

materialism asserts a (possibly counterfactual) claim about the effects on patterns of social change of the interactions of forces and relations of production (a) wherever the conditions under which it has application obtain, and (b) wherever there are no interferences of sufficient force to countervail the effects of historical materialist development. Historical materialists from Marx on, however, have not been content simply to postulate the existence of these endogenous mechanisms; they have also advanced the historical hypothesis that these mechanisms provide the primary explanation for the actual course of the history of human civilization. Of course, historical materialism does not deny that, as a matter of historical fact, exogenous factors—not recognized by the theory—have causal efficacy. But just as Darwinian theory hypothesizes that, as a matter of historical fact, natural selection is overwhelmingly the most important factor accounting for evolutionary change, so historical materialism supposes that, as a matter of fact, the dynamic processes the theory acknowledges actually account for (epochal) historical change. Thus historical materialism favors endogenous over exogenous causes twice over: its general laws acknowledge only endogenous processes, and its associated historical hypothesis asserts that these endogenous processes have played a crucially important role in determining the shape of human history.

Many critics of historical materialism challenge the claim that these mechanisms exist and impart any tendency at all to historical development. This challenge differs from the contention that these mechanisms, as a matter of fact, have not played the pre-eminent role the theory assigns them. What is denied is the claim that human history has any overall directionality, other than the trivial chronological directionality of the sequence of events. The transhistorical endogenous mechanisms postulated by historical materialism to determine the epochal trajectory of human history are not simply overwhelmed by other causal processes. On this view they don't exist and therefore cannot even generate a weak tendency for development.¹⁹

In the next chapter, we examine a particularly insightful example of this genre of criticism.

19. Typically, the evidence used against the existence hypothesis comes from the analysis of the empirical importance of other causes of historical change. Demonstrating the importance of other causes, however, is only evidence against the historical hypothesis that the forces and relations of production are sufficiently powerful causes to explain the overall contours of historical development by themselves. It does not constitute evidence against the existence hypothesis itself. To reject the existence hypothesis it is either necessary to show that some of the internal assumptions of the model are false (e.g. that human beings are not rational in the manner assumed by the hypothesis) or empirically to identify situations in which the conditions postulated by the theory hold, and yet the hypothesized effects are not produced.

Historical Trajectories

Criticisms of historical materialism tend to take two forms: either they are hostile attacks by anti-Marxists intent on demonstrating the falsity, perniciousness or theoretical irrelevance of Marxism, or they are reconstructive critiques from within the Marxist tradition attempting to overcome theoretical weaknesses in order to advance the Marxist project. In these terms, Anthony Giddens's two books, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* and *The Nation State and Violence*, are rare works: appreciative critiques by a non-Marxist of the Marxist tradition in social theory.¹ While finding a great deal that is wrong with Marxist assumptions and theoretical claims, Giddens also argues that "Marx's analysis of the mechanisms of capitalist production ... remains the necessary core of any attempt to come to terms with the massive transformations that have swept the world since the eighteenth century."² Indeed, in his use of the labor theory of value and his analysis of the capitalist labor process, Giddens is closer than many contemporary Marxists to orthodox Marxism. These books are not wholesale rejections of Marxism, but attempts at a critique in the best sense of the word—a deciphering of the underlying limitations of a social theory in order to appropriate in an alternative framework what is valuable in it. While many of Giddens's arguments against historical materialism are unsatisfactory, his books represent a serious engagement with Marxism. They deserve a serious reading by Marxists and non-Marxists alike.

1. Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and *The Nation State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

2. *A Contemporary Critique*, p. 1.

An Overview of Giddens's Argument

The criticisms elaborated in these books are rooted in Giddens's general theory of social agency and action, or what he terms the theory of "social structuration". We shall not attempt a general assessment and summary of this broader framework. Instead we shall focus on a core theme, prominent in the first of the two books: Giddens's critique of the Marxist account of the forms and development of human societies and his elaboration of an alternative theory of history.

Giddens's argument revolves around three interconnected issues: (1) discovering the right methodological principles for analyzing the interconnectedness of different aspects of society within a social whole or "totality"; (2) determining a strategy for elaborating classificatory typologies of forms of societies; and (3) developing a theory of the movement of societies from one form to another within such a typology. Giddens criticizes what he takes to be the Marxist treatment of each of these issues: *functionalism* in the Marxist analyses of the social totality; economic or class *reductionism* in the typologies of societies rooted in the concept of mode of production; and *evolutionism* in the theory of the transformation of social forms. In place of these alleged errors, Giddens offers the rudiments of his general theory of social structuration: instead of functionalism, social totalities are analyzed as contingently reproduced social systems; instead of class and economic reductionism, forms of society are differentiated on the basis of a multi-dimensional concept of "space-time distanciation"; and instead of evolutionism, transformations of social forms are understood in terms of what Giddens calls "episodic transitions". These critiques and alternatives are summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Summary of Giddens's Critique of Historical Materialism

	<i>Central Marxist Concept</i>	<i>Giddens's Critique</i>	<i>Giddens's Alternative</i>
1. Logic of interconnection of social whole	Functional totality	Functionalism	Contingently reproduced social system
2. Typology of social forms	Mode of production	Class and economic reductionism	Level of space-time distanciation
3. Logic of transformation	Dialectic of forces and relations of production	Evolutionism	Episodic transitions

Functionalism and the Social Totality

Giddens correctly observes that much Marxist social science relies expressly or covertly on functional explanations. He then criticizes functional explanations on a variety of grounds: for presupposing a false division between statics and dynamics; for suggesting that human actors are only agents of social relations and, most importantly, for falsely imputing "needs" to social systems. Giddens illustrates these points in a brief discussion of Marx's theory of the reserve army of labor:

Marx's analysis can be interpreted, and often has been so interpreted, in a functionalist vein. Capitalism has its own "needs", which the system functions to fulfill. Since capitalism needs a "reserve army", one comes into being. The proposition is sometimes stated in reverse. Since the operation of capitalism leads to the formation of a reserve army, this must be because it needs one. But neither version explains anything about why a reserve army of unemployed workers exists. Not even the most deeply sedimented institutional features of societies come about, persist, or disappear, because those societies need them to do so. They come about *historically*, as a result of concrete conditions that have in every case to be analyzed; the same holds for their persistence or their dissolution.³

The only way that functional arguments can be legitimately employed in social science, according to Giddens, is when they are treated *counterfactually*: "we can quite legitimately pose conjectural questions such as 'What would have to be the case for social system X to come about, persist or be transformed?'"⁴ But stating conditions of existence does not explain anything. Doing so merely indicates what needs to be explained.

Giddens is, we believe, substantially correct in his description of functionalist tendencies within Marxism and in his critique of these tendencies. Social reproduction, whenever it occurs, is not an automatically guaranteed process, but a phenomenon that calls for an explanation. While in some cases functional *descriptions* may be heuristically useful, they always raise questions of mechanism that must be addressed.

Nevertheless Giddens's critique of Marxian functionalism is in certain respects misleading. First, Giddens writes as if Marxists have ignored this problem. In fact, a number of debates among Marxists in the 1970s and 1980s focused precisely on functional explanations. It was a key issue in discussions of the work of Louis Althusser and other "structuralist" Marxists. As noted in Chapter 2, it has also played a central role

3. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

in "analytical" discussions of historical materialism.⁵ Second, while Giddens is right to indict easy transitions from functional descriptions to functional explanations, he is wrong to dismiss functional explanations altogether. The functionality of a given institution or practice is never a complete explanation of that phenomenon, but it can surely constitute part of a proper explanation.

