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
also a major concern of most of his main characters. His plots usually revolve around certain moral predicaments and the actions of the characters are often guided by what benefits mankind most. Having lived through the most turbulent times in history, (the 2nd World War, the atomic bomb and the Cold War) he is acutely aware of the cruelties and destructiveness that man is capable of. Therefore, it is of no surprise that he has such a deep and fervent concern for humanity.

Because of this concern, Asimov has attacked many beliefs and aspects of society that are fanatic ally held as sacred by the modern world; most prominently nationalism and religion. He considers these two to be archaic, superstitious and illogical notions that have been responsible for many human atrocities. In his essay, "The Humanism of Isaac Asimov; Prophet of the Rightness and Power of Knowledge," humanist advocate, Ross Hamilton Henry writes:

...many of us, along with Dr. Asimov, think that the true salvation of individuals, and ultimately of our civilization, is in turning away from the credulous beliefs and delusions offered by ancient wonder stories and myths with their inflexible absolutes and the intolerances that they inevitably espouse. (n.pag.)
In *I, Asimov: A Memoir*, Asimov expresses the dire need for the world to rethink its views on culture and nationalism, reconsider its priorities and to work together for the salvation of humanity:

The Earth should not be cut up into hundreds of different sections, each inhabited by a self-defined segment of humanity that considers its own welfare and its own "national security" to be paramount above all other consideration...I am all for cultural diversity and would be willing to see each recognizable group value its cultural heritage. I am a New York patriot, for instance, and if I lived in Los Angeles, I would love to get together with other New York expatriates and sing "Give My Regards to Broadway."...This sort of thing, however, should remain cultural and benign. I'm against it if it means that each group despises others and lusts to wipe them out. I'm against arming each little self-defined group with weapons with which to enforce its own prides and prejudices...The Earth faces environmental problems right now that threaten the imminent destruction of civilization and the end of the planet as a livable world. Humanity cannot afford to waste its financial and emotional resources on endless, meaningless quarrels between each group and all others. There must be a sense of globalism in which the world unites to solve the real problems that face all groups alike...Can that be done? The question is equivalent to: Can humanity survive? ...I am not a Zionist, then, because I don't believe in nations, and because Zionism merely sets up one more
nation to trouble the world. It sets up one more nation to have "rights" and "demands" and "national security" and to feel it must guard itself against its neighbors...There are no nations! There is only humanity. And if we don't come to understand that right soon, there will be no nations, because there will be no humanity (n.pag.)

It is exactly this “sense of globalism”, the urgent need for the world to unite and “solve the real problems that face all groups alike”, that Asimov and the main characters of his stories are most involved in.

Being a humanist, Asimov’s concerns are for humanity as a whole, but the problem of clearly pinpointing what is humanity or what can be done—or averted for its good, is a dilemma faced by his characters as well as Asimov himself, and others with humanistic concerns like him. In End of Eternity and Robots and Empire, the greatest difficulty with finding solutions for the problems of humanity is to first identify what exactly is humanity, and then how to go about finding means for its benefit. In the first novel, humans have discovered a place called Eternity where they can observe the past and also travel in time with the appropriate equipments. Initially, Eternity was used only for trade and travel but some of its residents saw the enormous potential for good. In an immense moral gesture, the Eternals, as they call themselves, decide to travel to strategic moments in the
past and make subtle changes so as to prevent humankind's greatest tragedies. However, by doing so, they soon realize that they are also eradicating its greatest achievements. Mankind has a way of accomplishing its greatest achievements only when forced upon by crisis and tragedies. The conversation between Harlan, the hero, and Noys present this very dilemma. Noys tries to convince Harlan to destroy Eternity saying that it delays the discovery of hyperspace travel for one and a quarter million years and by the time humans move out into space, all the planets would have been occupied by younger species from other planets. Thus, mankind would eventually die out. Harlan believes that the problem can simply be fixed. He points out that the Eternals “have not yet failed to achieve the greatest good in all those centuries we could reach” (186). An enraged Noys retorts:

Noys understands the paradoxical nature and tragedy of humankind better than Harlan. He continues:

