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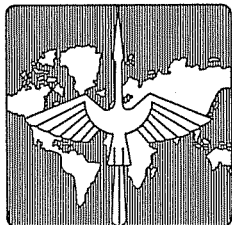
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Is a Marxist Theory of the State Possible?

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**G. van Benthem
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No. 61, February 1977

It is a theory
of the state

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1. RECENT MARXIST THEORISING ABOUT THE STATE*

Nation-states have become, for better or for worse, the basic units into which humanity in a more and more inter-dependent world is divided. Notwithstanding what the predominant mode of production in the states of the present world may be, states all over the world are organised in a remarkably similar manner. They all have armies or at least police forces, custom officials, secret services, a diplomatic service, central taxation systems and civil bureaucracies divided into departments headed by cabinet ministers. They all have central institutions located in the state capital, provincial or regional administrations and local governments. There are few states that are ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous to the extent that they have no problems with so-called 'national minorities'. Political parties, whether one or more, are also a nearly universal feature of present day state societies. Nearly all states attempt some form of planning the development of their economies. All state societies are supposed to coincide with 'nations' or if they are Federations with 'peoples': they in any case all have a national flag, a national hymn, a national history and a national ideology, containing an image of their own society in contrast to neighbouring state societies, usually based upon what are considered to be the best characteristics of one's own nation and the worst characteristics of neighbouring societies. These national images and stereo-types fulfil similar functions of identification and integration all over the world.

The common features of states of the present day world - no matter whether their modes of production can be described as liberal capitalist, state capitalist, mixed or socialist - are usually taken for granted as self-evident facts of modern life. Yet, they require explanation. Why do we observe such similarities notwithstanding great differences in terms of cultural heritage, mode of production, class structure, pattern of income distribution, predominant political ideology, and degree of dependence on other states and economies? Do processes of state formation have a structure and direction of their own, a specific sequence of phases, which are relatively

*I am grateful to Brian van Arkadie, Rod Aya, Oscar Braun, Johan Goudsblom, Ken Post, Peter Skalnik and Peter Waterman for their comments on an earlier version of this paper. I thank Rod Aya for permitting me to use his translation of the introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*.

autonomous from processes of economic development or - in Marxist terms - from sequences or modes of production?¹

To ask this question is to address oneself to the heart of the recently revived debate on the Marxist theory of the state. It should be said from the outset, however, that this is primarily a debate on the theory of the *capitalist* state, a combination of terms which indicates that the participants in the discussion are but little concerned with the question formulated above. To speak of the *capitalist* state is in fact an implicit answer to that question: the state is supposed to be a function of the mode of production - and the nation-state the product of capitalism.²

If the state in the Marxist theory of development is seen as subordinate, as an 'epiphenomenon of the class struggle',³ which belongs to the superstructure, why then is there now such vivid interest among Marxists in the theory of the state? Four reasons can be distinguished, each a mixture of political-strategic and theoretical motives.

(a) In advanced capitalist states one can observe a continuously increasing number of economic functions of the government and state bureaucracies. One often speaks of an intermingling between state and economy, which makes havoc of the liberal premises of the desirability of separation between state and economy. Monopolisation of economic power in global corporations and an increase in the number and importance of the economic functions of states go hand in hand. These developments have been conceptualised in the theory of state monopoly capitalism, as propounded by Soviet and Eastern European scholars and taken up by Western European communist parties.⁴ They are also expressed in the title of the Marxist journal *Kapitalistate*, published in the United States and supported by contributors from all over Western Europe. In order to explain these developments and the role of the state in the economy Marxists argue that the theory of the state needs to be further developed.

(b) In post-colonial societies, incorporated into the world-wide division of labour dominated by the advanced industrial states and by global corporations, and for that reason often called peripheral capitalist societies, it has become clear that the economic functions of the state are also becoming more and more important. And an increasing number of Third World states are governed by military-bureaucratic oligarchies. When they want to explain why the military and state bureaucracy are so much more important in post-colonial state societies than the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, Marxist scholars are also confronted with the inadequacies of the Marxist theory of the state. The discussion among Marxists on the post-colonial

state has been started with an article by the Pakistani scholar Hamza Alavi and is now also applied to African states.⁵

(c) Then there is the stubborn refusal of 'socialist' states to show any signs of beginning to wither away, as they should according to the Marxist theory of development. Different arguments are advanced to explain that on the contrary the Soviet, Chinese or Cuban states continuously expand their functions and power. It is said that they are still in a period of transition and that the socialist mode of production has not yet come to fruition within them. Another argument is to say that in the Soviet Union a 'radically new type of capitalist social formation' has emerged. Indeed to label the Soviet Union a capitalist state is to solve all problems and makes it possible to argue, as Martin Shaw does, 'that the expansion of the state in "communist" societies is only apparently contradictory to the Marxian theory, and that the theory in fact provides the basis for a more adequate account of this phenomenon'.⁶ Karl Marx himself would not have considered such arguments adequate enough:

The question then arises what transformations will the nature of the state (Staatswesen) undergo in communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence there that are analagous to present functions of the state? This question can only be answered scientifically and one does not get a flea-hop nearer to the problem by a thousandfold combination of the word people with the word state.⁷

A last argument would be to say that present day 'socialist' states embody the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', but it is rather difficult to maintain that Stalinist terror was directed only at the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus. Marx's comment is also appropriate in this connection, if we remember that Stalin declared in 1936 that the Soviet-state had become the state of the people as a whole. But it is more in accordance with Marx's own categories to say that the Soviet Union embodies neither the dictatorship of the proletariat nor the people as a whole, but that a bureaucratic class has emerged there, as the Dutch Marxist S. Stuurman has asserted.⁸ But if that is so, a theory of state formation becomes all the more indispensable. Why could this bureaucratic class emerge?

That revolutions - whether or not in the name of socialism - lead to anything but a state and classless society, but on the contrary to a strengthening of the state, and to new patterns of class formation has also been an important observation for the Marxian theory of political development as outlined in Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. That revolutions strengthen

state power instead of the other way round, has been taken as starting point for theorising about the autonomous development and role of the state and of state bureaucracies by a few American scholars influenced by Barrington Moore.⁹ The discussion on the Marxist theory of state, however, has been little affected by this kind of historical-sociological research. This might change, if the research on state formation and nationalism of the British Marxian scholars Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn and the research on the capitalist mode of production as a 'world system, of the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein will be taken up in the debate on the Marxist theory of the state.¹⁰

(d) The last reason is less directly related to historical developments in different parts of the world. This is the long-standing debate between Marxists and what they prefer to call bourgeois social science. Anti-Marxist social scientists have contributed to this misleading categorisation by lumping Marxian and Marxist scholars together, and then taking the most dogmatic of Marxist writings as representative of the whole. Nevertheless, it is mistaken in two ways: it neglects the aristocratic-conservative tradition in social science which has been at least as influential as the liberal-bourgeois tradition.¹¹ But, more seriously, it creates a blindness to the way in which the two opposing traditions form what Norbert Elias has called a 'paradigm community' (in a lecture given at the University of Amsterdam, 30 November 1976) sharing certain presuppositions - such as the primacy of the 'economic' as determinant of social development and social structure - and classifying all attempts to go beyond those, such as the work of Elias himself, as belonging either to one or the other part of that paradigm community. But how can one classify - within that community of arguments - a theory of development of which class struggles form just as integral a part as the formation of establishments and outsider groups, or for that matter state and nation formation? Elias' work clearly goes beyond the paradigm community which liberal and Marxist social scientists form. As Poulantzas says: 'The class division of society necessarily means class struggle, for we cannot speak of classes without speaking of the class struggle. This runs counter to official modern sociology, which is prepared to speak about classes but never about the class struggle'.¹² But class struggles (in the plural) *are* an integral part of Elias' theory of the development of human societies.

