

Giddens and Historical Materialism

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Introduction

In this paper I examine a recent critique of historical materialism by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens and the alternative theory of history developed by him. This is contained in his recent book A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism. It is the most recent in a series of prolific writings developing a theory of structuration which claims to overcome a host of sins, including functionalism and the division between actionist and structuralist sociologies <1>.

I point to a number of problems in his work, and especially in his alternative 'structuralist' theory of history <2>. Firstly, it is argued that Giddens's view of Marxism is little more than a gross caricature of historical materialism, and involves a narrow conceptualisation of evolutionary theories of social change. Secondly, his methodology of bracketing agency, while analysing the structural aspects of social change, produces a vulgar structuralist account of the processes of social change. Thirdly, his theory implicitly involves an eclectic account of adaptive mechanisms that propel social change at various levels. Finally, it is argued that Giddens's differences from Marxism are, on certain crucial issues, merely terminological, and that the major difference concerns the way in which he focuses on international systems of societies, what he calls 'inter-societal systems', as important sources of social change.

A central theme of the paper is the conception of evolutionary theories of social change, what is precisely wrong with them, and whether or not Marxism necessarily involves such a theory. Giddens's work on historical materialism has already been extensively criticised by the North American Marxist Erik Wright <3>. His response to Giddens is heavily based on the work of G.A. Cohen <4>. His critique of Giddens is inadequate in a number of respects. Several important elements in Giddens's argument are not dealt with, especially the relationship between agency and structure, and the relations between societies at the inter-societal systems level. Furthermore, Wright employs an inadequate conception of historical materialism as being merely an evolutionary typology <5>.

For these reasons it is important to assess Wright's contribution when looking at Giddens's critique of Marxism.

It is apparent that 'orthodox' historical materialist interpretations of Marxism have a strong evolutionist element. It is held that the distinctive theoretical core of Marxism consists of a view of all human history as being the adaptation of social relations to the development of the forces of production <6>. A central problem with such an interpretation, as with many other social evolutionary theories of social change quite alien to Marxism, is that it involves teleological explanations in terms of some struc-

tural adaptive mechanism <7>. This problem has been elegantly expressed in a more general vein as follows:

A doctrine or theory is said to be teleological if it explains the existence of some phenomenon by asserting that it is necessary in order to bring about some consequence; more specifically, teleological theories are said to explain one thing by showing that it has beneficial consequences for another. The principal objection to this is that the explanation treats an effect as a cause.

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This, in Percy Cohen's opinion, teleological explanations expressed in this form are simply illogical. It is important to stress that the teleological explanations I am criticising make claims for their explanatory power by reference to some structural mechanism, and not by reference to the knowledgeability and intentionality of human agency <9>. On the contrary, in social evolutionary theories of social change, 'orthodox' Marxism included, human agency and consciousness are explained by reference to the teleological process of structural adaptation <10>.

The central critical thrust of this paper is to show how Giddens, through his methodology of bracketing agency while analysing structure, the most significant point overlooked by critics such as Wright, is led to develop a structuralist theory of history. Here the explanatory power apparently lies in a structural adaptive process which has no explicit role for human agency despite Giddens's claims to the contrary.

Giddens's alternative to historical materialism

Giddens summarises his broad theoretical position on social change in the following way:

The approach upon which this book is based recognises that there are both endogenous and exogenous sources of change in human societies ... but that neither has generalised primacy over the other. In some circumstances, influences emanating from 'outside' a society can entirely wreck or even eradicate that society; in other instances, there are strongly marked endogenous sources of societal transformation.

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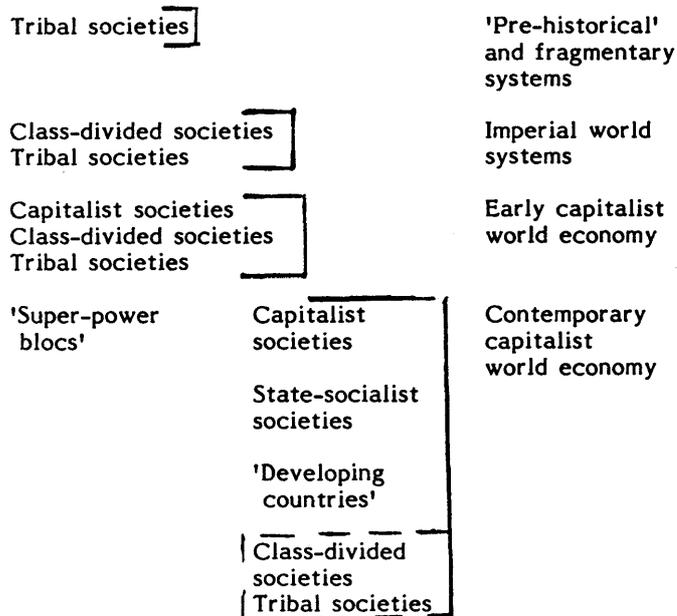
In contrast to this view, Giddens argues that evolutionary theories of social change suffer from four major problems. Firstly, they are ignorant of agents' knowledgeability of society. Secondly, they conceive of social change as a series of stages. Thirdly, societies are conceptualised as 'isolated' entities which contain their own immanent forces of social change. Finally, these immanent forces are seen

