The identification of human consciousness with the practical process of reality as shaped by man is Marx's epistemological and historisophical achievement. To Marx reality is always human reality not in the sense that man exists with nature, but in the sense that man shapes nature.

Shlomo Avineri

Chapter - 2

TWO CONTRASTING MODELS:
SOCIOLOGICAL AND DIALECTICAL
Marx's concept of man has often been interpreted in a deterministic manner. Deterministic mode of interpretation involves on the one hand materialism; consciousness is reduced to matter, or ideas are reduced to material circumstances. On the other hand it involves sociologism, in that everything subjective is reducible to the objective social circumstances. Man, according to sociologist approach is the product of society and therefore is causally determined by society. The reality of the product is wholly dependent on the reality of what produces it. Man, therefore, is not independently real, but determined by the 'real'. Human subjectivity is a derivative category and all that is subjective, namely ideas, concepts, thoughts etc., are epiphenomenal. Undoubtedly, this approach presupposes a causal paradigm of subject-object relation, and as a result, the objectivistic epistemological thesis of the primacy of the objective domain.

Does Marx's theory involve the claims of sociological determinism?. The main objective of this chapter is to find out an answer to this question. In the previous chapter we have seen that Marx's epistemology is grounded on the conceptual system of Hegel's dialectics. Here, we shall try to bring out the epistemological presuppositions of sociologism and to compare them with those of Marx's dialectical system. Naturally, the focal attention would be on the epistemological foundation of sociological approach, more clearly, on the sociological model of knowledge.

One practical difficulty we face here is the diversity of the approaches towards the construction of a sociological model of knowledge. Discussions in this direction have been carried out by many thinkers, most of them are sociologists rather than philosophers. Their approaches have generally been brought together under the label of 'sociology of knowledge'. Karl Mannheim is the systematic expounder of this school of thought. We shall confine our study to the observations of Karl Mannheim, Particularly to his theory
of ideology, for two reasons. (1) Mannheim's theory of ideology clearly presupposes an epistemological position which provides the methodological ground for the whole of sociologism. (2) Mannheimian model of knowledge is based on Marx's conception of ideology, or, at least on a particular interpretation of ideology. In the first section we shall have a brief sketch of Mannheimian theory of ideology. In the second section we shall try to see how Mannheimian model depends on Marx's model (on a special interpretation of Marx's model). Third section would attempt to highlight the epistemological assumptions of Mannheim's theory and to compare them with those of Marx's philosophy of praxis. In the final section we would see how Marx's theory involves the space for a non-materialist paradigm of knowledge which is 'critical' of the positivist paradigm involved in the sociological method. A close view of the epistemological assumptions of Mannheim's theory would enable us to perceive how positivism is exemplified in sociological mode of analysis and also, how Marx's non-positivist method differs from the method of sociologism. Subsequently, we would come to the point that dialectical method is not merely different from the sociological method, but also critical of it.

Mannheim's Theory of Ideology: An exposition

Central to Mannheim's sociological enterprise is the theory of the social determination of knowledge. This theory precisely says that every knowledge is socially determined; a person's thought is socially located, or is a function of the social position. Mental activities such as knowing, thinking, conceiving etc. do not have an autonomous realm of their own as they are fundamentally dependent on the practical, social life situations of the knowing (thinking, conceiving) subject. The process of knowledge does not develop in accordance with the immanent laws; it does not follow from the pure logical possibilities. ¹

¹Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, p.240.
In other words, the activity of knowing does not take place in an abstract plane depending on its own internal laws, but in a concrete realm, i.e, the realm of the practical life process of the knowing subject.

The practical, social, life situations, according to Mannheim are 'the existential factors', which not only influence but "determine the scope and the intensity of our experience and observation..."² Man can never be a pure, isolated being. His very subjectivity is embedded in a life situation in a particular social structure. This life situation penetrates into his mental world and determines the very mode of mental activities, the mode of perception or the mode of thought. So, all mental activities of human subject are determined by the factors external to the realm of thought, i.e, in Mannheim's terminology, the extra theoretical factors.

An individual can think only in a certain way in which he is 'compelled' to think by his life situations in a particular social structure. This is to say that the life situations generate a thought model which determines the modality of one's thinking process. Every one has this implicit 'thought model' before he proceeds to think or to understand something. He can not go beyond this 'thought model'. In other words, he is bound to think in accordance with it. This lead Mannheim to the rejection of the claim of absolutism in theory of knowledge, or positively, to the relativist thesis that every knowledge is necessarily relative.

Individual 'A' understands something in accordance with the 'thought model' which is implicit in him. 'B' understands the samething in a different way from that of 'A', precisely because his 'thought model' is different from B's, or, to put it in the plain

²Ibid P. 240.
language, the life situations which determines A’s mode of perception is different from that which determines B’s. Both A’s and B’s understanding is necessarily partial and relative. Every knowledge is relative, in so far as the social factors determine the mode of perception of every knower.

Mannheim locates the ‘thought model’ within the system of beliefs of the social groups to which the individuals belong. An individual who belongs to a specific social group will have a particular ‘thought model’, a particular mode of perception, which represents the belief-system of the group. Social groups differ from one another in terms of their respective belief systems. Consequently, individuals differ in their perspectives depending on their respective memberships in various social groups. Every perspective is relative, since everybody belongs to a social group and has a thought model which reflects the belief system of his group.

