CHAPTER 2

The Materialist View of History

Scientistic Marxism

Leszek Kołakowski rightly referred to the period of the Second International (1899–1914) as the ‘golden age’ of Marxism. During this period, the doctrine was received in a spontaneous fashion. It was referenced and fiercely discussed by many branches of the social sciences, and, ultimately, was not spared criticism. It was also during this time that two contradictory interpretations of Marx and Engels’s thought took shape, leaving aside certain sub-varieties. This resulted from divergent ways – controversial to this day – in which determinist and activist elements, i.e. the two spheres of phenomena and processes (the objective and subjective spheres), were linked together. So-called objectivist interpretations of Marxism, which developed mainly under the influence of naturalism, scientism and positivism, were based on the premise that social realities are subject to their own autonomous, inevitable laws of development. These laws were treated as extensions of the laws of nature. The significance of conscious and purposeful human action was minimised or eliminated from the historical process. Instead, an emphasis was placed on material factors, especially economic aspects. This was reflected in how modes of consciousness were viewed as external to being, and the relationship between objective and subjective conditions was conceived of mechanically, as moving in one direction only. The opponents of the ‘naturalists’ – not just revisionists, but equally

1 Kołakowski 1978, p. 355.
2 Numerous Marxists from the period of the Second International noticed the inherent contradiction between the determinist and activist elements in Marx’s thought. The determinist aspect concerns Marx’s economic prognosis that capitalism would inevitably develop towards communism and his vision of capitalism’s decline, which was linked to his theory on crises of overproduction. The activist aspect concerns the conscious participation of the oppressed classes in the destruction of capitalism. The attempts of these Marxists to link the two elements together were motivated by their aspiration to defend the economic interpretation of theory without denying the driving force of collective action. Resulting from this, Marxist theorists were caught up in contradictions and inconsistencies. However, many of them favoured one of the two aspects. This spawned two distinct interpretations of Marxian theory: an objectivist and an activist interpretation. Please note that this outline is a conscious simplification of the problem.
ethical socialists and so-called revolutionary Marxists – rightly objected to this interpretation of Marxism. In their view, it reduced Marxian theory to a historical automatism, and in political practice it strengthened so-called attentist attitudes in the workers’ movement.3

In contrast, the Marxists who advocated an activist standpoint – also known as the humanist perspective – stressed the relative independence of the sphere of consciousness from the economic structure. Most overstated subjective factors in the historical process, particularly ethical and political factors, which they ultimately separated from the socio-economic foundation.4

The emergence of these two primary models of understanding Marxism can be attributed to the fact that the theorists of the Second International took two opposing positions in relation to their ‘masters’.5 The first approach was characterised by a relatively unreflective attitude towards the adopted doctrine, which they considered self-contained, unified, and self-sufficient. The advocates of this interpretation believed that Marxism encompassed a comprehensive worldview, held a ready set of questions and indisputable answers that explained all phenomena of natural and social life, and produced its own scientific criteria and methodological tools. Karl Kautsky, Georgi Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin, among others, were in this group.

In comparison, the second stance was characterised by a certain distrust as to the durability and correctness of the solutions offered by Marx and Engels, and an openness towards questions and problems posed by other intellectual currents. It took an instrumental approach towards Marxist theory, albeit in the positive sense of the term. Characteristically, Marxism was treated as a base that supplied analytical methods and tools to conduct research in various fields of the social sciences, e.g. philosophy, sociology, history, economy, and politics. Marx’s theory as such was not deemed of interest as a separate subject of study. The likes of Eduard Bernstein, the ethical socialists, the Austromarxists, Antonio Labriola, Antonio Gramsci, and the ‘young’ György Lukács represented this approach to the founding doctrine. While naturalistic interpretations of Marxism generally went hand in hand with the previous stance, activist interpretations were associated with the latter. However, one cannot apply

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3 The politics of passively waiting for events to unfold automatically.
4 For the representatives of both determinist and activist interpretations, the following idea of Marx was unclear: consciousness always means conscious being, since it is based on our active life process, which is accomplished in specific socio-historical conditions.
5 See Kolakowski 2005, 511.
this rule to all Second International theorists, the case of Otto Bauer being exemplary in this regard.

Not unlike Gramsci and Lukács, Bauer stood for a tendency that aspired to creative interpretations of Marxism – yet his method of reading the philosophical content of Marx’s theory was closer to the ‘naturalists’ than to their ‘activist’ opponents. Bauer dedicated relatively little room to the reception of Marxism in his works; it only featured in a sporadic and rudimentary fashion within his literary output. To a certain degree, his lack of philosophical education was decisive in this. Before we move on, we should be clear that as a thinker Bauer was not of the same stature as Max Adler or the neo-Kantians. The influential non-Marxist philosophical currents of his time set the limits of his philosophical horizon. There was another factor no less crucial to Bauer’s idiosyncratic reception of Marxism. He was mainly interested in sociological and historical depictions of social reality, and especially the possibility of using historical analysis, based on historical data, for researching the origins and development of social phenomena; for gaining insight into the laws and internal mechanisms of socio-economic processes; and for explaining the structural evolution of societies. Thus, Bauer only sporadically took interest in strictly philosophical questions – his sole philosophical work was Das Weltbild des Kapitalismus (The Worldview of Capitalism), published in 1924, which he wrote as a prisoner of war in Russia from 1916–17 (it was published in an anniversary edition in honour of Karl Kautsky’s 70th birthday). It is impossible, then, to identify philosophical thought as an autonomous strand of research in Bauer’s work. While it appears on the margins of his historical and sociological works, it does not form a coherent or even loosely connected whole. Nor does it contain a meta-theoretical layer. There was, however, a distinct turning point in Bauer’s reflections on Marxism. In the first phase, he reflected upon the scientific status of Marxism, interpretations of philosophical materialism, dialectics, epistemology and

6 Bauer wrote on Marxism mainly on the occasion of anniversaries, and, even then, not very much: his first and most important work in this respect is the study ‘Marxismus und Ethik’ (‘Marxism and Ethics’, 1905–6). Further relevant texts are the article ‘Die Geschichte eines Buches’ (‘History of a Book’), published in 1908 for the 40th anniversary of Capital, the article ‘Marx und Darwin’, published in 1909 for the 50th anniversary of Marx’s preface to Critique of Political Economy, and the article ‘Marx als Mahnung’ (‘Marx as a Warning’), published in 1923 for the 40th anniversary of Marx’s death. As to the works of other Marxist theorists, only Karl Kautsky’s The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx attracted his interest – see Albers 1985, pp. 69–70.

7 This question will be discussed comprehensively later.

8 Albers also notes this aspect in Bauer’s work: see Albers 1983, pp. 98–9.
ethics from a scientistic, positivist and Kantian point of view. Following his watershed moment in 1916, he critically reviewed the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of the past during the second phase.

To discuss Bauer’s reception of Marx, one needs to consider the scientific context with due regard to Austrian specifics, as well as the social and political conditions in which Marxism found itself at the turn of the twentieth century. An important circumstance was the lack of familiarity with the revolutionary form of Marxism in Austria, which can be traced back to a number of reasons. The workers’ familiarity with the writings of Marx and Engels, for instance, had all but vanished. Christian Social and nationalist groups exerted a strong influence. The workers’ movement was organisationally divided for a prolonged period. Furthermore, no independent theory emerged in the Austrian Social-Democratic movement up until 1904. It therefore adopted the theoretical and political assumptions of German Social Democracy, the most

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9 Referring to Austromarxism as ‘revisionism of a special type’, Alfred Pfabigan writes: ‘In order to understand this “revisionism of a special type”, we need to take a brief look at the conditions for the reception of Marxism in the Austrian workers’ movement. In Austria, these conditions were rather unfavourable. Marx and Engels’s thought evolved largely in Great Britain, which was socially at a higher level, and rested on a foundation that was alien to the culture of the Danube Monarchy: an advanced, industrialist way of thinking. I only want to mention some aspects of this mode of thinking, which was an important precondition for socialist thought and missing in Austria. The Enlightenment never fully prevailed in this country, utopian socialism was a marginal phenomenon, no materialism that argued in a scientific manner existed, and the writings of classical political economy were largely unknown. The same is true for classical German philosophy… Especially for Hegel it was not necessary to perish in 19th century Austria, he was already a “dead dog” when he was still alive’ (our translation) – Pfabigan 1990, p. 47 and Pfabigan 1990b, p. 53.

10 See Pfabigan 1990, p. 47. Ernst Hanisch also supports this in his article, ‘Die Marx-Rezeption in der österreichischen Arbeiterbewegung’ (‘The Reception of Marx in the Austrian Workers’ Movement’). Hanisch writes: ‘Only a small number of workers had a more intimate knowledge of Marx and Engels’ (our translation) – Hanisch 1978, p. 120. In the same article, however, Hanisch argues: ‘Nonetheless, Marx was an established name for the majority of Austrian workers: as the creator of “scientific socialism”, as a genius, as a symbol’ (our translation) – ibid. Discussing the lack of reception of Marx and Engels’s works in the Austrian labour movement, Hanisch points out that the SDAP’s daily newspaper, Arbeiter-Blatt, printed the Communist Manifesto on 7 June 1868. Furthermore, from 1869 onwards, the leaders of both groups in the workers’ movement – the ‘radicals’ and the ‘moderates’ – as well as circles of educated workers were familiar with Marx’s Capital and Engels’s The Condition of the Working Class in England. In addition, Marxism was popularised by workers’ calendars in a form that was understandable to them. See Hanisch 1978, pp. 93–121.
important of which included an evolutionary interpretation of the historical process and resulting reformist orientation. Almost all Austromarxists, most of whom held PhDs from the University of Vienna, were influenced by its bourgeois professors. Followers of Johann Friedrich Herbart and Friedrich Jacob dominated the philosophy department there, but unlike in France, there was no strong materialist tradition. The works of ‘itinerant preachers’, such as Karl Vogt, Jacob Moleschott and Ludwig Büchner, were known in Austria, yet they did not provoke any major interest, and the synthesis of philosophical materialism and dialectics was neither understood nor accepted. Likewise, the influence of German idealism was minor – among German philosophers, only Kant commanded respect and attention. Hegel was regarded as a dangerous irrationalist and mystic. Furthermore, there was strong resistance against the neo-Kantian methodology and its dichotomous understanding of the sciences – i.e. the differentiation between nomothetic and idiographic sciences made by the Baden School. The Austrian conception of Marxism, within which neither philosophical materialism nor materialist dialectics were granted a right to exist, evolved in this intellectual climate. In the fields of ontology and epistemology, Kantianism and empirio-criticism, respectively, had become prevalent.

The limited reception of Marxism in Austria was conditioned by objective circumstances and, in a sense, historically justified. During the period of the Second International, only a few elements of Marx’s theory were subjected to factual analysis, as his early writings did not appear until the 1920s. However, it also resulted from the programmatic task that the Austromarxists had set themselves. They had no desire to prove the legitimacy and correctness of historical materialism in the way earlier generations had done. Rather, they wanted to utilise Marx’s findings and method for their own research in the areas of philosophy, law, economy and history. In doing so, they were aware that any further development of Marxism would involve confronting its basic theoretical and philosophical assumptions with the latest findings of hard science and explanations offered by other currents of intellectual culture. For it was not Marxism, but positivism, scientism, social Darwinism, naturalism and Kantianism that defined perceptions of social and historical reality at the time. Of no less importance were the insights of formal sociology (Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel and Max Weber), which were thriving particularly in Germany.11

11 The concepts of society and social ties contained in Ferdinand Tönnies’s Community and Society (1887) and Georg Simmel’s Sociology. Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms (1908) met with lively interest in scientific and Marxist circles. See Tönnies 2003 and Simmel 2009.
In view of the growing importance of the ‘Bernstein debate’, the Austrian socialists were faced with a dilemma: they could either subscribe to the thesis of a ‘scientific crisis’ of Marxism, popularised particularly by the neo-Kantian or positivist-oriented revisionists, or take to Marxism’s defence. Few of those who chose the latter option were fully aware of Marxism’s distinct theoretical and methodological features, which is why they felt that drawing on notions, methods and criteria of scientificity developed by the social sciences up until then would be the correct way to proceed. The essential advantage of their approach was that they could fall back on age-old scientific and philosophical traditions that had accompanied the birth of Marxism. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, it was not at all self-evident that Marxism was part of European philosophical culture.

Another crucial question that prompted both interest and controversy in the Marxist camp was the relevance and adequacy of Marx’s theory to the political practice of Social Democracy, which was changing during the era of monopoly capitalism. Under the new economic and social conditions (concentration of capital, increasing stratification of the working class and changes in the class structure of society) and political circumstances (newly legal activity of working-class parties, rising membership and growing trade-union ranks), Social Democracy left behind its formative years. Spontaneous mass demonstrations were already of the past, and the Social-Democratic parties focused on defending reformist gains. They did not stand in the way of the process through which the working class was gradually integrated into the existing socio-political structures. Their main objective was to transform the capitalist state into a socialist state by democratic means. At the turn of the century, this position found a particularly acute expression in revisionism, which gave a theoretical grounding to earlier attempts at combining Marxism with non-Marxist currents in the social sciences. Based on empirical research, it furthermore put the main theses of historical materialism into question – rightly so, as history would show. For the practice of the workers’ movement, revisionism meant abandoning the revolutionary principles of Marx’s theory and strengthening reformist politics based on a temporary acceptance of the bourgeois-democratic state – despite its simultaneous verbal and ideological negation. The strong influence of revisionism on the workers’ movement shaped the worldview of Social-Democratic parties at the beginning of the twentieth century: its foundation was non-revolutionary Marxism and the reformist orientation of workers during the ‘golden age’ of capitalism in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} Bauer rightly recognised that this worldview met the expectations of the progressive
The Austrian interpretation of Marxism mainly grew out of opposition to revisionism. Its essence – as mentioned in the first chapter – was a modification of the theoretical and philosophical premises of Marxism, which was achieved by contrasting its conclusions with the findings of scientism, positivism, naturalism and neo-Kantianism. This process enabled the Austrians not only to settle scores with the revisionists, but also to overcome the weaknesses and limitations of orthodox Marxist theory. As a result of their investigations, two different – yet not wholly opposing – models of interpreting Marx and Engels emerged. Anti-naturalist and anti-positivist elements outweighed scientistic elements in Max Adler’s model, while positivist and scientistic aspects characterised Friedrich Adler, Karl Renner and Otto Bauer’s approaches. It is worth noting in passing that the Austromarxists regarded themselves as legitimate heirs to Marx and their theories as creative advancements of his doctrine. They knowingly overlooked the fact that their paths were, in truth, divergent, and that the right wing headed by Karl Renner had moved fairly close to revisionism. The fact that they took a stand against revisionism was motivated more by ideology than by theory. At least at the level of proclamation, their intervention allowed them to maintain the revolutionary character of the party. One could observe an interesting phenomenon in the process, which Alfred Pfabigan described: the Austrian socialists debated the views of Bernstein, Ignaz Auer, and Ludwig Waltmann – but not their own, as they were anxious not to cast doubt on the ideological unity of the party.13

Let us, however, focus on Bauer’s interpretation of Marxism, whose point of departure was, likewise, its references to revisionism. Bauer assumed a position that was not entirely consistent: he repeatedly asserted his hostility towards revisionism, describing it as vulgar Marxism, yet without offering any interpretation of that term.14 At the same time, he tended to minimise the significance of Bernstein’s theoretical critique by claiming that it did not concern Marx’s system as a whole, but merely abstract formulas and generalities. Nor was he, on

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13 See Pfabigan 1985, p. 41.
14 See Bauer 1979f.
the other hand, fully convinced whether one could deny the scientific and historical legitimacy of Bernstein’s intervention. A remark he made on the fortieth anniversary of Marx’s death testifies to this: ‘What today appears to be a crisis of Marxism is nothing but the painful process of adjusting socialism to a fundamentally revolutionised world’ (our translation).\textsuperscript{15} He only perceived revisionism as a threat to certain areas of political practice, fearing it could lead to a loss of faith in socialism among the masses and transformation of parties from revolutionary to reformist – the latter, \textit{nota bene}, was already a \textit{fait accompli}. This was partly why he pointed to the fundamental difference between revisionism and Marxism at the 11th party congress in Innsbruck in 1911: revisionism viewed social gains and the path of reform as the foundation for a transition from capitalism to socialism, whereas Marxism argued that the concentration of capital itself paved the way for its socialisation, and that the growing contradictions between classes must necessarily culminate in a decisive struggle.\textsuperscript{16}

Bauer disassociated himself from revisionism in numerous statements, yet this did not prevent him from approving of Victor Adler’s reformist tactics. In contrast to the revisionists, however, Bauer did not regard Marx’s theory as outmoded or erratic.\textsuperscript{17} He conceded that some of Marx’s theses no longer fully applied to existing socio-historical conditions, but, in his view, this did not mean that the doctrine itself was deficient. He was in favour of generally remaining faithful to Marx’s ideas, yet he considered Marxism itself to be an open-ended system still capable of providing cognitive and methodological directives to meet the needs of socio-economical and political analysis of reality. In his social philosophy, Bauer put forward the slogan of ‘Marx overcoming Marx’, although he discerned a certain distrust in the party ranks towards posing problems in new ways. He was mainly concerned with utilising Marx’s historical method to research new socio-political phenomena. To him, historical materialism (which he just as often referred to as ‘the materialist view of history’) represented, more than anything, a science of the laws of social development, as well as a method for studying the driving forces behind the evolution of societies. He also understood it as a methodological postulate for examining forms of intellectual life in their dependence of the economic structure. From a political point of view, Bauer added that the value of historical

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\item \textsuperscript{15} ‘Was heute eine Krise des Marxismus zu sein scheint, es nichts anders als der schmerzhafte Prozeß des Anpassung des Sozialismus an eine vom Grund aus umgewälzte Welt’ – Bauer 1980i, p. 50.
\item \textsuperscript{16} See Bauer 1978, p. 50.
\item \textsuperscript{17} See Heimann 1985, p. 131.
\end{itemize}
materialism lay in indicating the ways and means to change the existing socio-economic order; it was also an instrument to which Social Democracy had to refer if it endeavoured to make socialism a reality.\textsuperscript{18}

Bauer was particularly absorbed in the question about the scientific nature of Marxism. Before we engage in any further discussion, we should understand that Bauer’s view of Marxism was defined particularly by positivism and scientism. According to Bauer, Hermann Cohen had already posed the crucial opening question: what is Marxism – a science or an ideology? The reply that it was both a science and an ideology was difficult to accept for Bauer and other Marxists informed by the intellectual climate of the time. However, the widespread belief that it was a science prompted the question as to what scientific model it was based on, while also pointing to a more general query: what criteria does knowledge need to fulfil in order to be considered scientific?

It is worth stressing that, when addressing this issue, Bauer did not address essential questions about the relationship between social reality and nature, theory and empirical evidence, and deductive and inductive approaches. They appeared, however, in his observations on the economic development, class structure and national question. Bauer took a critical stance towards Karl Menger’s scientific model, which was widespread among Austrian scientists at the time.\textsuperscript{19} It was based on the method of abstraction and deduction, operating on the premise that the categories established by a particular theory decisively shape the process and results of acquiring knowledge. In his own attempt to define a model of scientific knowledge, Bauer drew on a historical method suggested by the historian Karl Grünberg, who had developed it harking back to J.S. Mill’s position. Its core principle was to examine diagnosed social conditions in order to draw conclusions about their causes, i.e. it was the science

\textsuperscript{18} Hence, as Detlev Albers convincingly argued, Bauer put special emphasis on two principles: (1) the development of Marxism as a social science and guide for practical action; and (2) the role this theory played in revolutionising the political consciousness of the proletariat and maintaining the unity of the workers’ movement. See Albers 1985, pp. 77–8.

\textsuperscript{19} Karl Menger (1840–1921) – founder of the Austrian school of political economy. He was interested not in the production of goods, but in their exchange. He placed an investigation into the formation of prices in the exchange process at the centre of his analysis and viewed prices as the result of individual evaluations of the usefulness of exchanged goods on the market. Menger understood economy as a network of bundled markets and economic activity as a result of actions by individual economic subjects. Main works: \textit{Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre} and \textit{Untersuchungen über die Methode der Sozialwissenschaften und der politischen Ökonomie insbesondere} (\textit{Principles of Economics and Research into the Methods of Social Science, particularly Political Economy}). See Menger 1981 and 1985.
of deducing from descriptive studies, which, in turn, would serve as the basis for an inductively accomplished synthesis. The greatest direct influence upon Bauer’s concept of science, however, was J.S. Mill, especially his distinct view on the correlation between theory and empirical evidence, deduction and induction. The scientific theory of Ernst Mach was of no lesser importance. Under the influence of positivism, Otto Bauer agreed that knowledge only bore phenomenal characteristics. Experience, which one must read independently of any class and social determinants, is its only source: ‘Science is nothing but the collecting, organising, and processing of experience’ (our translation).20 Like Ernst Mach, Bauer assumed that scientific results represent a set of approximately adequate facts, and that the researcher’s subjective goal determines their degree of adequacy. Because he also recognised Mach’s principle of ‘economy of thought’, Bauer treated theory as a quicker, economic way of recording empirical data. Sharing the position of the positivists and Kantians, he advocated ontological reductionism, and, accordingly, demanded a strict separation of science and philosophy.

Let us note at this point that Bauer also applied the principle of eliminating ontological and value judgements from science within the field of Marxism. Consequently, he adopted a solution that aimed to extract ‘pure’ and ‘applied’ science from Marx’s theory very much in line with Bernstein’s approach. In other words, he viewed socialism as a fact, value, goal, and ideal. Of course, Bauer did not agree with the Machian empirio-critical method in one respect. He sharply protested against its inherent tendency to deny science its autotelic value and reduce it to a means to an end. Instead, he defended the autonomy of science and its right to seek truth. This position manifested itself in his negation of Lenin’s postulate for a partification (partiinost) of science.21

Crucially, Bauer was interested in the mode of being, adopted premises, and the role of science primarily with respect to the scientific status of the humanities, among which he also placed Marxism. His arguments were part of a debate that was taking place in German philosophy and sociology. The key question was whether the methodological premises of a homogeneous model of science built on naturalist foundations were legitimate.

In the argument between the positivists and the Baden school of neo-Kantians, Bauer sided with the former, though not resolutely so.22 He was inspired by

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20 ‘Alle Wissenschaft ist nichts anderes, kann nichts anderes sein als Sammlung, Ordnung, Bearbeitung von Erfahrungen’ – Bauer 1980i, p. 49.
21 See Haug 1985, pp. 69–70.
22 For more on Bauer’s contradictory relationship with positivism and empirio-criticism, see Goller 2008, p. 70.
Max Adler’s insights, especially his criterion of isolating humanist phenomena and his category of lawfulness (Gesetzmäßigkeit), and wanted to integrate them into his position. His aim was to formulate a unified theory that could explain natural and social phenomena, while simultaneously taking into account their specific characteristics. At the outset, Bauer considered the paradigm of natural sciences as the only correct model for acquiring scientific knowledge. He stressed the importance of basing social science on the conceptual framework and methods of the hard sciences. For him, this was the only approach that could approximate the degree of precision and certainty associated with the natural sciences and therefore guarantee objective results. Nonetheless, one should refrain from classifying Bauer as an advocate of natural-scientific reductionism. In his statements, he frequently cited the differences between natural sciences and sociology: according to him, they consisted of their varying degrees of accuracy. Of Marx’s works, he held Capital in particularly high regard and argued that it embodied a prime example of social science. Marx’s special achievement, in Bauer’s view, lay in the fact that he defined the material premises of social conditions and formulated objective laws of social development. Hence, the author of Capital had built a model for the social sciences that approximated the ideal of the natural sciences.

This begs the question: on what premise did Bauer base his judgement? Bauer regarded the Marxian method – which, according to him, was fundamental to the scientificity of his system – as the essence of Marxism. He referred to this method as the ‘materialist view of history’ or ‘economic historicism’. He substantiated his high opinion thus: not only did the method explain the tendencies of social development; it also provided a methodological apparatus, i.e. a means of interpreting concrete socio-political situations and structural changes in relation to general laws. For Bauer, however, it was not just a historical method; he believed that both Hegel and Marx had employed a technique on par with the mathematical natural sciences. For him, Hegel and Marx’s greatest achievement was that they had expanded the remits of applied natural sciences to social science. Bauer went a step further and drew a parallel between Marx’s and Darwin’s respective methods. According to him, their theories differed only in terms of their fields of research. What Bauer had in mind in this instance was undoubtedly the methodological approach: in this

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23 Both Detlev Albers and Alfred Pfabigan have noted this fact, although neither took any particular position on it. Let us therefore stress that reducing Marxism to a method was an unjustified simplification, given that Marxism contains a complete view of the development of class societies, and thus a theory of economic formations. See Albers 1985, p. 78; compare Pfabigan 1977, pp. 42–3.
respect, both theories fulfilled the requirements of modern science. However, his ongoing quest for a unified and universal means of gaining knowledge was another positivist trait in his reading of Marx.

According to Bauer, Marx adopted two core methodological principles from scientism and positivism. The first principle, phenomenalism, negates the notion that objects have a hidden essence. The second, empiricism, entails a strict refusal to recognise facts that are not established through experience; it furthermore contains an imperative to generalise findings in accordance with the principles of logic. Bauer believed that Marx’s method proceeded from describing social conditions to then stating their regularity and intersubjective verifiability, and, lastly, to formulating laws. From this, Bauer concluded that Marx, following the example set by Mills, linked induction with deduction. He particularly emphasised the significance of the inductive method for substantiating claims that had the characteristics of general laws. However, in this regard, his approach was not entirely consistent. His criticism of Renner’s attempt to replace the deductive method of *Capital* with an inductive one demonstrated this. As if to further highlight his inconsistency, he himself employed Marx’s deductive method for economic analyses. Bauer failed to adequately recognise the distinctiveness of Marx’s principle of rising from the abstract to the concrete (for the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that he wrote about it himself). Likewise, he did not sufficiently appreciate Marx’s aspiration to investigate phenomena accessible to observation by means of abstract theoretical categories from outside the sphere of empirical reality.

A reading of Bauer’s writings might create the impression that he viewed the reality of nature and social reality as one body. The naturalist position was reflected in his belief that the evolution of humankind constituted but one stage in the evolution of nature. In his text ‘Marx and Darwin’, which was heavily informed by a Darwinian perspective, Bauer concluded that the cultural development of humanity was a continuation of evolution in nature. However, this text is not a very representative source for evaluating Bauer’s position. His other works do not allow us to lump him in with the Social Darwinist current. Bauer did not ignore the complexities at the point of

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24 See Bauer 1980s, p. 260.
25 Alfred Pfabigan would most certainly not agree with my assessment. According to him, Bauer was the first of socialist theorists to recognise the significance of the Marxian method, ‘from the abstract to the concrete’, although he interpreted it in a critical cognitive sense. See Pfabigan 1977, p. 43.
26 According to Richard Weikart, Social Darwinism can be understood as an ideology that views nature as based on competition and uses the Darwinian concept of struggle for
interception between the world of nature and the world of humans, nor did he disregarded the qualitative differences that separate natural and social realities.

Bauer clearly stressed the elements that distinguish humankind in nature: our ability to gain knowledge about ourselves and our innermost need to subordinate nature. Like Max Adler – and later Lukács and Gramsci, who continued this line – he was looking for intrinsic connections linking both spheres of reality that constituted a unity and a whole without concealing the immanent differences. Thus, Bauer concluded that there was an ontological dependency between the laws of nature and social laws. He found the link between the two in the universal validity of the causality principle, which allowed one to discover consistent laws of natural and social life. Assuming that social phenomena were causally determined, Bauer suggested that a deterministic causality principle reigned in the sphere of human action. However, we must not infer that he eliminated objectives and values from the historical process. To substantiate his perspective, he referred to the category of ‘social causality’ first introduced by Adler.27 Much like Adler, he followed a Kantian approach when deducing social causality from the formal psychological characteristics of consciousness. He assumed a priori socialisation of individual consciousness, yet, unlike Adler, he did not develop this approach any further.28 True to his under-

27 I dealt with this category more extensively in Czerwińska 1991, pp. 160–1. Guided by methodological assumptions close to Max Adler’s, Wilhelm Dilthey’s successor at the University of Berlin, Alois Riehl, challenged the Baden School’s differentiation between nomothetic and idiographic sciences. This differentiation was based on the opposition between generalising and individualistic understanding, as well as the opposition between causal and teleological modes of explanation. Riehl assumed that the individual was a manifestation of the general, and that there are general causal relationships in both types of science. At the same time, Adler and Riehl agreed with the neo-Kantians that the notion of general laws was a feature of consciousness superimposed on nature and history.

28 According to Max Adler, causality in nature differs from causality in society insofar as the former has a mechanical character, whereas according to the latter, the assessment process is an integral component of the causal process.
standing of the social sciences – i.e. Marxism – Bauer ascribed the significant purpose of combining two opposed concepts to the causality principle: first, the scientistic-positivist belief in the impartiality of science, and second, Marx’s demand to establish science as the basis for action.

Other questions raised in Bauer’s earlier writings concerned philosophy, dialectics, and epistemological theory in Marxism, though they merely formed a collection of passing remarks. Bauer’s interpretation of the philosophical content of Marx’s theory was defined by his view of science and the fact that he applied it to Marxism. The author of *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* understood that social theory was more closely related to philosophy than to natural science and could not eschew basic philosophical questions concerning the essence of the world and the meaning of the succession of phenomena. Even so, he placed these questions beyond the realm of science, given that they reached, or even exceeded, the limits of experience. Using the philosophical and methodological premises of positivism and scientism, he interpreted Marx’s historical materialism as an empirical science that approached the precision of prognoses and analyses in the natural sciences.

Bauer emphasised the objectivist and naturalist qualities of historical materialism. At the same time, he denied that one could base ontological and evaluative assumptions on historical materialism, which he reduced to a sociology modelled on the natural sciences. He commented:

Marx’s social doctrine is an exact science. It is thus not a critique of knowledge nor a philosophy … In principle, Marxian social theory needs guidance from philosophy just as little as, for instance, mechanics or astronomy.29

our translation

Bauer’s view of sociology as an exact science that draws on research practices analogous to the natural sciences emerged, firstly, from his polemical examination of Wilhelm Dilthey’s thesis, according to which it was impossible to establish a scientifically grounded sociology. Dilthey questioned the adequacy of a sociological approach and its ability to solve the questions it posed. Secondly, Bauer criticised Georg Simmel, who negated sociology’s basis in naturalism. At the same time, Bauer’s reductionist understanding of Marxist sociology

29 ‘Marx Gesellschaftslehre ist eine exakte Wissenschaft. Sie ist also keine Erkenntniskritik, keine Philosophie. (…) An sich bedarf die Marxscbe Gesellschaftstheorie der Belehrung durch die Philosophie ebenso wenig wie etwa die Mechanik oder die Astronomie’ – Bauer 1979f, p. 188.
as a pure doctrine, devoid of any basic assumptions, had far-reaching consequences. That is to say, it led him so far as to disregard the internal connection between Marx’s philosophical materialism and his theory of social development.

In this context, Bauer’s aversion to Kautsky’s interpretation of Marx’s social theory becomes understandable, given that Kautsky’s reading gave emphasis to its origins in historical materialism. To Bauer, materialism entailed the positivist directive of basing the research of social phenomena and processes on empirical foundations. His defence of Marxism against the pitfalls of materialism was analogous to that of other Austromarxists, who equally reduced materialism to its natural-scientific dimension and denied it a right to exist philosophically. According to Pfabigan, their position was inspired by the neo-Kantian Friedrich Albert Lange. Lange’s work *History of Materialism and Critique of its Present Importance* (1866), which was popular in Social-Democratic circles, reduced materialism to natural sciences and rejected its metaphysical content.

Let us briefly recap. Bauer’s notion of the interrelationship between science and philosophy was rooted in the scientistic postulate of an opposition between science and ideology (*Weltanschauung*). According to this view, it was unacceptable to deduce one’s conception of the world from science – consequently, there was no relationship between scientific practice and the ideological implications of science. It is therefore understandable why Bauer negated the ideological nature of socialism: he considered the choice of *Weltanschauung* to be a private matter. Bauer thought that every participant in the workers’ movement accomplished their own interpretation of ideology; according to him, the foundation for any kind of democratic socialism was ‘the free self-determination of the working class in choosing an intellectual current from among those competing for its verdict’ (our translation). It should be noted here that the claim about Marxism’s ideological neutrality was a pillar of Austrian Social Democracy, serving its political aim to win people of various views and beliefs to the idea of socialism. That the party agreed to integrate trends into Marxism that represented divergent theoretical and philosophical

30 For Friedrich Adler, the concept of materialism was synonymous with the experience of modern natural science – see F. Adler 1918, p. 137. For Max Adler, it constituted a realistic positivism, i.e. a restriction of science to the causal examination of reality. See M. Adler 1964, p. 83.

31 See Pfabigan 1977, pp. 42–3.

32 ‘Die freie Selbstbestimmung der Arbeiterklasse in der freien Wahl der um ihr Urteil ringenden Geistesströmungen’ – Bauer 1980, p. 199.
assumptions was closely linked to its political practice. This way, it could legitimise Social Democracy’s collaboration with bourgeois parties.33

Bauer frequently identified philosophical materialism with a specific method: that of investigating phenomena and processes in their movement and development, i.e. in their interrelationship. However, he did not think of the interrelationship between phenomena and processes as a dialectical contradiction. At the time of Austromarxism’s inception, dialectical materialism was understood as neither a characteristic nor a self-evident method of Marxism. Even Bauer, under the influence of Karl Lamprecht, had a negative stance towards it, which was certainly aided by his faint knowledge of Hegel’s works. Among Austromarxists, only Max Adler fully appreciated the significance of Hegel’s philosophy for Marxist theory, while others considered it irrelevant. In his defence of the role of dialectics in Marxism, Adler eschewed its ontological implications and reduced it to a method of gaining insight into the sphere of consciousness. His critique of Engels’s and Lenin’s notions of dialectics resulted from his ontological and epistemological assumptions – for Adler, being was merely a product of thought, while the critique of scientific knowledge was a critique of consciousness. Bauer held Hegel’s insights in low esteem, stressing that the Hegelian triad of development was a speculative construct that bore no relationship to reality in either nature or society. Consequently, when Bernstein accused Marx of abandoning the empirical method of inquiry and instead applying Hegelian a priori development schemes to historical reality, Bauer defended Marx against Bernstein’s claims.

As the above account makes abundantly clear, Bauer believed that Marx’s theory contained no philosophy, value theory, or epistemology. From 1904–16, he demanded that Marxism be complemented with Kantian epistemology. In Austromarxism, this was a particular hobbyhorse of Max Adler’s, and Bauer highly valued his attempts to merge Marxism with transcendentalism.34 However, he did not create an epistemology of his own, and some of his passing remarks betray a flawed understanding of the epistemological problems in Kant and Marx. In light of Bauer’s own insights, it is worth noting his surprising results when he attempted to defend the scientific character of Marxism employing a method of transcendental critical philosophy. Rather than recognising the laws of social development formulated by Marx as empirical laws, he conceived of them as transcendental regularities that could be investigated due to a priori conditions of human knowledge. Initially, he assumed, along with

33 See Pfabigan 1977, p. 51.
34 See Bauer 1961, pp. 228–36.
Max Adler, that the process of gaining knowledge occurred through the agency of a supra-individual consciousness expressed in *a priori* socialised individual consciousness. He soon revised his position and declared that there were *a priori*, socio-historically divergent cognitive forms: ‘There not only exists a social *a priori* of human knowledge in general, but ... also a special social *a priori* of each historical epoch, each social order, and each class’ (our translation).\(^\text{35}\) Bauer interpreted the Kantian approach as historical and credited himself with building a bridge from Kantianism to Marxism. This ‘achievement’ of Bauer’s, which was devoid of any scientific value, did not meet with the slightest interest from Marxist theorists or Social Democrats.

From 1916–17, the years during which he wrote *The Worldview of Capitalism*, Bauer began to critically examine Kantianism, its socio-historical determinants, and its limitations. In 1924, in the preface to the second edition of his text, *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*, he wrote: ‘It was only in the context of later studies that I learned to grasp critical philosophy as itself a historical phenomenon, thereby overcoming my Kantian childhood malady and at the same time also revising my methodological viewpoint’.\(^\text{36}\) In *The Worldview of Capitalism*, Bauer, following Marx’s directive to investigate the historical evolution and social conditioning of philosophical ideas, attempted to explain why the bourgeois intelligentsia and Marxists were both appealing to Kant.\(^\text{37}\) He pointed out how economic and philosophical knowledge was conditioned by socio-economic and historical factors. The economic and political decline of liberalism was followed by a period of organised capitalism. In the field of philosophy, scientific materialism was superseded by positivism and relativism. Scientific knowledge was no longer a goal in itself: it was utilised to build capitalism, make socio-economic life more efficient, and thus facilitate capitalism’s free development. For this purpose, it took lawmaking as its reference point, understood as the legislative parliamentary practice that passes laws to secure the effectiveness of economic enterprise. The new worldview triumphed over mechanical materialism; when faced with the demise of the latter, a generation of Marxists still clinging to intellectual categories typical of early capitalism at the turn of the nineteenth century resorted to Kant.

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35 ‘Es gibt also nicht nur ein *Sozialapriori* der menschlichen Erkenntnis überhaupt, sondern ... auch besondere *Sozialapriori* jeder Geschichtsepoch, jeder Gesellschaftsordnung, jeder Klasse’ – Bauer 1961, p. 232.

36 Bauer 1996, p. 7.

37 This being Marx’s notion, in *The Holy Family*, that the history of ideas is intrinsically conditioned by the history of production. See Kolakowski 2005, p. 125.
In the aforementioned text, Bauer employed Marx’s methodological postulate mainly to interpret the philosophy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was especially preoccupied with the historical origins of scientific materialism and the reasons why it had replaced philosophical idealism during the early period of capitalism. He considered the following as the most important factors in this development: philosophical interest transformed into an aspiration to investigate the scientific laws of the development of the world and subordinate them to the needs of the flourishing capitalist mode of production; traditional social structures were destroyed and atomised societies created; the third factor was the development of the relationship between society and nature, based on the principle of the free interplay of forces. Consequently, Bauer associated the progress of modern capitalism with the origins of modern natural science and the related philosophical systems: positivism, scientism, and materialism. According to his one-sided interpretation, the laws of the capitalist market alone determined the new worldview. The author argued that changes in production relations and property rights determined changes in philosophical thought, as did the character of international economic relations and modifications to the organisation of the working process. Among these changes were a shift from idealism to materialism and from universalist approaches to individualism, a transition from a quantitative to qualitative interpretations of phenomena, and a shift from causal to teleological ways of thinking. Concerning the interrelationship between social being and social consciousness, Bauer – and we will elaborate on this shortly – attributed a decisive role to the former. This inevitably led him to overstate the degree to which the economic base determined thought structures. Bauer concluded his treatise by stating that materialism constituted the ‘last dogmatic system of capitalism’, bound to be annihilated alongside capitalism’s demise. In The Worldview of Capitalism, he once more identified the critiques of mechanistic materialism proposed by positivism and Marxism with a complete rejection of materialism of any kind. He maintained that science and philosophy were radical opposites – a judgement rooted in scientism.

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38 Hanisch argues that Bauer’s work is ‘the result of an impressive intellectual effort and extensive knowledge of the history of philosophy, but it is reductionist. Philosophical thought is mechanically traced back to the socio-economic conditions’ (our translation) – Hanisch 2011, p. 22.

39 Bauer 1976f, p. 931.
2 Historiosophical Reflections

Bauer’s adopted naturalist and scientistic perspectives had an effect on his historiosophical views. Before we examine them, it is worth noting that Bauer was a historian who, inspired by Marxism, broke away from merely presenting the history of dynasties, wars, ideas, and ‘great men’, i.e. the traditional Austrian way of history writing.40 His treatises linked the analysis of economic life with the history of human action (i.e. mass movements), although he did not develop a clear concept of history. For him, the history of humankind was no more than the history of class struggles. Bauer applied historical materialism, which he understood as a methodological guideline, to investigate the ways in which various forms of spiritual life – ideological consciousness in particular – were determined by the development of the economic structure. This being the case, he paid little attention to some fundamental questions of historical materialism: the nature of social laws; their relation to the laws of evolution in nature; and the question of progress in history. Nor was he – in contrast to Max Adler – interested in the rationality and purposiveness of the historical process as a subject of independent reflection. In fact, he tried to evade references to philosophical traditions altogether. This was particularly true for the historiosophy of Hegel, which was incomprehensible to him. Of the broad range of issues that historical materialism addressed, he only took interest in two problems intrinsically linked to the Social Democrats’ party-political practice: firstly, the question of dependency between economics and consciousness, which Bauer often identified as ideology. Secondly, the view of class struggle as an objective law and driving force behind historical development. Bauer’s conclusions can be put down to two opposing claims. One of them was linked to naturalism and evolutionism; the other was based on the Marxian premise of social change as revolutionary process.

The two claims might be summed up thus:

- The economic factor is predominant in the historical process, significantly reducing its arbitrary and contingent character. This economic factor is genetic and primarily functional with regard to social and individual consciousness.
- The direction that the social process takes is decisively influenced by the struggle of classes that strive for social and political liberation.41

40 Hanisch investigates the differences between the Viennese school of history and Bauer’s historical method in detail. See Hanisch 2011, pp. 181–91.
41 When advocating this interpretation of the socio-historical process, Bauer was certainly
Bauer started from Marx’s well-known dictum that people make their own history, albeit in material conditions not of their own choosing. This thesis prompted questions about the ways in which human activity was determined by pre-existing material conditions (and to what extent), the scope of human influence, and the degree to which humans could give purpose and direction to the evolution of society. Like Friedrich Adler, Bauer was one of the Austromarxists who adopted a deterministic, monist position, i.e. he regarded the unity and general determinacy of natural phenomena and the social world as an ontological principle. He drew two conclusions from the assumption of a general determinacy: both types of regularity had a causal character, and, what is more, the causal relationship was unequivocal. Bauer was therefore convinced that the laws of social development could be grasped as tightly as the laws of physics. Referring to Capital, he claimed: ‘Thus, Marx gave us the first mathematical law of motion of history’ (our translation). Bauer fully accepted the historical-materialist thesis that the social process was self-contained and immanent. He also believed that it proceeded according to objective and consistent laws. Naturally, he did not link his determinism to a dialectical theory of development. On the contrary, he eliminated any dialectics from the historical process, veering towards an evolutionist interpretation. In most of his writings, he reduced the Marxian relationship between base and superstructure to a one-way concurrency: ‘As the scientific and social living conditions of humans change, so do their modes of thought, their customs, their moral values, the sciences, art, and religion’ (our translation). Bauer conceived of the productive forces 

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42 Of all Austromarxists, Friedrich Adler placed the strongest emphasis on the biological necessity of the historical process. Indeed, he assumed that it constituted a plain extension of the laws of nature. See F. Adler 1918b, p. 62.

43 ‘So gibt uns Marx das erste mathematische Bewegungsgesetz der Geschichte’ – Bauer 1979f, p. 937. Bauer’s familiarity with the works of Marx was somewhat tenuous. Presumably, he used many of Marx’s concise expressions without looking into their essence. When passing judgement on Capital, he referred to the preface of Critique of Political Economy, where Marx wrote that the material upheaval of the economic conditions of production could be measured with the precision of hard science. As P. Śpiewak rightly points out, the Marxists’ attempts at establishing a social science based on the model of the natural sciences were harshly criticised by Antonio Labriola, Antonio Gramsci and Georges Sorel – see P. Śpiewak 1977, pp. 48–50.

44 ‘Mit den wissenschaftlichen und sozialen Lebensbedingungen der Menschen verändert
and objectively existing relations of production as the base, which in his view were determined by changes in production and the exchange of goods. The superstructure, for him, consisted of intellectual achievements and the legal and political system. As already mentioned, he did not agree that there was a dialectical relationship between the two sides of the socio-economic process, instead stressing their mutual dependency.

These reflections reveal a grave inconsistency in Bauer’s theory that is worth examining more closely. The inconsistency relates to questions of the mutual relationship between objective and subjective factors of history, where the philosopher took a position close to that of the anti-naturalists. He summarised the relationship between the objective and subjective sides of Marxism in a formula that went beyond the confines of what was accepted by orthodox Marxists. Taking issue with their positions, he emphasised: ‘To simply counterpose subjective and objective factors is worlds away from Marxist dialectics. One needs to understand that the qualities of the subjective factor result from objective factors no less than objective factors result from subjective actions’.45 It is not difficult to explain the position that Bauer took here. Because he agreed that transformations in the economic structure constituted the sole determinant of social development, he logically assumed that the human spirit obeyed material conditions. This assumption was, as it were, a sort of plea for the automatism of history. Inevitably, it led to the affirmation of attenist attitudes in the workers’ party, which ran counter to the implicit objective of the Social-Democratic movement, namely that of revolutionary upheaval. To overcome this dilemma, Bauer made a remarkable attempt to link deterministic-economic elements with activist elements (note that both are intrinsic to Marx’s theory). Bauer’s line of argument accentuated the following components:

1. The consciousness-forming constituents of the economic base, the productive forces, have no purely material character. Rather, they are forces of nature that humans consciously instrumentalise in order to satisfy their needs. Human thought is an inalienable part of technological processes. Economic relations must always be read as social relations. Let us note here that Bauer’s

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45 ‘Man ist von marxistischen Dialektik weltenweit entfernt, wenn man den subjektiven und den objektiven Faktor einander unvermittelt gegenüberstellt, statt die Qualitäten des subjektiven Faktors ebenso als Resultate objektiver Faktoren zu begreifen wie die objektiven Faktoren als Resultate subjektiven Handelns’ – Bauer 1980ee, p. 739.

sich ihre Denkweise, verändern sich die Sitten die moralischen Werte, die Wissenschaft, die Kunst, die Religion’ – Bauer 1976j, p. 491.
privileged treatment of the role of consciousness did not at all imply indeterminism concerning the economic sphere.\textsuperscript{46}

2. Economic relations are not forces that influence humans mechanically—economic regularities merely illuminate the main tendencies of historical development. The way in which this developmental process evolves (and how quickly) depends on the activities of individual social groups and classes.\textsuperscript{47} Bauer highlighted the role of mass movements, which is why he adopted a position close to the anti-naturalists on this subject, arguing in favour of relatively autonomous social consciousness. This position also justified his view of the class struggle as the decisive driving force behind social change.

3. Needs and ideas are conditioned by the mode of production and can only be realised in the material sphere of human actions, even if they act as external forces in relation to social being. Not individuals, but the masses are carriers of ideas.

Bauer thus understood the socio-historical process as a permanent and progressive development of forces of production and related economic conditions that develop in the course of our conscious struggle to dominate nature for the sake of satisfying our needs. This process, according to Bauer, is synonymous with the evolution of humankind itself. If individuals actively participate in the collective social production of goods through their own productive activities, then not only can they grasp the prevailing laws and regularities, but they can also use the knowledge acquired to help shape their own history. The question arises as to whether Bauer considered the subjective and objective factors of history equally significant. Since he assumed—analogously to Marx and Kautsky—that economic factors were predominant and determined social and political factors, he evidently did not give equal weight to both subjective and objective factors. It is no accident that Bauer invariably appealed to so-called objective conditions to justify his and his party’s anti-revolutionary stance. Even so, Bauer’s critics unjustly accused him of construing Marxism in

\textsuperscript{46} Gerald Mozetič passes the same judgement—see Mozetič 1987, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{47} According to Bauer, historical materialism discovered the laws of social development and signposted a way to achieve the goals of the practical order, which led to a particular social politics. However, historical materialism is based on applied theory in practice, rather than just being a theoretical hypothesis. According to Bauer, Marxism does not, in and of itself, contain any ideological claims because it is an economic theory of society. It is here that the scientist perspective of separating theory from practice and science from social interests becomes obvious.
the spirit of automatism and historical fatalism. Much like the late Kautsky, Bauer viewed any fatalistic understanding of the laws of historical materialism very sceptically. He criticised theories that argued that the downfall of capitalism was inevitable. Indeed, he viewed crises as virtual opportunities for the capitalist economy to renew itself. Yet merely to assume an ontological law of the general determinacy of phenomena and processes is not tantamount to presuming that the historical process is subordinated to a vaguely specified destiny. Neither is it synonymous with writing all subjectivity out of history.

