society and its lack of awareness of itself. The preoccupation of contemporary society with only the material or physical qualities of life and terming it as “progress” is a major issue of concern with Asimov. The Foundation Trilogy is an assertion for the need to also progress internally so as to have a better insight into the “madness” that is the modern world.

Chapter III: The *Foundation Series* and Marxist ‘Historical Materialism’

The basis of the fictional science of psychohistory and its possible usage stems from the theory that history moves in cycles. This is by no means a new or unique concept that has been theorized and developed by Asimov. Ancient civilizations like the Aztecs and the Egyptians also believed that time moves in cycles, an idea of time and history which has influenced poets like Arnold Toynbee and W. B. Yeats. The concept basically states that history has certain natural laws in which it moves in a predictive cycle where civilizations are born and then decay after reaching a certain point. The end of one civilization gives birth to a new one which grows and matures to a certain period, dies out again, thus following the
predictive path and completing the cycle. Upon looking into the history of mankind’s past, civilizations have flourished and disappeared and given birth to new ones. Edward Gibbon’s in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, analyses the birth and death of the Roman Empire. Asimov’s universe in the foundation stories is modelled after the political structure of the Roman Empire presented in Gibbon’s book. According to Jean Fielder, one of the greatest influences on Asimov's Foundation novel is Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This parallel is most discernible as Foundation depicts the gradual disintegration of a great empire, the concomitant rise in regional trade, and the eventual consolidation of political and economic power in the trading city- (or planet-) states. And, like a history, “*Foundation* focuses on mass movements rather than on individual actions” (Fiedler 59).

In *Foundation*, the Galactic Empire is the gradually disintegrating great empire, just as the Roman Empire is the disintegrating empire in Gibbon's work. And, as in Gibbon's history, the Foundation builds a trading empire that later unites the planets together. Though many popular histories seem to focus on the empire-builder's military conquests, in *Foundation* however, Asimov's history of the future “makes the cogent point that the true tools of empire-building are economic and socio-political development”
(Fielder 57). This principle is shown through the use of the Seldon Crises. Most often, the resolutions to these crises are a unique mix of psychological manipulation and technological usage. For example, the Galactic religion provides a means of psychologically manipulating the people of the galaxy to become dependent upon the technological sophistication of the Foundation. This underlying concept in the *Foundation Series*, the concept of history, is very similar with one of the main ingredients of Marxism—historical materialism.

Marxism is an economic and social system based upon the political and economic theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism is summed up in the Encarta Reference Library as “a theory in which class struggle is a central element in the analysis of social change in Western societies” (n.pag.). Marxism is the antithesis of capitalism which is defined by Encarta as “an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods, characterized by a free competitive market and motivation by profit” (ibid).

According to Marx a class is defined by the relations of its members to the means of production. He proclaimed that history is the chronology of class struggles, wars, and uprisings. Under capitalism, Marx continues, the workers, in order to support their families are paid a bare
minimum wage or salary. The worker is alienated because he has no control over the labour or product which he produces. The capitalists sell the products produced by the workers at a proportional value as related to the labour involved. Surplus value is the difference between what the worker is paid and the price for which the product is sold. An increasing dissatisfaction of the proletariat occurs as the result of economic recessions; these recessions result because the working class is unable to buy the full product of their labours and the ruling capitalists do not consume all of the surplus value. A proletariat or socialist revolution must occur, according to Marx, where the state (the means by which the ruling class forcibly maintains rule over the other classes) is a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Out of the many concepts and philosophies that Marxism has given birth to, concerning all spheres of life, historical materialism is one of the most intriguing. The approach to the study of human development and history in terms of materialism is a unique concept that totally differs from previous approaches:

The discovery of the materialist conception of history, or rather, the consistent continuation and extension of materialism into the domain of social phenomenon, removed two chief defects of earlier historical theories. In the first place, they at best examined only the ideological motives of the historical activity of human beings, without grasping the
objective laws governing the development of the system of social relations... in the second place, the earlier theories did not cover the activities of the masses of the population, whereas historical materialism made it possible for the first time to study with the accuracy of the natural sciences the social conditions of the life of the masses and the changes in these conditions. (Lenin, 15)

Historical Materialism is the application of Marxist science to historical development. In the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx sums up the fundamental proposition of historical materialism in a sentence: “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness” (n.pag.) Historical materialism started from a basic underlying reality of human existence that in order for human beings to survive and continue existence from generation to generation, it is necessary for them to produce and reproduce the material requirements of life. While this may seem obvious it was only with Marx that this was seen as foundation for understanding human society and historical development. "Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand” (qtd. in In Defense of Marxism, n.pag.). Marx then extended this premise by asserting the importance of the fact that, in order to carry out production and
exchange, people have to enter into very definite social relations, specifically production relations. To each stage in the development of the productive forces corresponds a certain set of production relations. Production relation means the way people organise themselves to gain their daily bread. Production relations are thus the skeleton of every form of society. They provide the conditions of social existence that determine human consciousness. Production does not get carried out in the abstract, or by entering into arbitrary or random relations chosen at will. Human beings collectively work on nature but do not do the same work; there is a division of labour in which people not only do different jobs, but according to Marxist theory, some people live from the work of others by owning the means of production. How this is accomplished depends on the type of society. Production is carried out through very definite relations between people. And, in turn, these production relations are determined by the level and character of the productive forces that are present at any given time in history. For Marx, productive forces refer to the means of production such as the tools, instruments, technology, land, raw materials, and human knowledge and abilities in terms of using these means of production:

It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers—a relation always naturally
corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity—which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short the corresponding specific form of the state. (ibid)

The historical materialist theory of history, also synonymous to "the economic interpretation of history" (Bernstein, 265), looks for the causes of societal development and change in the collective ways humans use to make the means for living. The social features of a society (social classes, political structures, ideologies) derive from economic activity; "base and superstructure" is the metaphoric common term describing this historic condition. Writers such as Asimov who identify with historical materialism usually postulate that society has moved through a number of types or modes of production. That is, the character of the production relations is determined by the character of the productive forces; these could be the simple tools and instruments of early human existence, or the more developed machinery and technology of present age. The main modes of production Marx identified generally include primitive communism or tribal society, ancient society, feudalism and capitalism. In Asimov's *Foundation*, the Seldon Plan predicts the fall of the decadent First Galactic Empire, the
rise of the Traders and Merchant Princes and the growth of the First Foundation- a post-industrial, bureaucratic-technological society. In each of these social stages, people interact with nature and produce their living in different ways. Any surplus from that production is allotted in different ways. Ancient society was based on a ruling class of slave owners and a class of slaves; feudalism based on landowners and serfs; and capitalism based on the capitalist class and the working class. The capitalist class privately owns the means of production, distribution and exchange (e.g. factories, mines, shops and banks) while the working class live by exchanging their socialized labour with the capital class for wages. Society moves from stage to stage when the dominant class is displaced by a new emerging class, by overthrowing the political shell that enforces the old relations of production no longer corresponding to the new productive forces. This takes place in the superstructure of society, the political arena in the form of revolution, whereby the underclass liberates the productive forces with new relations of production, and social relations, corresponding to it.

Marx's clearest formulation of his "Materialist Conception of History" was in the 1859 Preface to his book, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 
The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic
structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and
political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of
consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the
general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the
consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social
existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of
development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict
with the existing relations of production or — this merely expresses the
same thing in legal terms — with the property relations within the
framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of
development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters.
Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic
foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole
immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always
necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the
economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the
precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or
philosophic — in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious
of this conflict and fight it out. (53)

Historical materialism represented a revolution in human thought, and
a break from previous ways of understanding the underlying basis of change
within various human societies. The theory shows what Marx called a
"coherence" in human history, in which each generation inherits the productive forces developed previously and in turn further develops them before passing them on to the next generation. Further this coherence the more the productive forces develop and expand, the more they bind people together in production and exchange.

This understanding counters the notion that human history is simply a series of accidents, either without any underlying cause or caused by supernatural beings or forces exerting their will on society. This posits that history is made as a result of struggle between different social classes rooted in the underlying economic base.

According to Charles Elkins, the perspective of historical materialism entails the assertion of over-riding historical laws.

In its cruder versions, it involves the old puzzle of historical inevitability (predestination) versus free will, which itself flows out of the often unsuccessful yet desperately necessary, and therefore always repeated, struggles of men to control their personal futures and the future of their societies. (28)

These ideas are shown throughout Foundation, and in fact are the basis behind most of the heroic characters. Characters like Hober Mallow,
Salvor Hardin, and Limmar Ponyets epitomize men who struggle to control their futures. These men devote their lives to doing their part to help Seldon's Plan to be a success, but in reality, they are a planned part of Seldon's plan to help the Foundation succeed. The "random" choices these men make are all predetermined by Seldon's mathematical computations. Thus, these men try to control a future which has already been determined for them (Elkins 105).

In *Foundation and Empire*, the discussion of freedom versus necessity between the old, powerless patrician, Ducem Barr, who understands the implications of Seldon's Plan, and the eager, ambitious and headstrong General of the Galactic Empire, Bel Riose, goes as follows:

[Barr] Without pretending to predict the actions of individual humans, (Seldon's Plan) formulated definite laws capable of mathematical analysis and extrapolation to govern and predict the mass action of human groups....