In ironing out the disasters of Reality, Eternity rules out the triumphs as well. It is in meeting the great tests that mankind can most successfully rise to great heights. Out of danger and restless insecurity comes the force that pushes mankind to newer and loftier conquests. Can you understand that? Can you understand that in averting the pitfalls and miseries that beset man, Eternity prevents men from finding their own bitter and better solutions, the real solutions that come from conquering difficulty, not avoiding it. (186-87)

Asimov realises that simply focusing on stability and security does not necessarily serve humanity best: sometimes short-term pains are necessary for much greater long-term gains. In *Foundation*, the main characters always allow crises to run their course and they do nothing until there is no choice but to act and this act would be exactly as Seldon has calculated as being the best course of action for mankind.

In *Robots and Empire*, the problem of identifying humanity again arises. Asimov’s treatment of robots is very different from other science fiction authors. In most other science fiction novels about robots, the ending is always Frankenstein-like with the artificial beings leading humans to
disaster. However, Asimov feels that robots are tools, and their purpose can only be one of service to humanity. He develops the famous Three Laws of Robotics to safeguard robots from turning against humans:

1. A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law,
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. ("Story," vii-xvi)

Asimov’s best robot stories involve ambiguities in interpreting these Three Laws. The laws remain unchanged for several centuries in Asimov’s universe. It is not until Robots and Empire that a change is made to these laws and this change is profoundly significant. The First Law of Robotics states that – “A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm” (353). This law is debated by two robots, R. Daneel Olivaw and R. Gistard Reventlov. Daneel observes that “…the tapestry of life is more important than a single thread…that humanity is more important than a single human being” (353). So they decide to formulate a new law known as the Zeroth Law in which the robots main concern will be the service of humanity:
There is a law that is greater than the First Law: "A robot may not injure humanity or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm." I think of it now as the Zeroth Law of Robotics. The First Law should then be stated: "A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm, unless this would violate the Zeroth Law of Robotics." (353)

The Zeroth Law represents a shift away from the narrow focus on the individual and towards a concern for humanity. The immediate problem that both Daneel and Giskard face is that, while picking out individual human beings and deciding what might harm them is reasonably easy, picking out "humanity" and identifying harm to it is much harder. Asimov returns to this problem frequently; it will be a question that troubles Daneel for thousands of years. Immediately after articulating the Zeroth Law Daneel is asked:

But what is your "humanity" but an abstraction? Can you point to humanity? You can injure or fail to injure a specific human being and understand the injury or lack of injury that has taken place. Can you see an injury to humanity? Can you understand it? Can you point to it? (353)

It is exactly these questions that the later Foundation Series attempts to answer, and the development of psychohistory is paramount in being able to determine the courses of action that will most benefit humanity. Giskard says to Daneel that:
It is not sufficient to choose, then, friend Daneel. We must be able to shape. We must shape a desirable species and then protect it, rather than finding ourselves forced to select among two or more undesirabilities. But how can we achieve the desirable unless we have psychohistory, the science I dream and cannot attain? (428)

The robots themselves are unable to develop the complex statistical science but are aware of its immense potential. It is only much later, Daneel meets Hari Seldon and manages to manipulate him into developing a method for making psychohistory useful.

Asimov's humanism is the driving force behind the themes and plots of his major novels. Humanism is a European phenomenon and its philosophy seeks to dignify and ennoble man. As Cuddon observes:

At its best, humanism helped to civilize man, to make him realize his potential powers and gifts, and to reduce the discrepancy between potentiality and attainment. (403)

Asimov became the president of the American Humanist Association or AHA in the spring of 1985, following his election to its board of directors late in 1984. Earlier in 1984, he had received the association's highest annual honour, the Humanist of the Year Award. However, Asimov's earliest
involvement with AHA dates back to almost a decade earlier, when in 1976 he joined with such noted scientists as Hudson Hoagland, George Gaylord Simpson, Chauncey Leake, and Linus Pauling in sponsoring a national education campaign promoted by AHA. *A Statement Affirming Evolution As a Principle of Science*, adapted from an earlier text written by Hermann J. Muller, Nobelist and former AHA president, was sent to every major school district in the United States. The text included the signatures of hundreds of leading scientists, educators, and civic and religious leaders and called upon school boards and educators to oppose the demands to include Creationism in science texts and classroom discussions. Creationists argued that fairness itself dictated that all "scientific theories" should be given "equal time and emphasis" in biology classes. In his criticism of those that advocate creationistic beliefs, Asimov says, "Creationists make it sound as though a 'theory' is something you dreamt up after being drunk all night" (Asimov Quotes, n.pag.)

