

## THE DOCTRINE OF HISTORICAL INEVITABILITY

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### ABSTRACT:

In post-feudal period, man began to realise that society develops and progresses from one state to another though ancient Greeks, for example Heraclitus had formulated the ontology of dialectics. But what is the driving force of history? Is it man made or supernatural? Or is it understood to be something which develops on its own with its inner principle like e.g., nature develops? This haunted the human mind, and even after so many theories there are ambivalent claims about the forces behind the history of mankind. This is what our field of inquiry is in this chapter, in which we shall discuss some of the basic interpretations of history and arrive at some basic understanding of the nature of history.

Through this research work I will investigate the issues within the Marxian domain of enquiry and I shall mention some of the basic propositions of Marx's interpretation of history, the most prominent interpreter of history.

### INTRODUCTION:

In the writings of young Marx, history is understood as an 'alienation' in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and history as 'activity' in *The Holy Family*. For Marx, alienation was indicative of those characteristics and those social relations under which men's life and activity appeared to be dominated by a force, which is alien and hostile to people. Marx mentioned that progressive ideas alone can lead society beyond the ideas of the old system, and that "in order to carry out ideas men are needed who can exert practical force."<sup>1</sup> Here it means that it is men understood in the context of their activity that makes the history. But it seems as if Marx was later to proceed towards what is called a "historical materialism". For Marx transformed Hegel's "Philosophy of History" into what he termed as "Materialist conception of History".

The arguments of the material conception of history are found in the 'Introduction' to *The Critique of Political Economy*, where he presented (fifteen) propositions which constitute the basic assumptions.

The first proposition states:

*"In the course of social economic production men enter into certain relations, and certain conditions are formed by them, of necessity and independently of their will. These conditions of production correspond to certain stage of development of the material forces of production'."*

Marx, here means that there is a certain compulsion in the conditions of production and that men are driven by necessity to create them. The manufacturer cannot help producing, rationalizing, forming trust; agriculture is, in a given period of production necessarily extensive and intensive. Here workmen and capitalists are compelled to make certain agreements. Men's will, it seems has no great influence on history.

Another proposition observes:

*"It is not men's consciousness that determines the forms of existence, but, on the contrary, the social forms of life that determines the consciousness."*

It seems to me, Marx's intention is to show that, economic conditions do not depend on what individual likes or dislikes. However, there is an important role played by the individual bycollectively interacting and carrying out economic conditions of life, which ultimately form their consciousness.

In proposition two Marx goes on to say:

*"Conditions of production taken as a whole constitute the economic structure of the society - this is the material basis on which a superstructure of laws and political institutions is raised and to which certain forms of political consciousness corresponds."*

By 'The Superstructure of Laws and Political Institutions' Marx means that the superstructure comprises constitutions, laws and jurisdiction administration, political superstructure as well as the political life of a given society. The words, 'forms of consciousness' comprise religion, morals, arts, science, property, opinions that is whole intellectual life of a given epoch.

The third proposition deliberates on political and intellectual life and the mode of production. It says:

*"The political and intellectual life of a society is determined by the mode of production as necessitated by the wants of material life."*

Marx has distinguished between Asiatic, Antique, feudal and Modern Capitalist forms of production, as being the progressive economic forms of society.

For Marx :

*"These social systems represent therefore the closing period of the prehistoric era of human society."*

These are the broad outlines of Marx's material conception of history, i.e. the notion of a historical materialism, or what shall henceforth be understood as a scientific, deterministic conception.

The notion that the history is determined by laws, whether natural or supernatural, that every event of human life is an element in a necessary pattern, has a deep metaphysical origin. These theories have a deep rooted belief in an inexorable necessity - an inevitability or unavailability - about what happens. An assertion is made to the effect that what is fated will occur no matter what we do to try to prevent it. The central concept in these theories is that of an agency external to the historical process itself. Somewhat in the way a human agent may be said to determine through his will, what happens in a process is monitored and manipulated by an agent. It is generally assumed, however, that the means by which fated events are brought about lie outside the mechanism of ordinary causal connection and are therefore described as "transcendent".

These views generally give birth to fatalism, according to which all processes in the world were initially pre-determined and ruled by necessity to the exclusion of freedom and creative endeavour. This theory of fatalism was interpreted by many philosophers in various ways. The Stoics thought that the inexorable 'Fate' governs the universe and that after periodically recurring world conflagrations everything is repeated over again.

Any attempt to make fate or providence immanent in the ordinary process of history is a move toward a second major conception of the necessity of historical events. In this conception, over-all direction, whether to be attributed to an active but impersonal "force", a nisus towards some ultimate goal, or a 'dynamic' law of development. According to Hegel,

the spiral proceeds dialectically toward the actualisation of a human freedom, each regress contributing to an ultimate spiritual synthesis and that the stages of freedom succeed each other only with 'rational' necessity.

