

*Studies in Critical Social Sciences*

*Paul Paolucci*

# Marx and the Politics of Abstraction



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# Studies in Critical Social Sciences

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# Marx and the Politics of Abstraction

By  
Paul Paolucci



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*On the cover:* Karl Marx Monument at the entrance of the University of Leipzig at Augustus Platz before it was removed in 2006. Photographer: Lars Göhler.

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## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Midway through the first decade of the twenty-first century, Moishe Postone (2005: 77) wrote the following:

Because this dynamic is quasi-independent of its constituting individuals, it has the properties of an intrinsic historical logic. In other words, Marx's mature theory no longer hypostatized history as a force moving all human societies; it no longer presupposed that a directional dynamic of history in general exists. It did, however, characterize modern society in terms of an ongoing directional dynamic and sought to explain that historical dynamic with reference to the dual character of the social forms expressed by the categories of the commodity and capital. The existence of a historical dynamic is now taken to be a manifestation of heteronomy.... As an aside, it should be noted that, by grounding the contradictory character of the social formation in the dualistic forms expressed by the categories of commodity and capital, Marx historicizes the notion of contradiction. The idea that reality or social relations in general are essentially contradictory and dialectical appears, in light of this analysis, to be one that can only be assumed metaphysically, not explained. This also suggests that any theory that posits an intrinsic developmental logic to history as such, whether dialectical or evolutionary, projects what is the case for capitalism onto history in general. (also see Postone 2004 for a similar argument)

For many people who read, analyze, and write about Marx, Postone's observation seems accurate, though perhaps unremarkable. Many commonly accept that Marx had a universal theory of history driven by a contradictory metaphysical dynamic. In a reading such as Postone's, the older Marx discarded the younger Marx's metaphysical conception of social relations and historical development as he became more scientific. What if this reading is wrong? Not in that the older Marx retained a metaphysical universal theory of history, but the reverse. What if the younger Marx was no metaphysician and the traditional way we learn to read him has us interpreting him in ways he never intended? To the extent this is so, we must ask how many other ways of reading Marx provide us a less-than-clear view of his ideas.

Before we can adequately understand Marx's view of social relations, history, and the logic of capital, we must understand the methodological principles he accepted and rejected and how these inform both his work and our reading of it. Marxist scholars are not finished with this task. This book is the second installment of my research on this issue.



As this book builds on findings in my *Marx's Scientific Dialectics*, readers might find familiarity with that material helpful. Hopefully, this is not a requirement, as this current work discusses several central ideas found there. That having been said, perhaps a brief overview of what returns here is necessary. First, this book revisits Marx's method of critique, which *Marx's Scientific Dialectics* addresses, though in a relatively shorter, less systematic, and less detailed and complete form than here. Second, this book contains a summary of the methods of abstraction and moments of inquiry that *Marx's Scientific Dialectics* spends space examining, though only in summary form here. Third, this book returns to Marx's so-called theory of history, but this time in a discussion of teleology and with additional material brought to bear on the claim that his approach is (still) widely misread.

Besides an expanded discussion of critique and a new one on teleology, what else is new? First, several examples of relationships between science and politics, and how we might think about them, open the discussion. Second, extending from the first, there is focus on how Marx's method of critique provides principles for evaluating standard social science as well as conventional social discourse and practice. Here, I examine how Marx asks us to consider a different and new way of asking questions about science and politics. Marx's method of critique does not rely on, though he does not deny, traditional criticisms of malformed science, such as corruption of scientists (from political entities as well as of their own doing), debates over objectivity versus subjectivity, and unconscious prejudice. My discussion extracts categories in the philosophy of science that Marx's method of critique targets and uses these as a point of departure for examining how, unlike conventional moral-ethical-political criticisms that rely on abstract absolutes, Marx's criticism comes through a form of historical and scientific analysis. Though *Marx's Scientific Dialectics* referenced the political in Marx's work, how this extended from his scientific and dialectical sensibilities is the central focus of analysis here. This issue would benefit from additional elaboration in Marxian scholarship.

