic society in which, summarizing the views of the Persian thinker Tusi, the market "is simply one manifestation of this more general principle of mutual aid, of the matching of abilities (supply) and needs (demand)" and "is itself an extension of the kind of baseline communism on which any society must ultimately rest" (pp. 278, 280). A more modern conception might be seen in Charles W. Johnson's essay "Markets Freed from Capitalism" from the anthology *Markets Not Capitalism* <<http://radgeek.com/gt/2011/10/Markets-Not-Capitalism-2011-Chartier-and-Johnson.pdf>> in which he argues that "a fully freed market" should not be understood solely as a cash nexus or even fundamentally as a sphere of exchange but rather as "the space of maximal consensually-sustained social experimentation" (pp. 61-62). Such considerations are obviously beyond the scope of this piece but are worth mentioning because the history of markets is essential to understanding their context and the relationship between—and possibility of separation of—market and state is itself an issue of dialectical consideration, as it is treated in Johnson's essay "Liberty, Equality, Solidarity: Toward a Dialectical Anarchism" <<https://radgeek.com/gt/2010/03/02/liberty-equality-solidarity-toward-a-dialectical-anarchism/>> and "Part Two: Libertarian Crossroads: The Case of Murray Rothbard" from Sciabarra's *Total Freedom*.

43 Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.

collectivize Russian agriculture into "sovkhoz (state farms)" and "kolkhoz (collective farms)" in order to maximize the production of grain and foodstuffs in general for the industrializing workforce in urban centers. But Scott points out that the Soviet officials "were operating in relative ignorance of the ecological, social, and economic arrangements that underwrote the rural economy." This lack of contextual knowledge led to the immense failure of the entire project. The conscious alteration of the productive forces and relations of production did not totally recreate social organization—specifically the abolition of "cultural difference between the country and the city"—nor did it create fundamentally "new men and women." Instead, "[f]or the next half-century, the yields per hectare of many crops were stagnant or actually inferior to the levels recorded in the 1920s or the levels reached before the Revolution." Thus, the practical usage of the historical materialist analysis led to catastrophe because it ignored the existing social, natural, and economic context. In fact, Scott argues that the only great victory of the Soviet agricultural project "was to take a social and economic terrain singularly unfavorable to appropriation and control and to create institutional forms and production units better adapted to monitoring, managing, appropriating, and controlling from above."<sup>44</sup>

Whether it is the utopian problems inherent in Marx's theories or the command economy and high modernist tendencies of the Soviet Union, what these examples demonstrate is that it might be necessary to abandon the notion that a conscious understanding of reality through historical materialism can lead to a totalizing control over history and society, and that one should emphasize—in a dialectical fashion—the important limitations of context. A good place to start might be in Scott's contrasting between Vladimir Lenin's authoritarian high modernist socialism—the same project that eventually led to the failure of Russian agriculture—and Rosa Luxembour's more bottom-up and open-ended socialism, particularly as they envision the practice of revolution.<sup>45</sup> According to Scott, "Lenin proceeded as if the road to socialism was already mapped out in detail and the task of the party [was] to use the iron discipline of the party apparatus to make sure that the revolutionary movement kept to that road." This is perhaps an unsurprising interpretation considering the manner in which dialectical and historical materialism are often propagated as exact sciences. An alternative vision is presented by Luxembour, who recognizes the importance of spontaneity, creativity, improvisation, and the direct influence of the working class. As Scott accounts, for her, "[t]he openness that characterized a socialist future was not a shortcoming but rather a sign of its superiority, as a dialectical process, over the cut-and-dried formulas of utopian socialism" and therefore such a future could not be administered wholly from above by a vanguard or small group of intellectuals.<sup>46</sup> A distilled version of this Luxembourian insight, when applied specifically to historical materialism, might take the form of a particular application of Alfred Korzybski's famous dictum, from his book *Science and Sanity*, that "[a] map is *not* the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a *similar structure* to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness."<sup>47</sup> In practice, this means realizing that the insights of historical materialism are incredibly relevant to an understanding of the progress of history and

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44 Ibid., 202-03.

45 Ibid., 204.

46 Ibid., 175.

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

the shape of society and, even more pertinently, how one might influence those things, but that it is at its core a model and not the actual reality of the situation and should never be mistaken as such.