What is a ‘social group’? Mannheim’s answer would be that it is a social category whose unity is constituted by a similarity of location of a number of individuals within a social whole. Mannheim seems to believe that individuals appear to be assuming different ‘places’ in the social structure. Those who are located in the same place or the individuals who assume the same position in the social whole, belong to a particular social group. This concept of of social group resembles Marx’s concept of ‘class’. By class Marx means the economic group, the similarity of location of a number of individuals in the economic structure or, in the system of production. But, Mannheim goes further by arguing that social group refers not merely to classes, but also to generations, status groups, sects, occupational groups, schools etc.

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3Cf. Nicholas Abercrombie, class, structure and knowledge, P. 38.
4Cf, Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, PP. 247-8.
Ideas, modes of thought and behaviours of the individuals who belong to the same group are moulded by their common social location. The crucial feature of common location is that it limits the range of experience open to an individual. It excludes certain possibilities, and also encourages the formation of certain definite modes of behaviour and thought. For example, certain individuals who belong to the social group of capitalists believe in justice as long as it is not detrimental to their economic interests. Their common location 'compels' them to exclude some of the aspects of the concept of justice and to follow a mode of approach and behaviour which suit their interests. Labourer's mode of approach regarding the concept of justice would be different from that of the capitalist, precisely because their 'place' in the social whole is different from that of the capitalist. Both the capitalist's and the labourer's mode of thought is biased towards the interest of their respective social positions. They perceive the reality in different angles, from different perspectives. They cannot go beyond these perspectives, and therefore, their knowledge is limited to these perspectives. There is nothing called absolute knowledge other than different perspectives, since everybody in a social whole assumes a particular 'position', belongs to a particular social group.

Mannheim illustrates this point with the example of the concept of 'freedom'. In the early years of the nineteenth century, when a German conservative spoke of freedom, he meant thereby the right of each estates to live according to its privileges. If the same concept was used by some other man who belonged to the protestant movement of the same century, he would have understood it as 'inner freedom', that is the right of each individual to live according to his own individual personality. 'Both of these groups thought in terms of the 'qualitative conception of freedom', because they understood

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5cf, Nicholas Abercrombie, Class, Structure and knowledge, P. 38.
freedom to mean the right to maintain either their historical or their inner individual distinctiveness".  

We have seen that, in Mannheim’s account, thought is located within the belief-system of the social group in which the thinking subject is a member. A question still remains, namely, what kind of relation exists between belief and social group? The theory of the sociological relationship of thought and social group would be inadequate if it does not attempt to provide a sufficient account of the mechanism involved in such a relation. Mannheim is not explict in providing such a theoretical account, but his theory implicitly contains the assumption of an interest-mechanism, i.e., the interest-relation between the belief-system and the social group. The question, namely why a social group should adopt one set of beliefs rather than another can be answered from a Mannheimian point of view by arguing that there is an interest-mechanism involved in a group’s adoption of a particular belief-system. Every social group has certain interests which determine the conditions of its existence. These interests compel the members of the group to adopt a particular belief-system suitable to them. For example, the capitalist class has the interest of extracting profit from the production process, the profit-motive, without which it can not exist as a social group. The profit motive compels the members of the capitalist social group to adopt a particular mode of thought which serves and justifies the conditions of existence of their group. Therefore, what is expressed at the fundamental level of all the perspectives of a capitalist is his group-interest. A mode of thought, Mannheim assumes, consists of a basic interest which represents the basic assumptions shared by all who belong to a specific social group. In other words, all modes of thought consist of a group-interest. Every knowledge is biased towards the group-interest of the

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The question that why an individual should have a particular set of interests rather than another is an absurd question, because, in Mannheim's account, interests are determined by the social position, not by the 'free will' of the individual. Social position, obviously, is not the matter of individual's choice, since it is objectively structured or, determined by the social structure. The basic conviction of every sociological approach is that society is not a collection of individuals, rather it should be understood as an objective structure which determines the 'places' of the individuals. The position of the individual in the whole, thus, is predetermined by the social structure. Mannheim, like all other sociologists, assumes that one's social position is distinguished by specific conditions of existence, a specific set of social relations. For example, to be a teacher is to be related to other teachers, the students and also, to have a definite relation to the entire society. These relations constitute the position of the teacher and form his conditions of existence. Obviously, his relations are objectively or socially structured, and so are his conditions of existence. Since his social position is constituted by his conditions of existence and is objectively structured, his interests are also structured. His forms of thought, the categories in which he perceives the reality are also, Mannheim assumes, socially structured. Knowledge, which is biased towards the interests of the social position of the knower, therefore, is socially determined.  

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a ‘partial’ mode of perception and therefore, is ideological. There is no knowledge which is free from ideology, since there can not be a subject detached from social existence. The extreme relativist thesis which obviously follows from this position is that there can never be an absolute criteria for determining the truth and falsity of knowledge. The self-refutative nature of this thesis is well discussed in philosophy, that to hold the claim that no knowledge is absolutely valid is to deny the validity of the claim itself. The only way to escape this fallacy is to take a positivist stand by arguing that there are some knowledges which are free from the social determination, autonomous and therefore, non-ideological. In the next chapter of this thesis, we would be discussing Althusser’s celebrated distinction between science and ideology. Mannheim does not provide a theory of such a distinction, but it is quite obvious from his assertion that science and mathematics are above social determination and free from ideology, that he also moves towards the positivist camp, towards the positivist theory of scientific knowledge as the true, objective knowledge.

