MARXIST PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION STUDIES: MARXIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF SOME IMPORTANT ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to how Marx's ideas and subsequent Marxist-inspired scholarship have contributed to the analysis of the various forms of work organization. It summarizes Marx's basic philosophy, theory of history, and critique of political economy; it distinguishes more critical and more optimistic variants of Marxist theory; and it then shows how these ideas have been used in the analysis of key organizational forms, contrasting Marxist versus non-Marxist approaches and critical versus optimistic versions of Marxism.

Keywords: Marxism; dialectical materialism; historical materialism; organization form.

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INTRODUCTION

It is hardly obvious that Karl Marx, a philosopher, economist, and revolutionary activist who died a century and a quarter ago, should have much relevance to organization studies today. Surely, the skeptic says, too many important features of contemporary organizations postdate Marx. On closer inspection, however, it is clear that organizations today share many fundamental features with those Marx saw emerging in his time. In particular, we still live with a basically capitalist form of society and enterprise. Even so, the skeptic retorts, social science has surely advanced since Marx. Here too, the skeptic is off the mark: social sciences find continuous nourishment in their classics (Alexander, 1987), and Marx figures prominently among the classics that continue to inform both social science in general and organization studies in particular (Adler, 2009b; Marens, 2009).

Since Marx's time, the general matrix of Marxist theory has not remained fixed in doctrinaire rigidity: numerous variants of the basic theory have emerged (Anderson, 1979; Burawoy, 1990). This chapter's goal, however, is to highlight the most basic and enduring of Marx's insights, and to show how they have contributed to the analysis of the various forms of work organization.[1]

The following sections discuss, in turn, Marx's basic theory, Marxist contributions to our understanding of organization forms, and finally Marxism's critics. My survey is limited to English-language publications and focuses on organization studies construed rather narrowly, ignoring Marxist work in contiguous fields of research such as accounting (on Marxist-related work here, see, e.g., Bryer, 1999; Tinker, 1999) or marketing (Lee & Murray, 1995).

MARXISM: KEY IDEAS

Marx's ideas can be grouped under three headings: philosophy (''dialectical materialism''), history (''historical materialism''), and economics (''critique of political economy''). The following sections review them briefly in turn.

Dialectical Materialism

Reading Marx is sometimes exhilarating – his prose can be very compelling, especially as polemic, but contemporary readers can also find long passages excruciatingly opaque. This opacity is often the effect of Marx's commitment

to dialectics as form of reasoning and presentation. The dialectical form is disconcerting to the unfamiliar reader, but it is rewarding once its assumptions are understood (see Ollman, 2003 for a particularly clear exposition of Marxist dialectics).

Marx inherited and adapted the dialectical approach from Hegel. Hegel saw history as the progressive emergence of the Spirit (German: *Geist*), which can be understood either as the God's essence of the universe or as humanity's understanding of itself. The Spirit evolves as a function of the contradictions among the key ideas governing successive periods (*Zeitgeists*): a thesis provokes the emergence of an antithesis, and the conflict between them eventually yields a synthesis. This synthesis abolishes the thesis and antithesis, but also conserves what was valid about them.

The notion that the objective world embodies contradictions is rather foreign to the Anglo-American intellectual tradition: we often assume that contradictions obtain only between logical propositions, not between real things. However, this dialectical approach provides a fruitful heuristic device for characterizing the development of systems over time, especially social systems. Marx retained the "rational core" of Hegel's dialectics, but turned it on its head, arguing that it is contradictions in the real world of human interaction that explain the evolution of ideas rather than vice versa.

This mode of reasoning is visible right from the start of Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*. Here Marx argues that the "germ" of capitalism – the inner core whose unfolding contradictions explain capitalist development – is the "commodity." Marx uses this term to refer to any product or service produced for sale rather than for direct use. Commodities embody a *contradictory unity* of use-value and exchange-value. *Unity* because each pole of this contradiction *presupposes* the other: for the product to be created in the first place, the producer must believe it has exchange-value – power for the seller to command a determinate amount of money or goods in exchange; and to generate this exchange-value for the seller, the product must have use-value – usefulness to the purchaser. *Contradictory* unity because the two poles *oppose* each other: their disjointedness can put them in conflict with each other, and this in at least two ways. First, the producer anticipates the exchange-value of the product, but does not know until she reaches the market if this hope will be realized or if, on the contrary, the use-values that were consumed in producing the commodity will be wasted: pursuit of exchange-value can destroy use-value, for example, new houses that cannot be sold even at the builder's cost and automobiles that must be sold at a loss to move them off the lot. Second, when production is oriented to exchange-value, there are many socially important use-values that will remain unmet,

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for example, clean environment, health care for all, and food and shelter for the hungry. This real contradiction embedded in the commodity form shapes both the structure and the historical trajectory of capitalism in multiple ways, of which I will discuss a few below.

The notion of real contradiction has reappeared in mainstream organization studies as a kind of "paradox" (Lewis, 2000; Poole & van de Ven, 1989). The Marxian version locates the conflict that is at the heart of paradox in the real world, whereas many others use the notion of paradox to refer exclusively to theoretical conflicts created by inadequacies in our theories about the world. We should note in passing that among Marxists there is some debate as to whether the concept of real contradiction is of much use, or even preserves validity, in the study of the natural domain as compared to the social domain. Ollman (2003) offers a nuanced assessment, suggesting that the dialectical form of causality subsumes more "common sense" forms of causality as special cases, and that the dialectical form has proven powerful in analyzing social structures, most notably capitalism, but has proven less unhelpful in the natural sciences.