But Marxists are still caught in what they perceive as *the* polarity between two class-bound social sciences. This inspires a continuing polemic against theories developed in social science disciplines as they have become institutionalised in American and Western European Universities,

(i.e. economics, anthropology, sociology and political science). One recent contribution to the Marxist theory of the state, Ralph Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society*, has been written as a polemic against the theory of political pluralism which has been dominant in American political science. Miliband's aim is to show that these 'bourgeois' theories are wrong because in capitalist society the state is in fact 'the coercive instrument of a ruling class'.¹³

A different way to wage the polemic is to show that the Marxist theoretical approach is better suited to understand and explain politics than bourgeois social science. The most influential recent attempt to develop the Marxist theory of the state from such a vantage point is Nicos Poulantzas' *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales*. The difference between such a direct and indirect polemic have been made clear by the authors of these two books in a debate published in the English journal *The New Left Review*.¹⁴ In this debate the problems of a Marxist theory of the state have been spelt out in great detail.

Each of the four reasons just mentioned provides us with examples of the difficulties of Marxist theorising about the state or for that matter about politics. The first points to the problem of the relationship between the economic base and the political and ideological superstructure, a basic tenet of Marxist theory which as far as one can now see must be maintained to preserve the integrity of the Marxist conceptual and theoretical framework. The second shows the difficulty of clearly relating class formation processes to the development of states. Alavi, for example, has pointed out that in post-colonial societies one cannot speak of a single ruling class as one could in Western Europe, but has to distinguish three ruling classes, between which a 'military-bureaucratic oligarchy' is supposed to mediate or arbitrate. The third brings out the fact that Marxists only have a theory of capitalist states. They have no theory of state formation as a process with a direction of its own, notwithstanding the particular character of a mode of production, which would make it possible to explain the similarities between the state formation processes of 'capitalist' and 'socialist' states. The fourth shows the limitations of the Marxist theory of sequences of modes of production, as determined by the internal dynamics of societies. The latter assumption clarifies why Marxists attempt to develop a theory of the state in the singular, instead of taking the elementary observation into account that states always exist in the plural. Marxists therefore do not incorporate into their theory of the state the regularities of interstate competition or the modelling effects of more advanced (effectively

centralised and bureaucratised) states on less advanced states.¹⁵

These problems of Marxist theorising on the state will be discussed more extensively below. However, the theoretical problems and the inadequacies of the Marxist theory of the state can be better understood, if the origins of Marx's own ideas about the state and its relationship with what is now called the economy or the society are first analysed.

2. THE ORIGINS OF MARX'S THEORY OF THE STATE

The implicit assumption of most recent discussions about the Marxist theory of the state is that the concepts and notions which Marx used in order to understand the relationship between politics and economics or the relationship between state and mode of production were developed by Marx as if he was a contemporary social scientist.¹⁶ It is presumed that Marx simply studied society, economy and politics as social scientists do now and that he coined his concepts in relationship to facts and processes that he actually observed. What is insufficiently realised is that Marx's ideas about the state and its relationship with society developed in the context of the philosophical tradition and debates of his time. Marx remained all of his life primarily interested in the liberation of human reason and creativity, a function which he later came to assign to the proletariat as the 'universal' class. As Avineri formulates the main preoccupation of Marx, when he started to write his critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*:

For Marx, Hegel's chief attraction lay in his philosophy's apparent ability to become the key to the realisation of idealism in reality, thus eliminating the dichotomy [between the 'is' and the 'ought' - BvdB] Kant bequeathed to the German philosophical tradition.¹⁷

Most of the serious biographies of Marx stress the same point, that he remained preoccupied with these philosophical questions, even when he turned his attention more and more to 'the Critique of political economy', to the analysis of the structure and dynamics of exploitation by social classes of other social classes.¹⁸ In his analysis of Marx's anthropology Bertell Ollmann also emphasises the continuity of Marx's thought since the 1844 Manuscripts:

Even the concession which is always made regarding the new terminology Marx adopted after 1844 is overdone. The 'Hegelian' and 'Feuerbachian' language is only partly replaced by another, better suited to presenting Marx's ideas and

getting them accepted...Even in his later works however, whenever connections across disciplines had to be made, he frequently resorted to these 'older' terms.¹⁹

But this is not to say that for Marx observable realities were not important. They certainly were. It should also be stressed that Marx has contributed greatly to the development of the social sciences, through the way in which he translated his philosophical quest in attempting to understand the immanent dynamics of the development of human societies. Nevertheless, in order to understand certain present problems of Marxist theorising, it is necessary to bear in mind that his conceptualisation of the structure and development of human societies remained firmly anchored in what was originally a philosophical problematic. Marx's analysis of the relationship between state and society (at that time he was not yet concerned with economic problems) started with his critical examination of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, written in 1843 after the *Rheinische Zeitung* was forbidden by King Frederick William IV and his Council of Ministers.²⁰

Hegel's own theory of the state is an attempt to systematically discuss the implications of the distinction between state and civil society which occupied a central place in 18th and early 19th century political philosophy. The term 'civil society' was diffused all over Europe through translations of the Scottish moral philosopher, Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), a study of what Ferguson saw as the progress of society from rudeness to refinement. Ferguson speaks of 'crude society' in contrast to 'civil society'.²¹ But Hegel uses 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft' as the translation of civil society. From 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft', which may still refer to a society in which the civilised conduct of town citizens is seen as the embodiment of progress, it is but one step to 'bourgeois Gesellschaft', as the class dominated capitalist society, which it became for Marx. But the antecedents of the distinction between state and civil society remain important for understanding Marx.

The philosophical discussion on the relationship between state and civil society can be better understood if it is seen in the context of the process of state formation, i.e. the development of dynastic states into so-called absolute monarchies. One can see the change in preoccupation of political philosophers if one compares Hobbes' *Leviathan* in which the central problem is the establishment of domestic peace and order - in Elias' terms: of a relatively stable central (state) monopoly of the use and control over the means of violence - with those of John Locke, the Scottish and French Enlightenment,

and especially the physiocrats. In their writings one can see a clear shift in preoccupation from the problem of order to viewing the state - the absolute monarchy - as an obstacle to the natural development of society and economy. If left to itself the natural, harmonious order of society would emerge.²² Thus, the distinction between state and civil society formed the context and determined the terms with which philosophical debates on political problems were waged. To this it should be added that political philosophy in the 18th and early 19th centuries could be a dangerous activity. It was often necessary to be very careful in choosing one's words and discuss contemporary political problems as if they were metaphysical problems *sub specie aeternitatis*. In the case of Hegel it is difficult to determine to what extent his language was developed as an outgrowth of his theological upbringing or as a deliberate attempt to disguise the politically dangerous implications of his ideas.²³

It is impossible here to discuss in detail the complex relationship between Hegel and Marx. What should be stressed is that the standard Marxist conception - Marx himself did have also more nuanced views - of the 19th century western European state as the executive committee of the ruling class as a whole (the bourgeoisie), or in broader terms of the class character of the state, goes back to Marx's polemic with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. In Hegel's theory of the state the distinction between state and civil society occupies a central place. Hegel describes civil society as the clash of social forces, in Avineri's words, 'to be transcended by the universality of the state'.²⁴ But Hegel still equates the universality of the state with monarchy:

Hegel vindicated monarchy by saying that it expresses in an ideal form the principle that subjectivity and self-determination are underlying sources of the objective norms and institutions of the state. By saying 'le Roi le veult', the monarch expresses the individual self-determination which, according to Hegel, characterises political institutionalisation in the modern world.

Marx saw this as a rationalisation. The will of the monarch was the will of one person separated from the universality of the consciousness of the people as a whole. Avineri gives a clear example of the difference between the reasoning of Hegel and that of Marx. For Marx one should say: 'in the historical context of the early 19th century, the will of the monarch finally decides'. But Hegel hypostasised such an observation of factual relations

into: 'the final decision of the will is the monarch'.²⁵ In a similar manner Marx demonstrates that Hegel perceives the state as set apart from the real context of social relationships. Marx already anticipates his later conceptualisation of a dependent relationship between state and ruling class by pointing out that the 'objective arrangements of the state are just so many particular interests parading under the banner of the general and the universal'.