This would seem to be the attitude taken by Graeber in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* regarding the concept of revolution—the sort of events that Marx would attribute to the productive forces surpassing the relations of production thereby necessitating the end of a particular social system. For Graeber, the concept of revolution, as it is usually formulated, assumes that all radical change must take on the same form as scientific revolutions, like the shift from a Newtonian universe to an Einsteinian one, where there is a “clear break, a fundamental rupture in the nature of social reality after which everything works differently, and previous categories no longer apply.” But through this view “[h]uman history thus becomes a series of revolutions: the Neolithic revolution, the Industrial revolution, the Information revolution, etc., and the political dream becomes to somehow take control of the process; to get to the point where we can cause a rupture of this sort, a momentous breakthrough that will not just happen but result directly from some kind of collective will.”<sup>48</sup> From the assessment given earlier in this piece, this would seem to apply quite well to Marx’s vision of historical materialism as applied to European history and as it pertains to the fate of the current era.<sup>49</sup> The problem with this vision though, according to Graeber, is that these totalities are fundamentally products of the human mind and the actual reality of things is substantially messier and more complicated. This is not an argument that one should abandon these imaginary totalities “even assuming this were possible, which it probably isn’t, since they are probably a necessary tool of human thought. It is an appeal to always bear in mind that they are just that: tools of thought.”<sup>50</sup> If one applies Graeber’s insights to historical materialism—much like when one does so with Luxembourg’s—perhaps the conclusion is that, once again, it is incredibly helpful for understanding social change, but should not be mistaken for the actual reality of the world and do not therefore lead to totalizing control, understanding, or a break in terms of history and society.

Similar observations to these are not lost on Marxist thinkers, as is demonstrated by the earlier assessment of Luxembourg. Furthermore, in *On Practice*, Mao Zedong outlines a dialectical materialist concept of knowledge gathering that emphasizes the primacy of reality over

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48 David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, Paradigm 14 (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), 43-44.

49 Graeber’s criticism of the concise Marxist outline of historical progression is further elucidated in *Debt* in which he critiques what he refers to as “mythic communism” or “epic communism” which holds that “[o]nce upon a time, humans held all things in common—[whether] in the Garden of Eden, during the Golden Age of Saturn, or in Paleolithic hunter-gatherer bands. Then came the Fall, as a result of which we are now cursed with divisions of power and private property. The dream was that someday, with the advance of technology and general prosperity, with social revolution or the guidance of the Party, we would finally be in a position to put things back, to restore common ownership and common management of collective resources.” He asserts that this vision “has inspired millions; but it has also done enormous damage to humanity” and that it should therefore be abandoned. However, his argument that this means thinking of communism as not having “anything to do with ownership of the means of the production” is obviously not the conclusion this piece is attempting to reach (p. 95).

50 Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist*, 44.

theoretical formulations.<sup>51</sup> Although this expresses an extremely dialectical re-emphasis on context and reality, the history of Mao's revolution in China must make obvious that this is not the same point that Graeber is making. Instead, he points towards not thinking of a single revolution but more generally of revolutionary action—any collective effort that rejects power or domination.<sup>52</sup>

However, in the context of historical materialism, we can look to economic aspects of large-scale initiatives like that of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (better known as Rojava) which, amongst many other major social and economic accomplishments, has rejected the Syrian regime's policies. The regime, Maksim Lebsky writes,<sup>53</sup> "deliberately took steps to keep the local industry from developing" and, according to *A Small Key Can Open a Large Door*, the now autonomous region is working to establish a "People's Economy" based on the three major concepts of "commons, private property based on use, and worker-administered businesses."<sup>54</sup> These efforts are also deeply contextual as Rojava's system emerged from pre-autonomy councils, neighborhood assemblies, and meetings, in addition to numerous pre-existing cultural practices.<sup>55</sup> And the Rojavan conceptualization of "social economy," as described by Ahmed Yousef, "is not a centrally planned economy" and "the market is a main part of social economy, but the use-value must be greater than the exchange-value, and there is no stock market."<sup>56</sup>

But this also means focusing on (at least currently) smaller-scale economic restructurings like the incredible work of Cooperation Jackson, which focuses on the long-term goal of developing a cooperative network centered in Jackson, Mississippi. Their "basic theory of change is centered on the position that organizing and empowering the structurally under and unemployed sectors of the working class, particularly from Black and Latino communities, to build worker organized and owned cooperatives will be a catalyst for the democratization of our economy and society overall."<sup>57</sup> Of particular interest from a historical materialist perspective is their Community

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51 Mao Zedong, *On Practice, On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing* (1937), accessed April 25, 2020, <[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_16.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm)>.