Consider the problem of racism. Marxists often attempt to explain racial domination in terms of its consequences for working-class disunity (divide and conquer). This is a functional explanation in the sense that the phenomenon, racism, is explained by its beneficial effects for capitalism. But it is clearly an incomplete explanation, if only because the fact that an effect would be beneficial does not guarantee that it will be produced. A docile and happy working class would be beneficial for capitalism too, but this fact hardly assures that workers will be happy and docile. Nevertheless, it could be argued that in the absence of its beneficial effects, racism would disappear *much more easily*. If this is the case, then the effects of racism would play a critical role in explaining racism's persistence. Giddens, we imagine, would accept this point, but still insist that it does not imply the legitimacy of functional explanations in social science. If the effects of racism are beneficial to capitalism, this helps explain its persistence only because the *actions* of capitalists support racism. The explanation, then, would be based on an analysis of the consciousness of actors and their associated strategies of action, not on the functional relation as such.

However, the fact that racism will actually have these beneficial effects is not a property of the consciousness of capitalists, but of the social system within which they form their beliefs. It is, to use Cohen's formulation, a "dispositional fact" of the social system. Similar situations pertain throughout biology. Thus, to use one of Cohen's examples, giraffes have long necks in consequence of natural selection for genes that produce long necks. But unless it had been a dispositional fact that longer necks would be beneficial for giraffes, natural selection would not have worked in the way it did. Similarly, unless it were a dispositional fact about a society that racism would produce the effects it does, what

5. It is striking that Giddens's books completely ignore *KMTH*, and the debate over the role of functional explanations in Marxism that it inspired. In this context, Jon Elster has been a particularly ardent critic of functional explanations. See, among others, "Cohen on Marx's Theory of History", *Political Studies* XXVIII:1 (March 1980), pp. 121-8; "Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory", *Theory and Society* 11 (1982), pp. 453-82; and *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Chapter 1. See also G.A. Cohen, "Functional Explanation, Consequence Explanation and Marxism", *Inquiry* 25 (1982), pp. 27-56; and "Reply to Elster, 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory'", *Theory and Society* 11 (1982), pp. 483-96.

capitalists do, intentionally or not, to encourage racial divisions would produce different outcomes from their actual consequences. This causal structure can be represented as follows:

- (1) *Dispositional fact*: (Racism → divides workers)
- (2) *Functional explanation*: (Racism → divides workers) → Racism

If elites *believed* that racism divides workers, this would constitute a crucial mechanism linking (1) and (2) that explains (in part) how racism becomes an institutional arrangement:

- (3) *Functional explanation with intentional mechanism*: (Racism → divides workers) → Beliefs by elites that racism divides workers → Racism-enhancing practices → Racism

To be sure, the beliefs and practices of elites are important in this explanation. But the explanation of the outcome cannot be reduced to these beliefs and practices; the underlying functional relations are also important.

Dispositional facts are real properties of social systems. Thus they can legitimately figure in causal explanations of social processes and outcomes. It is, of course, difficult to defend claims about dispositional facts empirically. Arguments in support of such claims often rely on counterfactual analyses as Giddens suggests. But this does not imply that these analyses are only heuristic exercises, which point the way towards explanatory questions; claims about dispositional properties of social systems also figure in many answers.⁶

Some of Giddens's own arguments can be reconstructed as functional explanations based on dispositional facts about particular kinds of societies. Consider, for example, Giddens's account of the association between "nationalism" and the nation-state. How should we explain the fact that nationalism plays such a prominent role in modern states? Giddens argues as follows:

With the coming of the nation-state, states have an administrative and territorially ordered unity which they did not possess before. This unity cannot remain *purely* administrative however, because the very coordination of activities involved presumes elements of cultural homogeneity. The extension of communication cannot occur without the "conceptual" involvement of the whole community of knowledgeable citizenry.... The sharing of a common

6. In Chapter 7, we shall develop an objection to Cohen's analysis of functional claims, but this will not undermine the present point.

language and a common symbolic historicity are the most thorough-going ways of achieving this (and are seen to be so by those leaders who have learned from the experience of the first "nations").⁷

According to Giddens, modern nation-states face a problem of social reproduction. Nationalism, a common symbolic historicity, is the pre-eminent solution. It is a dispositional fact about nation-states that nationalism will contribute to social reproduction. Through a process of historical learning, leaders come to understand this fact. Eventually, the functional solution becomes generalized.

It is implausible that nationalism would become a general ideological feature of nation-states if political actors did not recognize its cohesion-producing effects, and encourage it deliberately. It might therefore be argued that Giddens has not produced a functional explanation, after all, because intentionality plays a role in the feedback mechanism that establishes the functional outcome. Elster has stipulated this point in the course of arguing that functional explanations seldom figure in sound social scientific explanations.⁸ For Elster, and perhaps for Giddens too, if nationalism is intentionally encouraged, it is explained by the intentions of political actors, not by any supposed functional relation. However, what is distinctive about this explanation is precisely its dependence on a functional relation. If Giddens's analysis is right, nationalism cannot *simply* be explained in terms of the intentions of political leaders: those intentions are themselves formed within a set of causal processes where particular functional effects are produced. The fact that the actors recognize this causal relation and consciously take steps to sustain the effects it produces does not imply that the causal process is reducible to their intentions. We therefore reject Elster's suggestion, implicit in Giddens's rejection of functionalism, that in a proper functional explanation, the feedback mechanisms must remain unknown to the human actors involved.

It is worth noting that even Elster would not banish functional explanations altogether. Even if we adopt his very restrictive understanding of "functional explanation", and exclude accounts where intentionality plays some role, there would remain situations in which functional explanations would still be appropriate. Elster gives an example in his discussion of the profit-maximizing strategies of capitalist firms.⁹ He argues that it is appropriate to answer the question, "why do

7. *The Nation State and Violence*, p. 219.

8. Cf. *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality* (Cambridge and Paris: Cambridge University Press and Edition de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1979), Chapter 1.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

capitalist firms adopt on average profit-maximizing strategies?" with a functional explanation. The market acts as a selection mechanism that eliminates firms that adopt sub-optimal strategies. Therefore only firms that adopt profit-maximizing strategies will survive. Even if decision-making procedures within firms operate on "rough-and-ready rules of thumb", only those rules that happen to maximize profits will survive over time. The end-result, therefore, will be a distribution of strategies among firms that are generally functional for the reproduction of those firms, even though such a distribution was not intended by any actor within the system. Of course, it may happen that some capitalists consciously attempt to adopt profit-maximizing strategies. Elster's point is that we need not assume that they do in order to understand how the functional outcome is possible. Conscious profit-maximization may improve the efficiency of the selection mechanism, but the functional relationship is itself structurally ensured by the market.

To be sure, relatively few social processes have the properties of firms acting in competitive markets. Thus it is generally not the case that functional outcomes can result without any conscious intervention whatsoever. Functional explanations unconnected to intentional explanations are usually unsatisfactory precisely because no plausible mechanism for achieving functional outcomes can be found. Giddens is therefore justified in his suspicions of disembodied functional explanations. But his categorical rejection of functional arguments within social explanations is unwarranted.