to bring about the adaptation of the societies concerned to their material environment <12>. This critique is directed at all evolutionary theories of social change, but Giddens directs it particularly at historical materialism which he characterises in the following way:

... that a measure of the level of development achieved by any given society can be derived from how 'advanced' it is in terms of its capability of controlling the material environment - in terms, in other words, of the level of development of the productive forces ... (and) ... the heavy concentration ... upon social development as an 'adaptive' process, where 'adaptation' is conceived of in an almost mechanical fashion. <13>

On the basis of this interpretation, historical materialism does indeed seem to suffer from the above problems. However, it is a very particular and one-sided interpretation of historical materialism, and one to which not all Marxists would subscribe <14>. To this 'orthodox' interpretation of historical materialism Giddens proposes a very complex but eclectic alternative which revolves around a typology of societies within which he calls 'inter-societal systems'. These are systems of societies which are in 'contact' with each other in social, economic and/or military terms:

Inter-societal systems <15>



At the bottom of the diagram the broken lines around the class-divided and tribal societies indicate their impending destruction by capitalist and state-socialist societies. The central logic to this ordering of both societies and inter-societal systems is the concept of time-space distancing.

The structuration of all social systems occurs in time-space, but also 'brackets' time-space relations; every social system in some way 'stretches' across time and space. Time-space distancing refers to the modes in which such 'stretching' takes place ... how social systems are 'embedded' in time and space. <16>

The understanding of this obscure but crucial concept is clarified enormously if we look at some specific examples of its use. In tribal societies time-space distancing is relatively low in comparison to class-divided societies, where, in turn, the level of time-space distancing is low relative to capitalist and state-socialist societies. Social relations in tribal societies stretch across relatively small geographical areas in comparison to contemporary capitalism. In tribal societies consciousness of time is

closely related to legitimation through religion and tradition on the one hand, and the phases of the life cycle in relation to kinship organisation on the other. Giddens contrasts such societies sharply with contemporary capitalism where social relations stretch through considerably greater areas of geographical space. Furthermore, the commodification of time and space in capitalist societies produces, according to Giddens, a 'reified' consciousness of time and space <17>.

Giddens then goes on to relate time-space distancing to the concepts of allocative resources and authoritative resources. Allocative resources are embedded in economic institutions, and authoritative resources are embedded in political institutions. Both correspond to distinct forms of power and domination. Allocative resources consist of natural resources, means of production and produced goods, the control over which gives economic domination through the ownership of property. Authoritative resources consist of the organisation of social time-space, relations between human beings in relation to the production and reproduction of the human body, and the possibilities of self development and expression. The control over these features of human life gives rise to the various forms of political power and structures of specifically political domination. Giddens keeps power and domination conceptually distinct in a generic sense, where power is involved in all social interaction but draws upon and reproduces structural relations of domination. Thus, the distinction that Giddens makes between allocative and authoritative resources broadly corresponds to the 'base and superstructure' distinction in classical Marxism <18>.

The combination of whether authoritative or allocative resources are the primary structuring principles of a society together with the level of time-space distancing provides the criteria for the categorisation of societies. In tribal societies time-space distancing is low and authoritative resources (tradition and kinship relations) the primary structuring features. Class-divided societies have distinctly higher levels of time-space distancing, but authoritative resources remain the major structuring principle. Both capitalist and state-socialist societies have the highest levels of time-space distancing. However, in capitalism allocative resources are the primary structuring principle, whereas in state-socialist societies authoritative resources become most important again <19>. In this scheme, at the level of individual societies, social change has a dual quality with the bases for social change of the endogenous forms lying in either authoritative or allocative resources. Thus, at this level Giddens's approach apparently differs from classical historical materialism by according causal primacy in the long run neither to allocative resources (the economic base) nor to authoritative resources (the superstructures). However, an interesting aspect of Giddens's analysis is his attempt to theorise the relations between societies in the intersocietal systems as providing the exogenous sources of social change. Here a further set of neologisms has to be dealt with. Firstly, there are episodes, which are 'processes of social change that have a definite direction and form, and in which definite structural transformations occur' <20>.