One of the common versions in the fatalistic theories is that, men and all living creatures and perhaps intimate things as well, not merely are as they are, but have functions and pursue purposes. These purposes are either imposed upon them by a creator, who has made every person and thing to serve a specific goal; or else these purposes are not indeed imposed by a creator but are, as it were, internal to their possessors. so that every entity has a nature and pursue a specific goal which is natural to it and the measure of its perfection consists in the degree to which it fulfils it.

In another form, determinism first appeared in an ancient philosophy and was most clearly postulated by antique atomism. The conception of determinism was substantiated and developed by natural science and materialist philosophy in the epoch of modern history by Bacon, Galilo, Descartes, Newton, Laplace, Spinoza and the French 18th century philosophy which ultimately led to fatalism. Their determinism was necessarily mechanistic and abstract in conformity with the level of contemporary natural science, they believed, the forms of causality to be absolute and governed by the strictly dynamic laws of machanics, identified causality and necessity and denied the objective character of chance.

Laplace defined this point of view more conclusively than other philosophers. Laplace held that the co-ordinates and impulses of all particles in the universe at a given instant unequivocally determine a state at any past or future instant. This form of determinism leads to fatalism which assumes a mystical complexion and in effect, merges with belief in divine predestination.

According to the so called scientific theory of determinism, an event might be said to be determined in the sense if there is some other event or condition or group of them, some times called its cause that is sufficient condition for its occurrence. The sufficiency residing in the effects following the cause in accordance with one or more laws of nature. The general assertion of historical determinism then becomes the assertion that for every historical event - there is such a sufficient condition whether, in consequence, history manifests a unitary pattern or direction is a further and separate question.

What all these concepts - metaphysical materialistic and scientific alike - have in common (despite their vast differences) is the notion that to explain is to subsume under general formulae, to represent as examples of laws which cover infinite number of instances; so that with knowledge of all relevant laws and of a sufficient range of relevant facts, it will be possible to tell not merely what happens but also why.

All these theories, in one sense or another, are forms of determinism, whether metaphysical, teleological, fatalistic mechanistic, aesthetic or scientific and represents the view that 'history is inevitable', in the sense that events are determined or predetermined. And also of the view that only those events going to occur, not in the sense that they can be predictable, but that in a certain condition 'certain events would follow' whatever the case may be. One common characteristic of all such outlooks is the application that the individual's freedom of choice at any rate is ultimately an illusion i.e. the notion that human being could have chosen otherwise.

The theories mentioned above of determinism or inevitability were criticised from their very assumptions.

The more common argument against determinism is that history is a realm of human freedom and human responsibility. As indeterminist claims that the subject matter of history is not mere 'events' but 'human actions', in a destructive sense quite familiar to plain men who deliberate and decide what to do. If the historian is not to misrepresent such a subject matter, then hemust take seriously the notion of choosing between alternatives. As John Huizinga

expressed it, that the historian must put himself at a point in the past at which the known factors still seem to permit different outcomes.

In historical inevitability, Isaiah Berlin gave a further and even more familiar reason for adopting the standpoint of 'agency'. "If determinism were true, ...", he wrote, "the notion of human responsibility as ordinarily understood, would no longer apply". For an ascription of responsibility requires the assumption that the agent was 'in control', that he could have acted otherwise than he did. The historical accounts, which men ordinarily give of their own and others actions presuppose 'freedom of will'.

However, according to Marx, the objective logic of history follows from the fact that changes in social relation depend upon the material and economic conditions. Development of the productive forces, improvement in the socio-political and ideological forms of life are determined by the economic basis and the socio-economic class structure that expresses it. The objective logic of history is the necessary change of socio-economic formations, including changes in the economic structure, and indeed, in the type of life of a society and historical forms of communities. The logic of history also amounts to qualitative changes in political institutions consonant with the evolution of economic relations as well as reassessment of ideological values.

By objective laws of history here is meant that there have never been generations or nations able to choose the way of life exclusively to their taste or volition in disregard of according the material conditions they have largely inherited from the preceding society.

In his deterministic theory, Marx mentioned that there are laws of history which are objective in nature. People can learn the laws of history, can change their knowledge of them. But they operate regardless of whether or not we have learnt them. These laws are defined as universal, essential, necessary and recurring links between phenomena, their component, trends, etc. which form the inner objective side of any historical activity of social relations. Marx claimed that these laws follow from the material conditions of the life of society, from material productions they originate as society or a socio-economic formation originates, and their operation ceases when the socio-economic conditions that generated them cease to exist. Unlike natural laws, the laws of human history govern men's social activity and social relationships, consequently, they cannot exist and do not operate prior to or outside history and the life of society.

Necessity', as we mentioned above for the supporters of historical inevitability is 'predetermined', they did not give value to chance and on the other hand for indeterminist, there is not anything like necessity and whatever occurs, by chance. Further that Necessity is incompatible with chance. But Marx, following dialectical lines recognized the interdependence of 'Necessity and Chance' and explained that these are dialectically opposite categories and cannot exist without each other, as these reflect relations between the essence of phenomena and their manifestation. As he mentioned:

*"World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallible favourable chances. It would on the other hand be of a very mystical nature, if 'accidents' played no part. These accidents naturally form part of the general course of development and are compensated by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very much dependent upon such 'accidents', including the 'accident' of characters of the people who first head the movement."*

It should also be taken into consideration that in his philosophy of history, Marx's mentor, Hegel, treated people as instruments of the objective spirit. All this had to have an impact upon Marx, who occasionally went to extremes of determinism:

*"My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a Process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.*

But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation."<sup>12</sup>

Marx in the preface to Capital quoted one of Capital's reviewers, who had written:

*Consequently, Marx only troubles himself about one thing: show, by rigid scientific investigation, the necessity of to successive determinate orders of social conditions, and to establish, as impartially as possible, the facts that serve him for fundamental starting point. For this it is quite enough, if he proves, at the same time both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass over; and this all the same, whether men believe or do not believe it, whether they are conscious or unconscious of it. Marx treats the social moment as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, but rather, on the contrary, determining that will, consciousness, and intelligence....*

It follows from this passage that Marx advocates both strict determinism, according to which social laws functions with 'iron necessity', but at the same time a milder form of determinism as well, which treats laws as 'tendencies':

*"Intrinsically, it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonism that results from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results."*

And in the third volume of Capital, Marx again puts forth the view that a law is only a tendency which can be annulled by contradictory tendencies.

And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of natural laws of its movement - and it is the ultimate aim of this work to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society - it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs.

There are, it seems, two interweaving motifs in Marx's writings which reflects his stress upon dialectical line for the construction of determinism. On the one hand, for Marx, men are creative beings and are subjects of historical process, on the other, course of history is independent of human consciousness and will. This is clear from Marx's statement:

*"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."*

Similarly, while people can exert an influence upon historical events, they can exert such influence only upon the speed with they take place, and not upon their general course. To be sure, this rule of blind historical forces over man was for Marx a sign that we are still in man's pre-history. In communism, associated humanity would determine the course of history.

Another argument put forward by Marx, in favour of determinism is:

*"In all forms of society it is a determinate production and its relations which assigns every other production and its relations their rank and influence. It is a general illumination in which all other colours are plunged and which modifies*

*their specific tonalities. It is a special ether which defines the specific gravity of everything found within it."*

The tension is clearly visible in Engel's well known letter to Block (21 Sep, 1890): 'The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure... also exercise their influence upon the course of events... and in many cases pre-ponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction in which, amid the endless host of accidents, the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary'.

In his influential essay 'contradiction and over determination', 1965, Althusser attempted to meet the desiderate of avoiding both monism, whether of an economic reductionist, like of Kautsky and Bukharin or historical essentialist views, as of Lukacs and Gramsci's kind. Pluralism, in his concept (borrowed from Freud) of 'over determination'; arguing that it is the economy that determines which relative autonomous level of the superstructure in conjecturally or epochally dominant.

We can find comparative views in Marx's Capital :

*"It is the manner in which the [ancient world and the middle ages] gained their livelihood which explains why in one case politics, in the other case Catholicism played the chief part."*

But Gramsci still saw fit to characterize 1917 as 'the revolution against Karl Marx's Capital'; and a line of criticism most recently expressed by Habermas (1971) and by Wellmer (1981) who has seen Marx's approving quotation in the Afterword to the second edition to Capital Vol. I (quoted above) from a reviewer's description of his method as indicative of our objectivistic misunderstanding of his own scientific practice.

Instead of these views about Marx, it seems certain that Marx is neither fatalist nor he advocated the theory of an inevitablism.

For him what happens in the future will happen because or at least in virtue of, not despite, whatever men and women do; any other gross reification of the view would constitute a historical process and be contrary to Marx's repeated assertions that it is 'men who make history'.

## References

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4. Marx's letter to L.Kugelmann of 17th April, 1871: Marx and Engles, Selected Correspondence, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1956).
5. Marx, Karl, Preface to the First German Edition", Capital, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986).