We shall not deal with the above problem here, as the aim of this chapter is restricted to the understanding of Mannheim’s concept of ideology and its methodological links to a particular interpretation of Marx’s theory. We have seen that, in Mannheim’s account, every knowledge presupposes a thought-model which is constituted by the social position of the knower. Knowledge contains ideology, or in other words, ideology is the structural element of every knowledge; it lies in the perceptual structure of every individual. This conception, Mannheim believes, is a positive advancement over Marx’s ‘particular’ concept of ideology in which certain of the ‘opponents’ assertions alone are viewed as ideological. Marx’s concepts of ideology, according to Mannheim, refers to the modes of thought of certain individuals who belong to a particular social group, i.e., of bourgeois.
It fails to take into account the total mental structure of the asserting subject. 'The total concept of ideology', on the other hand, as Mannheim says, takes into account the mental structure in its totality and presents the problem of ideology as a general epistemological problem. By the expansion of the particular concept of ideology, Mannheim claims, a new mode of understanding has come into existence in which every knowledge, the form, the content and the conceptual framework of every mode of thought are necessarily bound up with the concrete life situations in the society, and therefore, are unavoidably ideological.

**Sociologism and the Materialist Interpretation of Culture**

We shall argue, in this section, that the above discussed view of ideology is closely associated with, or even based on a particular interpretation of Marx's view of culture. It has been commonly accepted in the conventional schools of Marxism that Marx's theory of culture involves the method of materialist reductionism. Materialism is the view that matter is the primary reality and everything 'non-material' is absolutely dependent on it, or ultimately reducible to it, that the material conditions of men constitute the objective domain which determines the consciousness, ideas, thoughts, in short, the subjective domain. Ideas do not have independent existence, as they are determined by the material conditions of man's existence. They do not cause changes in the objective conditions of men, on the contrary, the objective conditions of men cause changes in ideas. Methodologically speaking, materialism is the view which asserts the primacy and the autonomy of the objective domain and the relativity of the subjective domain. Marx's theory, as it is viewed in the perspective of conventional schools, presupposes the materialist methodology, in so far as it contains the idea that culture belongs to the superstructure which is determined by the economic base-structure, or the thesis that all forms of consciousness are 'super structural' as they are determined by the 'real structure', i.e, the economic
structure which comprises the material conditions of man’s existence.

Materialist interpretation of culture, obviously, bases on the two above mentioned claims, viz, (1) base determines superstructure (2) Material conditions of man’s existence determines the forms of consciousness. Both these claims are interdependent, and even complementary to each other since base refers to the economic structure which comprises the material conditions of man’s existence, and superstructure to the totality of the non-economic activities of man, i.e, legal, political etc, and the forms of consciousness corresponding to them. But, for the sake of convenience, we shall deal them separately, and see how they have been understood and developed conventionally into a rigid materialistic theory of culture. Naturally, what immediately follows here would be an exposition of the conventional account of base-superstructure model. The difficulties with this conventional account particularly that how the conventional account contradicts the non-materialist presuppositions of Marx’s theory would be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Every attempt towards a materialistic reading of Marx’s theory of culture starts with the formula from the preface to A contribution to the critique of political economy: “It is not the consciousness of men determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness”\(^8\). It is often suggested that the term ‘social being’ refers to the conditions of existence of man in the society, i.e, the social conditions of man’s existence. Again, the term ‘conditions of existence’ refers to the basic features of the mode in which men exist or the way in which people earn their living. The mode of existence or, the conditions of existence of men is embedded in a specific type of social

relation. In other words to be engaged in a specific form of economic activity is to be involved in a specific type of social relation. An agricultural labourer earns his living through a specific form of activity; the fundamental characteristics of this specific form of activity form his social conditions of existence. By this he is also involved in a specific type of social relation, that he is related to his fellow labourers, to his masters and to the wider society in a specific manner. To be a labourer is to be related to others in a specific, socially determined manner. This is to say that the conditions of existence of a labourer is defined by a specific type of social relationship.

Every man in a social totality is engaged in a specific form of activity by which he earns a living; he is involved in a specific type of social relation. This involvement determines the quality and the content of his life. In other words, the manner in which man earns his livelihood determines his all other activities, his mode of life in general. The activities such as thinking, knowing, conceiving etc. are conditioned by his involvement in the economic process, in the ‘mode of production of material life’. Consciousness in general, therefore, is determined by the material conditions of man’s existence.

Men, engaged in a common manner of earning a living, involved commonly in a particular type of relationship, have common interests, belief-systems and ways of thinking. They share in common their conditions of existence, and are related to and affected by the rest of society in a similar manner. Their common interests and experiences tend to generate a shared sense of identity, i.e., the class identity.\(^9\) For example, men engaged in the specific activity of producing food in a feudal system belong to a social class, because they have a common manner of earning a living, a common type of social relationship,
and therefore a common way of living and thinking. They share in common their material conditions of existence, and thus their modes of life in general. Their consciousness is determined by their membership in the class, i.e., by their common location in the economic structure of the society.

The relationship between the class and consciousness, assumed here, is explicitly a causal one. To say that social class determines consciousness is to say that there is a kind of causal relationship between social class and consciousness, that, consciousness is causally determined by social class. This is precisely to say that consciousness is an 'effect', social class being the source, that given the cause one can assume the effect. The effect does not have either primacy or autonomy. It is not 'real in itself', but determined by the 'real'. Consciousness belongs to a secondary realm; it does not have autonomy in so far as it is determined by social class. Ideas do not have any 'original' content; they are mere reflections of the interests of the social class. They are passive and do not cause changes in the material conditions of man's existence, the material conditions cause changes in ideas. This lead the conventional Marxists to believe that ideas do not have any active role in history, since they are mere by-products of material, social conditions, and also to hold the materialist view that the non-economic activities of man and the forms of consciousness corresponding to them, in short culture, is absolutely determined by the economic base-structure of the society.