Typologies of Social Forms

Marxists employ a distinctive strategy for classifying societies. They base their typologies of social forms on the concept of class structure. Class structure is itself based on the concept of the mode of production. While there are substantial disagreements over how the latter concept should be defined and precisely how class structures should be distinguished, there is general agreement among Marxists that these concepts provide the central principle both for differentiating types of societies and for providing a road map of the historical trajectory of societal transformations. Even where Marxists concede the autonomy of relations of domination distinct from class (e.g. ethnic, gender or national domination), they nevertheless characterize the overall form of society in terms of its class structure.

Much of *A Contemporary Critique* is devoted to challenging this principle of social typology. The accusation that historical materialism is an economic or class reductionist theory is, of course, a standard

criticism. What is unusual about Giddens's position is that he rejects class-based typologies of societies without challenging the importance of class analysis in general.

Giddens raises the critique of reductionism in two contexts: first, he insists that only in capitalism can class be viewed as the central structural principle of the society as a whole. Therefore, in general, class structure provides an inadequate basis for specifying the differences between social forms. Second, he argues that societies are characterized by multiple forms of domination and exploitation which cannot be reduced to a single principle, class. The first of these claims serves as a basis for a critique of *intersocietal* class reductionism, the second for a critique of *intrasocietal* class reductionism.

Intersocietal Class Reductionism

Societies should not be classified primarily in terms of their class structures, Giddens argues, because only in capitalism does class constitute society's basic structural principle. Only in capitalism does class permeate all aspects of social life. While non-capitalist societies may have had classes, class relations did not constitute their core principle of social organization. This argument forms the basis for a distinction Giddens makes between *class society* (a society within which class is the central structural principle) and *class-divided society* ("a society in which there are classes, but where class analysis does not serve as a basis for identifying the basic structural principle of organization of that society").¹⁰

Giddens's defense of this position revolves around his analysis of *power* and *domination*. Power, in Giddens's theory of "social structuration" is a subcategory of transformative capacity, in which "transformative capacity is *harnessed to actors' attempts to get others to comply with their wants*. Power, in this relational sense, concerns the capacity of actors to secure outcomes where the realization of these outcomes depends upon the agency of others."¹¹ This relational transformative capacity rests on resources used to get others to comply. In particular, Giddens distinguishes between *allocative* resources (resources involving control over nature) and *authoritative* resources (resources involving control over social interactions of various sorts). *Domination* is then defined as "structured asymmetries of resources drawn upon and reconstituted in such power relations".¹²

10. *A Contemporary Critique*, p. 108.

11. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979), p. 93. Italics in the original.

12. *A Contemporary Critique*, p. 50.

On the basis of these concepts of power and domination, societies can be classified along two principal dimensions:

(1) *The type of resource domination, allocative or authoritative, more important for sustaining power relations.* Giddens argues that it is only in capitalism that control over allocative resources *per se* is of prime importance. In all non-capitalist societies "authoritative resources were the main basis of both political and economic power".¹³

(2) *The magnitude of control over each of these resources in time and space.* This notion is the core of Giddens's complex concept of "space-time distanciation". The control over any resource can be specified in terms of its extension over time and space. This idea is easiest to understand if we focus on allocative resources. Hunting and gathering societies involve rather limited control over allocative resources in both time and space: food is acquired more or less continuously and with relatively short time-horizons, and trade over long distances (spatial extension of allocative resources) is very limited. On both of these counts, settled agriculture involves greater space-time "distanciation". Industrial capitalism, of course, extends such distanciation to historically unprecedented levels: production is organized globally and allocative time-horizons extend over decades in some cases. In terms of authoritative resources, the principal basis for the extension over time and space is the increasing capacity of a society for *surveillance*, i.e. for gathering and storing information and for supervising subordinate groups. The institutional sites for the extension of authoritative resources in time and space are initially the city and subsequently the state.

Taking these two dimensions together produces the general typology of societal forms in Table 4.2. This typology differs from the Marxist typology of modes of production. But are the two really incompatible? Giddens believes that they are. Nevertheless, the clash may be not as great as Giddens imagines.

The central qualitative break in Giddens's typology occurs between capitalism and all non-capitalist societies. Only in capitalism are allocative resources the central basis of power. Thus only in capitalism can class be viewed as the organizing principle of society. This claim appears to run counter to the Marxist thesis that class structures (or modes of production) are the basic structural principle of all societies. On closer inspection, however, the difference virtually disappears.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Table 4.2 Giddens's Typology of Social Forms

		Type of resource which is the primary basis of power	
		Authoritative	Allocative
Level of space-time distanciation	Low	Pre-class societies	
	Medium	Class-divided societies	
	High	Socialist societies	Capitalist societies

First, we might ask: *why* is it that in non-capitalist societies authoritative resources are the basis of power, while in capitalist societies power is based on control of allocative resources? One could say that the question is illegitimate. The authoritative/allocative resource distinction could be viewed as a strictly taxonomic criterion for specifying different types of societies. Then there would be no meaningful answer to the question. Giddens, however, does not reject the question. In fact, when he attempts to explain the differences between the two types of societies, he emphasizes the causal importance of their respective economic structures: the role of agrarian production, the degree of economic autonomy of communities, the existence of free wage labor, the alienability of different forms of property, etc.¹⁴ While Giddens clearly emphasizes non-economic factors in his explanations of the *genesis* of capitalism (e.g. the specificity of the European state system), he argues that it is the distinctive property relations of capitalism that explain why class becomes such a central organizing principle of capitalist societies.¹⁵ Such an explanation, however, is symmetrical: the distinctive property relations of feudal society (in contrast to capitalism) explain why in feudalism the control of authoritative resources is the central axis of power. To state our contention more generally: throughout Giddens's analysis, it is *variations* in the nature of property relations that explain *variations* in the relative centrality of control over allocative or authoritative resources in societies.

14. See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 114–15; *The Nation State and Violence*, pp. 70–1.

15. Classical Marxism, of course, sees class as central both to the problem of historical trajectories and to the problem of social structure. Thus, “class struggle is the motor of history” is as important a formula as “class structures constitute the base of society”. Giddens consistently rejects the dynamic role attributed to class struggles in Marxism. But, contrary to his express declarations, it is not clear that he rejects Marxist claims for the centrality of class structures in the explanation of variations across societies.

Giddens's position actually resembles Marx's claim in *Capital* that the economy is “determinant” even if, in some pre-capitalist economic structures, other aspects of society are “dominant”:

My view is that each particular mode of production, and the social relations of production corresponding to it at each given moment, in short the economic structure of society ... conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. In the opinion of the German-American publication this is all very true for our own times, in which material interests are preponderant, but not for the Middle Ages, dominated by Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, dominated by politics. ... One thing is clear: the Middle Ages could not live on Catholicism, nor could the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the manner in which they gained their livelihood which explains why in one case politics, in the other Catholicism, played the chief part.¹⁶

This idea is also at the heart of Althusser's notion of society as a “structured totality” within which the economic structure determines which aspect (“instance” or “level”) of the society is “dominant”. To be sure, Giddens emphatically, and we think correctly, rejects the functionalist assumptions underlying Althusser's position. Nevertheless, when he tries to explain the differences in the relationship between allocative and authoritative resources in capitalist and non-capitalist societies, he adverts to just those considerations Marx and Althusser relied upon.