In this context there are also 'episodic characterisations', and these refer to the typical forms that the directions and types of episode take. Episodes apparently involve the transition from one type of society to another, but not the transition from one type of intersocietal system to another. The form and directionality of episodes is given by the conjuncture in which they occur. The most crucial features of these conjunctures are: what type of society is involved, when the episode is occurring in terms of world history, and, apparently most importantly, the society's place in the intersocietal system concerned. This place in the intersocietal system is referred to in terms of what Giddens calls 'time-space edges'. These are

... the forms of contact - and often interdependence - between different structural types of society. These are edges of potential or actual social transformation, the often unstable inter-

sections between different modes of societal organisation.
<21>

The whole uneasy relationship between endogenous and exogenous sources of social change is summarised by Giddens within the concept of 'world time'.

To acknowledge 'world time' is to recognise the influence of changing forms of intersocietal system upon episodic transitions. An episodic transition that occurs in one historical conjuncture may have quite a different form, and quite different consequences, to an apparently similar episode in another conjuncture.

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There are a number of serious problems with this approach. I shall look at it initially in terms of the problems that Giddens perceives in evolutionary theories of history.

Some problems with Giddens's alternative to historical materialism

Firstly, there is the issue of the agents' knowledgeability of their societies. Giddens's claim that his theory does account for the knowledgeability and agency of the subjects in the societies concerned simply does not stand up to close scrutiny. He advances an interesting analysis of the agents' experiences of social change in terms of the changes in meaning and consciousness of time and space, the commodification of time and space with the development of capitalism and the rise of nationalism. But the role of subjects' knowledge about society, and more importantly, the role of their agency and political struggle in social change is nowhere to be seen.

... the commodified world that capitalism has created has stripped away a massive variety of institutions, skills and forms of human experience, many of which are irretrievably lost ... for in the world that capitalism has originated, time is no longer understood as the medium of Being, and the gearing of daily life into comprehended tradition is replaced by the empty routines of everyday life. On the other hand, the whole of humanity now lies in the shadow of possible destruction.

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In this analysis it would seem that people are no more than the 'cultural dopes' of the 'structuralist' theorists that Giddens is so fond of criticising. Here people are condemned to suffer the experience of the 'dehumanising' consequences of the inexorable and uncontrollable structural processes of capitalist development. At this level of Giddens's view of the world there are no resistances or social struggles, and there is no indication of how past struggles helped reshape and fashion present-day social structures and how these form today's bases of resistance and arenas of political struggle. To grasp this problem accurately, a detour through Giddens's social ontology and broader methodology is required. Briefly, his ontology attempts to overcome the traditional division in social analysis between the analysis of 'structures' and the analysis of human agency. This is achieved through an interesting abstract theory of structuration and the 'duality of structure'.

Interaction is constituted by and in the conduct of subjects; structuration, as the reproduction of practices, refers abstractly to the dynamic process whereby structures come into being. By the duality of structure I mean that social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution.

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Giddens has spent many years developing this, by now, very influential position in both Marxist and non-Marxist social theory. It is explicitly a development of certain

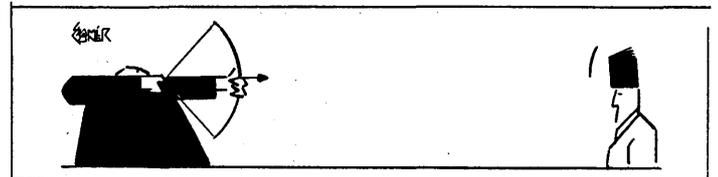
themes in Marx's Grundrisse, and it also has close connections with the recent work of Roy Bhaskar <25>. However, this theoretical work is, to all intents and purposes, undone in the few sentences outlining the methodology for its use.

Social systems are produced as transactions between agents, and can be analysed as such on the level of strategic conduct. This is 'methodological' in the sense that institutional analysis is bracketed, although structural elements necessarily enter into the characterisation of action, as modalities drawn upon to produce interaction.