In his ontological commitments, Marx's dialectical materialism puts him in opposition both to "vulgar" materialism, which accords ideas no causal efficacy, and to "idealism," which sees the world as driven entirely by ideas or, in the extreme versions, as composed only of ideas. Marx's view is more consistent with "critical realism" as developed by Bhaskar (1975) and others (Brown, Fleetwood, & Roberts, 2002; Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004). Marx distinguishes between the knowledge that we have of the world and the knowledge-independent world around us. While all knowledge is provisional, the aim of science, including social science, is to discern the underlying forces that give shape to this latter, knowledge-independent world. These forces may not be immediately visible in the empirical world around us, but that fact does not negate their reality: invisible gravity explains the apple's visible fall from the tree; the real contradictions hidden within the commodity form contribute to the persistence of economic cycles and crises. Science should aim to offer an account of the mechanisms that generate the more visible, empirical manifestations of these underlying forces. Marx thus has a "stratified" ontology, in which scientific explanation follows a path that ascends from the abstract, deepest, less visible structures to the visible, concrete, empirically observed world. In this, Marx is radically opposed to empiricism, which sees science as limited to discerning patterns in the visible world. And he is no less radically opposed to strong forms of social constructivism common in the discursive universe of postmodernism, for which the very pursuit of objective knowledge is illusory if not worse.

Notwithstanding Marxism's rejection of strong social constructivism, dialectical materialism embraces the social nature of knowledge. Mainstream management scholars often contend that politics should not enter into processes of knowledge creation: they believe that value-neutral objectivity is the hallmark of proper scientific work and that advocacy would undermine that objectivity. Marx argues that there are no facts without theories: our access to the knowledge-independent world is always mediated by our existing concepts, and in a class-divided society, these mediating concepts are shaped (at least in part, and even if only unconsciously) by political value considerations. To adopt the standpoint of the dominant elite inevitably encourages the development of theories that legitimize and naturalize the status quo: such theories cannot penetrate deeply into the structures that give rise to this domination. The Marxist argument is that the view "from below" has greater potential to generate more complete and more objective knowledge – knowledge that raises consciousness about exploitation and helps movement toward emancipation. This idea has been taken up and generalized by feminist scholars: as Harding puts it, research should begin with the concrete circumstances and lived experiences of the "systematically oppressed, exploited and dominated, those who have fewer interests in ignorance about how the social order actually works" (1991, p. 150). In a social world of exploitation and domination, we can learn more about deep structures and that they can be changed by adopting the standpoints of the subaltern (see also Adler & Jermier, 2005; Harding, 2004; Wedel, Shore, Feldman, & Lathrop, 2005).

Historical Materialism

In *The German Ideology* (originally published in 1845), Marx and his lifelong collaborator Engels mark their distance from Hegel and the Young Hegelians. They advance three main ideas. First, human action is constrained and enabled by its historically specific conditions: generic transhistorical theorizing is therefore a poor foundation for social science. Second, the ideas we work with, including abstract theoretical ones, are conditioned by our own historical context. And finally, because people must produce in order to live, the sphere of production is primary relative to the sphere of thought and culture. While the last of these ideas, expressing Marx's materialism, is eternally unfashionable in intellectual circles, it does have counterparts in several streams of non-Marxist social science. The second idea is less common. And the first contrasts strikingly with most contemporary social science, where theory is considered more advanced precisely to the degree that it is based on ostensibly timeless

features of human nature, of dyadic interaction, or of larger collectivities. Marx begins with the opposite assumption because he sees human nature as largely socially determined and therefore relatively plastic.

The *Communist Manifesto* (originally 1848), the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), the *Grundrisse* (1857), and *Capital* (1867) further articulate Marx's historical materialism. (See Cohen (1978) for a particularly clear exposition of historical materialism.) If production is primary and if human production is by nature collective rather than individual, then the most basic structure of society is its "mode of production." (Concrete societies often embody residues of earlier modes alongside their dominant mode: for example, capitalism is dominant in India today, but coexists with feudalism.) Modes of production are defined by two sets of relations. "Forces of production" are humanity's relations with the natural world, composed of material "means of production" (equipment, technology, raw materials) and human productive capacities (skills, etc.). "Relations of production" define the distribution across social categories ("classes") of rights to ownership and control over these means of production. In the capitalist mode of production, for example, capitalists own the means of production and compete in product markets to sell their commodities, and workers own nothing but their labor power and compete in the labor market to earn a wage. On top of this "base" of forces and relations of production sits a "superstructure" of culture, religion, law, and government. This superstructure is the means by which the ruling class maintains its domination and attempts to moderate its internal conflicts. Marx's materialism leads him to see causality flowing mainly upward, from forces to relations of production, and from base to superstructure, but he acknowledges the importance too of downward causal paths, especially in shorter term and for more localized settings.

Marx is famous for the *Communist Manifesto*'s assertion that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle." There is little specifically Marxist about a perspective on history that highlights conflict and struggle: Marxism is distinctive in (a) privileging class conflict where much non-Marxist history devotes more attention to international and intraclass conflict among factions within the ruling class, (b) seeing this class conflict as taking different forms depending on the structure of the prevailing relations of production, and (c) seeing the direction and scope of this conflict as shaped by the real contradiction between the relations and forces of production.

The broad sweep of human history can be understood as the dialectical progression of successively more productive modes of production. In the European region, this progression was from primitive communism to

slavery, feudalism, and then capitalism. This progression is dialectical insofar as the emergence of a new structure is the result of the internal contradictions of the old. Class struggle between the exploiting and exploited classes is the *motor* of this progression; its overall *direction* is set by the vector of advancing forces of production. When the prevailing relations of production are no longer able to support the further advance of the forces of production, class conflict intensifies and the old class structure is eventually overthrown, allowing a new mode of production to emerge in which human productivity can develop further.

Capitalism is distinctive in this sequence of modes of production because its characteristic relations of production greatly intensify pressures to develop the forces of production. In comparison, all previous modes are far less technologically dynamic. This dynamism prompts Marx to predict as inevitable the emergence of a new form of society – communism – that would transcend the contradictions of capitalist society, preserving the positive historical achievements of capitalism (such as advanced technology and freeing the individual from the shackles of ascribed status), while abolishing private property in the means of production and freeing society from the anarchy of market-coordinated, profit-driven production.