[Riose] You are trying to say that I am a silly robot following a predetermined course of destruction.


[Riose] Because of Hari Seldon's dead hand?

[Barr] Because of the dead hand of the mathematics of human behavior that can neither be stopped, swerved, nor delayed.
Bel Riose, unwilling to accept that he was part of a predetermined fate struggles against Seldon Plan only to realise in an Oedipus-like irony that he was actually facilitating the workings of it. The logic of history is equated with the logic of the natural sciences. Bayta, in Second Foundation says:

The laws of history are as absolute as the laws of physics, and if the probabilities of error are greater, it is only because history does not deal with as many humans as physics does atoms, so that individual variations count for more. (77)

This is a fascinating concept with clear conceptual parallels with classical Marxism. Donald Wollheim in The Universe Makers (1971) observes that

Asimov took the basic premise of Marx and Engels, said to himself that there was a point there [i.e. in Marxism] -- that the movements of human mass must be subject to the laws of motion and interaction, and that a science could be developed based upon mathematics and utilizing all the known data...(41).

In his speech at Marx's funeral, Frederick Engels asserted that

Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history.... Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist method of production and the bourgeois society that this method of production has created. (39)
Similarly, just as Seldon concentrates not on the individual but the masses, so also Lenin says:

Historical materialism made it possible for the first time to study with scientific accuracy the social conditions of the life of the masses and the changes in these conditions. Marx drew attention and indicated the way to a scientific study of history as a simple process which, with all its immense variety and contradictions, is governed by definite laws. (13)

It is this concept, that history has "definite laws" which cannot only be made intelligible but can give insight into the course of future historical events, which so intrigues both the readers of the Foundation novels and those who study Marxism. Moreover, whether embodied in Seldon's Plan or the concept of historical materialism, this idea is the very essence of drama for it inevitably "raises the question of human free will versus historical determinism, a problem fraught with dramatic tension from Sophocles's Oedipus Rex through to the present." Time and again, just as "Oedipus and Sophocles' audience come to understand the power of Apollo over man's destiny, Asimov's characters and readers come to comprehend the full implications of "Psycho-Historical Necessity" (Elkins, 29-30).

This dilemma—given a predetermined outcome, to act or not to act—is exactly what Asimov's characters experience. It generates the dramatic tension in his novels. The hero of the First Foundation, Salvor Hardin,
decides to wait until the "crisis" itself (an attack by another planet) limits his choice to one and only one course of action. By contrast, other characters, such as Bel Riose and Dr. Darell, resist the implications of the Plan and of historical inevitability:

...he (Darell) knew that he could live only by fighting that vague and fearful enemy that deprived him of the dignity of manhood by controlling his destiny; that made life a miserable struggle against a foreordained end; that made all the universe a hateful and deadly chess game (14).

Ultimately, resistance is futile as all actions merely confirm the inevitability of Seldon's Plan. The eventual collapse of the civilization and other important foreseen events which come under the calculation of Seldon's psychohistory are all part of what is called Seldon's Plan. The fall of the Galactic Empire is similar to the predicted fall the capitalist society. This sense of inevitability is expressed by Nikolai Bukharin in his book *Historical Materialism*:

society and its evolution are as much subject to natural law as is everything else in this universe... Socialism will come inevitably because it is inevitable that men, definite classes of men, will stand for its realization, and they will do so under circumstances that will make their victory certain (46).
Wollheim is the first to point out the probable Marxian "influence" on Asimov. Asimov's parents immigrated from Russia in 1923, six years after the October Revolution. So Asimov, Wollheim feels, must have been aware of Soviet Marxism. Moreover, in 1939, the year Asimov began writing his future history, was the year of the Soviet-Nazi Pact, which he described in *The Early Asimov: Book One*, along with how he was caught up in the events unfolding in Europe. Though Asimov does not mention any involvement in radical politics, Sam Moskowitz credits him with helping to found the Futurian Science Literary Society in 1938, a society which James Blish says "was formed exclusively for those who were either actual members of the Communist Party or espoused the Party's policies" (87). The members "did endorse the Marxist view of change, or whatever version of it the American CP was wedded to at the time" (183).