52 Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist*, 45.

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

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

55 Lebsky, "The Economy," Co-operation in Mesopotamia.

56 Ahmed Yousef, "The Social Economy in Rojava," Co-operation in Mesopotamia, last modified May 26, 2016, accessed May 14, 2020, <<https://mesopotamia.coop/the-social-economy-in-rojava/>>.

57 "Who We Are," Cooperation Jackson, accessed April 25, 2020, <<https://cooperationjackson.org/intro>>.

Though a left-libertarian formulation of historical materialism need not be beholden to the specific programs of Marx, he did, at least at certain points in his career, speak favorably of producer cooperatives. In "The Civil War in France," <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm>> he says, in reference to the Paris Commune of 1871, that "[i]f co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co-operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production – what else . . . would it be but communism, 'possible' communism?" (Continued on next page.)

Production Initiative which seeks “to turn Jackson into an innovative hub of sustainable manufacturing and fabrication” through “community production.” They define this as “industrial manufacturing and fabrication based on a combination of 3rd and 4th generation industrial technology, namely the combination of digital technology and automated production with 3-D printing and quantum computing, that is collectively owned and democratically operated by members of geographically and/or intentionally defined communities.”<sup>58</sup> Like Rojava, Cooperation Jackson’s efforts are acutely contextual, as they work to specially address the unique socio-economic issues of communities in Mississippi<sup>59</sup> and draw from historical efforts in that region like the Freedom Farm Cooperative and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund.<sup>60</sup> And obviously all of this is contained within the larger (but generally unfree and overtly capitalist) market economy of the United States.

The role of those examining these efforts from outside their specific context should not be that of an authoritarian planner dictating how they should work. Instead, an alternative can be found in Graeber’s formulation of an anarchist social theory which rejects vanguardism in favor of an approach that more resembles ethnography. He proposes that “radical intellectuals” should “look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities—as gifts.”<sup>61</sup> In this manner, the insights of historical materialism in shaping society can be shared, but always with an overt premise of context-keeping—a respect for the evolution of local practices and market-like spontaneity and unintended consequences. This all may seem like an extremely watered-down version of historical materialism which reduces the more radical implications of Marx’s original formulation. But this shift should be appealing to left-libertarians because a respect for local practices and a denial of the possibility of totalizing control would seem to preclude the ability for the method to be used in an authoritarian manner as it was in the Soviet Union.

As must be obvious, this piece is only a very cursory attempt at a left-libertarian formulation of historical materialism—focusing, as it does, heavily on explaining and, in some ways, defending the traditional Marxist vision and only indicating the direction in which left-libertarians might go in rethinking the theory. The critiques outlined are also certainly not exhaustive. From opposite sides of the anti-statist spectrum, Graeber makes the point that the very concept of modes of

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And in “Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council,” <<https://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1866/instructions.htm#05>> he acknowledges “the co-operative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show, that the present pauperising, and despotic system of the *subordination of labour* to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of the association of *free and equal producers*.” See David L. Prychitko’s *Marxism and Workers’ Self-Management* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991) for an in-depth consideration of Marxism and cooperatives.

58 “The Community Production Initiative,” Cooperation Jackson, accessed May 10, 2020, <<https://cooperationjackson.org/the-community-production-initiative>>.

59 “Overview: Why Cooperatives? Why Jackson, Mississippi?,” Cooperation Jackson, accessed April 28, 2020, <<https://cooperationjackson.org/overview>>.

60 “The Story of Cooperation Jackson,” Cooperation Jackson, accessed April 28, 2020, <<https://cooperationjackson.org/story>>.