A second reason why Giddens's position is not as distant from Marxist formulations as he claims centers on the concept of class. Giddens narrowly ties class to “sectional forms of domination created by private ownership of property”, where “ownership” means direct control over the use and disposition of means of production, and “private” designates legally guaranteed rights over those means of production. When a group of individuals appropriates surplus coercively, without actually owning the means of production privately, the appropriation is treated by Giddens as a consequence of control over authoritative resources, not allocative resources. Perhaps the appropriators control military personnel and are therefore able to extract a surplus. Class divisions still *result* from such appropriations, since the process produces differential access to allocative resources. The system of appropriation

16. *Capital*, vol. I (London: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 175–6. Marx's reasoning is quite elliptical. The fact that feudal society could not “live on” Catholicism does not show why the mode of production has explanatory primacy. Giddens's analyses of how particular forms of social conflict and power relations are conditioned by particular forms of property relations provides a more refined analysis. His arguments, however, do not contravene Marx's point that it is fundamentally *differences* in property relations—class relations/economic structures—which explain the broader structural *differences* between capitalist and feudal society.

divides individuals into social categories—perhaps even into groups of rich and poor. But the *basis* for the appropriation is not the class structure, but the structure of authoritative domination. Feudal exploiting classes, therefore, are not classes directly in virtue of property relations, but in virtue of the secondary effects of the redistributive mechanisms of feudal authoritative power. It is for this reason that Giddens maintains that feudal societies are class-divided but not strictly class societies.

This formulation depends, of course, on Giddens's definition of "class". Many Marxists define classes in terms of the mechanisms by which surplus products or surplus labor is appropriated, not by property relations as such.¹⁷ But the appropriation of an economic surplus always involves combinations of economic and political mechanisms or, as Giddens would have it, relations to allocative and authoritative resources. In feudal societies this mechanism involves the direct use of extra economic coercion; in capitalist societies the political face of class relations is restricted to the guarantee of contracts, the protection of property rights and supervision of the labor process. In both kinds of societies, however, it is mechanisms of surplus extraction that specify the character of class relations.

Thus the disagreement between Giddens and Marxism is at least partly terminological. Many Marxists draw the same descriptive contrast that Giddens does between the economic mechanisms of class relations under capitalism, rooted in the labor contract and private property, and the extra-economic coercive mechanisms of non-capitalist class societies. Marxists agree with Giddens too that this qualitative distinction between capitalist and non-capitalist class societies represents a more fundamental break than any distinctions among pre-capitalist societies. Where they disagree is in how the term "class" is to be employed with respect to the use of authoritative and allocative resources in surplus appropriation.

Terminological disputes are seldom innocent. In general, drawing the boundary criteria for a concept opens up or closes off lines of inquiry. When Marxists treat the mechanism of appropriation, the exploitation of labor, as the principal basis for specifying class relations they do so, at least implicitly, because they hold: (1) that this mechanism determines tendencies towards struggle by supplying a set of social actors with opposing interests; (2) that typological distinctions based upon this mechanism constitute a sound basis for distinguishing societies with

17. For an important dissenting view in which a property relations definition of class is defended in Marxist terms, see John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). The debate over the status of "private property" in the definition of class dissolves when "property" is extended to include a range of productive resources other than the means of production.

different dynamics, forms of social conflict and trajectories of development; and (3) that the elements of social forms so conceived do not operate independently, but instead form a kind of system. The last point is the most important. By combining the joint effect of control over allocative and authoritative resources in the specification of class relations, Marxists hold that these forms of resource control are not just contingently interconnected, but systematically linked in such a way that only certain kinds of variation can occur in their forms of combination. By excluding relations to authoritative resources from the concept of class, Giddens suggests, in contrast, that the social organization of authoritative resources and their development and transformation are independent of the social control of allocative resources. This is not to say that, for Giddens, the development of forms of control of authoritative resources has no effect on allocative resource control. It is only to maintain that their effects are contingent, not systematic.

Some implications of this difference will become clear when we consider Giddens's critique of "evolutionism". First, however, we turn to Giddens's complaints against Marxism's supposed intrasocietal class reductionism.

Intrasocietal Class Reductionism

Historical materialism is class reductionist, Giddens argues, not only in its treatment of the central differences between societies; it is reductionist in its treatment of the forms of domination within given societies. In addition to class exploitation Giddens argues that:

There are three axes of exploitative relationships ... which are not explained, though they may be significantly illuminated, either by the theory of exploitation of labor in general or by the theory of surplus value in particular. These are: (a) exploitative relations between states, where these are strongly influenced by military domination; (b) exploitative relations between ethnic groups, which may or may not converge with the first; and (c) exploitative relations between the sexes, sexual exploitation. None of these can be reduced exhaustively to class exploitation ...¹⁸

As Giddens points out, Marxists have often attempted to explain the existence and forms of these axes of domination as "expressions" of class, typically by recourse to functional explanations. If such reductionist accounts are illegitimate, interstate, ethnic and sexual relations of domination would have sources of variation not wholly explained by

18. *A Contemporary Critique*, p. 242.

class. Then the attempt to characterize the overall form of society exclusively in terms of modes of production and associated class structures would be plainly inadequate.

Many, perhaps most, contemporary Marxists accept much of this argument against class reductionism. In general there is a recognition that ethnic and sexual domination are not simply expressions of class domination. Some Marxists would add inter-state domination to this list as well. How much independence these relations have and how their articulation with the class system should be understood are, of course, matters of considerable disagreement. While tendencies towards functional reductionism continue in the Marxist tradition, it is nevertheless beyond dispute that the principal tendency of contemporary Marxist thinking opposes intrasocietal class reductionism.

Marxists would, however, disagree with Giddens where he suggests that the irreducibility of sex or ethnicity or nationality to class implies that these forms of domination/exploitation are of equal status in defining differences among societies. Most Marxists would continue to argue for a general primacy of class, even if other relations are not simple reflections of class. Thus it is often argued that class structure determines the limits of possible variation of other forms of domination, even if it does not determine the nature of these forms as such. If this position is correct, class relations do not simply "illuminate" the analysis of gender, ethnicity or nationality, as Giddens suggests; they determine the basic structural parameters within which these other relations develop.

This argument can, of course, be reversed. It can be argued, as some feminists have, that gender relations impose limits on forms of variation of class structure. It would certainly be plausible to hold too that the interstate system of political and military relations imposes limits on the possible forms of development of class relations. If the relations of limitation are symmetrical, then it is arbitrary to claim primacy for class relations.