The distinction between superstructure and base became the conceptual basis of Marx's developmental scheme of sequences of modes of production in human history, transformed into the mechanistic Marxist-Leninist conception of a necessary and automatic sequence within all human societies, sanctified by Stalin into 'universal history', with the Soviet Union leading mankind on its predetermined path. But the original distinction goes back to Marx's quarrel with Hegel's separation of man and nature-or, in more abstract terms, spirit and matter. Following Feuerbach Marx contended that no longer thought should be the subject of philosophy but man and his 'material' needs.²⁶ In the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* Marx expresses his own intellectual development in this respect quite clearly:

My investigation led to the conclusion that legal relations as well as forms of the state are to be understood neither by themselves nor in terms of the so-called universal development of the human spirit but, on the contrary, are rooted in the material relation of life whose totality Hegel, following the precedent of the English and French (writers) of the 19th century, sums up under the name 'civil society' (bürgerliche Gesellschaft); moreover, that the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy.

If one combines the dichotomies between state and civil society and between spirit and matter as they were conventionally understood in the period preceding Marx one can see how the conceptualisation of the development and functions of the state as belonging to the superstructure can only be understood in the context of the philosophical discussions of Marx's time. Hegel's dictum 'it is as absurd to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes' is appropriate here.²⁷ The image of state versus civil society remained important in Marx's later more scientific writings. Hegel had already used 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft' as the equivalent of civil society in Ferguson's sense. But for Marx 'bürgerliche Gesellschaft' increasingly became a society dominated by the bourgeoisie as a social class. Therefore Marx no longer conceived the problem of making philosophy come true as the application of rational will through the

institutions of the state. One must search for the *immanent* forces capable of transforming society in the direction of liberating man's reason and creative capacity. One must examine the actual tendencies and potentialities within society itself, not the 'superstructure' of the state or the ideas legitimating class domination.²⁸ After this polemic, first with Hegel himself and then with the young Hegelians, Marx turned his attention away from the state and politics and became increasingly preoccupied with political economy. The left Hegelians saw as the most important obstacle to human freedom and the liberation of man's creative capacity the reification of formerly progressive institutions - the religious beliefs which came to be used to justify political domination. But Marx had come to see those antiquated beliefs as merely a form of ideology, which should not occupy a central place in social analysis. The real 'material' needs of human beings and the way in which they cope with these needs in processes of production and reproduction should henceforth be placed at the centre of attention.

Thus, the origins of Marx's own theory of the state is to be found in his attempt to emancipate himself from the philosophy of Hegel. But if one turns a conceptual framework on its head in order to rid it of its metaphysical connotations, one still has to continue to use its terms. Even though the meaning of the concepts may be changed, the internal relations of the conceptual scheme remain the same.

A recent survey of present tendencies in Marxist theory of the state shows clearly to what extent the recent debates still remain tied to the conceptual categories which Marx derived from Hegel's synthesis of 18th century philosophy.²⁹ Three directions in Marxist theorising are distinguished.

(a) Instrumentalist, in which the state is seen primarily in terms of the functions that it fulfils for the ruling 'capitalist' class. It is empirically oriented and attempts to demonstrate the strong influence of bourgeois ideology in the political system of capitalist states. Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* is a prototype example of this kind of Marxist approach to the state.

(b) Structuralist, which tries to relate the state in a more abstract manner to the theory of the capitalist mode of production. Here the state and its apparatus are analysed with respect to the functions which they fulfil for the maintenance and smooth functioning of the capitalist mode of production. Poulantzas' *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales* is the clearest example of this kind of theorising.

(c) Hegelian Marxist, which emphasises mainly the problems of consciousness, ideology, alienation and so on. This is the tradition of Lukacs, Gramsci and the Frankfurter Schule, of which Jürgen Habermas and Claus Offe are now the most prominent representatives.³⁰

But whatever their differences, it is quite clear that all three versions of Marxists theorising about the state start out from a conceptualisation in terms of base and superstructure. They are mainly concerned with the relationships between state and ideology (superstructure) and the ruling class or mode of production (base).

It is thus the distinction between state and civil society transformed into the dependent relationship between superstructure and base which has remained the central distinguishing text of Marxist theorising. For Marxists, even though they may admit the dominance or the political in Antiquity or or religion in feudalism, the 'relative autonomy' of the state or the 'mutual conditioning' of state and economy in capitalism, it is 'ultimately' or 'in the last instance' the development of the economic base or mode of production that decisively shapes or determines the way in which all other social relations, underlying the state, develop. Though the mechanistic relations between base and superstructure as reified entities as sanctified in Marxist-Leninism and Stalinism are repudiated by nearly all contemporary Marxist theorists in the West, they still use the conceptual categories of base and superstructure. They elaborate Marx's own refutation of a critical comment on the determinant influence of the development of the base on the development of the superstructure:

I seize this opportunity of shortly answering an objection taken by a German paper in America, to my work, 'Zur Kritik der Pol. Oekonomie, 1859.' In the estimation of that paper, my view that each special mode of production and the social relations corresponding to it, in short, that the economic structure of society, is the real basis on which the juridical and political superstructure is raised, and to which definite social forms of thought correspond: that the mode of production determines the character of the social, political, and intellectual life generally, all this is very true for our own times, in which material interests preponderate, but not for the middle ages, in which catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics, reigned supreme. In the first place it strikes one as an odd thing for any one to suppose that these well-worn phrases about the middle ages and the ancient world are unknown to anyone else. This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part. For the rest, it requires but a slight acquaintance with the history of the Roman

Republic, for example, to be aware that its secret history is the history of its landed property.³¹

Marx makes here the distinction between the dominance of a specific factor in a particular period, which may be either (part of) the superstructure or the economic base, and determination, which is always exerted by the 'real base'. I will return to this distinction, which has become quite important in recent Marxist theorising. There can be little doubt that the assumption of the determining role of the economic base in the development of societies remains a, if not the central distinguishing tenet of Marxist theory. Whether Marx himself, if he would have been able to finish the intended book of his general critique of political economy, would have remained tied to this assumption, is a moot point. An indication, that he was not fully certain, may be derived from what he writes in a letter to Kugelmann: 'the development of what follows (with the exception perhaps of the relation of the different forms of the state to the different economic structures of society) could be easily accomplished on the basis of it [the first volume of *Capital* - BvdB]'.³²

But that volume has not been written and the assumption of the determining influence of the economic base - the combination of productive forces and relations of production - has remained fundamental for Marxism. But is a theory of the state, or rather of states and state formation, which departs from this assumption possible?

3. THE LIMITATIONS OF A MARXIST THEORY OF THE STATE

Marx himself has never systematically dealt with the state, nor for that matter with social classes. Marxist theory therefore had to make do with the one aspect of the development and structure of human societies, which Marx did analyse more or less systematically: the sequences of different modes of production, which he discerned in the history of mankind, and in much greater detail, the structure of the capitalist mode of production, as analysed particularly in *Capital*.

There are thus two ways in which it is possible to derive a Marxist theory of the state from the writings of Marx. One can use all the scattered references to the state in Marx's early and in his later political writings. That procedure is wrought with difficulties, because it is quite easy to find in different works of Marx citations which contradict each other. It is therefore also possible to seemingly substantiate divergent theories on the basis of such citations. But to use only the earlier writings of Marx in which Marx himself had not yet thought out all

the implications of his theoretical analysis of the structure and development of human societies is not satisfactory either.