61 Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist*, 12.



production is under-formulated,<sup>62</sup> and Rothbard, in a similar claim, holds that both the ideas of productive forces and relations of production—the elements that make up the mode of production—are overly vague.<sup>63</sup> Bas Umali, an anarchist activist in Manila, argues that the Marxist dialectical analysis of history is fundamentally hierarchical and colonial and inapplicable to the semi-stateless communities of the indigenous archipelago (today called the Philippines).<sup>64</sup> These and many more insights must be taken into account in formulating any, but in particular a left-libertarian, reinterpretation of historical materialism. But the main point to keep in mind is the rejection of (at least the worst excesses of) naturalism, utopianism, and high modernism, in favor of a historical materialism that is truly dialectical in its balancing of objective and subjective factors, its non-deterministic view of both societies and individuals, and its commitment to the crucial limitations of context.

Finally, this piece would seem incomplete without some mention of two well-known figures in the history of anarchism and libertarian socialism: Mikhail Bakunin and Murray Bookchin—the latter of which is a significant influence on many of the efforts in Rojava, largely through Abdullah Öcalan, a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (or PKK).<sup>65</sup> Bakunin, a contemporary of Marx, is also a firm materialist, writing in *God and the State*, "Yes, facts are before ideas; yes, the ideal, as [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon] said, is but a flower, whose root lies in the material conditions of existence. Yes, the whole history of humanity, intellectual and moral, political and social, is but a reflection of its economic history."<sup>66</sup> But, again much like Marx, he is not a reductionist by any means and is rather an eminently dialectical thinker. Brian Morris attests, in *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, that despite his "stress on social and natural determinism" he places "an important emphasis on the individual as a creative agent, both determining as well as being determined by natural and social conditions." Furthermore, "[i]n Hegelian fashion, Bakunin sees human history as a world process, as the progressive move towards greater freedom, first with the development of life, then, with human culture and consciousness, humans establish a degree of autonomy from the world of nature, finally, with the potential establishment of a truly human society, the freedom of the individual. Human freedom for Bakunin can only be in nature and society, not something independent from the world."<sup>67</sup>

Bookchin—a more contemporary dialectician—is, in his piece *Listen, Marxist!*, contextually critical of the "historically limited, indeed paralyzing, shackles" of Marx's theories, but acknowledges the importance of many of his ideas like "[t]he Marxian dialectic," "the many seminal insights

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62 David Graeber, "Turning Modes of Production Inside Out: Or, Why Capitalism is a Transformation of Slavery," *Critique of Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (March 2006): 62-64, accessed April 28, 2020, <[http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/dcrawford/graeber\\_2006a.pdf](http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/dcrawford/graeber_2006a.pdf)>.

63 Rothbard, *Classical Economics*, 372, 375.

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

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

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

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

provided by historical materialism," and "above all the notion that freedom has material preconditions." But in his assessment, "Marx was occupied above all with the *preconditions* of freedom (technological development, national unification, material abundance) rather than with the *conditions* of freedom (decentralization, the formation of communities, the human scale, direct democracy)."<sup>68</sup> He also articulates an ecological and anti-hierarchical philosophy of "dialectical naturalism," which seeks to overcome both "Hegel's empyrean, basically antinaturalistic dialectical idealism and the wooden, often scientific dialectical materialism of orthodox Marxists" and "does not terminate in a Hegelian Absolute at the end of a cosmic developmental path, but rather advances the vision of an ever-increasing wholeness, fullness, and richness of differentiation and subjectivity." With all this in mind, perhaps Bakunin and Bookchin can serve as counterposing figures to Marx in the elaboration and expansion upon a left-libertarian version of historical materialism.

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68 Murray Bookchin, *Listen, Marxist!*, transcr. Jonas Holmgren (Anarchos, 1969), accessed May 13, 2020, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bookchin/1969/listen-marxist.htm>>.

A critical examination of Bookchin's thought in relation to markets—a thoroughly dialectical matter as it has been presented in this piece—can be found in Prychitkos's "Expanding the Anarchist Range: a critical reappraisal of Rothbard's contribution to the contemporary theory of anarchism," <[https://www.academia.edu/23680989/Expanding\\_the\\_Anarchist\\_Range\\_A\\_Critical\\_Reappraisal\\_of\\_Rothbards\\_Contribution\\_to\\_the\\_Contemporary\\_Theory\\_of\\_Anarchism](https://www.academia.edu/23680989/Expanding_the_Anarchist_Range_A_Critical_Reappraisal_of_Rothbards_Contribution_to_the_Contemporary_Theory_of_Anarchism)>.