Third, while the influence of Bertell Ollman's work on my own should be apparent to those familiar with both, here my discussion offers a more extended involvement with his take on Marx. Though I try to keep repetition of quotations from Ollman found in *Marx's Scientific Dialectics* to a minimum, some revisiting is inevitable for a few reasons. First, his work presents complex issues in Marx's methodology in a manner more easily understood than was Marx very

often. Second, several of his categories and explanations of the method of abstraction have become ingrained in my own thinking, so much so that it is only proper to acknowledge their source when I use them. At the same time, studying and using his framework sometimes brings one to conclusions Ollman makes elsewhere and thus is often necessary to refer to his work as the source of a particular idea.

Though one of the top Marxian theoreticians, Ollman's influence on other scholars is sometimes unclear. True, one can find instances where others cite him in reference to a particular point they are making but few work in his tradition directly as one might work within Goffman's dramaturgy, Foucault's archaeology, or Wallserstein's world-systems analysis. Further, his influence on sociology as a whole is not extensive. Ollman refers to how Marx put dialectics "to work." In showing how Marx through Ollman's eyes (though not solely his) tells us much about scientific practice in general as well as the social sciences in particular, I wish to similarly put his ideas to work. As sociology's paradigms and literature are most familiar to me, I have a bias toward asking how Marx and Ollman inform theories and practices there, though my analysis addresses other Marxist traditions as well as other disciplines. As such, one of this book's goals is to utilize the principles Ollman advocates in interpreting Marx and, by extension, advancing the Marxian research agenda through showing how the internal relations approach informs a myriad of issues in popular, social scientific, and political discourse. These issues include an engagement with the philosophy of science, conceptualizing variables and estimating their associations, theories of religion, class analysis, and models of history. These are not issues just for Marxology but are fit for all social scientists interested in how to study the world and anyone concerned about questions of the political in social life.

What is not here? First, the book does not provide an in-depth demonstration of how Marx applies empirical data to each of the principles in the philosophy of science dealt with herein. In order to maintain focus and not get bogged down in extensive examples of how Marx's specific analyses mobilize the methods he advocates, my narrative strives to present the categories of scientific reasoning Marx ejects and accepts and why he does so in a relatively succinct manner. Though I apply these issues to conceptual frameworks in sociology, Marxist studies, and popular discourse, a goal here is to provide interested readers categories they might need when reading Marx in order to understand his methodology better, as rarely does one find him using

lengthy dialectical exegesis to analyze and explain historically emerging data of his period, especially true of the journalism done after his younger years.

Though the question of the politics of Marx's abstractions organizes the book's overall content, it treats his specific strategies for revolution, socialism, and communism generally, as my past work—as well as work of others—treat these issues more thoroughly. Additionally absent is an in-depth political-economic analysis of capitalism (past and present) as well as a theory of the state. The internal relations approach has much to offer these issues in Marxist studies as well as in sociology, though retaining a focus requires that I reserve these inquiries for another time and/or place.

I want to make a few comments on this return to the issue of critique in Marx's work as part of his methodological development, and by implication his understanding of science. It is probable most experienced Marxist scholars have encountered most, if not all, of the terms and concepts in this book in Marx's writings at some point. Some appear quite often, others only somewhat regularly, and still others often enough to be somewhat familiar. Further, there is no doubt that some of these concepts have come under the microscope of Marx's students and appear under their published writings, usually in a section or chapter, occasionally an extended essay. What one has a hard time finding, however, is a more comprehensive treatment of the categories of criticism Marx repeatedly deploys and how these, conceptualized as the method of critique, give us insight to the lessons on science Marx's various analyses provide.

Marxist scholars have longed bemoaned Marx's failure (against his own wishes and plans) to write a systematic treatise on method while at the same time acknowledging that the idea of "critique" is pervasive in his writings and even book titles. Further, almost all readers of Marx know he "criticizes" things, i.e., he does not "like" religion, capital, the rich, trite conversation, and so on. This has little to do with our object of study here. We need to understand how Marx deployed a form of "scientific criticism" in his method of critique, what general principles this critique represents, and what these principles tell us about Marx's understanding of the interconnections between science, criticism, and political/moral evaluation.

I have been one of the writers I referred to above who have sometimes treated the categories of Marx's method of critique less systematically

than possible. In one of my early writings on Marx's method (Paolucci 2000), for instance, my discussion of speculative philosophy as a framework in which not to read Marx offered no satisfactory evidence or explanation of Marx's critique of speculation, gave no more than a few examples, and failed to place it within the larger framework of Marx's philosophy of science. My treatment of his method of critique in *Marx's Scientific Dialectics* is more thorough in terms of use of Marx's categories, but there I still ultimately fail in terms of systematization, with several concepts not directly connected together and discussed across 20 or so pages in two different chapters. Of course, in neither work was a systematic explanation of Marx's method of critique the goal. Nevertheless, to the extent some review here is necessary, these past ruminations fail in completeness, systematization, as well as organizing principles for an extended explanation of Marx's philosophy of science and its relationship to politics. These failures of mine, I believe, mirror the general weaknesses in the literature.

### *Outline of Book*

This book engages the considerations above both thematically and empirically. Chapter One examines various relationships between "Science and Politics", with a concluding focus on how Marx's approach to the issue varies from conventional views. Chapter Two investigates Marx's approach to "Critique and Method" as a form of inquiry where his criticism reveals political biases built into putatively scientific models and the alternatives he poses. Chapter Three, "Inquiry and Abstraction", outlines the central categories of Marx's methods of abstraction across his moments of inquiry (a general outline of several main threads in *Marx's Scientific Dialectic*). Chapter Four, "Relational Sociology and Dialectics", discusses how to apply Marx's internal relations philosophy to several issues and debates in mainstream sociology. Chapter Five investigates the issue of "Teleology and Dialectic" in both natural and social science as well as Marx's work and how his approach helps us understand issues within the sciences and historical events. Finally, Chapter Six, "Marx's *Political Science*", concludes with further thoughts the relation between science and politics in Marx's thought and the work that remains for both social scientists and laypersons alike.



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CHAPTER ONE

SCIENCE AND POLITICS

Who is to decide on the limits of scientific research if not scientific  
research itself?  
Karl Marx, The Leading Article in No. 179 of the *Kölnische Zeitung*

*Introduction*

The relationships between science and politics elicit multiple observations and criticisms. Nietzsche raged against forms of knowledge presented as Morality and Truth that dominate and control individuals. Though famously targeting religion, Nietzsche did not need to exaggerate in depicting philosophers and scientists as a collective ascending priesthood—Comte’s proposal for a Parisian cabal of sociologists caretaking humanity was not a metaphor. Later, following Nietzsche’s lead, Foucault traced how medical and psychiatric knowledge emerged as forms of domination from institutional arenas far removed from scientific inquiry, where all manner of violence, superstition, and quackery flourished. For his part, Marx (1991c: 26) had no doubt that there was a “scientific basis for socialism.” The use to which the Soviets put his ideas produced a Marx-in-caricature opposite. Anthropology was the progeny, in part, of the colonial system.

The interchange between power relations and scientific knowledge is not one-way. A redeeming Enlightenment principle is society’s and the individual’s right (and responsibility) to demand from institutions of knowledge and power—political, religious, scientific—that they explain and justify themselves. Why do these institutions exist? From where did they come? Are they necessary social relations or just temporary historical phenomena? How can we know what any of them claim is true? Once intellectuals won a realm of public discourse pivoting on such questions, critical inquiry did not overwhelm and negate traditional powers, as each institutional sphere negotiated jurisdictional spaces with the others. And, if anything, institutions of power work to turn back meddlesome inquiries and transform the intelligentsia into a partner.

Political entities (i.e., actors and institutions) can corrupt knowledge through censoring scientists or courting forms of research that serve their ends. Religious leaders initially repressed scientific endeavors, often violently, and many today continue to deny science's insights. A tentative and provisional truce exists in some places but the religious are still on the attack in others, as are intellectuals in retort (e.g., Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins). When religious reactionaries attain state power and when scientific findings challenge dogma, scientists are at greater risk; when scientists' findings support doctrine, priesthoods court them, as do governments. Many Jewish, Christian, and Islamic fundamentalists reject evolution but embrace powerful armaments that science yields. Scientists help develop medicines for healing and biological weapons for killing, technology for mass communication and political-psychological techniques for audience manipulation, and tools for studying the heavens as well as those of mass surveillance. The German state drafted scientists to help facilitate the Holocaust, and the US Government, in Operation Paperclip, imported Nazi scientists after the war to become crucial figures in the US space program. Stalin supported the pseudo-science of Lysenko and purged dissenters, resulting in massive crop failure, famine, and starvation. George W. Bush's administration blocked climate scientists from publishing research that did not serve their political-economic ends (Mooney 2005; Grant 2007).

Still, social institutions of power often must negotiate the world of knowledge. Past religious leaders who calibrated their doctrines with modernity's institutional changes survived and their religions became qualitatively new. The Catholic Church long ago jettisoned the Ptolemaic model of the universe, though not without resistance. Today, it accepts evolutionary theory. Perhaps its denial of such new forms of knowledge would make its leaders appear out of touch, dogmatic, and insular (and, it was Georges Lemaître, a Catholic priest, who, after all, proposed the Big Bang Theory). There have been other changes in its doctrines as well. Indulgences and the Latin mass only exist today in minute crevasses. Certified laypersons participate in giving out Holy Communion. In 2007, the Vatican dispatched limbo from accepted teaching, part of it for centuries. These changes make today's Church unrecognizable to a Christian believer from medieval Europe (whose religious faith would probably be unrecognized by many Christians from the first century). This type of negotiation is not ubiquitous,

however. In reaction to perceived corruption from liberalizing doctrines, fundamentalists of all sorts stick to their dogmas (e.g., the young Earth, creationism, the Flood, etc.), as they claim a foundation in a past that no empirical research shows ever existed, nor did, in fact, their “tradition”, which is relatively recent.

Capital as a new social relation also works to institutionalize its logic and interests. Corporate leaders do not simply wait for scientists to make findings public and then reap the benefits should an opportunity arise. The business class long ago learned to put money into research and development and to fund universities, which is all the more useful when scientists willingly rent out their services. Marx examined how capitalists apply scientifically generated knowledge and technology in the production process to expand output and control labor, none-too-seldom crushing people in the process. He was no doubt hostile to the practice when done for the sake of increasing rates of surplus-value. Fredrick Winslow Taylor later celebrated and advanced his own doctrine of “scientific management.” Engineering, business, and management schools today, though often repudiating Taylor’s open supplication to capital, engage in a similar practice, studying ways to make labor costs and practices as efficient and profitable as possible, with actual human beings a secondary or tertiary concern. In learning such “sciences” one can attain a college degree and often well-paid work while healthcare and pensions are denied to the workers one supervises, and for whom one makes life-changing decisions.

When corporations fund research institutions this not something necessarily suspect if capital’s representatives leave scientists alone to do their work, depending on the nature of that work, of course. Nevertheless, a great deal of mischief goes on here. Corporate managers may ask scientists to study a question that might have a practical application for their business enterprise but nothing to do with the public weal (Monsanto’s production of suicide seeds and tobacco companies’ attempts to deny their products’ harmful effects are two ready examples). Sometimes new diseases must be invented and the public induced with concern because a pharmaceutical company has a drug that produces some sort of bodily effect but does not yet have an identifiable illness with which to match it. Corporate executives try to place representatives on advisory and editorial boards of scientific journals, leaving a reasonable conclusion that they do this so that published results turn out how they wish. This corrupting influence of business



imperatives may occur even without the intervention of corporate agents, where scientists fake or fabricate data to serve commercial interests, something more common in medical research.<sup>1</sup>

The insertion of scientific practice into the corporate-state-apparatus is not always militaristic, bold, or obvious. To become politically useful, liberal social science harnesses a language of liberation onto a technical discourse integrated with institutions founded in surveillance and control, often in terms of legal justice (jurisprudence, criminology), economic discipline (industrial arts, vocational training, management), and public supervision (social work, public administration). Liberal social science's goal is a reform of "society" so that all groups might have an "equal opportunity." To do what? At a basic level, equal opportunity means a chance to learn, express one's creativity, and earn a living without suffering discrimination. This sounds unobjectionable on its surface, one reason why such disciplines enjoy legitimacy. In our world, however, this also usually means an equal opportunity to participate in capitalism, to work for someone else's business enterprise, to move up, and to become overseers of capital's expansion—an equal opportunity for exploitation—or working for some sector of capitalism's state apparatus—an equal opportunity for administration. An equal opportunity to become unequal, that is, is the liberal ethos (another reason for its institutional legitimacy?).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A recent meta-analysis of 18 prior surveys found that close to two-percent of scientists admitted to scientific misconduct related to faking or fabricating data while a full third admitted to questionable research practices. See Daniele Fanelli, 2009. "How Many Scientists Fabricate and Falsify Research? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Survey Data." *PLoS ONE* 4 (5): e5738. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0005738 | URL (consulted 29 June 2010): <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0005738> "A Case Study in Medical Writing." *New York Times* (no date given). URL (consulted 29 June 2010): <http://documents.nytimes.com/design-write-medical-writing#p=1> Richard Alleyne, "Scientists Faking Results and Omitting Unwanted Findings in Research." *The Telegraph*. 4 June 2009. URL (consulted 29 June 2010): <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/scienceandtechnology/science/sciencenews/5438844/Scientists-faking-results-and-omitting-unwanted-findings-in-research.html>

<sup>2</sup> In an article likely to be seen by other Marxists as liberal accommodationism, Erik Olin Wright (2004: 84–85) writes: "The ideal of 'Equality of opportunity,' as it is conceived in much liberal egalitarian discussion of justice, involves trying to distinguish between those conditions of life for which people can reasonably be held responsible and those for which they cannot. Social justice requires trying to minimize those inequalities outside of individual control, and redistribution is one way of accomplishing this. Both UBI [Universal Basic Income] and stakeholder grants can be defended as significant steps in the direction of remedying unjust failures of such equality of opportunity. On these grounds, in fact, some people might prefer a generous

Social administration is not the only way liberal scientists participate in power relations. Take the ethnographer. Once one adopts this epistemological perspective, he or she then observes private lives, extracts people's memories of their experiences, documents their story, and inserts it into the intellectual stream. Stories are told, but for whom, for what ends, in what institutional moorings, for whose use and interests? Foucault argued that all of our professional discourse is married at the hip with institutions of power. No doubt, the academy, as part of a socio-political complex, intertwines with capital, its state, and all manner of power relations. What institutions do with knowledge scientists produce is, once published, out of their control. If the body of knowledge accumulated in institutions of learning is not separate from the state apparatus, is it then baseless to see a blurred line between ethnography and surveillance? Though one could easily overstate the case, it is worth considering. After all, in the Iraq War, the US military courted anthropologists to assist with those peoples conquered and occupied (and enlisted psychologists to help with "enhanced interrogation", torture by any other name).<sup>3</sup> This call for assistance would be nonsensical if a discursive connection not been present already.

Privileges await those who defend, cover over, apologize for, or otherwise support elites and their interests. It would be exceptional if it were any other way. As a result, sciences that prove themselves serviceable to institutions of power enjoy greater prestige, resources, and

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stakeholder grant system to UBI insofar as it might be thought as better embodying the responsibility ideal of equal opportunity. In some ways UBI looks like a paternalistic program in which, to avoid the risk of individuals squandering redistributed resources, the state doles out a stipend to people rather than giving them a single, large lump-sum payment. In a UBI program people can still squander their basic incomes, but they can only do so one month at a time. If avoiding paternalism is a high priority within a conception of equality of opportunity, and if equality of opportunity is the central justification for redistribution, then stakeholder grants might be preferred over UBI.

"The defense of UBI offered here is not, however, primarily about social justice as such. It is about creating the conditions under which a stable move toward more equal power within class relations can be achieved." Though Wright would likely retort that his proposal is meant to shift some social power back to working classes in a sort of Gramscian war of position, this proposal does follow the liberal line of thinking of working within the logic of capitalist class relations.

<sup>3</sup> Values of candidness and objectivity require that we note here that Marxist scholars engage in a similar practice when they lend advice, services, and other forms of intellectual support to purportedly revolutionary parties and states. The difference, however, is that usually Marxists are open about using their scientific knowledge on behalf of some interest, an explicit goal Marx often stated with clarity and honesty.

public and governmental support. State and corporate agencies need certain kinds of information, producing an institutional bias towards certain types of research (does not an art history professor has more substantive lessons to offer the human community than one with a degree in advertising?). Historically, this has been the hard sciences, business, management, quantitative sociology, economics, psychology, and political science. The social sciences, for instance, raised their political coin in servicing the rise of the welfare-state. In the United States, during and after the 1980s, liberal discourse faced accusations that welfare-states had failed spectacularly. To the degree to which this was true, it represented a defeat of mainstream sociology's historical program. For critics on the right, the welfare-state's failure was the predictable result of an ill-conceived social engineering project, though we must balance this against the degree to which the neo-liberal program attacked the welfare-state and made it lame.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, most observers do not see academic advertising, accounting, economics, business, and political science disciplines as social engineering projects in favor of capital's interests, telling us much about their worldview. In either case, both liberal and conservative academic traditions remain inside the political-economic structure capital has cultivated for them.

Working within their socio-political institutional framework, scientists may censor themselves because of disciplinary convention, conformity, fear, cowardice, or self-preservation. Any examination of the leading journals in the social sciences finds a notable lack of attention to the dominant powers of the day, i.e., capital and its state apparatus. Inequalities of race, gender, and sexuality represent salient and significant relations of power, too, and these issues occupy a great deal of space in liberal social science discourse, as they should (though this took much too long to happen and faced significant obstacles from within hierarchical intellectual circles). Perhaps a reason for this lack of attention is that eliminating inequalities of race, gender, and sexuality would do nothing to the position of capital and its state apparatus.

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<sup>4</sup> As Postone (2005: 70) explains, "the welfare state was expanded in all western industrial countries in the 25 years after the end of World War II and then limited or partially dismantled beginning in the early 1970s. These developments occurred regardless of whether conservative or social democratic ('liberal') parties were in power. The general character of such developments indicates that they cannot be explained sufficiently in terms of contingent political decisions, and strongly implies the existence of general structural imperatives and constraints."

When social science does target capital and/or its state, there are inducements—in sociology especially—to present this in Weberian terminology (and its descendants) and to leave radical and/or Marxist analyses behind (with exceptions to be sure), to offer a more nuanced version of any critical analysis.<sup>5</sup> In the professionalization process, one common accusation is that a sort of bias other approaches lack threatens Marxist analysis (also true for feminist criticism to a lesser extent). Colleagues and journal editors offer new faculty suggestions that “improving” their work means adopting terminology more fit with the *American Sociological Review*, the *American Journal of Sociology*, and *Social Forces* than with *New Left Review*, *Critical Sociology*, *Historical Materialism*, or *Monthly Review*. A cursory examination of the “top” journals in sociology finds that the nature of capital is “the name that shall not be spoken” default position for the discipline.<sup>6</sup> The problem with Marx for professional sociology is not that he was wrong, but *if he was right*. If he was right, then several sociological traditions, as we shall see, have gone off the tracks. As drawing attention to this is unwelcomed, predictably and understandably so, there is not very much dialogue between these traditions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Erik Olin Wright’s (1985: 1–3) Preface to his work, *Classes*, comes to the brink of making this admission, though he leaves himself some room for denial as it clearly seems unflattering to him.

<sup>6</sup> In 2008, the *American Sociological Review* (Volume 73) published six issues containing 43 Articles, one Presidential Address, and one Research Note. The follow list presents the most frequently used terms or subjects in titles and the number of times they appear that year: “gender”, “sex”, “men/women” (10), “ethnic/ity”, “race”, (and derivative usages), (7), “labor”, “worker/s”, “employment” (5), “earnings”, “income”, “wage/s” (4), “education” (4), “inequality”, “inequalities” (4), “identity” (3), “market/s” (3), “corporate”, “corporations” (3), “immigrants”, “migration” (3), “religion”, “religious” (3), “delinquency”, “crime”, “social control” (3). “Capitalism” (1) appears in an examination of debates on transitions in China (issue Number 4). In the same issue, “capital” appears the only time in the whole yearly volume but in reference to “ethnographic capital”, a topic that has nothing to do with capital as such (note: if a term appeared in both the main title and the subtitle, it was only counted once here; this list is not exhaustive of all the terms used in this volume).

<sup>7</sup> Marxist scholarship also bears some blame for this. Although some of it is more ideological than scientific, there exist none-too-few legitimate attempts to reconstruct Marx’s science that are less than convincing, i.e., fear, cowardice, politics, ideology, and careerism in the academy from conventional scholars alone do not explain the relative marginalization of Marxist scholarship. This does not mean a vast of array of quality Marxist scholarship does not exist. In fact, the social sciences as a whole are far behind in keeping up with the advances Marxists have made in clarifying Marx’s philosophy of science.

The number of scientists attracted to a line of thought is not the ultimate measure of its truth-value. No knowledge covers all it targets; there is always more still to learn, errors to uncover, and new and/or alternative ways of seeing things. How much more remains we cannot know. Sometimes new knowledge displaces old. Other times, new knowledge may offer worthy information and challenge older traditions, but its acceptance may not yet be widely embraced by those who “count” in a discipline. Within scientific disciplines, pecking orders of authority and status develop that can lift paradigms to a status beyond their substantive insights and/or squash troublesome inquiries (the space between these relationships is where Lakatos’s observations about degenerating and progressive research programs, in part, find a home). The scientific community at large embraced neither Darwin’s nor Einstein’s insights when first published. Functionalism rose to prominence in mid-20th century American sociology because of the services its practitioners provided corporate and state policy-makers rather than on its merits alone. Personal, intellectual, and/or professional allegiances—recognized as such or not—can often shape what scientists consider standard disciplinary knowledge.

This condition is not without its contradictions. An unintended outcome is that dominance of conservative and conventional social science in the academy provides a support for radical scholarship. Most universities are government-supported institutions and, as such, they must justify the expenditure of public funds on them. The business class spends not insignificant amounts of money and effort in getting politicians elected and having universities support their interests. Politicians, sensitive to such relations of political-economic influence, must maintain confidence that university life serves “the community”, though this understanding is often coterminous with the capitalist economy and state. Should Marxists and other radicals dominate the fields of sociology, economics, anthropology, and political science, among others, it is likely politicians and the business class would exert pressure on university administrators to change this, as it would appear to be money spent on scholastic inquiry unresponsive of the institutions of the day. Though they might loathe admitting it, radicals benefit from the dominance of conventional and conservative intellectuals in their respective disciplines as these groups create an umbrella of institutional legitimacy that provides them a

space to do their work. At the same time, non-radicals can point to the presence of radicals amidst conventional scientists as evidence of a program's embrace of inclusiveness and academic freedom.

Beyond traditions and structured influence, wider social relations of inequality shape "who counts" in scientific disciplines. Those gravitating upward in scientific institutions tend to be from the same social categories as those dominating other social institutions. Individuals from privileged social strata (e.g., classes) and statuses (e.g., sex and racial categories) enjoy relative over-representation in institutions of learning (a fact undergoing change, no doubt). This is one reason why Sandra Harding (2008, 2003, 2000, 1991) argues that knowledge is a product of, among other things, those in a position to create it. Western/Northern white men's control of intellectual institutions results in a conglomeration of knowledge molded and shaped by their social location and interests, she argues.<sup>8</sup> Their positions of authority allow them to subjugate knowledge of those whose social location is not as privileged. Traditional objective science is therefore not as objective as supposed. Further, Western science has developed within the project of colonialism, where core sectors harness knowledge that advances imperial oppression (well documented). Harding's approach to "strong objectivity" is to incorporate into social science views from other social locations, such as gay, female, Third World, etc., therefore providing for more well-rounded knowledge of social reality. Harding's critique is cogent and necessary; her conclusion is a non-sequitur.

Harding's "standpoint" approach seems akin, at first glance, to what dialecticians (Ollman 2003: 99–111) refer to as "vantage point" abstractions, though the similarity is mainly apparent. Harding argues for incorporating knowledge from the standpoint of members in categories of socially constructed groups into scientific discourse where "a world of sciences" flourishes. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*. Her objection to Western science has much to do with the uses to which it has been put, who has ruled scientific institutions, and their

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<sup>8</sup> "An alternative conceptual practice examines how sciences and their societies coconstitute each other as each tries to manage effectively desired interactions with its environment. Many postpositivist philosophers of science engage in just this practice, yet more rarely consider how such overtly political social projects as European expansion, the control of women's labor, the expansion of bourgeois entitlements, or the commitment to a Liberal political philosophy have coconstituted the cognitive technical core of particular modern Western sciences" (Harding 2003: 55).

narrow conception of what counts as method and thus valid knowledge. There is much to warrant her observations in these regards. But is it not one of critical sociology's central points that artificial social conventions oppress people labeled gay, black, Third World, or feminine? What sort of standpoint is it when the directional lens is a social artifice, an idealist one at that? Does scientific knowledge emerge simply from collating subjectivities across geography? Harding seems to conflate formal categories within the philosophy of science (e.g., tautology, induction, and so on) with the content with which scholars fill theories (e.g., male/Western-centric theories of development have had detrimental effects on peripheral regions).

Marx's dialectical vantage point abstractions adopt the view of historico-structural relations of a social system, such as production systems or governing institutions. Individualistic social constructions are less the vantage point here than are structural relationships and processes. Vantage point abstractions can do the work Harding supports without the threat of reifying such social constructions (Harding, one must acknowledge, takes an anti-essentialist stand). Her argument assumes that male-dominated, Western scientific institutions, because power corrupts and/or shapes perceptions, need the perspectives of the powerless as a corrective. This *can* provide a wider social view and Harding's call for inclusivity in science is supportable as a political call for institutional empowerment. We should not, however, confuse her position with the basis for judging the validity of scientific claims. Harding conflates the support of an expanding base of discourse with principles in the philosophy of science. Marx never worked in a factory but still told us much about what happens there and why and how to study such things (more on vantage point abstractions in later chapters).

Social conditioning shapes our assumptions about social reality. Social scientists tell us that the effects of language on perception and consciousness are paradoxically so massively minute and imperceptibly powerful as to be non-disentangleable—i.e., that what we think and do is always already shaped and/or directed by language. There is a great deal of truth to the observation. Some, however, see language and culture as determining perception so much that we must rely on recourse to individual subjectivity, the personally experiential, and the construction of reality. In this version of sociology, one may survey or interview, but one no longer documents the world *beyond* individual perceptions, what societal members think and say about it, an



eschewing of structural investigation for a study of personal or cultural type, opinion, and experience. Such analysts jettison historical analysis because there is no history anymore. And, if there is no history, there is no structure, just subjectivity and, therefore, we must jettison the commitment to producing knowledge in which we can have confidence as well. If anything goes, so does everything. This standpoint abdicates the charge and program Enlightenment scientists handed down. As should require no repetition (but often does), we should not estimate the validity of a unit of scientific knowledge based on cultural values, personal subjectivity, whether it makes us feel good, or if it serves some special interest we favor, a stance similar to confirmation bias but one with a political criterion built into it.<sup>9</sup>

The considerations above on relationships between science and politics are well-known across many disciplines, perhaps to the point, from a critic's perspective, of being pedestrian. Be this as it may, these considerations serve as a point of departure for thinking about the relationship between science and politics in a way that does not target agents of corruption, factional commitments, or otherwise suspect intentions. Here we interested in these familiar observations and criticisms about political bias in science not in and of themselves but to the extent that they set in relief often overlooked, unrecognized, and/or under-theorized issues on the relationship between science and politics, a topic to which we now turn.

The way one thinks about the world and thus the way one breaks apart that world into thinking units and provides these units meaning (i.e., the processes of abstraction and conceptualization) have significant political implications, whether an analyst recognizes this or not. Some corrupted science does not require intentionality toward endorsing relations of domination or catering to favored groups. Three examples will suffice to demonstrate the point.

In good faith, scientists' work may endorse an institutional framework because their abstractions take this framework for granted and

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<sup>9</sup> "If from the outset everything that contradicts your faith is error, and has to be treated as error, what distinguishes your claims from those of the Mohammedan or of any other religion? Should philosophy, in order not to contradict the basic tenets of dogma, adopt different principles in each country, in accordance with the saying, 'every country has its own customs'? Should it believe in one country that  $3 \times 1 = 1$ , in another that women have no souls, and in a third that beer is drunk in heaven?" (Marx 1975i: 24).



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