Overview

1. **Precursors**
2. The 1859 Preface
3. Modes, forces, and relations of production
4. Cohen’s ‘functionalist’ interpretation
5. Questions for Cohen
6. Looking ahead
‘In every enquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. Accordingly as that varies, their laws and policy must be different.’

– William Robertson, History of America
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The materialist conception of history

‘In the social production of their lives, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of society, the real basis, upon which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. ... At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production ... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution’

– Marx, ‘Preface’ to his Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859) [‘1859 Preface’]
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Forces of production

Relations of production

Legal and political superstructure

Social consciousness

DEVELOPMENT
Forces of production
Relations of production
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Social consciousness

FETTERING LEADS TO Revolution

DEVELOPMENT
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‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman – in a word, oppressor and oppressed. ... Modern bourgeois society ... has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression ... Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps ... Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.’

– Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto
Over how much of the following forces of production does the worker wield ultimate control?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Her own labour power</th>
<th>The means of production she uses</th>
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<tr>
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<th>Relations</th>
<th>Capitalism</th>
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(1) **The Development Thesis:** the productive forces tend to develop throughout history

(2) **The Primacy Thesis:** the level of development of the productive forces explains the nature of its productive relations

(3) The productive relations of a society explain the nature of its superstructure

(4) The productive relations of a society are responsible for the development of its productive forces

(5) The superstructure of a society is responsible for the stability of its productive relations

Reverse causation?

Forces and Relations

1. Development of F explains nature of R
2. Nature of R is responsible for development of F

Base and Superstructure

3. B explains nature of S
4. S is responsible for stability of B

➤ Problem: how can X explain Y, if Y is responsible for X?
Functional Explanation

Functional facts

- Y is functional for X
- Relations responsible for development of Forces
- Birds’ hollow bones facilitate flight

Functional explanations

- Y occurs because it is functional for X
- Relations obtain because they tend to develop Forces
- Birds have hollow bones because they facilitate flight

Problem: ‘microfoundations’ (Roemer), ‘mechanisms’ (Elster), ‘elaborations’ (Cohen)
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1. **Interpretative**: how much weight can be placed on the 1859 Preface?

2. **Empirical**: do the forces tend to develop? (Joshua Cohen)

3. **Determinism**: if all (epochal historical) events are determined, whither individual agency? (Isaiah Berlin)

4. **Sociological**: what about class struggle? (Andrew Levine & Erik Olin Wright)

5. **Analytical**: can the base be distinguished from the superstructure? (Steven Lukes), or the forces from the relations? (Charles W. Mills)
Determinism

 Ø ‘the natural laws of capitalist production ... winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity.’


Agency

 Ø ‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they choose. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly given, encountered and transmitted from the past.’

 – Marx, Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte
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To be continued...
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## Looking ahead

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Chapters in <em>Capital</em>, vol. 1</th>
<th>Pages (in Penguin edn.)</th>
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<td>Week 2: History</td>
<td>Part 8 (chs. 26-33)</td>
<td>873-943 (= 70pp.)</td>
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<td><strong>Chs. 1-2</strong></td>
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<td>307-429 (= 122pp.)</td>
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<td>Chs. 13-15</td>
<td>429-643 (= 214pp.)</td>
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<td>Week 8: Feminism</td>
<td>Ch. 25</td>
<td>762-873 (= 121pp.)</td>
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Summing-up

Key categories
- Forces, relations, modes of production

Key claims
- Development Thesis + Primacy Thesis
- Functional Explanation
- Capitalism as liberating (albeit imperfectly)

Key questions
- Interpretative and empirical accuracy
- Whither capitalism?
References

- Charles W. Mills, ‘Is it immaterial that there’s a “material” in “historical materialism”?’,* Inquiry* (1989)