Humanists believe that humans alone are responsible for the problems and achievements of society. In his essay, "What is Humanism?", noted humanist, Austin Cline quotes the entry on humanism in *The Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*:
Humanism as a technical term and as an intellectual or moral conception has always leaned heavily on its etymology. That which is characteristically human, not supernatural, that which belongs to man and not to external nature, that which raises man to his greatest height or gives him, as man, his greatest satisfaction, is apt to be called humanism. Humanism thus means many things. It may be the reasonable balance of life that the early humanists discovered in the Greeks; it may be merely the study of the humanities or polite letters; it may be the freedom from religiosity and the vivid interest in all sides of life of a Queen Elizabeth or a Benjamin Franklin; it may be the responsiveness to all human passions of a Shakespeare or a Goethe; or it may be a philosophy of which man is the center and sanction. (n.pag.)

Humanism can also be better understood when considered in the context of the attitudes or perspectives it is normally contrasted against. On the one hand is supernaturalism, descriptive of any belief system which stresses the importance of a supernatural, transcendent domain separate from the natural world in which we live. Quite often this sort of philosophy describes the supernatural as being more "real" or at least more "important" than the natural, and hence as something we should strive for — even if it means for humans to deny their own needs, values, and experiences in the here and now. "Humanists would believe that neither good nor evil is produced by
supernatural beings, and that the problems of humankind can be solved without such beings” (Seiler & Jenkins, n.pag.). In his autobiography I, *Asimov: A Memoir*, Asimov states:

I believe in the scientific method and the rule of reason as a way of understanding the natural Universe. I don’t believe in the existence of entities that cannot be reached by such a method... and that are therefore 'supernatural.' I certainly don’t believe in the mythologies of our society, in heaven and hell, in God and angels, in Satan and demons.... Humanists believe that human beings produced the progressive advance of human society and also the ills that plague it. They believe that if the ills are to be alleviated, it is humans that will have to do the job. They disbelieve in the influence of the supernatural on either the good or the bad of society, on either its ills or the alleviation of those ills. (498)

For Asimov, religion is seen as a means of social oppression. He is of the opinion that God is created by man and agrees with Alexander Pope that “…the proper study of mankind is man.” As Asimov puts it, “...I am incapable of accepting that existence on faith alone” (Asimov, 301). Asimov sums up his religious views by saying "I don't have the evidence to prove that God doesn't exist, but I so strongly suspect that he doesn't that I don't want to waste my time” (qtd. in Corvallis Secular Society, 1997). His novels reflect his view of religion as a tool for manipulating and controlling the
ignorant and uneducated. Although born of Jewish parents, Asimov took great interest in Christianity, the major religion of his country and moreover, the Bible, to the point of publishing a two volume book entitled *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*. In his book *Gold* published in 1995, Asimov gives his views of science fiction and religion:

I tend to ignore religion in my own stories altogether, except when I absolutely have to have it. ...and, whenever I bring in a religious motif, that religion is bound to be seem vaguely Christian because that is the only religion I know anything about, even though it is not mine. An unsympathetic reader might think that I am "burlesquing" Christianity, but I am not. That too, it is impossible to write science fiction and really ignore religion (297-302)

Christianity is parodied in a negative light in *Foundation*. The religion is described as follows:

...all this talk of about the Prophet Hari Seldon and how he appointed the Foundation to carry on his commandments that there might someday be a return of the Earthly paradise: and how anyone who disobeys his commandments will be destroyed for eternity. They believe it. (103)

In his essay, *Religion in Asimov's Writings*, Michael Brummond states that:

The parallelism to Christianity is apparent: the Prophet Hari Seldon represents Jesus Christ, the Foundation is organized religion, the
commandments are similar to those given to Moses in the old testament, the Earthly paradise is Heaven, and to be destroyed for eternity is the Christian idea of Hell (n.pag.)