Therefore, the second way is to be preferred: namely to explicate Marx's model of the development of human societies and assess what it implies about the development of the state. In most writings by Marxists on the state these two alternatives are not clearly spelt out. Usually the latter procedure is implicitly followed, but if difficulties appear, citations from Marx's earlier or more journalistic writings are often used to show that Marx, if he would have been able to finish his programme of research, might have assessed the development and role of the state in a different way, more in accordance with what has actually happened in the world. However, to answer the question which this paper poses: is a Marxist theory of the state possible?, the second alternative is the only one that can be followed. One has to ask oneself what Marx's theory of the development and structure of human societies precisely contains. In the preface to *The Critique of Political Economy* Marx has in a very concise manner explained what he himself considered as: 'The general result which yielded to me and, once won, served my studies as a guide'. Because that passage is a clear summary of Marx's theory, showing both its strengths and weaknesses, it is worth quoting in full:

In the social production of their life, people enter into relations that are definite, necessary, and independent of their wills; relations of production that correspond to a definite stage in the development of their material productive forces (*materielle Produktivkräfte*). The totality of these relations of production (*Produktionsverhältnisse*) forms the economic structure of society, the real basis, upon which arises a juridical and political superstructure (*Ueberbau*) and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production or material life conditions (*bedingt*) the social, political, and spiritual process of life in general. It is not the consciousness of people that determines (*bestimmt*) their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing relations of production or, what is only a juridical expression therefor, with the property relations inside of which they have moved hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces,

these relations turn into their fetters. Then an epoch of social revolution sets in. With the change of the economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure more slowly or rapidly revolutionises itself (*wälzt sich...um*). In considering such upheavals (*Umwälzungen*) one must always distinguish between the material upheaval in the economic conditions of production, to be verified scientifically (*naturwissenschaftlich treu zu konstatieren*), and the juridical, political, religious, artistic, or philosophical - in short, ideological - forms in which people become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as little as one would judge an individual according to what he fancies about himself, can one judge such an epoch of upheaval by its consciousness; rather this consciousness must, on the contrary, be explained by the contradictions of material life, by the existing (*vorhanden*) conflict between social productive forces and relations of production. A social formation never goes under before all productive forces for which it has room (*weit genug ist*) are developed, and new, higher relations of production never step into place before their material conditions of existence have incubated in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore humanity always sets itself only problems it can solve because, looked at more closely, it will always be found that the problem itself springs up only where the material conditions or its solution are already on hand or at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines, (the) asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois (*bürgerliche*) modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production; antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but an antagonism growing out of the social living conditions of individuals; however, the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create at the same time the material conditions for the solution of this antagonism. With this social formation therefore the prehistory of human society comes to a close.³³

If one tries to explicate the model of development implied in this passage, one is confronted with what in modern terminology could be called a system transformation conception of social change. In a given mode of production 'at least during the pre-history of mankind', and after the original classless societies of pre-history, there inevitably

will arise a situation in which the forces of production come into contradiction with the existing relations of production, i.e. the class relations. These are the relations between those who control the means of production and those who do not. The latter became bound to the first either through the labour market, as in capitalism, or through different ways of physical coercion, as in pre-capitalist modes of production. Different modes of production are thus different forms of exploitation, different ways in which a dominant class appropriates surplus value produced by (a) subservient class(es). Implied in this conception of a succession of modes of production is, of course, class struggle, but also the development of productive forces (technology, education, organisation of labour, etc.) giving increased power resources to the dominated classes, which eventually make it possible for them to overthrow the dominant class. Class struggle thus ushers in after a period of social revolution a new mode of production.

This is clearly a very coherent model of the dynamics of development of human societies. However, it is precisely when we begin to consider societies in the plural (i.e. state societies) that the problems begin. Marx's scheme did not refer to the development of societies in the plural, but to the development of mankind or the human species as a whole. He denied, however, that from his schematic description of the development of capitalism 'a historic-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself' could be deduced.³⁴

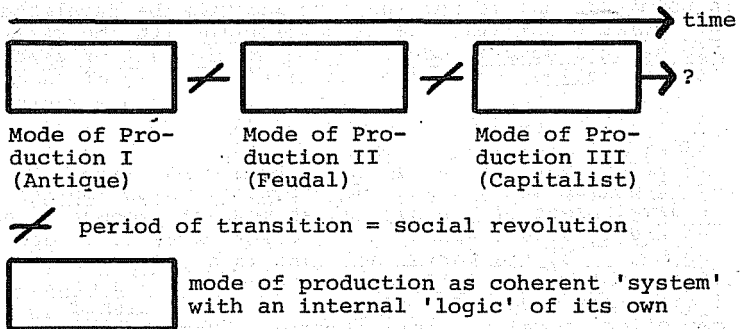
Marx, of course, was aware of the fact that the transformation of a particular mode of production into a different one did begin in certain areas or countries, but he supposed that, at least, with the development of capitalism the process would gradually spread all over the world. His writings on colonial societies are a clear illustration in point.³⁵ But if one wants to analysis the development of particular countries, one is confronted with the relationship of this general model to the development of specific state-societies, or as Marxists prefer to say, of 'social formations' (*Gesellschaftsformationen*). If one wants to explain, for example, the development of Russia, as Trotsky attempted in the first chapter of his *History of the Russian Revolution*, one has to resort to something like his so-called law of uneven and combined development, which implies that the development of the capitalist mode of production has been uneven with respect to different parts of Europe, and *a fortiori*, of the world, and that as a consequence of this, one can observe in different state societies a coexistence of different modes of production as distinguished in the theoretical model of their sequence. For the same reason studies of the development of contemporary state societies in Africa, Asia or Latin America the concept of 'dominance

of the capitalist mode of production' has been coined.³⁶

A second difficulty arises, because the development of capitalism has not proceeded according to the theoretical model. Social revolutions have occurred, but not in capitalist countries in which the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production was most highly developed. Revolutions occurred primarily in agricultural dynastic states in the periphery of the capitalist world market, where capitalist classes had hardly been formed, but in which communist parties have used Marxist ideology in order to mobilise the population at large and have been able to acquire state power through the use of arms.³⁷ Such anomalies in the theory made it necessary to discover in Marx's own theory an explanation for the remarkable survival capacity of the capitalist mode of production. It is no wonder that one then arrives at a conception of capitalism as a system, able to continually reproduce itself. The clearest expression of this kind of Marxist theory can be found in the work of a number of French Marxists, in particular that of Althusser, Balibar and Poulantzas. As Hindess and Hirst have said of Althusser and Balibar's conception of the capitalist mode of production: it becomes an eternity. 'The specific contradictions of the capitalist mode of production involve a tendency, not towards dissolution, but precisely to the reproduction of these contradictions'.³⁸

According to Marx the capitalist system would eventually perish from its own immanent contradictions, but for some latter-day Marxists the system has inbuilt mechanisms for self-maintenance (reproduction), such as the state, or the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

This systems transformation conception of the development of European societies can be quite simply represented as follows:³⁹



The Asiatic mode of production, which Marx believed to have already developed before the slave mode of production of European antiquity, does not fit into this linear succession of modes of production. The conception of an Asiatic mode of production provides a building block for the construction of a less Eurocentric, multilinear theory of the development of modes of production in human history. One of the reasons why discussion about the Asiatic mode of production was suppressed in the Soviet Union in the thirties is that it undermines the idea of the 'unity of world history', the linear conception of progress makes it possible to depict the Soviet Union as leading mankind on the road towards the necessary arrival of a world-wide classless society. One can easily see how useful this conception is as legitimating ideology of the Soviet imperial state.

Now no matter whether the capitalist mode of production is conceived as an eternity, if left on its own, or as a figuration, which because of its immanent dynamic will ultimately dissolve to make place for the more advanced socialist society (for which the development of productive forces under capitalism forms an important precondition), it is clear that in this conception only forces making up the mode of production (i.e. productive forces and relations of production) can explain why human societies develop in the direction, which they in fact develop into. In the Marxist developmental scheme there is no room for forces connected with state formation or the superstructure in general, which have a structured impact on the direction of social development. As Balibar has formulated this distinction between static 'dominance' and dynamic 'determination': 'To avoid misunderstanding: the existence of the state apparatus realises in a "transformed form" the political domination of the dominant class, even though this political domination in no sense originates from the state. The origin of political domination can only be the relation of forces within the class struggle and in particular, in the last instance in the "economic" class struggle, in exploitation.'⁴⁰

As Elias has pointed out, in the Marxist theory - admittedly a great advance on earlier theories - the development of human societies is seen as a structured process, but it is only the development of productive forces and relations of production, that is seen as structured, all other influences - of the state or of ideology - are seen as random or accidental.⁴¹ Seen in this way, it becomes possible to reconcile Marx's statements on the influence of the state or the superstructure on specific historical processes with his own model of the development of modes of production. The role of the state is then a contingent one which only in exceptional circumstances (such as 'Bonapartism' as analysed in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*)

plays an independent role in the development of a specific country.

But state formation as an on-going process or the competition between states are in Marxist theorising not seen as structured processes moving into a particular direction. The Marxist scheme of development remains that of sequences of modes of production, in which the structured dynamic is only the (contradictory) relation between the development of productive forces and the development of relations of production - the manner in which a ruling class appropriates surplus value.