Institutional analysis on the other hand, brackets action, concentrating upon modalities as the media of the reproduction of social systems. But this is also purely a methodological bracketing, which is no more defensible than the first if we neglect the essential importance of the conception of the duality of structure.

<26>

It seems to me that, when analysing particular social events, e.g. social change, this move of bracketing either structure or action does involve neglecting the duality of structure. The theoretical analyses developed in terms of this methodological bracketing cannot deal with the issue of the causal interaction of agency (either of individual or collective subjects), with the enabling/constraining features of structures in the production of social events. Furthermore, it fails to specify which aspect should be bracketed for particular analyses or explanations. It seems that we can have two distinct and perhaps incompatible explanations of the same social phenomena in Giddens's framework - a causal/structuralist one and a hermeneutic/actionist one. In the context of his theory of social change Giddens is concentrating on 'institutional analysis'. Thus, the agency of particular subjects, for example classes or other political forces, in social change remains untheorised. On the issue of accounting for the knowledgeability of actors, Giddens simply ignores it at this level, referring the reader to the abstract conception of the duality of structure. His more 'concrete' theories therefore retain many of the problems of conventional structuralist analyses.



Moving on to the next two characteristics of evolutionary theory, Giddens argues, quite plausibly, that they treat societies as isolated entities with their own immanent forces of social change, and that these societies are seen as moving through a series of stages. Now this seems to me to be an artificially narrow specification of the characteristics of evolutionary theory. I would like to argue that the central core of any evolutionary theory need only consist of the following: that a social entity, which shall be the unit of analysis, moves through a series of stages by virtue of its own immanent forces of adaptation. The environment in which the social entity adapts may be social and/or material in form. The knowledgeability or the agency of human subjects play no active role within the analysis. The adaptation of the social entity concerned is a structural process, and not the product of intentional human agency in any straightforward sense.

An important point here is that the unit of analysis could be an individual society or a group of societies. If we accept this quite reasonable point, then the possibilities for evolutionary theories broaden considerably. It is now clear that Giddens only considers very specific social evolutionary theories, especially classical historical materialism, rather than the features of such theories in general. Although Giddens may not accept my characterisation of evolutionary theory, it is now clear that his anti-evolution-

ist theory of social change is in fact a form of eclectic evolutionism.

In Giddens's approach there appear to be two levels or units of analysis. The first is at the level of individual societies, and the second at the level of intersocietal systems, with the intersocietal systems level in some sense being dominant over those of the individual societies. Despite his claim that endogenous and exogenous bases for social change are equally important for individual societies, Giddens's account of the role of 'world time' in episodic transitions indicates that the relations between individual societies within specific intersocietal systems is most important. The immanent forces of social change within intersocietal systems, that is, their evolutionary or adaptive logic, consist of the 'time-space edges' between societies which have different levels of time-space distanciation. In the analysis that Giddens presents those societies with the highest levels of time-space distanciation tend to destroy the 'lower' ones. Thus, the adaptive logic involved is the adaptation of the 'lower' societies to the intersocietal system dominated by those societies with the highest levels of time-space distanciation. If the weak societies do not fit in or adapt to the needs of the most powerful societies, then they are destroyed <27>.

It is interesting to note that Giddens derives the concept of inter-societal system from Wallerstein's discussion of the 'world capitalist economy' and successive world economic systems. Here Giddens points out that the economic systems involved have only recently become truly global in form and so he re-names them 'inter-societal systems' <28>, hardly a point of fundamental theoretical significance! Another point that he makes against Wallerstein is that political, and especially military, relations between societies are equally as important as economic ones <29>. Here Giddens's position comes close to that of the nineteenth-century sociologist Herbert Spencer. He argued that wars between societies had played a role in social evolution similar to that of the struggle for the survival of the fittest in the natural world <30>. In addition, Spencer was at pains to stress the complex inter-play of endogenous and exogenous sources of social change in social evolution:

Again, if each society grew and unfolded itself without the intrusion of additional factors, interpretation would be relatively easy; but the complicated processes of development are frequently re-complicated by changes in the sets of factors. Now the size of the social aggregate is all at once increased or decreased by annexation or by loss of territory; and now the average character of its units is altered by the coming in of another race as conquerors or slaves; while, as a further effect of this event, new social relations are superimposed on the old. In many cases the repeated over-runings of societies by one another, the minglings of people and institutions, the breakings up and re-aggregations ... destroy the continuity of normal processes...