Within the novel *Foundation* itself, the religion is summed up as follows:

The religion— which the Foundation has fostered and encouraged, mind you— is built on strictly authoritarian lines. The priesthood has sole control of the instruments of science we have given Anacreon, but they've learned to handle these tools only empirically. They believe in this religion entirely and in the ...oh...spiritual value of the power they handle...The Foundation has fostered this delusion assiduously (106-107).

In the novel, the people of Foundation are the only ones left in the universe with knowledge of the science and technology of the past. All the other planets have disintegrated into some form of barbarism or the other. Foundation imparts some of its knowledge and technology to its neighbouring planets but only as some sort of “magical sorcery”. Thus Foundation started a religion in which Hari Seldon is elevated to the role of a god and saviour, and Salvor Hardin becomes something akin to a pope. Citizens from the other planets are taught the basic fundamentals on how to run the “holy” machines that are given by the Foundation and they are given the garb of priests:
It started that way at first because the barbarians looked upon our science as a sort of magical sorcery, and it was easiest to get them to accept it on that basis. The priesthood built itself and if we help it along we are only following the line of least resistance (86).

To the people of Anacreon he was high priest, representative of that foundation which, to those 'barbarians' was the acme of mystery and the physical center of this religion they had created— with Hardin's help— in the last three decades (89).

These, more or less, exemplify Asimov’s view on religion. Religion is nothing more than a “barbaric” superstition and a mere delusion that is used for the control and manipulation of masses by a small minority. Though in Foundation it is used to maintain order in a universe gradually disintegrating into chaos, in real life, Asimov believes it has done more harm than good. Asimov's believes that "To surrender to ignorance and call it God has always been premature, and it remains premature today." Asimov also said:

I would not be satisfied to have my kids choose to be religious without trying to argue them out of it, just as I would not be satisfied to have them decide to smoke regularly or engage in any other practice I consider detrimental to mind or body (qtd. in Corvallis Secular Society, 1997).
One of the most apparent similarities between Asimov's own beliefs and his fictional work comes in the area of life after death. Asimov says:

It is entirely because such thoughts are so comforting and so exhilarating, and so remove us from the otherwise dreadful thought of death, that the afterlife is accepted by the vast majority, even in the absolute absence of any evidence for its existence (332).

He believes that the fear of death makes people accept religion so as to convince themselves that death is not the end. Asimov has been quoted as saying, “Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome.” One of Asimov's greatest objections to God stems from his objection to the idea of the afterlife. Asimov says:

I would also want a God who would not allow a Hell. Infinite torture can only be a punishment for infinite evil, and I don't believe that infinite evil can be said to exist even in the case of a Hitler. (334).

In one of his short stories, “The Last Question” from Robot Dreams, humankind has evolved into one mind, free of body and co-exist with a super computer in hyperspace. This super computer is known as a Multivac and called AC for short. AC is repeatedly asked if the winding down or loss of energy in the universe or entropy can be reversed. The story progresses
through eons and each time the Multivac is asked the question if entropy can be reversed, it always has the same answer that not enough data is available. In the end, after humankind linked up with the super computer in a bodiless entity in hyperspace, the universe comes to an end. As man fades out, the super computer suddenly realises how to reverse entropy:

And it came to pass that AC learned how to reverse the direction of entropy. But there was now no man to whom AC might give the answer of the last question. No matter. The answer--by demonstration--would take care of that, too. For another timeless interval, AC thought how best to do this. Carefully, AC organized the program.

The consciousness of AC encompassed all of what had been a Universe and brooded over what was now Chaos. Step by step, it must be done.

And AC said, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!"