Critique of Political Economy

Capitalism as a mode of production emerges from small-scale commodity production when labor too becomes a commodity. This happens through a process of violent dispossession that deprives workers of alternative ways to access consumption or production resources, and that thus forces workers to exchange their capacity to work for a wage as if this capacity too were a commodity produced for sale on a market. Capitalist relations of production are therefore defined by two more specific relations: a relation of competition among commodity-producing enterprises and the wage relation subordinating workers to managerial authority in the enterprises that employ them.

Marx's analysis of the capitalist economy takes the form of a "critique of political economy." Consistent with the philosophical premises discussed above, Marx argues that the economic base of capitalist society engenders a distinctive set of ideas about itself – a spontaneously generated ideology that he calls the "fetishism of commodities." This ideology imputes causal powers to commodities and to their money equivalents, when commodities and money are in reality mere manifestations of underlying human activity. To give an everyday example: we often say that "the market" obliges a firm

to cut production schedules and lay off workers. Marx argues that this locution makes a fetish of the market in the following sense: in capitalist society, we are alienated from each other; instead of collectively planning our production, we have put into place an anonymous mechanism – "the market" – which now constrains production and employment decisions; it is true that individual capitalists must submit to this mechanism, but behind the mechanism and explaining its apparent causal power lies the structure of capitalist relations of production. This fetishism is not merely a subjective illusion or error, but a (false) understanding of ourselves that is engendered by the social structure itself. A serious scientific account of the capitalist economy must penetrate below the level of surface appearance – where the market appears as a self-equilibrating and self-perpetuating mechanism – to reveal the historically contingent character of this capitalist social structure. It must therefore take the form of a critique of this spontaneous ideology. And this critique must encompass the more theoretically elaborated form of this ideology known in Marx's time as "political economy" and today as "economics." (See Foley (1986, 2006) for a particularly clear exposition of Marx's economic views.)

Marx builds on and critiques classical political economists such as Ricardo. He follows Ricardo in arguing that tastes, supply, and demand do not determine the price of a commodity (as argued current economic theory), but only influence its fluctuation around an objectively determined value. This value is determined by the socially necessary labor time invested in the product's production. Note that, contrary to a popular misconception, this "labor theory of value" is not a normative theory but an analytic one: Marx is not arguing that value *should* be based on labor input; on the contrary, he is adamant that use-values typically also require a host of nonlabor contributions; his theory aims to explain how exchange-value works as the principle governing capitalist exchange.

Marx develops his theory of the capitalist economy on the simplifying assumption that all products exchange at their values. (Marx goes on later to explain how prices also reflect different industries' capital intensities, and how innovation allows producers to derive temporary "super profits.") If all products exchange at their values, we are immediately confronted with a puzzle: where do profits come from?[2] This puzzle was the stumbling block for all prior theories of political economy, including Ricardo's. To understand profit, Marx argues, we need to find a commodity that somehow creates value even as it is being used up. This special commodity is labor power. Firms pay workers a wage in exchange for the use of their ability to work – their labor power. In principle if not always in practice, firms pay workers the

value of this service, which is determined, as is the cost of any commodity, by the socially necessary labor time required to produce it, which is expressed in the cost of the daily consumption required for workers and their families as well as in their expenses for training and education. The employment contract specifies that in exchange for this wage, workers will make available their labor services for a specified period. The gap between the value of labor power (the part of the working day necessary to cover the worker's wage, say four hours) and value produced by the expenditure of labor power (the product is sold on the market at a price that reflects the full eight hours work in the day – abstracting for now from the role of nonlabor costs) is a measure of exploitation. Given the level of productivity attained by the forces of production in the capitalist phase of historical evolution, it only takes a few hours in the working day for workers to produce the equivalent of their wages ("necessary labor time"), and employers can appropriate the value produced in the rest of the working day ("surplus labor" and thus "surplus value") with which to pay both the nonlabor inputs and investors' profit.

Note that Marx characterizes these relations of production as "exploitation" not because the worker does not receive the wages representing the full value of the day's labor: on the contrary, Marx celebrates the great progress in productivity that allows for the creation of surplus, just as he honors the need to reinvest that surplus. He sees this as exploitation because control over the surplus is in the hands of the capitalist, not the whole collectivity. And even if an individual capitalist were inclined to share control (indeed, even if the firm is run as a workers' cooperative), the implacable constraint of market competition on product, labor, and capital markets obliges the firm to pursue every avenue for maximizing surplus – without regard to workers' welfare – and to redirect this surplus to areas with greatest profit potential – without regard to social utility. In Marx's account, exploitation is not an exceptional state of affairs, a departure from the norms of competitive market relations, but on the contrary, a fundamental, defining feature of the capitalist form of production even in its more competitive forms.

The distinction between labor and labor power was, according to Marx, his great discovery. The resulting theory of the origin of capitalist profit is rather straightforward and intuitive. But to reach this insight, we need to penetrate the fetishism of commodities, and in particular to see the distinctive social relation hidden behind the commodity labor power: we need to recognize that in order for labor power to present itself as a commodity on a labor market, masses of people have been deprived of any alternative access to consumption or production goods, and have been forced to sell their creative powers in exchange for wage by subordinating

themselves to the alien authority of the capitalist. Alienation in Marx's theory – unlike most of the sociology that cites him – is thus not just a subjective state of mind, but first and foremost an objective feature of the social structure.

Marx identifies two generic strategies for increasing surplus value. First, firms can extend and intensify the working day and can force more members of each family into the labor force. This generates what Marx calls the "absolute" form of surplus value. Second, employers can respond to competitive pressures by technological and organizational innovations that reduce necessary labor time. This generates the "relative" form of surplus value.

When capitalism first establishes itself, firms usually leave the technology of production unchanged, and exploitation takes the form of increasing absolute surplus value. The resulting contrast in hours and intensity of work between traditional village life and early factory life has been documented in numerous scholarly and literary accounts (Thompson, 1963). This is what Marx (1977, appendix) calls the *formal subordination of labor to capital*: it is merely formal because the underlying labor process is as yet unchanged, still relying on traditional techniques. As capitalism consolidates, the negative social externalities of excessive working hours and child labor prompt political action by both workers and enlightened capitalists, resulting in new laws and regulations. These restrictions increase incentives for firms to accelerate technological innovation, and as a result, relative surplus value becomes progressively more important, and we see the emergence of the *real subordination* of labor to capital as the labor process itself is progressively reshaped by the introduction of new production techniques.