<31>

In his discussions of inter-societal systems and time-space edges, Giddens does not seem to be adding anything to what Spencer had to say on these matters. What is surprising is that he has no explicit discussion of these passages of Spencer's. Furthermore, all of this highlights Giddens's very eclectic mode of theorising.

Returning to the problem of time-space distanciation, Giddens is quite explicit at times in referring to it as a concept to account for the simple/complex typology, that the forces of social change are endogenous and the evolutionary scales of social evolutionary theory. For Giddens time-space distanciation is to replace all of these concepts:

... I wish to introduce the notion of time-space distanciation to analyse some of the phenomena with which evolutionary theorists have been concerned ... it is obvious that societies differ greatly in terms of the extent of time-space 'stretches' which they span; and we can ask how this comes about.... The nexus of relations - pol-

itical, economic or military - in which a society exists with others is usually integral to the very nature of that society Position on an evolutionary scale becomes replaced by distance or proximity in time-space.

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At this stage it should be clear that Giddens's non-evolutionary theory of social change does in fact involve some strongly evolutionist features. Firstly, through his methodological principle of bracketing human agency he effectively develops explanations of social change which focus on structural processes and relations rather than the knowledgeability and agency of human subjects. Secondly, he does clearly identify stages of both societies and intersocietal systems. These are ordered primarily in terms of time-space distanciation, but also in terms of the relations between allocative and authoritative resources within individual societies. Finally, the movement of inter-societal systems through the stages that Giddens identifies is propelled by the adaptive relations between societies of different levels of time-space distanciation - what Giddens calls time-space edges.

These are, I believe, the major flaws in Giddens's analysis. I now turn to Erik Wright's contribution which criticises Giddens from a perspective highly indebted to G.A. Cohen's defence of a functionalist interpretation of historical materialism. Wright focuses on the secondary issues of time-space distanciation and the relations between allocative and authoritative resources, rather than the central problem of Giddens's dualistic methodology. Wright's contribution also helps us to illuminate the relationship between Giddens's work and some tendencies of orthodox Marxism.

Wright's critique of Giddens

Essentially Wright's argument is that Giddens's alternative to historical materialism does not differ from the views of many contemporary Marxists. In Wright's view the major difference lies in Giddens's causally plural theory of social change in contrast to the mono-causal explanations of orthodox historical materialism. Even so, Wright argues that these differences leave orthodox historical materialism with greater explanatory power than Giddens's alternative. Wright casts this in terms of Marxism's claim that a general theory of history is possible, in contrast to Giddens's claim that such a theory is not possible. Wright's critique of Giddens covers a series of issues including the nature of functionalist explanations and class-reductionism, but here I shall restrict my discussion to the issues of the typology of societies and evolutionism <33>.

In reconstructing Giddens's argument, Wright places great emphasis on the notion of time-space distanciation, and the distinction that Giddens makes between class-divided and class societies according to the primacy of control over authoritative or allocative resources. He makes a pertinent point here by asking why should the control over authoritative resources be the dominant structural principle of class-divided societies.

As he points out, it is clear from Giddens's own argument that it is the nature of the economy, principally property relations, that determines the primacy of the control over authoritative resources in class-divided societies; the relation between forms of control over allocative and authoritative resources is explained by Giddens himself with reference to the organisation of allocative resources <34>. In this case, as in that of class, in Giddens's recent work his disagreements with Marxism are primarily terminological and not theoretical or explanatory, although Giddens himself does not recognise this <35>.

Wright's discussion of evolutionary theory is more extensive and contentious. He criticises Giddens's view of evolutionary theory on three main points. Firstly, although Giddens is correct to reject teleological evolutionary theory, he argues he is wrong to characterise all evolutionary theory as necessarily teleological. Secondly, when a correct characterisation of evolutionary theory is given, it

is not flawed in the way Giddens claims. Thirdly, Giddens's theory of time-space distanciation and episodic characterisations is a form of non-teleological evolutionary theory as Wright characterises it. Primarily, then, Wright disagrees with Giddens's claim that all evolutionary theories are teleological in that they suppose societies develop towards some end state of increasing adaptation to environmental or material conditions <36>.

In contrast to this, Wright proposes the following characterisation of evolutionary theory. Firstly, an evolutionary theory should involve a typology of societies which potentially has some directionality to it and is capable of being ordered in a non-arbitrary way. Secondly, the forms of society are ordered in such a way that the probability of staying at one level is greater than that of regressing in the typology. Thirdly, there is a positive possibility of moving from one level in the typology to a higher level, the implication being that there is some process giving directionality to social change <37>.

In Wright's reconstruction of Giddens's argument the general logic of social change is given by the level of time-space distanciation in terms of people's ability to control allocative and authoritative resources in space and over time for use in power relations. For Wright, increases in the control both of allocative resources and of authoritative resources implies a development in the forces of production. In these terms there is a positive probability in Giddens's analysis for an increase in time-space distanciation. Thus in Wright's representation of Giddens's views there is a dual logic to social change; firstly, through the autonomous development of time-space distanciation in relative to allocative resources (the economic structure). Secondly, there is the autonomous development of time-space distanciation of authoritative resources (the non-economic political and ideological structures). In Wright's reading of Giddens the dynamics of social change are rooted simultaneously in the development of the economic and of the political structures with no causal primacy of one over the other. The relations concerned are always conjuncturally specific and contingent. But while this theoretical position is clearly opposed to the orthodox Marxist position that the economic structure has causal primacy in the long run, nothing of Giddens's actual argument contradicts such a view. Indeed it is central to Wright's argument that it may be seen to be compatible with it <38>.

Wright goes on to make the claim that there is a more general social interest in developing allocative resources rather than authoritative resources. The evolution of all societies is explained for him by the general human interest in developing the productivity of labour to reduce human toil. He questions whether there is a general interest in developing authoritative resources, and rejects the possibility of a competitive greed for power as a serious generalisation. He concludes that it is more likely that increased control over authoritative resources increases control over allocative resources; that is, it reinforces property relations <39>.

Commentary on Wright's discussion

To begin with, I would like to point out two serious lacunae in Wright's presentation of Giddens's arguments. Firstly, Wright does not consider Giddens's view that a serious problem with evolutionary theories of social change is that they do not take account of the actions and knowledgeability of human agents. Furthermore, Wright does not consider Giddens's general methodology of bracketing agency whilst explaining social change in terms of an 'institutional' or structural analysis. I see this as a major problem with Giddens's critique of evolutionary theories, especially orthodox historical materialism, as treating societies as isolated entities. Consequently, Wright does not deal with Giddens's treatment of social change at two levels - societies and inter-societal systems - with the latter being most important. Thus in Wright's discussion the most impor-

tant problems of the relations between different societal forms, and the implications of these relations for the directionality of change in inter-societal systems fail to be considered at all.

Furthermore, Wright's list of the essential characteristics of evolutionary theories of social change is so broad and general as to be meaningless. If we take his view seriously, evolutionary theories cease to be theories at all, as he specifies no explanatory mechanisms of social change that evolutionary theories should have if they are not to remain merely heuristic typologies. His conception of a general social interest in reducing human toil is hardly a serious candidate as an explanatory mechanism. On the contrary, most evolutionary theories of social change seem to involve some structural process of 'adaptation' <40>.

Despite these reservations, two important implications of Wright's argument seem broadly correct and worth pursuing further. Firstly, I think that Wright has demonstrated beyond all doubt that what Giddens refers to as the level of development of time-space distanciation crucially depends on a certain prior level of development of what Marxists traditionally refer to as the forces of production. Just to illustrate the point, consider the following example from Giddens.

... even relatively rudimentary forms of agriculture necessitate advance planning of a regularised character. Irrigation agriculture ... both demands and makes possible a greater co-ordination of time-space relations.... The time-space distanciation made possible by writing (and in modern times, by mechanical printing) is much greater.... Writing seems everywhere to have originated as a direct mode of storage: as a means of recording information relevant to the administration of societies of an increasing scale.
<41>

The information and knowledge involved in these societies at the level of authoritative resources can only be stored and transmitted, and indeed need only be used in that way, when the forms of economic production make it necessary and technology makes it possible. This at the very least seems clear from Giddens's analysis despite his earlier disclaimer that '... storage capacity is much more important to the production of "surplus" than technological change in the instruments of production' <42>.

The second point follows on from this. When we look at the level of time-space distanciation in the context of the relations between different societal forms, those societies with the highest level of time-space distanciation are usually 'dominant' and tend to destroy the lower forms of society in the intersocietal system concerned. Each system, therefore, has a higher overall level of time-space distanciation implying a higher general level of development of the forces of production. The struggle to survive in a hostile intersocietal system provides the impetus for each society to further develop its forces of production

What is clear from all this is that the level of time-space distanciation actually depends very largely on the level of development of the forces of production, while the level of time-space distanciation is a crucial causal factor in changes in both allocative and authoritative resources. So, despite Giddens's initial arguments that authoritative and allocative resources are both autonomous sources of social change, in his more concrete explanations the nature of the organisation of authoritative resources is conceived in terms of the nature of the organisation of allocative resources.

Conclusion

It is clear that many of the problems with Giddens's theory of social change are similar to some of the problems he finds in conventional evolutionary theories of social change, such as orthodox historical materialism. These include ignoring agents' knowledgeability of society, seeing

societies as moving through a series of stages, and involving certain adaptive mechanisms. This results primarily from Giddens's methodology of bracketing 'agency' whilst pursuing a purely structural account of social change.

Wright's critique of Giddens, whilst useful in demystifying much of the irrelevant terminology, fails to give an accurate characterisation of evolutionary theory - he reduces it to mere typology. His account does not deal with the problems of agency and structure, eclecticism nor the role of inter-societal systems in Giddens's theory. His response to Giddens merely reasserts orthodox historical materialism. And it depends far too heavily on the work of G.A. Cohen. Wright rather simply and undialectically counterposes orthodox Marxism's mono-causal explanations to Giddens's supposedly causally plural explanations. Finally, he uses a trans-historical conception of human rationality where it seems that the improvement of the productivity of labour is always in the general human interest. Such ideas today have rather dangerous implications, given that the technology involved in improving the productivity of labour is having increasingly deleterious effects on the natural environment, and recent developments in the labour productivity of killing other people puts us all at risk.

Giddens's relationship to Marxism is a complex one due to his very eclectic mode of theorising. Many sophisticated Marxists would be in sympathy with his account of the ever-expanding commodification of time and space in capitalist social relations, the commodification of labour-time and generalised commodity exchange being the basis for Marx's theory of the capitalist economy and class relations. Here Giddens is providing an analysis which is only a simplified interpretation of Marx, and where the terminology is

the only significant difference.

His theory of social change, however, involves a significant debt to Wallerstein on the one hand, and an unacknowledged debt to Spencer on the other. Furthermore, Giddens has a considerable affinity to orthodox historical materialism:

The forces/relations of production dialectic is not a miraculous device that somehow holds the answer to disclosing the underlying sources of social change in general. Nor can the contradictory character of social formations be understood in these terms - except in the case of capitalism. The forces/relations of production dialectic, I shall argue, has peculiar reference to capitalism as a type of society.

<43>

Such a claim is quite surprising given that he characterised this 'dialectic' in terms of some process of adaptation to the environment in a mechanical fashion through the development of the forces of production <44>. In the light of this claim, the transitions of intersocietal systems that he identifies from imperial world systems through the early capitalist world economy to the contemporary capitalist world economy, i.e. those transitions where capitalist societies become dominant, can be understood in terms of this crude 'dialectic' <45>.

Above all, Giddens is an eclectic theorist, and it is this eclecticism, together with the methodology of bracketing agency or structure, that is the basis of the problems in his work, and which critics such as Wright have totally overlooked.

Footnotes

- 1 The following books are representative of the development of Giddens's work over the past dozen or so years: Giddens, A., The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies, Hutchinson, London, 1973; New Rules of Sociological Method, Hutchinson, London, 1976; Central Problems in Social Theory, Macmillan, London, 1979; A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, Macmillan, London, 1981. A book developing the recent themes of his work, provisionally entitled Between Capitalism and Socialism, is due for publication in 1984.
- 2 For a critical exposition of the basic ideas of the recently developed 'structurationist' school in social theory see: Urry, J., 'Duality of Structure: Some Critical Issues', in Theory, Culture and Society, Vol. 1, No. 2, Autumn 1982, pp. 100-106. Basically, they claim a necessary dialectical relation between agency and structure, where agency produces and reproduces structure, but yet structures form the media of this reproduction. So agency is not reducible to the effects of structures, nor are structures simply produced by agency.
- 3 Wright, E.O., 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism', New Left Review 138, March-April 1983, pp. 11-35.
- 4 Cohen, G.A., Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978. Also see the discussions by A. Levine and E.O. Wright, 'Rationality and Class Struggle', New Left Review 123, September-October 1980, pp. 47-68, and Sayers, S., 'Marxism and the Dialectical Method: A Critique of G.A. Cohen', Radical Philosophy 36, Spring 1984, pp. 4-13.
- 5 See the sections below on Wright's contribution.
- 6 This is the 'vulgar' or 'mechanical' Marxism of the Second International which Lukacs and Gramsci were engaged in criticising in their different ways.
- 7 Throughout this paper I shall be referring to social evolutionary theories, not biological evolutionary theory.
- 8 Cohen, P.S., Modern Social Theory, Heinemann, London, 1968, p. 47.
- 9 Logically speaking, it is possible to construe the Marxist concept of labour as a teleological mechanism; that is, that human social labour takes particular forms because of the need to produce certain things, e.g. food. However, this involves rational human intentionality, unlike evolutionary theories of social change, which refer to teleological

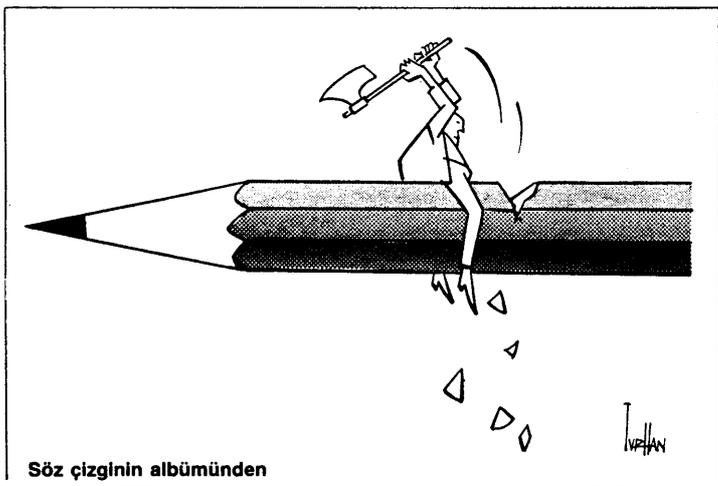
mechanisms which operate regardless of people's consciousness. Indeed, at times it is implied that such mechanisms actually give rise to consciousness.

- 10 For general discussions of various forms of theories of social evolution see for example the following: Sahlins, M.D. et al (eds.), Evolution and Culture, University of Michigan Press, 1960; Nisbet, R.A., Social Change and History, Oxford University Press, 1969; and Hirst, P.Q., Social Evolution and Sociological Categories, George Allen & Unwin, 1976.
- 11 Giddens, A., A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, pp. 166-67.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 20-21 and 90-91.
- 13 Ibid., p. 82. Giddens also recognises other 'versions' of historical materialism (see Giddens, A., Central Problems in Social Theory, pp. 150-55), but it is not clear why he focuses on this one in particular, other than the fact that it is easy to criticise. In my view it is certainly not characteristic of recent Marxist theorising.
- 14 Within the 'classical' Marxist tradition, Lukacs and Gramsci have reputations for opposing it.
- 15 This diagram is from Giddens, A., A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, p. 168.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
- 17 Ibid., pp. 91-97, 133 and 149.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 51-52 and 61-63.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 157-69.
- 20 Ibid., p. 23.
- 21 Ibid., p. 23.
- 22 Ibid., p. 24.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 251-52.
- 24 Giddens, A., New Rules of Sociological Method, p. 121.
- 25 The relevant quote from the Grundrisse is: 'The conditions and objectifications of the process are themselves equally moments of it, and its only subjects are the individuals, but in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew.' (Marx, K., Grundrisse, Penguin, London, 1973, p.172). The work of Bhaskar on these issues is in his book The Possibility of Naturalism, Harvester, Hassocks, 1979.

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- 26 Giddens, A., *Central Problems in Social Theory*, p. 95.
 27 See especially: Giddens, A., *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, pp. 166-69.
 28 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
 29 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
 30 Spencer, H., *Principles of Sociology* (edited by S. Andreski), 1969, pp. 176-78.
 31 *Ibid.*, p. 179.
 32 Giddens, A., *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, pp. 90-91.
 33 Wright, E.O., 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism'.
 34 See for example Giddens, A., *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, pp. 94-95, where he argues that more complex forms of

- agriculture 'demand' developments in authoritative resources.
 35 Wright, E.O., 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism', p. 21.
 36 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
 37 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 12-15 and 18-20.
 39 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.
 40 See the discussion above in the introduction.
 41 Giddens, A., *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, pp. 94-95.
 42 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
 43 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
 44 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
 45 *Ibid.*, p. 168.



Söz çizginin albümünden

The cartoons on books and censorship in this issue are once again from the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet* — the Turkish Ministry of Culture has recently admitted it plans to incinerate 118,000 books, including works by Bacon, Hume, Montaigne, and Camus, currently held in its stores.

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