To again quote Marx himself, a famous passage from *Capital*, Vol. III, Chapter 47:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers - a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite state in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity - which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis or the entire social structure, and with it the political form or the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis - the same from the standpoint of its main conditions - due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.

This passage is not quite clear, since Marx asserts on the one hand that 'it is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers etc.' and on the other hand that 'the relationship of rulers and ruled...in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element'. The first sentence implies that the economic base determines not only the overall development of societies, but also 'the specific form of the state' at any given moment. But the second sentence could be read as a formulation of the relative autonomy of the state. However, it is also possible to interpret it as referring only to class relations, not to the state. In that case there

would not be a contradiction between the two sentences. But no matter which interpretation one may prefer, the passage may again make clear that for Marxists, particularly when they are studying the development of specific societies, the relation between base and superstructure constitutes a difficult problem. With the assumption of a mechanistic one-way relationship one cannot account for the complexities and other contradictory tendencies in actual historical processes. In the practice of research, especially when dealing with politics or ideology, the base-superstructure conceptualisation constitutes a problem. But rather than abandoning this conceptualisation and the implied determination - even though pushed back to the last instance - Marxists are developing all kinds of come-to-the-rescue concepts such as 'mediation' or constructions such as the distinction between 'dominance' - which in a particular mode of production may be exercised by the superstructure - and 'determination', which is always by the base. One of the most ingenious solutions to the problem has been put forward by Maurice Godelier.⁴² After having again confirmed that 'The fundamental discovery of Marx is that of the role of transformations in the material base of societies for understanding the logic or forms of social life and the logic of their evolutions', he goes on to say that base and superstructure are often mistakenly conceived of as institutions. But it is not a distinction between 'economic' and 'political' institutions, or between 'material' and 'immaterial' (ideas), but a distinction between functions. In hunting and collecting societies, for example, lineage relations have the function of relations of production. A lineage structure as an institution can function at the same time as base and as superstructure. In Greek city states political relations function as relations of production. That explains why politics is dominant in the slave mode of production of European Antiquity: 'Only within the capitalist mode of production do the different functions at base and superstructure exist in the form of distinct institutions'. For Godelier the relation between base and superstructure is an expression of a hierarchy of functions and therefore also of a hierarchy of 'structural causalities'. Godelier thus can escape from the danger of reification, which the concepts 'base' and 'superstructure' as construction metaphors are very susceptible to. He also can account for the dominant role in previous modes of production of institutions which in capitalism belong to the superstructure. It should be said, however, that in Godelier's interpretation of Marx's conceptual scheme and model of development the concept of function is not terribly clear. As far as I can see, he uses the concept of function as it is used in structural-functionalism or systems theory, namely to describe 'functions' which particular institutions or structures fulfil for the maintenance and smooth 'functioning' of a mode of pro-

duction system. But this makes it difficult to explain the transformation of one mode of production into another. Though he does not deal explicitly with this problem, it is clear that for Godelier only the forces related to the 'production' function can explain the structure of development of human societies.

There are, as far as I know, no Marxists who see state formation as structured processes moving into a particular direction. Within the Marxist scheme - no matter how far removed from a mechanistic, reified interpretation it may be used - one has to stick to the conception of a relationship between base and superstructure, which is *unchanging* within the whole of the 'prehistory' of mankind and which determines the structure of development of societies.

From this analysis of the Marxist conceptual scheme and model of sequences of modes of production as determining the forms of societies and the structure of their development, it follows that a Marxist theory of state formation - of the genesis and development of states - is not possible. Elsewhere I have demonstrated some of the problems that Marxists have encountered, leading them to faulty interpretations, in attempting to account for state formation as an on-going process.⁴³ To admit the relative autonomy of state formation as a process with a particular structure and direction and with specific phases in the same way as the sequence of modes of production is seen as a structured process is to go beyond Marx - and Marxism. It implies that the conceptual scheme of base and superstructure with all the implied 'dominance' relations and determinations can no longer be used.

Can it be denied that this conceptual scheme is the most fundamental distinguishing characteristic of Marxism? It is difficult to stop using it, since it fulfils very important functions for guiding political practice. In what for Marxists remains essential - the relation between theory and practice - it may even appear to be indispensable, because how else could one identify what is 'basic', what are the determining or dominant factors to be blamed for exploitation and alienation and which have to be either eradicated or brought under conscious control? For Marxists to accept that it is still an open question whether in fact there is one 'basic' process - material production and reproduction - which conditions all other processes to be observed in human history, would imply that the theory to guide political practice no longer exists.

But does the impossibility of a theory of state formation also imply that a Marxist theory of the capitalist state is impossible? After all, if one only deals with Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production, would it then not be possible to develop a theory of the role and functions of the state for the production and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production? It is, of course, possible to develop a theory of the role of the

state on the basis of a Marxist description of capitalism as a 'system'. One then arrives at an analysis of the role of the state in which the state increasingly becomes the central agent for the maintenance of the capitalist mode of production. This is the gist of practically all recent Marxist analyses of the capitalist state. Miliband for example, tries to demonstrate that a capitalist ruling class still exists, contrary to the conception of a plurality of political elites, contesting for political power, as the dominant school in political science teaches. Poulantzas uses a more abstract method of analysing the development and role of the state, in which he tries to specify the functions of different political and ideological apparatuses of the state for the maintenance and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production as a system. Reading the writings of Marxists like Althusser, Balibar, Poulantzas and most of the contributors to the British journal *Economy and Society*, one is reminded of the endless conceptual refinements in the work of Talcott Parsons and many other structural functionalists and systems theorists. They are hardly concerned with the understanding and explanation of the development of particular human societies and their interrelationships, but spend their intellectual energy in endless refinements of specifying the meaning of and internal relations between empirically more or less free floating concepts: 'We attempt to determine the theoretical status and validity of certain abstract general concepts within the Marxist theory of modes of production but not to analyse particular concrete social formations or particular conjunctures'.⁴⁴ In that sense Miliband's analysis is to be preferred, because he at least tries to test certain propositions derived from a theoretical conception of the role of the state in the capitalist mode of production, through analysis of what in fact has happened in American and Western European societies after the Second World War. However, Miliband is less concerned with testing the Marxist theory than with providing its validity. And, of course, its validity is easily demonstrated, because examples of the influence of capitalist entrepreneurs or of employers organisations on government policies can easily be produced.

In discussions among Marxists the terms 'government' and 'state' are not clearly distinguished. For example, 'state intervention' or 'government intervention' in the economy are used interchangeably. But this is confusing. State and government should be clearly distinguished. We can speak of central, provincial and local governments, which are all parts of the political organisation of state-societies, belong to the state apparatus, as Marxists prefer to say. But to speak of states is to refer to societies in which stable central monopolies of violence and taxation have been established and which include an extended territory with a number of towns and other local communities.

Norbert Elias has introduced the generic concept of 'attack and defence units', within which internal violence is controlled and which are organised for the use of violence against other such units.⁴⁵ One can then distinguish between hunting and collecting bands, tribes, village and city-states, feudal units, dynastic states, nation-states and so on. Another source of confusion is to regard state formation as the process whereby stateless societies develop into state societies. Once established, states are then seen as in their essential characteristics unchanging entities, making it possible to speak of *the* state and to ask for a definition of *the* state. But it is more realistic and theoretically fruitful to speak of state formation as an ongoing process in which distinct phases and contradictory tendencies (for example oligarchisation versus democratisation or centralisation versus decentralisation) can be observed. It is therefore misleading to speak of the *role* of the state. States are specific figurations of interdependent human beings - in more abstract terms: composite units of which governments are one of the component elements or parts.⁴⁶

If one peels off the layers of abstractions from what is offered as Marxist theory of the capitalist state, one is left with what in fact are not much more than a few rather simple assertions; that there exists a capitalist ruling class; that there is an inherent logic of capitalism, which forces entrepreneurs to exploit workers; that the state fulfils different kinds of repressive, ideological and economic functions for the maintenance of capitalism, both domestically and abroad (imperialism). Whether one may call such a theory Marxist is a matter of doubt, because for Marx a theory should at least be dialectical, explain movement, change or development. A theory of the capitalist mode of production as a system would be quite contradictory to the most fundamental assumptions of Marx's own thought. And in that sense Marx was quite right. It is precisely the fact that Marx saw human societies as structured processes, which constitutes one of the most important theoretical advances in our understanding of the development of human societies that he has contributed.

However, both in Marx's own model of the development of human societies and his analysis of the capitalist mode of production very important observable realities are not taken into account. There is no theory of state formation as a process, relatively autonomous but interconnected with the development of modes of production.⁴⁷ There is no theory of the immanent regularities of interstate relations as a process of monopolisation with a similar dynamic as the competitive process between feudal lords which has led to the formation of dynastic states in Western Europe.⁴⁸ There is also no explanation of the similarities in the

development of so-called capitalist and so-called socialist states.⁴⁹ Because the Marxist model only considers the internal dynamics of the development of societies as structured, it cannot account for such similarities, which are to a large extent produced precisely by competition between states.⁵⁰ There is therefore neither a satisfactory theory of nationalism in the Marxist literature.⁵¹ As a last point, there is no satisfactory theory of power in Marxism, because only power resources arising out of the economic base are seen as structured, not the power resources arising out of control over means of violence, means of orientation, means of organisation or means of taxation. Marx deals with other sources of power mainly in his historical and journalistic writings. In his model they are seen as incidental, as arising from unique historical configurations, not as structured in the same manner as the power resources arising out of the 'economic' base, which determine the development of power balances between social classes and the forms of the state. But if one does not begin with the assumption of a pluriformity of power resources, it is impossible to achieve a more realistic understanding of the development of states and of the internal patterns of power distribution between social classes and between rulers and ruled in different state societies.⁵²

Thus we may conclude that a Marxist theory of state formation and interstate competition is impossible and that a Marxist theory of the capitalist state is only possible if one is interested primarily in the internal consistence - the syntaxis rather than the semantics - of the theory, not if one wants to use the conceptual scheme and model of development to explain the development of particular state societies.⁵³ Only when the Marxist conceptualisation in terms of base and superstructure and therefore also the conception of the ultimate determination of the structure and development of human societies by sequences of modes of production is transcended, does it become possible to further advance the understanding of the development of human societies.

The development of states and of modes of production including class formation should be seen as two interconnected aspects of one overall process, processes which go hand in hand and which cannot be reduced to each other.⁵⁴ Thus one cannot explain and understand state formation as a process without clearly connecting it to the development of productive forces and relations of production, including class struggles, and one cannot understand and explain the development of modes of production without connecting it to the immanent structure of the process of state formation, for which Norbert Elias provides a model in the second volume of his *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*.

Marx himself can be considered a transitional figure

in the process of the development of knowledge, in the sense that his problems were anchored in philosophy, but that he tried to find the answers to his questions through a scientific study of the immanent (materialist) dynamic of the development of human societies. Because of the latter the importance of his work can hardly be overestimated as a contribution to a more realistic understanding of the development of human societies and human life. But his manner of conceptualising social development still betrayed philosophical influences. Marx did see that human history was a blind process, not controlled or planned by any outside metaphysical force nor by specific human beings. As he wrote on the first page of the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*: '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'. Yet, history was not a random succession of events, but contained an order, a structure of its own, as conceptualised by Marx in the model outlined in the introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*. Marx was not yet able to take sufficient distance from his own problematic to see that history as a structured process does not move necessarily in the direction which one considers desirable on philosophical grounds, i.e. the liberation of human reason and creativity. As Elias has pointed out, because Marx lived in a period in which industrialisation had just begun and people experienced the state and a pacified 'civil' society as selfevident, he emphasised the destructive effects on human reason and creativity, which industrialisation and exploitation in the capitalist manner implied, rather than the destructive effects of state formation.

Is it a coincidence, that the most important anarchist theorists, who did see the latter but all too clearly, like Bakunin and Kropotkin, were educated in the first police state to develop, Tsarist Russia? But Marx, living in England, took states much more for granted as secondary, derivative phenomena, which were indispensable only to maintain exploitative class relations. What public (state) functions would remain necessary in communist societies could only be answered by scientific study, as Marx has said in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Marx therefore continued to see the capitalist state primarily as 'the committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie', as a political system of repression, used for furthering the interests of the capitalist ruling class, until the proletariat would acquire great power resources through the articulation of the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production, which would have to develop in capitalism. Because of the appeal of Marxism in this respect and for different

kinds of political and psychological reasons which I have tried to explain elsewhere,⁵⁵ we now observe a deadlock in Marxist theorising. The present situation of Marxism is reminiscent of the period, in which scholastic intellectuals attempted by all kinds of come-to-the-rescue concepts and constructions, to preserve the integrity of a framework of interconnected concepts and models of reality which had become obsolete.⁵⁶ Only because the Marxist theory still fulfils very important orienting and legitimating functions is it still so powerful also among social scientists.⁵⁷ But the impossibility of developing a satisfactory theory of state formation and the functions of states may lead them beyond Marx.

The work of Norbert Elias opens up that possibility. His research into state formation processes provides a model of the structure of state formation, which may be compared with Marx's model of the sequences of modes of production.⁵⁸ His analysis of court society and 'absolute' dynastic states may be compared to Marx's analysis of the immanent dynamic and structure of the capitalist mode of production.⁵⁹ The task before us is to synthesise the models of Marx and Elias into an overall model of the structure of the development of societies.

Such a synthesis may also clarify the notion of 'relative autonomy' of processes of state formation, civilising, the development of knowledge or of modes of production. To speak of 'relative autonomy' implies that one can distinguish these processes, but not separate them from each other. It implies that we should not split up social reality into separate sectors, whether in terms of the economic, political, social or of base and superstructure. To speak of the 'relative autonomy' of specific processes is thus very different from thinking in terms of the relative autonomy of such sectors or 'structures'. The relative autonomy of state formation has to be clearly distinguished from the relative autonomy of the state, as discussed in Marxism, and from the conception of separate sub-systems as used in sociology and political science.

A synthesis will not be possible on the basis of a conception of development in terms of systems transformation. But our present means of conceptualising make it indeed very difficult to deal more adequately with the problem of continuities and discontinuities in the development of human societies than it is being done in the systems model, implicit also in Marx's work:

However, if we use Norbert Elias' concept of human figurations, consisting of interdependent human beings, which are bound to each other in specific ways,⁶⁰ it becomes possible to theoretically distinguish different 'phases' in the way in which such human bonds change - whether related to production or other 'economic' functions people fulfil

for each other, or to 'state' functions and interdependencies. To distinguish such 'phases' is what both Marx's model of sequences of modes of production and Elias' model of state formation attempt to do.⁶¹ It goes without saying that in both cases much more comparative empirical analysis of specific figurations is needed before a theoretical synthesis can be made. In some cases 'revolutions' are convenient demarcation points to distinguish one phase from another - as long as they are not reified into different 'systems'. So, for example, does the French revolution mark the transition from dynastic into nation-states. Yet, nation-states began to develop before the French revolution - in France, England, the Netherlands - while dynastic states continued to exist long beyond it - in Germany, Russia, Austro-Hungary, not to speak of Iran, Ethiopia or Thailand. In other words, if one analyses specific human figurations one has to see the continuities even within discontinuous changes such as revolutions.⁶²

We thus come to see human history and society as moving interconnected figurations of interdependent states, ruling and ruled groups, social classes, established and outsider groups⁶³ and in the last instance, of interdependent human beings, both in the plural and in the singular.⁶⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. For this way of formulating the problem see Norbert Elias, 'Sociology of Knowledge: New Perspectives', *Sociology*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2 and 3, 1971. In his *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, Vol. II, he has demonstrated that the answer should be in the affirmative. To avoid misunderstanding: the term 'relatively autonomous' implies that state formation is connected with other distinctive processes. A certain level of economic and technological development is one of the conditions for the establishment of relatively stable central monopolies of violence and taxation by dynasties, just as the formation of dynastic states is one of the conditions for industrialisation. But they do not necessarily follow from each other: they are 'relatively autonomous' from each other.
2. The State 'is a product of society at a certain stage of its development' as Engels wrote in the concluding chapter of his *Origins of Family, Private Property and State*. And: 'Capitalism unified the nation-state' as David Horowitz (*Imperialism and Revolution*, London 1969, p. 42) paraphrases *The Communist Manifesto*: 'Independent, or but loosely connected, provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier and one customs-tariff'.
3. George Lichtheim, *Marxism: an historical and critical study*, London 1961, p. 373.
4. A good introduction can be found in 'Der staatsmonopolistischer Kapitalismus: Einführungen in marxistische Analysen aus der DDR, Frankreich und der Sowjet Union'. Frankfurt/Main 1972. See also Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, New York 1966, who stress the increasing importance of civilian government and military expenditures for the 'absorption of surplus'.
5. Hamza Alavi, 'The State in Post-colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh', *New Left Review*, No. 74, July-August, 1972, pp. 59-81; John Saul, 'The State in Post-colonial Societies: Tanzania', *The Socialist Register*, London 1974, pp. 349-372. Special issues on the post-colonial state in *African Review of Political Economy*, January/April 1976, No. 5, see especially Colin Leys, 'The Overdeveloped Post-colonial State: a re-evaluation', pp. 39-48. Also Colin Leys, *Underdevelopment in Kenya*, London 1975.

6. Martin Shaw, 'The Theory of the State and Politics', *Economy and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1974, p. 429.
7. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Peking edition 1972, p. 27.
8. S. Stuurman, 'Stalinisme en anti-communisme', *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift*, Vol. I, No. 4, pp. 110-141. Stuurman speaks of a bureaucratic class, because it refers to a group of people which stand in a particular relation (control) of the means of production; which have a standard of living, based on surplus appropriation from the working mass of the population and which is not subject to any form of democratic control and therefore more and more acquires a specific way of thinking and living.
9. See e.g. Theda Skocpol, 'France, Russia, China: a structural analysis of social revolutions', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 18, No. 2, April 1976, pp. 175-210; Ellen K. Trimberger, 'A Theory of Elite Revolutions', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1972. As is the case with Barrington Moore these scholars are Marxian rather than Marxist in the sense that they use Marxian categories in their analyses without identifying themselves clearly as Marxists in the sense of belonging to a specific political denomination.
10. Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism and Lineages of the Absolute State*, London 1974; Tom Nairn, 'Marxism and the Modern Janus', *New Left Review*, No. 94, November-December 1975; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*, New York and London 1974.
11. See e.g. R.A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York 1966 and J. Goudsblom, *Sociology in the Balance*, Oxford 1977.
12. Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Capitalist State: a reply to Miliband and Laclau', *New Left Review*, No. 95, January-February 1976, p. 82.
13. Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, London 1969, p. 5. The explicit polemic against the 'dominant pluralist view' is to be found on pp. 2-7, but it sets the tone for the book as a whole.

14. Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', *New Left Review*, No. 58, November-December 1969; Ralph Miliband, 'The Capitalist State - reply to Nicos Poulantzas', *New Left Review*, No. 59, January-February 1970; Ralph Miliband, 'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', *New Left Review*, No. 82, November-December, 1973; Ernesto Laclau, 'The Specificity of the political: the Poulantzas-Miliband debate', *Economy and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1; Nicos Poulantzas, 'A Reply to Miliband and Laclau', *New Left Review*, No. 95, January-February 1976.
15. Even the Marxist theory of imperialism was until quite recently not concerned with such problems. Lenin's theory was primarily an attempt to explain the failure of the Socialist International to prevent the First World War, and for that reason mainly concerned with 'monopoly capitalism' and with the effects of imperial competition on capitalist states themselves. For an interesting critical discussion of recent Marxist theories see Benjamin Cohen, *The Question of Imperialism: the Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence*, New York 1973. He does not discuss, however, the most sophisticated work in this new tradition, that of Samir Amin e.g. *Neo-Colonialism in West Africa*, Harmondsworth 1973 or *L'Accumulation à l'Echelle Mondiale*, Paris 1971.
16. An article on 'Hegel and the State' (in *Kapitalistate*, Nos. 4-5, summer 1976) characteristically begins 'Can a highly abstract theory of the state advanced by a German philosopher a century and a half ago be of more than antiquarian interest to modern Marxists, most of whom are absorbed in practical political struggles?' One is tempted to ask in reply: 'Can a highly abstract theory of modes of production advanced by a German philosopher a century and a half ago be of more than antiquarian interest to modern social scientists, most of whom are absorbed in empirical research of practical problems?'
17. Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge 1968, pp. 8-9.
18. See e.g. Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx, His Life and Environment*, London 1948; David McLellan, *Karl Marx, His Life and Thought*, London 1973; Fritz J. Raddatz, *Karl Marx, Eine Politische Biographie*, Hamburg 1975.
19. Bertel Ollman, *Alienation, Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge 1971. Ollmann also

points out that Marx's conception of human nature has remained implicit in his writings: '...he was only partially and intermittently aware of his own [views on man]' (p. ix).

20. For the episode see McLellan, *op. cit.*, Chapter 1, 'Journalism'.
21. See Duncan Forbes, 'Adam Ferguson and the Idea of Community', *Edinburgh in the Age of Reason*, Edinburgh 1967, and David Kettler, *Adam Ferguson*, New York 1965.
22. The idea of a 'natural order of society' may have been derived from Matteo Ricci's translations of Confucius. Quesnay whom his contemporaries called the 'Confucius of Europe', gave his manifesto of physiocracy the title *Le Despotisme dans le Chine* (1767) in which he wrote, that only in China existed 'a state founded on science and the natural law, whose concrete development it represents'. (Cited in Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie*, London 1961, p. 24.)
23. See Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*, Cambridge 1972, 'Any discussion of Hegel's theory of the state proper has to contend with a prevalent built-in conception holding that Hegel advocated an authoritarian, if not totalitarian form of government. The preceding chapters have attempted to show how far from the truth such a simpleminded explication of Hegel's political theory is' (p. 176).
24. Avineri, 'The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx', *op. cit.*, p. 17.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
26. Avineri (*Ibid.*, p. 12) shows the importance of the use which Marx made in his critique of Hegel of the transformation method introduced by Feuerbach. This method implies the substitution of subject for predicate and vice versa. This is what is commonly called 'turning Hegel's philosophy upside down'. Feuerbach anticipates Marx in this respect: 'Only the perception of objects and experiences in their objective actuality can free man from all prejudices. The transition from the ideal to the real takes place only in the philosophy of Praxis'.
27. *Philosophy of Right*, cited by Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the State*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

28. The clearest exposition of these assumptions are to be found in *The German Ideology*, especially in 'Feuerbach, Opposition of the Materialistic and Idealistic Outlook': 'It follows...that all struggles within the state, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy and monarchy, the struggle for the franchise, etc. etc., are merely the illusory forms in which the struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another...' (International Publishers, New York edition, p. 23). The famous dictum 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' is to be found in the same chapter (p. 39).
29. David Gold, Clarence Y.H. Lo, and Erik Olin Wright, 'Recent Developments in Marxist Theories of the Capitalist State', Parts 1 and 2, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 27, October and November 1975.
30. See e.g. Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1973, and Claus Offe, *Strukturprobleme des kapitalistischen Staates*, Frankfurt am Main 1972. I would also include Bertell Ollmann's interesting analysis of 'the State as a value relation' (Chapter 30, *Alienation, op. cit.*) in this category. According to Ollmann 'Marx was more interested in the character of the forms he was examining than in who controlled them' (p. 220). His philosophical analysis of alienation was more important than his sociological analysis of politics and rule: 'The state is an illusory community as well as the instrument of rule in class ridden societies: this best expresses its essential character' (p. 221).
31. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow 1970, p. 86.
32. Cited in Roderick Aya, *The Missed Revolution*, Anthropologisch-Sociologisch Centrum, Universiteit van Amsterdam 1975, p. 13.
33. In the translation of Roderick Aya, which is truer to the German text than the standard translation contained in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow 1931, pp. 328-329.
34. Letter to the Editors of Otechestvenniye Zapiski, 1877 cited in Shlomo Avineri (ed.), *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, New York 1969, p. 469.
35. See Shlomo Avineri (ed.), *ibid.* Some examples: 'The need of a constantly expanding market for its

production chases the bourgeoisie all over the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere. The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country' (Chapter I of the *Communist Manifesto*). 'The specific task of bourgeois society is the establishment of a world market, at least in outline, and of production based upon this world market' (*Mars to Engels*, October 8, 1858). 'England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating - the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia....The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis of the new world - on the one hand the universal intercourse founded upon the initial dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse; on the other hand the development of the productive powers of man and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies. Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions of a new world in the same way as geological revolutions have created the surface of the earth' ('The Future Results of British Rule in India', *New York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853).

36. See Samir Amin, 'Le Capitalisme et la rente foncière: la domination du capitalisme sur l'agriculture', in Samir Amin and Kostas Vergopoulos, *Le Question Paysanne et le Capitalisme*, Paris 1974 and W.G. Wolters, *Klasseverhoudingen en Politieke Processen in Centraal Filippijnen*, Anthropologisch-Sociologisch Centrum, University of Amsterdam 1976.
37. For an analysis of the dynamics of these revolutions, combining in her explanation intersocietal with intranational processes, see Theda Skocpol, *op. cit.*
38. B. Hindess and P.Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, London 1975, p. 274. Cited in Talal Asad and Harold Wolpe, 'Concepts of Modes of Production', *Economy and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 4, November 1976, pp. 470-506, a critical review of the Hindess and Hirst study.
39. For a more extended analysis see G. van Benthem van den Bergh, 'The Structure of Development: an invitation to the sociology of Norbert Elias', *Occasional Paper*, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague 1971.

40. Etienne Balibar, *Cinq Etudes du Materialisme Historique*, Paris 1974, p. 92 (my translation, BvDB).
41. Norbert Elias, *Sociology of Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 149-156 and pp. 365-369.
42. Maurice Godelier, 'Le Marxisme dans les Sciences Humaines', *Raison Presente*, No. 37, 1976. I thank Peter Skalnik for drawing my attention to this article.
43. G. van Benthem van den Bergh, 'The Interconnections between Processes of State and Class Formation', *Acta Politica*, XI, 3 July 1976, pp. 289-312.
44. Hindess and Hirst, *op.cit.*, p. 18.
45. Norbert Elias, *Was ist Soziologie?*, München 1970, especially pp. 151-159.
46. For a more extended answer to the question 'What are states?' see G. van Benthem van den Bergh, 'The Interconnections', pp. 255-306.
47. See van Benthem van den Bergh, *ibid.* W.G. Wolters, *Transformation of the Class Struggle within the State Formation Processes in the Philippines*. Unpublished paper for Peasant Seminar, Centre of International and Area Studies, University of London, 1976. A revised version will be published in *Development and Change*, 1977.
48. See Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, Vol. II, Esp. Zusammenfassung, Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Zivilisation, VIII, Überblick, especially pp. 434-441 and pp. 451-454. Cf. also R.N. Berki, 'On Marxian Thought and the Problem of International Relations', *World Politics*, XXIV, No. 1, 1971, pp. 80-105. As Berki cites Marx: 'Is the whole inner organisation of nations, are all their international relations anything else than the expression of a particular division of labour? And must not these change when the division of labour changes?' (Letter to P.V. Annenkov, 1846). And: 'The relations of different nations among themselves depend on the extent to which each has developed its productive forces, the division of labour and internal intercourse' (*The German Ideology*). Of interest are also Kenneth R. Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, New York 1959, and Tom Nairn, *op. cit.*
49. For some useful comments on Marxist explanations of fascism (and its similarity to Stalinism) see A. James Gregor, 'Fascism and Modernization: some addenda',

- World Politics*, XXVI, 3 April 1974, pp. 370-384. He asks: 'Is Italian fascism a member of the class of mass-mobilising developmental dictatorships under single-party auspices that include Stalinism, Maoism and Castroism, as well as an indeterminate number of related political systems?' For his own (affirmative) answer see *The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics*, Princeton 1974. Gregor's short-term comparative perspective would benefit, however, from the analysis of the connection between the uneven development of capitalism and the rise of 'developmental dictatorship' in peripheral states, as outlined in Tom Nairn, *op. cit.*
50. Here we need to distinguish between the 'coincidentia oppositorum' effect of superpower competition, which makes, for example, the defence, foreign policy and secret services apparatuses of the United States and the Soviet Union quite alike in habitus and activities (as described, for example, in the novels of John Le Carré) and the modelling effects of industrially and organisationally more advanced state societies on backward societies. For the latter see Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, London 1964; Tom Nairn, *op. cit.* and Theda Skocpol, 'A Critical Review of Barrington Moore's Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy', *Politics and Society*, Vol. 4, 1, 1973, pp. 1-34.
 51. Admittedly the Austro-Marxists and Stalin dealt with the problem of 'nations' in the context of multiethnic and multilingual empires such as the Habsburg empire and Tsarist Russia. For an analysis of the inadequacies of Marxist explanations of nationalism, see Tom Nairn, *op. cit.* and R.N. Berki, *op. cit.*
 52. See further G. van Benthem van den Bergh, 'On the Concept of Power,' unpublished paper, Institute of Social Studies, 1971 and C. Marijnen, *Een begripsanalyse vanuit het Paradigma van Norbert Elias van R.M. Emerson's Macht-Afhankelijkheidsrelaties*, unpublished thesis, University of Amsterdam, 1972. H. Driessen, *Een Essay over Macht*, unpublished thesis, Instituut voor Culturele en Sociale Anthropologie, University of Nijmegen, 1976.
 53. For the distinction between the syntactic and semantic aspects of a theory see J.F. Glastra van Loon, 'Languages and the Epistemological Foundations of the Social Sciences' in C.I.J.M. Stuart (ed.), *Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics*, no. 17, *Report of the 15th Annual R.T.M. on Linguistic and Language Studies*,

Leiden 1964; also his *Norm en Handeling*, Haarlem 1956, Chapter V.

54. See further G. van Benthem van den Bergh, 'The Interconnections between Processes of State and Class Formation', *op. cit.*
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.
56. See also Thomas Kuhn's description of Ptolemaic astronomy in his *Theory of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago 1962), Chapters VII and VIII and *The Copernican Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass. 1957. 'Given a particular discrepancy, astronomers were invariably able to eliminate it by making some particular adjustment in Ptolemy's system of compounded circles' (*Theory of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 8). Replace astronomers by Marxists and 'system of compounded circles' by 'the relations between base and superstructure' and one has a description of the present state of Marxism.
57. See Aidan Foster-Carter, 'From Rostow to Gunder Frank: Conflicting Paradigms in the Analysis of Underdevelopment', *World Development*, Vol. 4, No. 3, March 1976, pp. 167-180 for a good description of the reasons why so many young students of Third World development have turned to Marxism.
58. See especially the second volume of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, Bern und München 1969; 'Processes of State Formation and Nation Building', *Transactions of the 7th World Congress of Sociology*, Varna 1970, Geneva 1972; and 'Toward a Theory of Communities' in Howard Newby and Colin Bell (eds.), *Readings in the Society of Community*, London 1974.
59. See especially *Die Hofische Gesellschaft*, Neuwied and Berlin 1969.
60. See *Was ist Soziologie?*, München 1970, Chapter 5.
61. The expression 'permanent revolution' reflects increased awareness of this.
62. Common to Marx' and Elias' models of development is also that they both see 'as one of the indispensable ingredients of a scientific theory of society the fact that men may oppress and exploit men and that far from being unstructured accidents, social oppression and exploitation are structured and can be explained in connection

with the overall development of societies' (Norbert Elias, 'Sociology of knowledge: new perspectives', *Sociology*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1971, p. 155). Common is also that they see exploitation and oppression as originating in social differentiation and in competition resulting from the uneven distribution and scarcity of what people need and value in life. In that sense Elias is just as much a (historical and dialectical) materialist as Marx was.

63. See Norbert Elias and John Sootson, *The Established and the Outsiders*, London 1965.
64. For the usefulness of seeing and conceptualising human beings in the plural (to talk of *men* instead of *man*) see Johan Goudsblom, *Sociology in the Balance*, Oxford 1977.