The comparison between Marxist Historical Materialism and Asimov's concept of Cyclical History has come under some criticism especially from Charles Elkins. Being an ardent supporter of Marx and his philosophies, he believes that this comparison is another one of the crude misinterpretation of Marxist ideology by people in the west:

> It was precisely this crude conception of historical inevitability culminating in Stalin's widely propagated writings, that dominated the
thinking of a large majority of American radicals and concerned social
activists throughout the Thirties and into the Fifties, in and out of the
Communist Party. (Much of Marx’s and Engels’ writing was still
untranslated; the German Marxists’ and Antonio Gramsci’s works were
unknown; most George Lukács’ essays were unavailable. What Marxist
theory Americans received was basically what was filtered through the
USSR under Stalin.) (29)

Elkins opines that what has been generally accepted as Asimov’s
“underlying concept” in the Foundation Trilogy, is nothing but a vulgar and
debased version of Marxism promulgated in the 1930s. He argues that
Asimov and those that state that his trilogy is representative of Marxist
ideology, have not properly understood Marxism and their understanding of
it can be termed as “mechanical pseudo-Marxism” (31). This is very
different from Wollheim’s opinion in The Universe Makers that Asimov’s
concept is the exact science that “Marxism thought it was but never could
be” (41). Elkins also objected to the fact that Asimov’s concept of history is
being hailed as an exact science whereas Marxist ideologists have been very
careful to describe their theories as tendencies. Marx warns that his theory of
the capitalist mode of production assumes “that the laws of the capitalist
mode of production develop in pure form. In reality there is always an
approximation” (41). Similarly, Engels writes that no economic law:
has any reality except as approximation, tendency, average, and not immediate reality. This is partly due to the fact that their action clashes with the simultaneous action of other laws, but partly due to their nature as concepts (42).

Also, in Asimov's books, the fate of the world seems to be in the control of an elite group who are aware of the Seldon Plan whereas in Marxism, the eventual social revolution will bring the control of the world to the great mass of humanity. Besides all this, according to Elkins, the Foundation novels give a sense of predestination, of remorseless logic and pervading fatalism but in Marxism, there is a sense of unlimited hope and freedom.

The accusations levied by Elkins on the Foundation Trilogy, however, seem to be more aimed at the American misinterpretation of the Marxist ideologies. Asimov himself never claimed the concept in his novels to be an exact science. Also, the observation of the "elite" by Elkins as the controllers of human destiny is a fallacious observation. All the main characters in the trilogy, though aware of the Seldon Plan, are not able to make changes to it nor manipulate it to suit themselves. Their awareness of the plan always requires them to make great personal sacrifices for the benefit of humanity. What Elkins seems to have confused is the fact that, Asimov's trilogy is not a history book or one of pure political ideology. The fatalism that pervades
in Asimov's trilogy is simply a criticism of a society that refuses to learn from its past and seem to carry on towards the same demise suffered by its predecessors. According to Kapel, in his essay, "Return to Solecism:"

Mark Twain and Isaac Asimov were astute observers of the human condition, and, although they understood people well enough to know that nothing would be done, they left us with their observations of what could be done (n.pag.).

From a Marxian perspective, Asimov's depiction of the particular future embodied in the "Foundation" stories is an accurate reflection of the material and historical situation in the 1930's and 40's, out of which these works arose which is the alienation of men and women in modern bourgeois society. For Marxists, alienation describes a situation in which the creations of people's minds and hands—whether they be goods or complex social systems—stand over against and dominate their creators. Alienation is a consequence of man's impotence before the forces of nature and society, and of his ignorance of their operations. Alienation abates to the extent that man's knowledge and powers over nature and his social relations are increased. Thus, in one sense, Asimov's Foundation Trilogy endures because of its fatalistic perspective. It accurately sizes up the modern situation. Reading these novels, the reader experiences this fatalism which, in a
Marxist analysis, flows from his own alienation in society and his sense of impotence in facing problems he can no longer understand. In this context, the solutions in the Foundation Trilogy which Asimov puts in the hands of a techno-bureaucratic elite can be easily related to by the modern reader.

Chapter IV: Humanity, Humanism and the Religious Discontent

Asimov, besides being a science fiction writer, was also a prominent humanist. He was the president of the American Humanist Association for eight years starting from 1985. His humanistic work and concern for the welfare of humanity is well documented by authors such as Thomas Gunn, Janet Asimov, J. Joseph Miller and others. Asimov himself wrote many non-fictional books in which he criticises many aspects of human beliefs and superstitions that he regarded as detrimental and harmful to society. His fiction also cannot be truly separated from his beliefs as again and again his philosophies and critique of society keep reappearing in his stories. The *Foundation Series* and the *Robot Series*, has been interpreted by many critics as Asimov's attempt at pointing out inherent problems besetting humanity and finding solutions to these problems. Throughout his life, he has been greatly preoccupied with solving the many ills plaguing mankind and this is