This shift represents the historical unfolding of the basic contradiction of the capitalist *production process*, a contradiction which itself reflects the contradiction between two poles of the commodity form. On the one hand, the production process is a *labor process*, in which use-values in the form of work skills and effort, tools, and materials are combined to create new use-values. On the other hand, and simultaneously, it is a *valorization process* in which these use-values appear in the form of exchange-values – monetary wages, inventory costs, and capital investment – that are combined to create money profit (see Bottomore, 1991, pp. 267–270; Marx, 1977, appendix; Thompson, 1989).

Marx summarizes the real contradiction between the labor process and the valorization process as follows:

> If capitalist direction [of work] is thus twofold in content, owing to the twofold nature of the process of production which has to be directed – on the one hand a social labor

> process for the creation of a product, and on the other hand capital's process of valorization – in form it is purely despotic. (1977, p. 450)

The more conventional reading of Marx interprets this passage to mean that the technical imperatives of the labor process are subsumed or displaced by the social imperatives of valorization. The dialectical reading recalls that in Marx's Hegelian discourse, content (here: the social labor process) and form (the valorization process) can be in a relation of real contradiction with each other. (The real contradiction between form and content, appearance and essence, is a common theme in Marx's work. Geras (1971) explains the pitfalls of interpreting socially contingent forms as the true substance as well as the pitfalls of the converse illusion of seeing forms as a mere illusion.) On the one hand, valorization pressures drive capitalists to upgrade the capabilities of the labor process by "socializing" the labor process, by integrating a widening spectrum of specialized skills into the "collective worker" – the community of more or less specialized workers as well as technical and managerial staff, cooperating to produce use-values. But, on the other hand, these same valorization pressures simultaneously drive capitalists to intensify their exploitation of employees in order to expand the capital invested in their firm, and this pressure breaks the collaborative fabric required for the effective functioning of the collective worker. The contradictions of capitalism do not disappear with the shift from absolute to relative surplus value and from formal to real subordination – they deepen as socialization progresses.

Marx's analysis was not limited to the production process. Marx was one of the precursors of national accounting in his study of the distribution of economic activity between producer goods and consumer goods industries, and between sectors that produce new value and those that merely redistribute a fraction of that already created value (personal services, financial services, advertising and sales, real estate). He argued that competition between capitalists tends over the long period toward oligopoly. In his more mature writing, he argued that workers' real wages would probably rise over the longer term. He argued that cyclical crises are an inevitable feature of capitalist development, periodically throwing masses of workers into misery and destroying productive capacities. He saw environmental crises too as inevitable in such a system. He argued that imperatives of the capital accumulation process would drive the capitalist system to expand imperialistically, becoming increasingly global and creating interimperialist rivalries, wars, and massive social disruption, but also driving important positive changes for the working populations of the dominated countries as they are drawn out of precapitalist forms of

despotism. He showed that capitalist development requires and stimulates the emergence of increasingly sophisticated credit and financial markets – and thereby multiplies opportunities for fraud (on the contemporary relevance of Marx's analysis of finance, see Marens, 2009).

Marx predicted – accurately – that as capitalism develops, government would play an increasingly important role in both directly assuring key services such as education and infrastructure and regulating the private sector. He was, however, skeptical that any degree of formal political democracy could change the fact that in a class-divided society, government, like the rest of the superstructure, reflects and reinforces the power asymmetry that defines the basic relations of production.

THE SCOPE OF MARXIST THEORY

By comparison with other social theories, Marxism has several attractive features. First, it offers a broad historical perspective. For those anxious to understand how a better world might be possible, it is important to understand the historical specificity of capitalism and its distinctive forms of organization so as to highlight the implausibility of the notion (as advanced by, e.g., Fukuyama, 1992) that capitalism could be the "end of history."

Second, Marxist theory offers depth in its analysis of social life. It reveals the role of the social relations at the heart of the economic process. It has a rich conception of power that includes the possibility of "false consciousness" (Lukes, 2005): this concept may be slippery, but no serious discussion of power can ignore the corresponding reality. It has a rich theory of psychology (Cole, 1996; Sève, 1978).

Third, Marxist theory does not deny the importance of the sphere of ideas and culture, but renders changes in this sphere more intelligible by highlighting their connections to changes in the material base of society. No critical point of view on society can be insensitive to the power of material interests in shaping discourse (as argued by, e.g., Eagleton, 1991).

Finally, for scholars in organization studies, Marxist theory has the considerable advantage of embedding the analysis of organizations in a theory of the broader structures of society. It thus draws our attention, for example, to the possibility that the promising advances at the "leading edge" of capitalist development may coexist with – or even presuppose – the superexploitation of those at the lagging edge (e.g., Thompson, 2003).

Nevertheless, Marxist approaches to organization studies face major hurdles. One hurdle stands out as particularly difficult: Marxists' difficulty

in acknowledging real progress under capitalism. Marxist scholarship is partisan: it is constantly seeking to highlight the problems of capitalism and to show why these problems cannot be satisfactorily resolved without fundamental change in social structure. This partisanship tends to blind Marxists to the progressive effects of capitalist development.

Marx himself was eloquent on these progressive effects. Capitalism accelerates productivity growth, which tend to bring higher material standards of living to working people and not only to the ruling class. It accelerates technological changes that facilitate travel and communication: these technologies bring people closer in their social lives and facilitate their struggles for emancipation. The imperialist expansion of capitalism pulls masses of people out of precapitalist exploitation into capitalist exploitation: for a young person drawn out of feudalistic exploitation in rural Pakistan into a factory, even a sweatshop, in Islamabad, that represents a considerable expansion of freedom. This imperialist expansion breaks down narrow regional, ethnic, and national boundaries, and as a result people around the globe come to recognize more of their common humanity. As women are drawn into the wage-earning workforce, they are progressively pulled out of the bonds of patriarchal family dependence: this trend is encouraged by the commodification of functions such a food production and by the direct socialization of other functions such as health care and child education. As capitalist industry becomes more automated, it needs more educated workers, and as a result, average education levels rise, and with this rise, workers develop a broader understanding of the world and they master tools for changing that world.

Most of these progressive effects are due to what I referred to above as the socialization of production. This socialization makes capitalist relations of production increasingly obsolete and precarious: obsolete because productivity advances are increasingly a function of collaboration rather than competition and exploitation, and precarious because working people become increasingly better equipped to take over the leading role in society from individual capitalists and from the blind mechanism of the market. This analysis motivates Marx's optimism that the passage from capitalism to a superior mode of production is inevitable, even if this passage proves to be a long time coming and even if the path to the emergence of this new mode of production is arduous.

This socialization tendency is in a relation of real contradiction with the valorization imperative that characterizes capitalist production. Valorization both stimulates and retards socialization. Focusing on the latter, retarding effect, many Marxists argue – with considerable merit – that the positive

effects of capitalist development are often chimerical. Where these positive effects have more substance and durability, Marxists often ignore them, asserting – accurately enough – that they already receive far too much attention from capitalism's apologists. Where they pay attention to these positive effects, Marxists often denounce their unevenness – which is indeed scandalous – without acknowledging that the aggregate effects are progressive.

The credibility of Marxist theory, the plausibility of Marx's optimism, and the effectiveness of Marxist partisanship are impaired unless Marxism can account for capitalism's positive effects, and unless it can show that these positive effects do not undermine the central Marxist thesis that capitalism's basic contradictions cannot be remedied without replacing capitalism with a superior form of society. The challenge for Marxist social theory is therefore to "walk on both legs" – the optimistic leg reflecting socialization's progress and the critical leg reflecting the enduring limits posed to socialization by valorization constraints. The concept of real contradiction helps Marxists meet this challenge – to acknowledge capitalism's progressive effects while maintaining and continually renewing Marxism's critical side. However, in the history of Marxism, there is an enduring tension between those who emphasize its critical side and those who emphasize its optimistic side.

MARXIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOME ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

This section reviews contributions by Marxists to the analysis of some key organizational forms. Space limitations preclude a comprehensive or detailed review, but within each subsection I identify the main arguments and distinguishing features of Marxist versus non-Marxist approaches and of critical versus optimistic versions of Marxism.

The Historical Imperative

Marxist theory encourages organizational studies to put contemporary organizational forms into historical context. As discussed above, Marx analyzed the transition in forms of organization from handicraft to manufacture to large-scale industry and toward automation, and underlying this transition, Marx identified the shift from absolute to relative surplus value. His analyses of these various configurations have proven inspirational to many scholars in analyzing the evolution of forms of organization.

More recent Marxist-inspired work in organization studies has built on this foundation, focusing on mutations in the nature of management control. Edwards (1979a) summarizes the main trajectory in the United States as a path from simple control, to technical control, to bureaucratic control. In Edwards' account, simple and technical control correspond, respectively, to Marx's absolute and relative surplus value, and the bureaucratic form is a more elaborate regime of relative surplus value that emerges in response to challenges to the legitimacy of technical control by dividing workers against each other and adding a normative layer. Others (e.g., Barker, 1993; Simpson, 1985) argue that bureaucratic control is increasingly being replaced by more internalized forms of control.

Edwards and most other critical Marxists present this sequence as one that consolidates ever-greater management control. In a more optimistic Marxist vein, Hirschhorn (1984) and Adler (2001) argue that over the last century or so, evolving forms of management control have become progressively more socialized, encompassing a progressively broader range of human capacities and of business activities. Building on Barley and Kunda's (1992) study of management journals that revealed alternating periods of focus on normative and rational controls, Adler (2003) argues that normative controls in the form of "industrial betterment" that began emerging in the 1880s relied on relatively primitive psychological mechanisms compared to the sophistication and subtlety of the personal and interpersonal processes invoked by the "human relations" approaches that emerged in the 1920s, and even more so compared to the "organization culture" approaches that emerged in the 1980s. Rational controls in the form of Taylor's scientific management that emerged in the first decade of the 20th century focused on individual workstations and their interrelations, and since then rational controls have progressively enlarged the sphere of activities under conscious control (rather than ex post market coordination) to encompass entire, complex, internally differentiated organizations under the doctrine of "systems rationalization," and then beyond the firm to suppliers and customers in the more recent period of outsourcing and business process reengineering.

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy plays a key role in this historical trajectory, and any discussion of bureaucracy must contend with Weber's (1978) classic account. Mainstream sociology interprets Weber's analysis of bureaucracy in two main ways. More conservative theorists read Weber as celebrating the efficiency

of this form of organization. More critically oriented theorists highlight Weber's discussion of bureaucracy as a form of domination legitimated by appeals to instrumental efficiency: they critique Parsons' translation and interpretation of Weber on bureaucracy, arguing that *Herrschaft* should be understood as domination, not leadership or authority (Weiss, 1983). Recent organization theory has highlighted the noneconomic factors that encourage the diffusion of bureaucracy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983); this has become part of a broad culturalist turn of neoinstitutionalism.

Relative to these approaches, the Marxist tradition has been more alert to the specific role of bureaucracy in capitalist production. In Wright's (1974) AU :2 critical Marxist account, bureaucracy is prevalent not because of its efficiency but because it is effective as a form of domination appropriate to exploitative capitalist production relations (see also Clawson, 1980; Edwards, 1979b; Marglin, 1974). In the optimistic Marxist account, bureaucracy has a dual nature: as part of the forces of production, it is a powerful social organizing technology that enables the effective functioning of the collective worker; as part of the relations of production, it is a coercive mechanism of exploitation; since bureaucracy embodies this real contradiction, the experience of bureaucracy is typically ambivalent (Adler, 2006).

The growing complexity and size of firms along with their progressive bureaucratization has meant considerable growth in the number of managers. On the Marxist account, managers play a contradictory role: on the one hand, they are agents of capitalist exploitation, and on the other, they are coordinators of a complex division of labor and part of the collective worker. Depending on their position in the hierarchy, one or other aspect will be more important; but Marxist theory highlights the extent to which all managers are agents of valorization. On the critical Marxist account, the growth of the management category represents a tendency to ever-more comprehensive management control over workers (Gordon, 1996). Optimistic Marxists suggest that we should also consider the socialization implied by this growth in coordinating capability. Van der Pijl (2004) draws an optimistic Marxist portrait of the senior managers in the private and public sectors of global capitalism, and the dual pressures they are under, as agents of both socialization and exploitation.

A key issue in the study of bureaucratic forms has been the role of bureaucracy under socialism. Weber was pessimistic concerning the emancipatory potential of socialism, fearing it would necessarily rely on bureaucracy to an even greater extent than capitalism does, and that socialism would therefore engender even greater alienation. According to Lenin, the organization of socialist production would require bureaucratically structured

administration, not only because a suitably redesigned bureaucratic form would support democratic administration, but also because in the preliminary, socialist phase of the transition to full communism, class struggle would continue, and bureaucratic structuring would allow the socialist regime to control its enemies and avoid production sabotage. To make this instrument more suited to new, revolutionary ends, Lenin, like Marx, took inspiration from the Paris Commune of 1871, and recommended that the tasks of government and bureaucratic administration be simplified so that they can be performed by every literate person rather than only by specialized functionaries, that officials be elected and recallable, and that they be paid wages comparable to other workers. Hearn (1978) argues that Maoist cultural revolution sought to create a form of bureaucracy that avoided the risks of technocratic domination by a combination of "politics in command" and the "mass line" – a set of processes that empowered lower-level functionaries and the citizenry at large ("the masses") in their relations with the bureaucracy. More recently, a new round of reflection on these issues has been stimulated by a series of volumes edited by Wright as the "real utopias project" (http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/RealUtopias.htm). This project has some strong Marxist roots and addresses in a far more nuanced way the role of bureaucracy in a superior form of social organization.

Taylorism and Scientific Management

A vast literature has grown up around the history of scientific management, its effects in specific organizations and its diffusion within US manufacturing (Nelson, 1980, 1992), its transfer overseas (Guillen, 1994), and its use in the public sector (Schachter, 1989). Taylorism is often vilified in mainstream organization studies for its dehumanizing effects. The Marxist approach has seen Taylorism as more than a (possibly ill-conceived) management technique: Braverman (1974) argues that Frederick Taylo's scientific management provides the template for capitalists' exploitation of labor; it is management's program of real subordination made explicit.

If, in the critical Marxist analysis, Taylorism is an offensive against workers, the optimistic Marxist view starts with empirical observations such as those by Nelson (1980) and Kelly (1982), who show that Taylor's scientific management brought improvements in pay and conditions for many workers. Jacoby (1985) documents the rapprochement between the scientific management movement and the labor movement after World War I. Nyland (1998) discusses the strong leftist leanings of many of the key

figures in the movement. Adler (1995) thus argues that scientific management represents a step toward greater socialization, since it created tools for designing work processes – tools that are neither the privately held tacit know-how of craft workers nor assertions of arbitrary power by foremen, but engineering models subject to verification and challenge by workers.

Lean Production

Lean production has given rise to a sizable literature, some of it Marxist in inspiration (Babson, 1995a, 1995b; Elger & Smith, 1994, 2005; Smith, 2000). Much Marxist analysis has focused on lean production's intensification of work effort, through eliminating unproductive pores in the work-day and further rationalizing workers' movements. It is seen as an extension of Taylor's scientific management. Quality circles are often a part of the lean production model, and these have been subjected to Marxist critique as manipulative efforts (Grenier, 1988).

Optimistic Marxists add that lean production makes some important steps toward socialization. Teamwork has been systematized, as have relations between teams (Delbridge, Lowe, & Oliver, 2000). Lean production brings under planful control upstream (supplier) and downstream (customer) relations. Workers typically get more training in the logic of the production system and in systematic improvement techniques (Adler, 2007; Kenney & Florida, 1993). Lean production, in this perspective, is a nice illustration of how contradictions deepen with capitalism's advance, in particular the contradiction involved in the firm's need for workers who are simultaneously dependable and disposable (Hyman, 1987).

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management has recently become a popular theme in management literature. Marxist scholars have insisted that in reality very few knowledge workers can produce anything of economic value without access to means of production controlled by others, that only few occupations allow employees to use much of their knowledge, and that relatively few organizations invest substantially in employee learning. For the main part, contemporary management is a direct descendant of scientific management in its effort to ensure that the key repositories of knowledge come under greater management control, even at the cost of productive efficiency. Some

proponents of knowledge management decry this shortsightedness (Brown & Duguid, 1991, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 1998), but few organizations appear willing to endow the collective worker with enough self-direction to develop comprehensive working knowledge (Jaros, 2004; Prichard, Hull, Chumer, & Willmott, 2000).

Optimistic Marxists are more enthusiastic about even modest steps by management toward recognizing the power of knowledge. They see the real, albeit modest, growth in knowledge intensity of jobs as the embodiment of Marx's prognosis of an increasingly "social individual" (Adler, 2001). In this, the optimistic strand builds on the assumption that all work, even the most routine, involves at least some knowledge: this may be tacit (Kusterer, 1978), but it is often collective (Spender, 1996). Lave and Wenger's work on the concept of "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) has helped bring Marxist ideas to a wider audience, most notably the community of practice as the collective worker, and practice itself as the primary locus of knowledge.

Professions and Professional Firms

There is considerable debate in both sociology and organization studies over whether the professions are destined to strengthen or weaken as capitalism advances. The stakes for the credibility of Marxist theory are high: Marx argued that the traditional middle class of small business would be destroyed by capitalist development, but acknowledged that new middle-class positions were constantly being formed as capitalist development created the need for more technical and management experts. If this latter trend were to predominate, and if these new categories formed a distinct new middle class, and if this new class developed interests distinct from and opposed to the working-class's interests, then Marx's basic argument about the future of capitalism would be seriously challenged (Boreham, 1983; Carchedi, 1977; Derber, 1983; Derber, Schwartz, & Magrass, 1990b; Johnson, 1977; Larson, 1980; Meiskins & Smith, 1996; Walker, 1979; Whalley, 1986; Wright, Costello, Hachen, & Sprague, 1982).

The growth of such a new class has been predicted by many observers. Bell (1973), for example, argued that professions will gradually supersede corporations as the dominant organizing principle in society. Against this professionalization thesis, other observers point out that professionals themselves have been dragged under the capitalist juggernaut. Some, such as Haug (1973) and Rothman (1984), see a process of *deprofessionalization* due

to increasing market rivalry between professions, the diffusion of expertise, and rising levels of public education and skepticism toward experts. Others (e.g., Derber, Schwartz, & Magrass, 1990a; McKinlay & Stoeckle, 1988) argue a more explicitly Marxist *proletarianization* position that highlights professionals' progressive subordination to hierarchical and market rationality. Yet others follow Freidson's diagnosis (1984) that there is little empirical support for the idea that professionalism's distinctive features have eroded, but there is much evidence that regulation within professions has become more rationalized and formalized.

Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher (2008) argue that capitalist development does indeed challenge the professions: the traditional "liberal" independent professional and their small-scale partnerships are being replaced by more hierarchically organized large-scale organizations. However, in an optimistic Marxist register, they also argue that professional work still requires a strong professional community – the effective production of these complex use-values requires a robust collective worker – and that the nature of this professional community is evolving toward a new, more advanced form that Marx might celebrate as prefiguring communism's "free association of producers."

Contingent Work

Marxist theory offers some useful lenses for studying the proliferation of "nonstandard" employment arrangements – part-time, interim, and contract work, the growing instability of regular employment, and the trend toward outsourcing (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000; Osterman, 2000; Rogers, 1995; Smith, 1998, 2001). Empirical analysis reveals that contingent work has different effects and meanings for different workers: for some, it amounts to semi-unemployment, and for others, it is a well-established niche in specialized labor market (Barley & Kunda, 2004).

Critical Marxists have shown how these new forms of work fragment existing collectivities. They undermine – often deliberately – the modest countervailing powers that some workers have managed to establish; they are particularly effective against unions. The loss of permanent status inflicts economic and psychological costs. From the optimistic Marxist point of view, contingent work appears to be in some cases a reflection of the deepening social division of labor, as activities are aggregated to form into new industries (e.g., engineering, food, or janitorial services). While economic insecurity is often a source of real anxiety and suffering, in some cases, the

ability to exercise choice in assignments is experienced as real freedom. This kind of flexibility has some positive progressive content, even if it takes an exploitative form.

Network Organization

Marxists have, since Marx, predicted growing concentration and centralization in industry, and therefore a tendency toward the domination of industries by large, bureaucratized oligopolistic firms (Baran & Sweezy, 1966). In this, they have been joined by writers from other, non-Marxist starting points, such as Galbraith (1967) and Schumpeter (1942). The rise of the "network" form – linking smaller, more focused firms in highly adaptable customer–supplier relationships – therefore represents a challenge to conventional thinking. Looking within organizations too, many observers argue that stable bureaucratic structures are giving way to flexible internal networks.

Marxists have responded to this challenge in two main ways. Critical Marxists have focused on the power asymmetries prevalent in these networks, arguing that in practice these networks are neither idealized markets of voluntary exchange between equals nor warm solidaristic relationships between peers, but instead structures of domination (Fields, 2004; Harrison, 1997). Optimistic Marxists have argued that these networks, insofar as their distinctive mechanism is trust rather than competition or authority, represent a genuine, if partial, socialization of capitalist relations of production (Adler, 2001). Engeström (2008) uses Marxist "cultural–historical activity theory" to explore the "knotworking" involved in continuously negotiating the cross-organization collaborations that mark the network form.

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Families and Households

The family is also an organizational form undergoing considerable change. The rise of single-parent households and the increasing involvement of women in the wage-earning workforce have deeply transformed the family. Calás and Smircich (2006) outline a broad spectrum of feminist approaches to organization studies. Their discussion of "socialist feminism" summarizes some of the key debates and insights associated with the Marxist tradition

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within feminism. (The earlier literature is reviewed by Thompson (1989), Hartmann (1981), and Vogel (2008).)

A key contribution of feminist work to the Marxist project has been to challenge simplistic accounts of the relation between the realms of production and those of reproduction. Feminists have argued that the production process presupposes a reproduction process, that women and men play different roles in these two processes, and that these differences are interrelated. This interrelation is important for understanding not only the structures of family and nonwork life but also the role of gender within production relations (Acker, 2000; Acker & Van Houten, 1974; Cockburn, 1991; Game & Pringle, 1984; Kanter, 1977; Reskin & Ross, 1992; Smith, 2002; Wajcman, 1998). Within this broad field, feminist work has had a particularly fruitful dialogue with Marxism in the study of technology and the organization of both wage work and domestic work (Wajcman, 2004).

And Many More …

To the various organizational forms reviewed briefly in the above sections, numerous others could be added that space limitations preclude me from discussing: multidivisional, multinational, and conglomerate types of corporations; unions (craft, industrial, associational, partnerships with management); government agencies; political parties (electoral, network form); military organizations; volunteer organizations; open-source software communities; churches; mission-based organizations; cooperatives; feudal organizations; slavery-based organizations; prisons; etc. In most of these, Marxist ideas have had some impact, and in some areas, substantial.

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MARXISM'S CRITICS

Criticisms of Marxism come in many variants. Some criticisms are hastily dismissive. Buss (1993), for example, assumes that Marxist theory stands or falls by the record of the former socialist countries, and asserts that so many other theorists have decided it is wrong that it must be wrong. Donaldson (1985) is surely correct that much of what passes for Marxist organization studies is indistinguishable from left Weberianism, but he is surely wrong when he asserts that because Marxism is mainly concerned with broader social structures and history, it can have nothing to say about the specific issues at the organization level.

The more substantive criticisms attack on a variety of fronts. An important current of criticism argues against Marxist theory's focus on class as a collective actor in history, and in favor of methodological individualism. There is no denying the attraction of deriving generalizable results from parsimonious assumptions about individuals. Recent years have even seen the emergence (then disappearance) of a small school of rational choice Marxists. Two problems arise for methodological individualism. First, in order to make the mathematics of aggregation work, these assumptions about human nature must be extremely simplistic and unrealistic. Second, there is no good theoretical reason to privilege the microlevel over the aggregate levels because causality goes both up from the individual and down from the collectivity: evolutionary biologists have made a strong case for the survival advantages of solidaristic altruism.

Marx's materialism is a common point of attack. Many scholars want to accord ideas and culture primacy. Adler and Borys (1993) argue that this is a debate that can be usefully joined, since the Marxist argument for materialism concerns primarily the longer-term and larger-scale transformations. On the Marxist view, local and short-term phenomena may well be primarily caused by "superstructural" factors, even as these factors are shaped by material ones over the broader spaces and the longer term. Discourse thus plays an important role in social change, but it is itself materially conditioned (see also Cloud, 1994, 2001).

Marxism is often criticized as a deterministic theory. The criticism is hard to evaluate, since Marx offers no specific time frame for any predictions (Desai, 2002). Moreover, Marx's predictions themselves are rather soft: they are formulated as trends, and are usually stated along with counteracting forces. At root, this criticism seems to be directed against any theory that prioritizes structure over agency as an explanatory principle. Against this criticism, Marxists respond simply that people make history, but not under conditions of their own choosing; that those conditions limit the options open and resources available for action; and that as a result, although agency may be a powerful explanatory axis for local outcomes of small groups, it simply cannot provide an explanation for broad historical trends.

More specifically, Marxism is often attacked for its technological determinism. Critical Marxists shy well clear of technological determinism, focusing on the role of class interests in shaping technology's trajectory (Noble, 1984). Optimistic Marxists by contrast embrace a form of technological determinism (Adler, 1989): they allow that capitalist relations of production accelerate the rate of technological change and that they encourage some directions of technology development at the expense of

others, but they argue that there is a transhistorical, "anthropological" imperative driving the development of technologies that improve the productivity of labor, and that no ruling class has a durable interest in fostering the sustained regression of productivity. They argue that the natural world powerfully constrains the vectors of technological innovation that can satisfy this imperative, and they thus reject the "strong social constructionist" thesis that would explain technology's overall direction of development by reference to social structures alone.

Many feminists, students of race and ethnicity, and other sociologists who study organizations more empirically find that at this level of analysis identities and projects are more powerful than class structure in explaining change. They are surely correct to criticize doctrinaire Marxists who refuse to accord nonclass dimensions of structure any relevance, but this leaves entirely open the question of the relative importance of these nonclass factors in determining the broader, longer-term sweep of history.

Some critics engage this latter debate and argue that social class as Marx analyzed it has receded in importance as a dimension of social structure. These critics argue that the emergence of the "new social movements" reflects a deep transformation of capitalism. Clearly we need good theories of social movements, and clearly Marxism offers only a modestly useful starting point for such theory. However, it is not clear that these social movements will assume ever-greater importance relative to the class dimensions of social identification and social conflict. Major surges in worker militancy, whether in the 1930s or 1960s, were preceded by predictions quite as confident as those we have heard in recent years that class conflict had permanently disappeared.

Ritzer and Schubert (1991) argue that there has been a progressive divorce of various post-Marxisms from Marxist thought. The Nietzschean mood has set many scholars to a deep skepticism concerning any "laws of history" such as Marx advances, and Nietzschean poststructuralism has joined forces with a wide range of mainstream theories to assert a greater role for contingency and path dependence in history. This debate is hard to join: it is difficult to see how dialogue can bridge such different theoretical tastes. On the other hand however, this divorce may be a generational phenomenon: the first generation of post-Marxists sought to define their distinctiveness by attacking Marxism, while scholars today appear more eager to find some common ground, whether it be between Marxism and postcolonialism (e.g., Frenkel & Shenhav, 2003, 2006; Prasad, 2003), Foucault and Frankfurt School critical theory (Willmott, 2003), and Foucault and Marxist labor process ideas (e.g., Sewell, 1998).

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The relevance of Marx for organization studies appears to wax and wane in inverse proportion to the apparent durability of the capitalist order. With rise of worker militancy in the advanced capitalist world and the surge of national liberation movements in the Third World in the 1960s, a generation of scholars emerged for whom Marx's ideas constituted the basic intellectual matrix. With the waning of the workers' and national liberation movements since the 1970s and the demise of the socialist bloc since the 1990s, Marxism lost much of its appeal for scholars in organization studies as in other fields. More recently, as the capitalist order came under threat from new waves of worker mobilization and from financial crises originating in the United States and the United Kingdom, Marx reappears on the agenda. The future of Marxist organization studies appears bright.

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NOTES

1. This chapter is complementary to Adler (2009a). It shares a similar overall structure, but focuses on philosophy and forms of organization rather than on topics in organization theory.

2. Current economic theory assumes that tastes, supply, and demand determine price; that at equilibrium all "factors of production" are paid a price reflecting their marginal productivity; that this is true too of capital; and that profit is therefore determined by the marginal productivity of capital. While this understanding of profit sounds plausible at a microeconomic level, it has proven to be entirely wrongheaded at the aggregate, macroeconomic level – indeed, it is a nice example of fetishism. A famous debate in the 1960s between Marxist-inspired economists at Cambridge, UK, led by Joan Robinson, and mainstream economists in Cambridge, MA, led by Paul Samuelson, ended in the victory of the former, acknowledged by the latter, in arguing that the profit rate could not be derived from any such supply and demand process, but was itself a function of the aggregate rate of exploitation. Graduate economics education today simply ignores the whole issue, and proceeds oblivious to the resulting incoherence of the neoclassical synthesis (Cohen & Harcourt, 2003).

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