And there was light. (246)

This incredible science fiction story has the underlying theme that man created God, and that the problems of society can be solved only by man, or man's creation, and that a supernatural being is not needed. This is a direct representation of Asimov's humanist beliefs. The use of religion is not intended, according to Asimov, to burlesque religion, but to profess his beliefs against the existence of a god, or an afterlife.
Asimov’s great concern for humanity made him a Humanist and this in turn made him object to many prevailing social institutions such as religion. Of his contribution as a Humanist, Hamilton writes:

For me Isaac Asimov exemplifies what a humanist should be, not a perfect paragon of virtue, but a perfectly fallible human being who lived his life in a humanistic fashion. I do not consider Dr. Asimov any sort of humanistic messiah, only an honorable and good man, a brilliant and prolific writer, and an obvious example of what a humanist can aspire to be. If we do not honor our own Humanistic “saints” and attempt to keep their memory and example alive, then we deserve the neglect and the lack of notice usually paid to us by the rest of the world. And we should not expect others to notice that persons of great moral fiber and exemplary character are found outside of the mainstream religious movements. We need to refute the suppositions make by national leaders like Joseph Lieberman, that it is not possible to lead a moral life without God and religion to keep us on the straight and narrow. (3)

Asimov has always stood for honesty. In his views on religion and nationalism, he believes that he is only projecting a truth that others are too afraid or uncomfortable to acknowledge. Much like the robots in his stories, he detaches himself from traditions and sentimentality to get a clearer
understanding of life and see it honestly for what it is. He writes in *Pebble in the Sky*:

They won't listen. Do you know why? Because they have certain fixed notions about the past. Any change would be blasphemy in their eyes, even if it were the truth. They don't want the truth; they want their traditions.

Never let your sense of morals get in the way of doing what's right.

Part of the inhumanity of the computer is that, once it is competently programmed and working smoothly, it is completely honest. (qtd. in *Famous Asimov Quotes*, n.pag.)

Asimov aims at making people see what he considers as obvious truths. His work as an author and humanitarian is aimed at achieving these goals:

It is the obvious which is so difficult to see most of the time. People say 'It's as plain as the nose on your face.' But how much of the nose on your face can you see, unless someone holds a mirror up to you? (ibid).

Asimov always preferred to be labelled a rationalist as opposed to being called an atheist. According to Asimov, being an atheist meant to not believe in anything and he found this to be an inadequate description of his
principles and ideals. He says that he does believe in humanity and the potential of man, and this is far more rational than believing in God.

I prefer rationalism to atheism. The question of God and other objects-of-faith are outside reason and play no part in rationalism, thus you don't have to waste your time in either attacking or defending (ibid).

Another reason why Asimov attacks religion besides deeming it to be mere superstition, and hence irrational, is due to the hypocrisy of those who stand for it.

If I were not an atheist, I would believe in a God who would choose to save people on the basis of the totality of their lives and not the pattern of their words. I think he would prefer an honest and righteous atheist to a TV preacher whose every word is God, God, God and whose every deed is foul, foul, foul.

If I am right, then (religious fundamentalists) will not go to Heaven, because there is no Heaven. If they are right, then they will not go to Heaven, because they are hypocrites. (ibid)

Asimov's rejection of religion is based largely on humanitarian grounds. Having seen the hypocrisy that surrounds it and the immense threat it poses to the unity and progress of mankind, Asimov strives to bring to attention
these issues in his works and life. History has shown the prejudice and persecution that man is capable of because of religion and sadly, it persists till today. Asimov believes that for the progress of humanity, such delusions must be left behind and only then can mankind truly come together to find solutions for its existential problems.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Patricia Warrick in an article entitled, “Ethical Evolving Artificial Intelligence: Asimov's Computers and Robots,” argues that Asimov's robots are programmed to regard “John Stuart Mill's concept of 'the greatest good for the greatest number'... as the essential element in the criteria for designing the (behaviorist) ideal” (191). Taking this a step further, J. Joseph Miller in his essay, “The Greatest Good for Humanity: Isaac Asimov's Future History and Utilitarian Calculation Problems,” argues that Asimov’s extended future history as it is articulated in The End of Eternity, the Robot Series and the Foundation Series, and the major social themes in Asimov’s social science fiction are ultimately motivated by utilitarianism. Throughout his future history: