Giddens and Historical Materialism

Paul Bagguley

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 'intersocietal 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 intersocietal 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 structural 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.

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 knowledgeable 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 ways:

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.

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 and intentionality of human agency despite Giddens's claims to the contrary.

11>

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 and intentionality of human agency despite Giddens's claims to the contrary.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-societal systems (&lt;15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tribal societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class-divided societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Super-power blocs'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporaneous capitalist world economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperial world systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early capitalist world economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Developing countries'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class-divided societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal societies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 distanciation. 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 distanciation refers to situations 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 distanciation is relatively low in comparison to class-divided societies, where, in turn, the level of time-space distanciation 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 legitimization 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 distanciation 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 human and non-human resources, and the primary structuring 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 any given society's 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 distanciation provides the criteria for the categorisation of societies. In tribal societies time-space distanciation is low and authoritative resources (tradition and kinship relations) the primary structuring features. Class-divided societies have distinctly higher levels of time-space distanciation, but authoritative resources remain the major structuring principle. Both capitalist and state-socialist societies have the highest levels of time-space distanciation. However, in capitalist societies allocative resources are the primary structuring features, 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 attaching 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 hint of neo-Marxism 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 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.

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.

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 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, their role as agents of change 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.

In this analysis it would seem that people are no more than '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.

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. 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 in terms of 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-concepts, and is therefore largely within 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.

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 individual societies, he argued, are explanatory or adaptative 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 adaptative 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 <37>.

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. However, Giddens himself notes that the intersocietal 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 important for individual societies, being dominant over those of the individual societies. Descriptions of the relations between individual societies, and the second at the level of intersocietal systems, that is, their evolutionary or adaptative scales of social evolutionary theory. For Giddens this comes about.... The nexus of relations - political, 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. <32>

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 knowledgable 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 authoritative 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. Giddens's causal pluralism has, as Wright notes, the further effect of this event, new social relations are superimposed on the old. In many cases the repeated over-runnings of societies by one another, the minglings of people and institutions, the breakings up and re-aggregations ... destroy the continuity of normal processes...

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's sociologist Herbert Spencer. He argued that what 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 or class. Moreover, while, as the further effect of this event, new social relations are superimposed on the old. In many cases the repeated over-runnings of societies by one another, the minglings of people and institutions, the breakings up and re-aggregations ... destroy the continuity of normal processes...

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. As he points out, it is clear from Giddens's own argument that such a theory is not possible. Wright's critique of Giddens covers a series of issues including the nature of his interpretative and authoritative resources, and the methodological principle of bracketing human agency he does clearly identify stages of both societies and intersocietal systems. These are ordered primarily in terms of time-space distanciation, and the distinction that Giddens makes between class-divided and class societies according to the primacy of contractual or distributive 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. Wright's critique of Giddens's positions on an evolutionary scale becomes replaced by distance or proximity in time-space. <32>

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 contractual or allocative or authoritative 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.

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 his interpretative and authoritative resources, and the methodological principle of bracketing human agency he does not recognise this <35>.

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 contractual or allocative or authoritative 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.
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 '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 important 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'.

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. Justin to illustrate the point, consider the following example from Giddens...

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".

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 higher level of time-space distanciation are usually the ones that are coercive and make possible a greater coordination of time and space. The information and knowledge involved in these societies is not flawed in the way Giddens claims. Thirdly, Giddens's critique 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'.

... even relatively rudimentary forms of agriculture necessitate advance planning of a regularised character. Irrigation agriculture ... both demands and makes possible a greater coordination 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.

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 explanation the whole 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 jargon and terminology, fails in 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 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 acknowledged 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.

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. 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'.

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

2 For a critical exposition of the basic ideas of the recently developed 'structurationist' school in social theory see: Urry, J., 'Duality of Structures: 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 structure and agency 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.


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.


9 Logically speaking, to say that 'capitalism is a social system where the principal concept of labour is 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.


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.


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.

ORGANISE FOR THE MINERS
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.