When it is assumed that men who share in common their conditions of existence have common interests and belief-systems, it is also assumed that consciousness of those men is shaped, conditioned, or determined by their common interests, i.e, the class-interests. The notion of class-interest is central to the deterministic interpretations of Marxism. Consciousness shaped by the class-interests is necessarily 'partial'; it is 'false
consciousness'. It cannot be true in the sense that its scope of representation is limited, that it cannot represent reality impartially. It is always a representation in a specific perspective i.e., the perspective of a particular class. Every perspective is limited in scope. "Since it is already committed and predisposed to certain assumptions, the validity of which it takes for granted, its perception of the whole is filtered through them, and is inherently biased" 10

Consciousness is biased towards the class-interests and is necessarily 'false'. The term 'false consciousness' refers to the partial representation of the whole. Biased representation, as it is often suggested, involves distortion, i.e., to represent reality in a biased point of view is to distort reality. Distortion has often been interpreted as a mechanism of misperception. Distorting something, in this sense, is misperceiving certain aspects of it which are against or irrelevant to the class-interests of the perceiver. Marx's discussion on the liberal ideology of the capitalist social class is often suggested as the example. Capitalists believe in liberal ideology, in the idea of freedom, because the bourgeois mode of production required that man should be free to sell their labour and to buy the goods, and therefore, they should be defined as 'free citizens'. The meaning of freedom, for them, is restricted to this aspect; it does not go beyond to the other aspect of freedom in which men should also be free from exploitation, that they have the right to earn sufficient money out of the labour they sell. Capitalist concept of freedom, therefore, is a distorted concept, that it misperceives certain aspects of the reality that do not serve their class-interests.

Ideology, in the conventional Marxist sense, refers to the biased perspective, the distorted representation of the reality. It is knowledge biased towards the class-interests

10Ibid, p. 27.
of the knower. Every knowledge is ideological, since everybody belongs to a particular social class and has class-interests. Needless to say that this position comes close to the sociologist view that every knowledge presupposes a specific thought-model which is biased towards the group-interests of the knower. The concept of class-determination of materialist Marxism gets replaced by the concept of group-determination in Mannheim’s scheme. Obviously, by this replacement, Mannheim does not deny the class-factor in the determination of knowledge. All that he does is to consider class as one among the social groups, to introduce a general term which comprehends all the social factors including the class-factor in the determination of knowledge and thereby to provide a wider framework for the theory of social determination of knowledge. Evidently, the idea of class-determination is included in the theory of social determination as one of the aspects of it. Marx’s theory of knowledge, thus, is conceived to be a part of the sociology of knowledge. Even, it has been claimed by some sociologists that the theory of class-determination of knowledge provides the methodological ground for sociologism.

The other of the two ideas upon which the materialist interpretation of Marx’s theory of culture is based is the one that ‘base determines superstructure’, or precisely ‘economy determines culture’. It is often said that such a deterministic thesis is clearly implied in the following passage from the preface of *A contribution to the critique of political economy*.

“"In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms
of social consciousness".\textsuperscript{11}

Society, here is said to be divided into two structures, namely economic structure and superstructure. Economic structure comprises the relations of production; it is the sum total of the relations of production. Superstructure stands for the non-economic institutions such as legal, political etc, and the forms of consciousness corresponding to them. Economic structure is the base, because it is the real ground on which the entire superstructure is based. It is ‘objective’ in the sense that it is independent of the subject; it is not to be understood as a structure determined by the subject, but as a structure which determines the position of the subject within it. Individuals enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. They occupy different positions in the economic structure, the positions being determined by the structure itself. More clearly, they are not the source of the structure, but the ‘elements’ of it.

The non-economic institutions are superstructural, because they are grounded on the base structure. Superstructure does not have autonomy, as it is fundamentally dependent on the economic base. The non-economic features, legal, political, religious, artistic, educational etc, and the definite forms of consciousness corresponding to them, such as law, political-ideologies, moral concepts, ethical values, aesthetic perspectives, literary theories etc, therefore, do not constitute an independent domain of their own. They are the reflections, or the expressions of the deep structure of the society. A ‘reflection’ is determined by what is reflected; it changes in accordance with the changes in the object reflected. The relation of the superstructure and the base structure is conceived to be

\textsuperscript{11}Karl Marx, preface to \textit{A contribution to the critique of political economy}, in K. Marx and F.Engels selected works, P. 181.
that of reflection and real, effect and cause. Culture as the totality of the superstructural forms, therefore, is conceived to be the effect, or the by-product of the economic substructure of the society. The view that culture is the 'effect' of the base structure explicitly entails the assumption that the forms of consciousness are causally determined by an independent reality. In the strict epistemological sense, it entails the 'reflection' theory of knowledge in which knowledge appears as a simple reflection of an independently existing reality. In short, it entails the materialist presupposition of the passivity of the subjective and the primacy and the autonomy of the objective domains.

We had noted that the thesis 'base determines the superstructure' is complimentary to the thesis of the class-determination of knowledge. It is, as we saw, because of the fact that base refers to the relations of production which constitutes the class-position of every knowing subject. Also, we had noted that Mannheim's theory of social determination of knowledge or theory of ideology is an expansion of the idea of class-determination of materialist Marxism. In the next section, we shall try to explore the central epistemological presuppositions of the Materialist-Sociologist theory of ideology and see how they basically contradict the Hegelian dialectical thrust of Marx's method.

Dialectical Model Vs Sociologist Model

The materialist-sociologist theory of ideology (here after MSTI) clearly implies the following epistemological claims

1. Knowledge is subject's representation of reality.

2. Every knowledge is mediated by the social position of the subject.

3. Knowledge, mediated by the social position of the knower can never be the true
representation; it must be biased, distorted and therefore, is ideological.

Representation is a category which necessarily entails the epistemological duality between the knower and the known, one who represents and the thing represented. The knower experiences the world outside through his senses. He pictures the world through the senses. This process of picturing is the process of knowing. Experience is the primary mode of knowledge. But, as the second of the above mentioned claims suggests, the experience is not a direct, unmediated encounter between the subject and the object. By assuming a slightly different epistemological position from that of empiricism, MSTI advances the idea that the perceiver imposes certain categories upon the external world, the categories which are implicit in him before he proceeds to perceive. What generates these categories is the social position of the perceiver. Knowledge, therefore, is the experience mediated by the social position of the knower.

When it is assumed that knowledge is mediated by the social position, class/group position of the knower, then the ‘objective truth’ is an impossibility. All knowledge is perspectival. There are only relative truths, no absolute truth. Perspectival thought is ideology. Theory of knowledge can not be distinguished from theory of ideology, since every knowledge is perspectival and thus ideological.

The social position of the subject is determined by the social structure. Society, in MSTI, is to be conceived as an objective structure, which determines the ‘positions’ of the subjects, a system of ‘places’. In conventional Marxism, we have seen that economic structure is an objective structure which consists of certain specific relations. These relations create the ‘places’, the different class-positions. The class-positions determine the mode of perception of the subject. More clearly, the structure generates the places, the points of perception and thereby determines the mode of perception of every knower.
Precisely, structure determines the content of ideology. Ideology is a function of the structure of reality itself; the places that are created by social relations generate the ideologies that follow, from them, through the mechanism of experience\textsuperscript{12}

Three tendencies can be plainly observed in the above mode of analysis; 1. crude empiricist, 2. Materialist reductionist and 3. relativist.

1. It is perhaps slightly unfair to say that certain empiricist tendencies can be observed in a system which is claimed to be oriented towards rationalism. Sociologism, especially of Mannheim, as we have seen earlier, takes the rationalistic turn with the assumption that there is a thought-model implicit in every individual before he proceeds to perceive the world. But the tendency of a naive variety of empiricism that we perceive is at a more fundamental level of the sociologist system, i.e., at the level where it conceives knowledge as belonging to the realm of passive representation, where it devalues the importance of thought by considering it as the passive reflection. The thought-model which determines the content of perception, or the categories that the subject imposes upon the object of perception, according to MSTI, are not the properties of the autonomous realm of mind; they are generated by the objective social structure. In short, the objective structure determines the mode of perception, the content of knowledge of every knower. In conventional Marxism it is the economic structure which determines the class-position, the point of perception and thus the content of knowledge of the subject. Knowledge, therefore is always the representation determined by an independent structure, a pre-existing reality. It can not have either primacy or autonomy. Thought can never be active, in so far as it belongs to the realm of reflection determined by the real. It is

the 'effect' of the objective social structure. a 'constituted' category, and can never be constitutive or 'creative'. The obvious outcome of this is the crude materialist thesis that man is merely the product of the social structure, by no means the producer of it.

2. Reductionist tendency is explicit in the sociologist's mode of analysis of ideology. Ideology, in MSTI, as we have discussed earlier is a form of 'false' experience, distorted representation. False, because it is determined by the position of the subject in the reality. 'Position' is the creation of the objective structure of the reality. More clearly, reality creates the position from which the experience (false) is generated. Reality, therefore, is the primary determinant of experience and, therefore, of ideology. It is the 'truth' of ideology, because it determines ideology. Going to the truth is looking at the reality. The form of experience of the capitalist, for example, is shaped by his social position, the capitalist social structure which defines his 'place' in it. To go to the truth of his ideology is to look at his social position, to reduce it to the objective social conditions which generate it. The mode of analysis, here is undoubtedly reductionist; it consists in reducing the subjective into the objective, ideas into the material ground.

3. It is beyond dispute that the theory of social determination of knowledge involves relativism, that the idea that all knowledge is mediated by the social position of the knower and is necessarily partial, implies the thesis that every knowledge is relative. This is to say that there are no objective criteria which would enable us to determine the truth and falsity of different knowledge. To reject the claim of absolution is to accept the relativist claim. Again, to accept the relativist claim.

\[13\text{Cf Ibid p. 24.}\]
that every knowledge is relative is to refute the absolute validity of the claim itself; therefore, relativism is self-refutative.

The self-refutative nature of sociology is well illustrated by Walter Benjamin in his celebrated paper 'The sociology of knowledge and the problem of objectivity'.\textsuperscript{14} Benjamin's criticism starts with the analysis of two statements, the first of which refers to the cardinal principle of Mannheim's sociology, the second one precisely shows the 'semantic riddle' involved in the first statement and illustrates the paradox of sociology in general.

Statement: 1: All empirical propositions about social life are perspective conditioned and therefore lack objectivity.

Statement: 2: Statement: 1 is an empirical proposition about the social life.

Obviously what is meant by the statement: 1 is the central epistemological principle of sociology. Once it is accepted, then there is nothing called objective knowledge, no proposition can claim the absolute validity. Benjamin argues that statement: 1 is not analytic; no self-contradiction is forced by asserting that propositions about social life are not perspective conditioned, nor it is tautologous since it can not claim any logical warrent for its certainty. It must, therefore, be synthetic, in more concrete terms, an empirical generalisation. But, if, as statement: 2 suggests, statement: 1 is a proposition about social life, it must be perspectival and can not claim the objective validity.

The way out of this paradox is to say that statement: 2 is wrong, that the statement: 1

\textsuperscript{14}Walter Benjamin, 'The sociology of knowledge and the problem of objectivity', in Sociological theory: inquiries and paradigms, 1975,
lack objectivity' is not an empirical proposition about social life. To say this is to say that statement:1 possesses a different cognitive status. To explain this cognitive status by arguing that the statements referring to the social determination of knowledge are themselves not socially determined, is to dilute the content of the sociologist theory itself.

A sociologist of knowledge, we can say, has to either dilute his theory by taking an Althusserian stand that there are some branches of knowledge that lie outside the realm of social determination, which are value-free and non-ideological and his theory is one among them, or to end up with a hopeless self-contradictory position. Althusser gives a positivistic solution to the paradox of sociologism (that we would discuss in the next chapter) by suggesting that there is a radical distinction between science and ideology, and Marxist theory is to be placed in the realm of science. Mannheim does not go to such an extent, but the orientation towards a positivistic solution to the riddle of relativism is explicit in his assertion that there are certain categories of knowledge, scientific, mathematical etc. that are exempted from social causation.

Now, we shall attempt to highlight some of the crucial epistemological presuppositions of Marx's concepts which have been already dealt in the course of our discussion on the Hegelian content of Marx's thought and to show that how they fundamentally contradict the above discussed tendencies of sociologism. We have seen that the epistemological thrust of Hegelianism is against empiricism. Also, it is explicit and no way disputable that Hegel's system does not involve the tendency of materialist reductionism, because ideas for Hegel do not belong to a secondary realm reducible to a 'primary objective' realm. Ideas are conceived to be more real than the objects in the sense that they make the objects what they are. The question of relativism, therefore, does not arise at all in
the Hegelian epistemological framework. We have also found in the first chapter that the
dialectical thrust of Hegelianism has been absorbed in Marx’s social theory, especially in
Marx’s concept of praxis. Here, we see how the epistemological postulates of philosophy of
praxis stand against the empiricist, materialist reductionist and the relativist tendencies
of sociologism.

Let us start with three claims which would be substantiated in the following discussion:

1. Philosophy of praxis rejects the primacy of the objective domain and thereby goes
against the methodology of materialist reductionism.

2. It refuses to accept the ‘reflection’ theory of knowledge and thereby discards the
possibility of empiricism.

3. It perceives man as a being of praxis and thereby attacks the methodological ground
of sociological relativism.

1. The essence of Marx’s conception of praxis is the idea that man is a creative being;
he is not a passive natural being, but a being who shapes the reality, a being of
praxis. Reality, viewed from the perspective of the philosophy of praxis, is not an
objective category; it is human reality “not in the sense that man exists with nature
but in the sense that man shapes nature” 15 This idea, obviously, has two aspects:
a) The so called objective reality is the product of man, the property of human
praxis. b) Man is not a being determined or produced by a pre-existing objective
reality. Presently, we shall restrict ourselves to the discussion of the first aspect,

15Shlomo Avineri, social and political thought, P. 71.
because the second aspect would be taken up in the next part, in our discussion of Marx’s methodological rejection of empiricism.

The whole of Marx’s critique of the materialist idea of the primacy of the objective domain is implied in ‘Theses on Feuerbach’. The very first theses of this essay says that the chief defect of materialism is “that the object, reality, what we apprehend through our senses, is understood only in the form of object or contemplation; but not as sensuous human activity as practice; not subjectively”. To conceive reality in the form of ‘object’ is to assert that there is something independent of man or the human sensuous activity, objectively real which can only be reflected or represented in human mind through a passive process. This is precisely to say that reality is an autonomous category. What Marx suggests in opposition to the materialist approach is that reality is to be understood as ‘practice’, to put it in more clear terms, the property of human praxis. To understand reality as the property of praxis, not as the object ‘out there’ is to destruct, on the one hand, the autonomy and, on the other, the primacy of the so called objective reality. Man, Marx views, is a being who transforms and constitutes the reality. Reality is something which is shaped or constituted through the historical praxis of man. It is not ready-made. It can not be the constitutive ground to which everything else can be reduced.

It is quite evident here, that Marx’s alternative to the materialist approach suggests a redefinition of the concept of objectivity. The methodological ground for such a redefinition has been provided by him in ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ (here after EPM). The central concern of this work, as it has been commonly described is the construction of a philosophical theory of labour basing on a ‘histori-cist’ view of nature, i.e., the view that nature for man is not the objective reality,
but essentially the human reality. Labour, as it is conceived in EPM is not merely an economic activity; it is the existential activity of man. Man exists primarily by producing things. The activity of production is the activity of transforming nature into the means of man’s subsistence; it is the humanisation of the nature. Nature, therefore cannot be conceived as an objective category unaffected by the historical praxis of man. On the contrary, it is to be understood essentially as ‘historical’, the property of human praxis. (This view would be discussed in detail in our fourth chapter). Explicitly, this historicist conception of reality fundamentally rejects the materialist hypothesis of an objective domain, the reductionist claim that everything subjective can be ultimately reduced to an objective ground. Marx’s method, therefore, is basically different from that of materialist reductionism.

2. The theory that reduces all thought to the level of a manifestation of social substratum which is objectively real implies the classical empiricist distinction between the ‘receptive’ subjectivity and the autonomous objectivity. We have seen that the idea of the autonomy of the objective domain clearly disappears in Marx’s redefined scheme. We shall argue here that to reject the autonomy of the objective domain is to attack the reflection theory of knowledge. Marx’s redefinition of objectivity, as we saw, establishes the conceptual primacy of the human agency, that it establishes the view that human praxis is the source of the social ‘substratum’, of the so called objective domain. When it is assumed that human praxis is conceptually prior to the objective reality, then it is also assumend that all that is humane are not to be conceived as belonging to a secondary realm; they constitute the primary realm. Consciousness viewed as the essential aspect of human praxis, then does not belong to the epiphenomenal realm, to the realm of reflection.
The view that consciousness is an essential aspect of human praxis needs to be elaborated. It is clearly implied in Marx's economic and philosophical writings, especially in his conception of human labour as exposed mainly in EPM, the idea that consciousness is not to be understood in isolation from praxis, the actual life process of man. "Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence"17 To understand the actual life process of man apart from consciousness, Marx assumes, is to reduce human existence to the level of a passive natural being. What distinguishes man from a mere natural being, according to Marx, is the activity of production, i.e., the conscious activity of transforming the objective nature into the means of his subsistence. It is the fundamental life activity of man. Animals, Marx says, do not involve in the activity of production consciously. Their life-activity is just mechanical. They are immediately one with their life activity. They do not distinguish themselves from it. Man, on the other hand, as we discussed earlier, makes his life activity itself into an object of his will and of his consciousness; he has conscious life activity. This conscious life activity distinguishes man directly from the life activity of the animal.

The thesis follows from the above is that consciousness is an inseparable aspect of human praxis. It becomes clear here that the statement, 'social being determines consciousness', understood in a crude deterministic sense, stands against this thesis. The term 'social being', viewed as an objective ground, does not involve the meaning of the conscious life activity of man; it refers to a category of being which is conceptually separated from, prior to the category of consciousness. Such a dualistic idea clearly disappears in Marx's formulation. The category of consciousness,

17Marx and Engles, German Ideology, in Portable Karl Marx, P. 169.
as we saw, in Marx’s account can never be different from the category of social being. Man, for Marx, is a conscious, creative being, a being of praxis. Consciousness separated from praxis is necessarily passive; it can never be creative. Human consciousness presupposes creativity, and creativity presupposes consciousness. Man produces consciously. “His creation, in practice of an objective world.... is the proof that man is a conscious species-being”\textsuperscript{18}

Marx’s concept of consciousness, therefore, has to be viewed in a fundamentally different way from that of sociologism. Thought, in Marx’s scheme, is not merely the passive reflection of a pre-existing reality; it is an inseparable aspect of praxis, a fundamental aspect of the activity of shaping the reality. Knowing is not to be understood as merely the activity of representing the reality, but the part of the activity of shaping the reality. In other words, the activity of knowing can not be divorced from the activity of transforming the reality. Reflection theory of knowledge is inadequate, if not false; it totally fails to account the creative content of thought and to perceive man as a creative being.

3. The sociological relativist thesis that every knowledge is mediated by the social position of the knower and therefore relative is methodologically founded upon the materialist conviction that the human subject is the product of the objective social reality, that everything subjective is causally determined by the outer reality. The supposition here is that society is an objective circumstance, the determinant base; when the circumstances change the subject changes in accordance with it. Marx attacks the very basis of this supposition by arguing that the change in the social circumstances is not to be understood in terms of an objective process unaffected by

\textsuperscript{18}Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, Ibid, P. 139.
man, it is man who causes changes in the circumstances "The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of (men's) circumstances and education forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator himself must be educated".\textsuperscript{19} The suggestion here is that materialism fails to grasp the human essence behind the social changes; it denies the fact that human praxis is the source of history. This denial leads the materialists to the reductionist thesis that man is merely the product of an objective process called history.

It is to be noted here that Marx's assertion that human praxis is the source of the historical process does not in any way imply that subject is unaffected by the process. It is true that the basic thrust of Marx's argument is against the reduction of subjectivity to the level of an effect, the relativisation of thought. But, it does not go to the extreme of assigning an ahistorical status to the subjective domain. Marx clearly maintains that praxis implies the shaping of both the objective and the subjective domains, that in the process of production man 'produces' himself. The act of shaping reality shapes man himself. In the process of changing the circumstances man changes himself. Man creates history and history creates man. Marx says: The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self change can be comprehended and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice".\textsuperscript{20}

Marx stresses the necessity for a new approach, a revolutionary approach which accounts the creative and the self-creative aspects of human praxis, and thereby conceives reality as a total process implying a constant interaction between subject and object. Explicitly, the relation between subject and object according to such an approach is not that of a one-sided determination in which the former is always determined by the latter,

\textsuperscript{19}Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, in \textit{Portable Karl Marx}, P. 156.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid, P. 156.
but that of a dialectical interaction where neither of them has a separate existence apart from the process, a ahistorical status.

But, man is an effect of a process which is initiated by himself. He recognises himself in a world that he has created.\(^\text{21}\) It can very well be argued here that there is a space for the autonomy of the subjective domain within the theoretical framework of Marxism. Subject is autonomous in so far as it is not an effect of something other than its own activity. Human activity is free in the sense in which it is not caused by anything outside the process. Precisely, this is what Marx means when he describes man as a free being, human life activity as a free conscious activity.\(^\text{22}\) Marx’s concept of praxis, in this sense, signifies the essence of man implying Freedom, consciousness and creativity.

Essentialism of Marx stands obviously against the deterministic concept of man; it offers a non-materialist approach to culture in which cultural domain is not merely a product of ‘structure’, it has an autonomy of its own. The rejection of determinism provides the methodological ground for the rejection of positivism in general. In the next section we shall see how Marx’s non-materialist theory of culture involves the space for a critique of positivism.

Non-materialist approach to culture and the critique of positivism

We shall begin with the crucial observation of Marx embodied in the nineth thesis of ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ which clearly exposes the methodological link between the representational concept of knowledge and the mode of approach of positivism. Marx says:

“They highest point attained by contemplative materialism, i.e., by that materialism which

\(^{21}\text{cf. Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’, in Portable Karl Marx p. 140.}\)

\(^{22}\text{Cf. Ibid, PI 139.}\)
does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of separate individuals and of civil society".\textsuperscript{23} The theory which presupposes a representational concept of knowledge, which perceives knowledge as a passive process of representation, not as an aspect of human praxis, is ‘contemplative’. It understands reality only in the form of an ‘independent object’; it fails to comprehend the constitutive essence of the reality, i.e., the human praxis. In other words, it conceives reality only as an ‘object’ devoid of any human content, as a form. Methodologically speaking, such a conception implies a mode of approach which refuses to penetrate the form into the essence. This mode of approach can be characterised as formalistic. To refute the essence behind the facts is to refute the universality, and thereby to accept the absolute reality of the particulars. A formalist theory which does not attempt to go beyond the appearance or which perceives the observable forms as the facts devoid of any content, therefore, implies the empiricist-positivist paradigm of knowledge i.e., the paradigm which restricts knowledge to the representation of the discrete particulars (or which conceives knowledge as the ‘contemplation of separate individuals’).

The term ‘civil society’ in the sense in which it is used in the thesis mentioned above, refers to a society where men are divided into separate individuals alien to each other; it refers to a system of alienation. We had seen in our first chapter that, in Marx’s account, in a system of alienation men get alienated from their species-life, from their social essence, and turn to be divided into separate, isolated individuals. The picture of civil society, therefore, is the picture of separate individuals. Marx’s observation here is that the spirit of positivism is exemplified in the form of life of the civil society.

\textsuperscript{23}Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, in \textit{Portable Karl Marx}, P. 157.
in 'On Jewish Question' where Marx brings out the formalistic character of the fundamental concepts which form the basis of civil society. Individual in a civil society, Marx observes is a self-sufficient monad withdrawn to himself and separated from the community. All the basic concepts of civil society such as liberty, equality etc. are defined in such a way that they provide the secure ground for the separation of man from man. For example, the concept of liberty as it is used in a civil society, denotes the right to do anything which does not harm others. The limits within which each individual can move without harming others are determined by law. Therefore, liberty, in a civil society is that of man as isolated monad withdrawn into himself. Concept of liberty, Marx says, thus is based not on the association of man and man but rather, on the separation of man from man. Similarly, the concept of equality refers to the right to be equally considered in front of law. Marx observes that it simply means equal access to liberty, that each man is equally considered to be a self sufficient monad. Again, Man's right to private property is the right to enjoy one's property, to dispose over it arbitrarily according to one's will, without considering other men, independent of society.\(^{24}\) Obviously, it is a right of self interest. It is the right of every individual to be an isolated monad. Thus, all the concepts which form the basis of civil society are the concepts of individualism. Individualism, in its most usual sense, is a mode of approach which presupposes the idea of separate individuals. In other words, the paradigm that implies in every individualist approach is positivism, that of 'the contemplation of separate individuals'.

The idea of civil society is the idea of separate individuals. The highest point attained by materialism is the idea of separate individuals. The standpoint of materialism therefore, as Marx says, is civil society. Non-materialist theory of culture which accounts the

\(^{24}\)cf, Karl Marx, 'On Jewish Question', in Portable Karl Marx, P. 108.
creativity of the subjective domain evidently discards formalism. It replaces formalism with essentialism. The standpoint of essentialism is not civil society, but a society where individuals are not alienated from each other, a 'human society'. Marx makes this whole idea explicit in the following thesis. "The standpoint of the old type of materialism is civil society, the standpoint of the new materialism is human society or social humanity.\textsuperscript{25}

To accept essentialism is to reject formalism. The idea of a society where the essence of man—freedom, consciousness and creativity is fully realised, implies the negation of the idea of civil society, the system of alienation. The establishment of the 'human society', in this concrete sense, implies the positive abolition of alienation, the destruction of the system of alienation. This essentialist-critical thrust of Marx's theory has been carried out and developed by later Marxists especially by George Lukács and Herbert Marcuse, into a full-fledged critical theory. We would be discussing the major features of the 'critical Marxism of Lukács, and Marcuse later on, in the last two chapters. Presently, in the next chapter, we shall have a critical view of the revival of the positivist paradigms in a relatively new theoretical form in Althusser's 'scientific Marxism'.

\textsuperscript{25}Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, in Portable Karl Marx, P. 158. We do not use the term 'new materialism' to designate Marx's mode of approach, for the practical reason that such a term might be misleading, especially in a discussion that focuses on a critique of materialism.