Yet Marxists continue to argue for class primacy, though sometimes covertly or apologetically. Three kinds of argument are invoked to defend the primacy of class.¹⁹ First, it is sometimes argued that, even if non-class forms of domination are irreducible to class, class systematically structures the subjectivity of actors. The point is not that individuals are always "class conscious" in the sense that they are aware of their class position and class interests, but only that their social

19. In Chapter 7 we shall examine some general issues involved in making claims for causal primacy. Here we are interested only in the kinds of substantive arguments that are made in favor of class primacy in theories of history.

consciousness is more shaped by class relations than by any other social relation. A second argument for class primacy shifts attention from the consciousness of actors to the constraints under which they act. The idea is that class relations, by structuring access to material resources, limit the capacities for action of different groups, including groups not reducible to class relations. For example, racial domination may be irreducible to class domination, and yet a condition for blacks struggling effectively against racial domination may be that they gain control over more of society's surplus product than they now enjoy. Thus, even if their interests or motivations for struggle are irreducible to class interests, the conditions for successful pursuit of these interests would be structured by class relations.²⁰

Giddens effectively endorses these arguments, at least for capitalism. Thus he designates capitalism a class society, a social form in which class permeates all facets of social life, shaping forms of subjectivity and conditions of action. But he rejects the idea that all societies are class societies in this sense. We think Giddens is correct. We would add that, even under capitalism, arguments for the *centrality* of class in the formation of subjectivity and conditions for struggle are not necessarily arguments for the *primacy* of class. There almost certainly are situations in which racial or gender conditions more deeply stamp the subjectivity of actors and their conditions for struggle than class does. And while struggle for control over material resources is *an* essential condition for struggle against non-class forms of domination, there are other necessary conditions too—struggles over ideology and control of political institutions, for example, neither of which directly concerns material resources. Where multiple necessary conditions exist, it is arbitrary to assign to one of these necessary conditions the privilege of "causal primacy".²¹

There is, however, a third argument for the primacy of class. Marxists have argued for class primacy on the grounds that only class relations have an internal logic of development which generates a trajectory of transformations of the class structure. No other form of domination appears to have a similar developmental trajectory. Thus, while class

20. This argument rests on the distinction between the *interests* groups have and their *capacities* for realizing those interests (see Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, London, NLB: 1978, pp. 98–108). Functionalist attempts at reducing non-class relations to class relations typically involve a translation of non-class interests into class interests. The "interests" whites have in dominating blacks, for example, is explained in terms of the interests the bourgeoisie has in dominating workers: the former is functional for the latter. In this case, non-class *interests* are irreducible to class interests, but the *capacities* for realizing non-class interests are systematically constrained by the society's class structure.

21. Cf. Chapter 7.

structures cannot be accorded primacy with respect to other social relations in a *static* sense, they do enjoy *dynamic* primacy.²² This argument assumes that class relations do indeed generate development endogenously. If they do not, Giddens's insistence on a pluralism of symmetrical forms of exploitation and domination would be difficult to fault. To assess this argument we therefore turn to the third complaint Giddens raises against historical materialism: its purported evolutionism.

Evolutionism

Throughout *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* Giddens attacks all forms of "evolutionary thinking" in social theory. He does so for both methodological and empirical reasons. Methodologically, he argues, evolutionary perspectives in social science are based on a notion of *adaptation*—typically, the adaptation of a society to its material environment. But, Giddens insists, it is a category mistake to talk about "societies" adapting: "the idea of adaptation falls in the same category as the functional 'needs' to which we have already objected. Societies have no need to 'adapt' to (master, conquer) their material environments."²³ Societies are not organisms and it is a mistake to see them evolving adaptively in the manner of organisms.

An alternative would be to reconstruct social evolution on the basis of a theory of individual human adaptation. Human beings adapt to their environment. Through such adaptations the societies they comprise are then pushed along an evolutionary path. But, according to Giddens, such a reconstruction fails empirically. While it no longer rests on a misleading reification of society, it is based on a false empirical generalization—that there is a transhistorical tendency for human beings to improve their material conditions of existence. In Giddens's view there simply are no transhistorical individual drives that can provide a basis for a general theory of social development.

The Marxist theory of history is thus doubly unsatisfactory. It is methodologically flawed in its presupposition that societies have transhistorical adaptive imperatives. And it is empirically false because, according to Giddens, there is no tendency for the forces of production to develop throughout history. Thus a "dialectic" of forces and relations of production cannot possibly serve as a basis for a general trajectory of historical change.

22. This argument too is examined and criticized in Chapter 7.

23. *A Contemporary Critique*, p. 21.

In place of evolutionary accounts, Giddens offers an explanation of social transformations in terms of what he calls "episodic transitions", "time-space edges" and "contingent historical development". "Episodes", Giddens writes, "refer to processes of social change that have definite direction and form, and in which definite structural transformations occur".²⁴ The directionality and dynamic of these changes are specific to each episode, each historically specific form of social transition. There is no general dynamic or direction to social change across episodes. "Time-space edges" refer to the "simultaneous existence of types of society in episodic transitions".²⁵ Giddens holds that evolutionary theories imply successions of societies in sequences of stages; while, in fact, different forms of society generally overlap. Finally, Giddens sees the overarching trajectory of historical development as radically contingent: "There are no 'inevitable trends' in social development that are either hastened or held back by specific historical processes. All general patterns of social organization and social change are compounded of contingent outcomes, intended and unintended ..."²⁶ Instead of a theory of social evolution, Giddens thus envisions social change as a set of discontinuous, contingently determined, overlapping transitions that have no overall pattern or logic of development.

Our basic criticism of Giddens's argument is that it incorrectly assumes that the only way a theory of history can embody a principle of directionality is by treating the historical trajectory of social forms in a manner parallel to the life-cycle development of organisms. In contrast we shall argue that directionality implies neither an evolutionary model of society nor an organism-development model, and that both Giddens's own theory of space-time distanciation and historical materialism embody such principles of directionality. The challenge Giddens poses to Marxist theory is not that his theory is somehow *non-evolutionary* in contrast to historical materialism, but only that he has developed a substantively different account of history's structure and direction. Which theory, if either, is right can only be settled empirically. To this end, Giddens's strictures against evolutionism are misleading and diversionary.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *The Nation State and Violence*, p. 235. Arguments of contingency play an especially important role in the analysis of *The Nation State and Violence*. Giddens argues, for example, that the universal scope of the nation state in the modern world is to be explained in part by "a series of contingent historical developments that cannot be derived from general traits attributed to nation-states, but which have nonetheless decisively influenced the trajectory of development of the modern world" (*The Nation State and Violence*, p. 256). Included in this list of contingencies is the long peace of the nineteenth century and the nature of the treaties following the First World War.

Directionality in Theories of History

Giddens is on firm ground when he rejects theories of epochal social change built on the idea that societies must develop along a unique path driven by increasing adaptation to environmental or material conditions. He is correct too in holding that one finds this image of social development in some Marxian accounts.

However, Giddens is wrong when he holds that "teleological" visions of historical development are automatically entailed by an *evolutionary* model. What Giddens rightly finds objectionable are "organism development" models of social change of an especially extreme and deterministic sort, not evolutionary models as such. The distinction is clearest in biology. Consider a theory of the development of an organism from conception to death that describes the genetic structure of the organism as effectively "programming" a process of development and decline.²⁷ Such a theory will claim that it is not at all accidental that organisms usually move through a particular sequence of stages, and that the reason for this sequence has a strongly endogenous character. In contrast, the now standard theory of biological evolution postulates neither an endogenous engine of change nor a programmed sequence of stages. There is no necessity for single-celled organisms to evolve into human beings or for any other actual evolutionary change to occur. Evolutionary theory allows for a retrospective explanation of the transitions that in fact took place. But the specific sequence of changes is a consequence of countless exogenous events. Thus Giddens is wrong to conflate evolutionary theories in general with theories of history that treat historical trajectories like deterministic theories of the life-cycle of organisms.²⁸

However, the real issue in Giddens's critique of "evolutionary theory" is not his use of the term, but his views about the kind of theory a theory of history must be.²⁹ Giddens poses two basic alternatives: either a theory of history must be based on a strong organism develop-

27. We do not wish to endorse such a theory, partly because talk of "programming" often serves to de-emphasize the role of environmental contingencies. Clearly, some sequences of phenotypes (like the early process of zygotic division) are more plausibly treated by a stage theory than are others (like the order in which a human being learns facts of geography). The present point is that theories of this sort assign a pre-eminent, though not necessarily exclusive, role to endogenous causes of change that confer on the organism a definite trajectory of development.

28. See Chapter 3 for a more sustained comparison of historical materialism and Darwinian evolutionary theory.

29. In conflating organismic growth models of development with evolutionary theories Giddens is, after all, following the common usage of the term "evolution" in sociology. Most sociologists who refer to social evolution have in mind a model of development along a particular, determinate path.

ment model (i.e. his "evolutionary" theory) or it must treat epochal history as a matter of contingent connections between different social forms without any overall directionality across epochs. These are not, however, the only alternatives. Two other kinds of theories of epochal history are conceivable. As already suggested, one possibility is a genuinely evolutionary theory of the Darwinian kind. Such a theory would *not* postulate any overall directionality to history, but it would argue for a transhistorical mechanism that drives historical change—by analogy with natural selection. Or one could propose a theory that did acknowledge an overall directionality to historical change, but rejected the view that directionality implies a unique path and sequence of development. We call a theory of this sort a theory of *historical trajectories* (the plural ending marking the idea that such a theory rejects the deterministic implication of a uniquely possible trajectory). We think such a theory is plausible, and that both historical materialism and Giddens's own theory are examples.³⁰

For a theory of history to embody a principle of directionality, it must propose a typology of social forms that can be ordered in a nonarbitrary way. Let us call these forms 0, 1, 2, etc. We can distinguish three conditions that suffice for directionality:

- (1) The probability of staying at the same point is greater than the probability of regressing; $\Pr(j \rightarrow j) > \Pr(j \rightarrow i)$, for all $j > i$.
In a proper theory of history, social forms must be "sticky downward".³¹
- (2) There must be some probability of moving from a given level to the next higher level; $\Pr(i \rightarrow i+1) > 0$, for all i .
- (3) The probability of a "progressive" change is greater than the probability of "regression"; $\Pr(i \rightarrow i+1) > \Pr(i \rightarrow i-1)$, for all i .

There are several important things to note about these conditions. First, they do not imply that societies have "needs" or teleologically-driven tendencies. Inherent teleologies might be one way to satisfy these conditions, but they are not the only way. Second, these conditions do not entail that there is a sequence of stages through which all societies *must* move. They do not imply that the probability of skipping a stage is zero. Nor do they suggest that for any given stage there is only one

30. In the published essay on which this chapter is based, it was claimed that Giddens's and Marx's theories of history were both "evolutionary" in character. Given the understanding of evolutionary theory developed in Chapter 3, this clearly is not accurate, and thus we now describe these as theories of historical trajectory.

31. The notation $\Pr(i \rightarrow j)$ means the probability of ending in state j if the system begins in state i .

possible future; there can be multiple alternatives. A theory of this sort merely claims that there is some positive impulse for movement and that movement is "biased" in a certain direction. It does not follow from these conditions that all societies must develop. Regression and stasis are compatible with our stipulated conditions. The theory can even describe circumstances in which regression and stasis are more probable than progress; this would be consistent with the theory describing other circumstances in which there is a bias towards progress. Thus, the theory can allow that in most societies, long-term steady states are more likely than epochal transformations. At the global level, there will be a tendency for movement in the specified direction.

Finally, this kind of theory need not postulate a universal mechanism of transition from one form of society to another. The mechanisms that explain movement between adjacent forms in the typology need not be the same at every stage. The theory provides a roadmap of history and specifies what kinds of movements are likely to be stable or unstable, reproducible or unreproducible. It does not postulate a universal process of transition. In this respect, theories of historical trajectories differ from theories modeled on Darwinism. But, as in biological evolution, there may be a high level of contingency involved in any particular transformation.

It is clearly non-trivial to affirm a theory of historical trajectories. Not every taxonomy of social forms satisfies the three conditions. Indeed, it could turn out that, in the final analysis, social forms cannot be conceived in the way a theory of historical trajectories requires.

The Marxist Theory of History

Historical materialism is a theory of historical trajectories. According to this theory, before capitalism there was no strong impulse for the development of the forces of production. Nevertheless there was some probability that the forces of production would develop, and the probability of regression was less than the probability of retaining previously achieved levels of productivity. In so far as the development of the forces of production renders certain forms of production relations more or less likely and stable, the cumulative character of the development of the forces of production would impart at least a weak directionality to the system.

To defend these claims, it is not necessary to rely on the idea that societies have needs or goals. All that is required is a defense of the claim that the development of the forces of production is "sticky downward". A number of arguments in support of this position can be advanced.

First, and perhaps least contentiously, there are no groups in society with fundamental interests in *reducing* the productivity of labour. There may be people whose interests have the unintended consequence of reducing labor productivity—for instance, their interests may lead to war and therefore to the destruction of productive capacities. Or, in some circumstances, workers might reduce productivity to protect their jobs. But in general no one has an interest in reducing labor productivity *per se*.

Second, the key aspect of the development of the forces of production is the development of knowledge of productive techniques, not the accumulation of hardware. With knowledge of productive technologies, levels of productivity can be restored even when physical means of production are destroyed. On the other hand, without the knowledge necessary for putting existing hardware to work, the means of production would be useless. Technical knowledge plainly has a sticky downward character; it *can* be lost, but it almost never is.³²

Third, as Marx and Engels argued in *The German Ideology*, once a particular level of development is reached, people's "needs" come to depend on prevailing technologies. Thus there are individuals—and organized collectivities—with strong interests in retaining productive forces, at the same time that no groups have deep and abiding interest in reducing them.

Finally, there will always be individuals and groups with particular interests in enhancing labor productivity—and therefore in developing the forces of production. Whenever increases in labor productivity have the consequence of reducing the toil of direct producers, direct producers will generally want the forces of production to expand. This situation was nearly universal in pre-class societies. Direct producers may not have had any effective interest in increasing the surplus product, but they surely wanted to reduce unpleasant labor.³³ Thus in pre-class societies, direct producers had interests in increasing productivity. The vast majority may not have felt pressure to reduce toil; and they may not have had the capacity to innovate. But when innovations that reduced toil occurred—for whatever reason and however sporadically—they were generally adopted.

32. See *KMTH*, p. 41.

33. We do not mean to suggest that a transhistorical definition of "burdensome toil" can be provided. The content of the activities defined as toilsome undoubtedly changes with the development of the forces of production. But in the human encounter with nature, some activities are experienced as unpleasant and even painful. The weak impulse for technical innovation need not come from a transhistorical drive to "expand the surplus product" or even to "reduce scarcity" understood in terms of consumption, but simply to reduce toil. See *KMTH*, pp. 302–7, for an elaboration of this argument.

In societies with class exploitation, however, there is no longer a direct link between the development of the forces of production and the reduction of burdensome toil. On the contrary, in many cases the introduction of new technologies resulted in the intensification of the direct producers' burdens. Thus there no longer was a general interest in developing the forces of production. Ruling classes, however, did have at least a weak interest in adopting changes that increased labor productivity. This interest followed, in large part, from their class interest in maintaining or enhancing the level of surplus appropriation. To be sure, circumstances can be imagined in which an interest in enhancing exploitation conflicts with an interest in expanding productive capacities. But generally the former propels the latter. Thus, except in rare cases, exploiters had an interest in the development of productive forces. We do not mean to suggest that before capitalism ruling classes systematically encouraged technological innovation. But they generally accepted them when they occurred.

The pressure to develop was a relatively weak impulse throughout much of human history. It took hundreds of thousands of years of toilsome existence before some of the innovations that marked the transition from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture occurred. But, we maintain, that there was at least a weak impulse for development even throughout this period, and that whenever innovations did occur, they were not willingly relinquished.

The Marxist theory of history is not simply a technological typology of societal forms. At the heart of the theory is an account of the interconnection between forces and relations of production. As we have seen,³⁴ historical materialists hold: (1) that for a given level of development of the forces of production, only certain types of production relations are possible; and (2) that within a given form of production relations, there is a limit to the possible development of the forces of production. There is thus a relationship of reciprocal limitation between the forces and relations of production. However, we know that there is at least a weak impulse for the forces of production to develop. This impulse creates a dynamic asymmetry in their interconnection. Eventually the forces of production reach a point at which they are "fettered"—a point beyond which further development is substantially impeded in the absence of transformations of the economic structure.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Marxists have traditionally maintained that when fettering occurs, the relations will be transformed into a unique successor set of relations; and that societies will therefore move along a single path from one societal form to another. However, as we

34. Cf. Chapter 2.

have already argued, this claim presupposes that social actors with interests in "progressive" transformations will eventually acquire the capacities required to bring about the changes they want. The traditional account also supposes that only one form of social relations will unfetter the forces. We have suggested that neither supposition is likely. However, this conclusion does not impugn the claim that tendencies towards progress exist; nor does it challenge historical materialism's account of the directionality of the social forms it identifies. Thus a theory of history shorn of what is least defensible in orthodox historical materialism, but retaining the core structural aspects of the orthodox theory, would still count as a theory of historical trajectories. We shall suggest in Chapter 5 that a theory of this sort provides a good basis for reconstructing historical materialism.

Giddens's Theory of History

Marx's theory is not the only one that satisfies our three conditions for theories of historical trajectories; the framework elaborated by Giddens in *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* does too. Giddens formulates a typology of social forms which has a clear quantitative ordering along the dimension of space-time distancing. How does this ordering meet our conditions for theories of historical trajectories? Giddens would deny that it does. He appears to reject any specification of tendencies towards movement through an ordered typology of social forms. In addition, he insists that the mechanisms of movement from one form to another are specific to each transition, and that there is no transhistorical impulse to move from tribal societies with low space-time distancing to capitalist or socialist societies with high space-time distancing.

On closer inspection, however, Giddens's own accounts seem to suggest a general progressive development. "Space-time distancing" is a concept that captures the ability of people in a society to control allocative and authoritative resources in time and space for use in power relations. Expanding allocative space-time distancing depends, in large part, on the development of the forces of production;³⁵ expanding authoritative space-time distancing amounts to development of

35. Increasing allocative space-time distancing is, in general, a by-product of the growth of productive forces. In most instances, therefore, the former is a good proxy for the latter. As we will discuss presently, the substitution is, in part, motivated by Giddens's substantive differences with Marxism. But, by focusing attention on a phenomenon less obviously associated with a plausible human interest (like the interest in expanding consumption and diminishing toil that motivates the Development Thesis), Giddens's move effectively dissociates historical change from a universal impulse to development. Our contention is that this implication of Giddens's theoretical framework is misleading.

means of surveillance. Increases in each dimension are human achievements: they enhance the capacities of at least some human beings to act. Since the people whose capacities are enhanced by increasing distancing will not willingly accept lower levels of distancing once a given level is achieved, there should be some tendency for this development to be "sticky downward".

Of course, there may be *other* agents who would like to see the level of distancing reduced. But with regard to allocative resources, this possibility is remote. As we have just argued, no one has a fundamental interest in increasing burdensome toil or diminishing levels of consumption. Reductions in allocative space-time distancing would, typically, undermine the efficient use of available forces of production, and thus in general there will be few, if any, organized interests for such reduction. Giddens nowhere suggests otherwise.

The situation is different with respect to authoritative space-time distancing. There plainly are social actors, often with effective capacities for struggle, with clear interests in reducing authoritative space-time distancing. Increasing capacities for surveillance can be a real threat to certain categories of people. Thus territorial centralization—an aspect of expansion of spatial authoritative distancing—is frequently opposed by groups and communities unwilling to be absorbed under a central authority. Such resistance could be described as "authoritative-Luddism".³⁶ It should be noted that even Luddite resistance is more often directed against the unequal distribution of resources than against the resources themselves. In any case, Luddism with respect to allocative resources, opposition to the introduction of more productive technologies, is rare; resistance to increasing authoritative space-time distancing is however a common occurrence in history. Indeed, attempts at reducing overall authoritative space-time distancing have often been successful. It might appear, therefore, that on this dimension, Giddens's approach does not imply a general directionality to social development.

Even here, however, we think Giddens's account retains the idea of weak directionality in epochal historical development. While there will often be contending social actors with interests in expanding, maintaining or reducing authoritative space-time distancing, actors with interests in expansion or maintenance will usually command more authoritative resources already and will therefore generally prevail in outright confrontations. Regressions may not be historical oddities. But,

36. "Luddism", named after the Luddite movement of the nineteenth century, refers to the protest movements of workers directed against the introduction of labor-replacing or skill-reducing machines. In this context it designates opposition to improvements in technical progress with respect to either authoritative or allocative resources.

at the very least, authoritative space-time distancing will tend to be sticky downward.

Is there a significant probability of movement up? We think it is fair to answer affirmatively in light of Giddens's own analyses. At bottom, the impulse for expansion of space-time distancing comes from conflict and competition. In class societies (capitalism), the process is impelled mainly by conflicts over allocative resources—by economic competition among capitalist firms. In class-divided societies (pre-capitalist societies with class divisions) it is rooted in conflicts over authoritative resources, primarily in military and territorial competition. What drives distancing will therefore depend upon the kinds of resources that form the bases of social power. But because of the link between conflict, power, resources and distancing, there will be at least a weak impulse for increasing distancing throughout history. Again, this conclusion does not imply universal *progress*. Nor does it imply that all societies *will actually* increase space-time distancing along both resource dimensions. It is simply a claim that there is a universal, if weak, impulse towards increasing distancing, and thus a certain likelihood that increases will occur.

It appears, therefore, that what is novel in Giddens's account is not his rejection of the idea that historical change has an epochal directionality. It is the idea that the trajectory of history follows a dual logic, animated by the autonomous impulses of the expansion of space-time distancing with respect to allocative and authoritative resources. Stated in more conventional terms (which Giddens would probably disavow), social development is the result of autonomous dynamics rooted simultaneously in political and economic structures. While in specific historical cases one may be justified in saying that one or the other of these dynamic processes constitutes the central locus of impulses for social change, there is no general priority of one over the other. In this sense, Giddens is a dualist and Marxists are monists.³⁷ Rhetorical stances aside, therein lies the difference.

Contending Theories of Historical Trajectories

What we have, then, are two contending accounts of history's trajectory, not a contest between an evolutionary theory (Marxism) and an anti-

37. Our use of the term "monism" is intended only to contrast with "dualism". As should be obvious from what we have already said, we do not mean to suggest that, for Marxists, there is only one (relevant) kind of social cause or that Marxism is in any other way "reductionist", as is sometimes implied by defenders of the so-called monist view of history.

evolutionary theory (Giddens).³⁸ Neither theory is “evolutionary”, and both affirm a principle of directionality within historical trajectories rather than, as Giddens claims for his own theory, a random walk.

The debate over these alternatives is not methodological but substantive. On the one hand, Marxists attribute causal primacy to economic structures.³⁹ Giddens, on the other hand, insists that the developmental tendencies of political and economic structures are autonomous and that no general principles govern their interconnection. In different historically specific situations one or the other may be more important.⁴⁰

It is not an easy task to adjudicate between these claims. Once a simple base–superstructure model is abandoned, it is difficult for Marxists to argue systematically for the structural unity of economic and political relations. It is therefore tempting to conclude that, in so far as real disagreements remain, Giddens’s dualism is the more appropriate characterization. Many so-called “post-Marxist” theorists have succumbed to this temptation.⁴¹ However, we believe that it is well not to take the dualist route. There are several compelling reasons for maintaining the core insights of the materialist account of historical trajectories.

First, as remarked, Marxists share Giddens’s view that in pre-capitalist societies the appropriation of surplus labor (or products) relied on the use of extra-economic coercion (control over authoritative

38. To these, a third could be added, as elaborated in the work of Jürgen Habermas (see in particular, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1979): the claim that normative structures also have an autonomous logic of development producing a typology of societies based on their level of moral development (a kind of moral space–time distancing, where “meaning” can be seen as an action-relevant resource).

39. In Chapter 7 a number of senses of causal primacy, some legitimate, some not, are investigated systematically.

40. The view that social relations and practices structured around allocative and authoritative resources have no intrinsic connections is also implicated in the difference between Giddens’s concept of class and the concept adopted by most Marxists. The Marxist claim that the concept of class combines the relations of economic exploitation and authoritative domination within production is implicitly a rejection of the claim that these have genuinely autonomous logics of development; Giddens’s restriction of class to relations of domination with respect to allocative resources affirms his view that allocative and authoritative domination are autonomous and contingently related processes. The adjudication of these contending class concepts and the typologies of social forms to which they are linked, therefore, ultimately hinges on these different substantive claims about the process of transformation of economic and political (allocative and authoritative) aspects of social relations.

41. See, for example, Barry Hindess, Paul Q. Hirst, Anthony Cutler and Athar Hussain, *Marx’s Capital and Capitalism Today*, 2 vols (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978 and 1979), and Robin Hahnel and Michael Albert, *Unorthodox Marxism* (Boston: South End Press, 1980) and *Marxism and Socialist Theory* (Boston: South End Press, 1982).

resources). Thus it is not in dispute that the relationship between control over allocative and authoritative resources varies across social forms. Marxists, however, insist that the explanation for the primacy of authoritative resources in pre-capitalist societies—and for the primacy of allocative resources under capitalism—must be sought in the differences in the economic structures of these societies. Giddens provides no alternative explanation for this state of affairs, nor does he challenge the Marxist account. We consider the Marxist explanation sound. Thus we would conclude, with Marx, that the key to understanding changes in the relationship between allocative and authoritative resources lies in understanding the trajectory of development of economic structures. Political institutions may indeed enjoy considerable independence from economic structures. But the dynamics centered in property relations impose more fundamental limits on the overall process of social change than occurrences at the political (“superstructural”) level.

Second, the motivational assumptions underlying claims for the development of productive forces are more plausible than parallel claims supporting the autonomous development of authoritative resources. Throughout most of human history, there has been a general interest in increasing the productivity of labor in order to reduce toil—and also often to increase the surplus product. This interest underwrites the sustained, if often weak, impulse towards expansion of the forces of production. We find no reason to think that there is a similarly universal interest in the expansion of social control over authoritative resources. Indeed, as already noted, such expansion is pervasively contested. There is therefore a less sustained impulse for development of allocative resources. There no doubt is a net developmental tendency for “space–time distancing” with respect to authoritative resources. But this can be explained by the fact that the social actors supporting expansion have greater capacities (power) to accomplish their objectives. This greater capacity itself depends upon their control over allocative resources: the ability to pay troops and retainers, and to build the infrastructures of surveillance and communication. In other words, there is an asymmetry in the explanatory role of allocative and authoritative resources. The former provides a systematic basis for explaining developmental tendencies within epochal historical trajectories; the latter does not.

This conclusion is reinforced if we try to impute a rationale for expanding authoritative resources. The most obvious reason for seeking to expand along this dimension is precisely to enhance material well-being—by increasing consumption and/or reducing burdensome toil. Usually, the beneficiaries of increasing space–time distancing of authoritative resources are individuals in ruling classes who use their augmented political power to increase their material welfare, directly or

indirectly.⁴² Perhaps this is why the impulse to develop authoritative resources appears less universal than the impulse to develop productive forces directly. In any case, in so far as the motive for expanding authoritative resources derives from the motive for improving material welfare, the development of authoritative resources is subordinate to motivations structured by allocative resources.⁴³ This is precisely what a Marxist analysis entails.

It is one thing to argue for the relative plausibility of a materialist theory of historical trajectories over Giddens's dualist theory. It is quite another to produce a substantive and compelling reconstruction of historical materialism. While we cannot elaborate such a theory, in the next chapter we will outline some of the directions in which this reconstruction might proceed.

42. It is interesting in this regard that many of the earliest historical advances in surveillance that Giddens identifies were concerned with the tallying of tribute. See for example his discussion of the early forms of writing in Sumer, *A Contemporary Critique*, p. 95.

43. It is, of course, conceivable that people want power for power's sake, not because it increases their material well-being. A desire for power could then provide the motivational basis for an autonomous development of authoritative resources. We are skeptical of this motivation, however; and, in any case, would caution against multiplying transhistorical human interests beyond necessity.

Towards a Reconstructed Historical Materialism

In the face of orthodox historical materialism's evident implausibility, many Marxists have abandoned the Marxist theory of history altogether. Both the Primacy Thesis and the Base/Superstructure Thesis are now almost universally rejected. Yet, as we have noted, Marxists continue to endorse the underlying intuition that historical materialism articulates—that history has a determinate structure—and continue to use concepts that derive their theoretical status from historical materialism. In our view, these intuitions are sound. What they suggest is that, at this point in the history of Marxian theory, historical materialism should not be abandoned, but reconstructed.

Orthodox historical materialism attempts to provide an explanation for the overall trajectory of historical development by linking together two pairs of concepts: forces and relations of production, and economic bases and superstructures. The interactions and contradictions between forces and relations of production explain the trajectory of economic structures; the interactions and contradictions between economic structures and superstructures explain the trajectory of superstructures. Accordingly, reconstructions of historical materialism involve rethinking each of these pairs of connections.

The Primacy Thesis

Orthodox historical materialism provides an account of:

- (a) the necessary (material) conditions for change;
- (b) the direction of change;