Bauer reiterated a well-known thesis from the works of philosophers such as Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and G.W.F. Hegel and economists like Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith. Marx’s thought mirrored this thesis: the general determinacy of phenomena does not enable us to strictly predict any consequences that human actions may have. More than once, Bauer stressed that history was often the result of an unconscious interplay of human actions, albeit with humans functioning as members of society, rather than as individuals. He sharply criticised bourgeois historiosophy for its individualism and elitism, particularly its emphasis on so-called great men in history. In his own text, Revolutionäre Kleinarbeit (Revolutionary Detail Work, 1928), meanwhile, Bauer ascribed the ability to comprehend historic lines of development to outstanding individuals, while denying that the masses possessed such a quality. Similarly, he believed that only outstanding individuals were capable of utilising acquired knowledge to give direction to historical events. The role of great men was to lead mass movements, yet the subject of the historical process was always the masses themselves. At most, leaders can channel the energy of the masses, but they cannot trigger it, for it matures spontaneously in the course of historical development. It was not Louis Bonaparte who changed history, but the peasant masses who were insufficiently informed about the socio-political situation and the aims of the battles they fought. They therefore supported Bonaparte against their objective class interest.

Actually existing social classes, groups, and layers that could be captured by empirical research, not groups that merely exist as theoretical categories, carried the collective

48 Leser 1979, p. 31. Compare Kulemann 1979, p. 260.
49 Kulemann writes about this too (Ibid.). Among Austromarxists, Max Adler and Karl Renner both rejected the theory of the inevitable collapse of capitalism – they took different premises as their starting point. Adler presumed the priority of the subjective over the objective factor, while Renner based his notion regarding the endurance of capitalism on his belief that the working class was immature and had not developed a proletarian class consciousness.
50 Bauer 1976m, p. 588.
subject, according to Bauer. That is why he – unlike the other representatives of Austromarxism, Max Adler and Karl Renner – did not define the working class as a term, but pointed to subjective and objective economic, sociological and political factors which determined the position of a class in society.51 The most crucial among these factors, according to Bauer, were the position of a class within the production process and distribution of goods, its numbers, strength, intensity and degree of organisation, level of education, political activity, and, ultimately, its ability to conceive an ideology.52 In the 1926 Programme of Linz, Bauer drew on two distinct meanings of the term ‘working class’. He used it more narrowly to denote the large-scale industrial proletariat (this use can also be found in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Luxembourg), and more broadly to encompass all waged workers.53 Interestingly, he did not comment on the diversification of the working class into various layers. In my view, there was an ideological reason for this: the effort to preserve before the proletarian masses the notion of a united labour movement. Nor did Bauer explore the preconditions for the formation of classes. Like other Marxists of his time, he focused his attention on the ‘class for itself’, i.e. a class that is conscious of its distinct interests, develops its own ideology, and builds its

51 Max Adler regarded social classes as a socio-historical category. By this, he meant a group of humans conscious that they form an interest group; their position in the social structure is defined by their participation in the social process of production – see M. Adler 1925, pp. 63–5. Karl Renner used the term as follows: ‘Individuals of the same or related social status, whom we at first conceive individually, are driven together by the similarity of their conditions. They gradually learn to self-perceive as a community, and finally establish a common organisation. In order to differentiate them, we call them social groups, and, as soon as they come into hostile conflict with each other, social classes’ (our translation). Original: ‘Individuen gleicher oder verwandter sozialer Stellung, vorerst jedes für sich erfasst, werden durch die Gleichartigkeit der Lage zusammengetrieben, lernen sich allmählich als Gemeinschaft fühlen und geben sich zum Schluss eine gemeinsame Organisation. Wir nennen sie unterscheidend soziale Gruppen und sobald sie gegeneinander in feindselige Abgrenzung geraten, soziale Klassen’ – Renner 1952, p. 111. Renner’s definition had a subjective psychological character and did not comprise economic criteria.

52 Bauer 1976c, p. 346.

53 The term ‘working class’ is unclear in Marx’s work. Kolakowski noticed this, and, according to Andrzej Flis, so did Stanisław Ossowski, Bertell Ollman and Sidney Hook. Hook writes: ‘Marx uses the term “class” ambiguously … In some instances, the criterion of differentiation is the role in the production system exercised by a group. In others, it is the group members’ entire way of life – including their culture and tradition – their source or level of income, profession, or, in case of unemployment, the lack of any profession’ (our translation) – compare Flis 1990, p. 30.
own apparatuses such as parties and trade unions. It becomes obvious here that Bauer reduced the meaning of the subjective factor to the concept of social consciousness, and he considered political consciousness its most significant type. He thoroughly analysed its development as an indispensable component of the class struggle, and, furthermore, deemed it one of the most crucial factors of the revolutionary process. Like Kautsky, and Marx too, Bauer conceived of the transformation of a ‘class in itself’ into a ‘class for itself’ as a gradual and lengthy process, which nonetheless pointed in one direction only. He regarded the conflict of economic interests and its extrapolations (political, cultural, and national interests), class struggles, and knowledge of the laws and tendencies of social evolutionary development as determinants of this process. According to Bauer, the formation of this type of consciousness was traceable to processes in the economic structure of societies – yet at the same time, he stressed that it evolved in the course of the historical process. He distinguished between four stages of development in that process:

1. During the first stage, an occupational notion of solidarity emerges; this occurs during the initial phase of working-class organisation at the level of different economic branches.

2. The second is a transitional stage between occupational and class solidarity. The proletariat achieves it during its volatile struggle against other classes. As with the previous one, this stage is devoid of historical self-consciousness. It is worth noting that Bauer merely spoke of the tendency of the working class of one particular nation state to unite. Because of the scramble for the labour market under capitalism, he regarded international solidarity as problematic.

3. Thirdly, the organisational stage of the working class in parties and trade unions struggling for economic and social reforms within the legal and institutional framework of the capitalist state. During this stage, the working and middle classes are too weak to seize state power. Hence, they depend on finding advocates of their ideology among all progressive forces in society. It is here that Bauer underestimated how alien ideologies might negatively affect proletarian class consciousness.

4. During the final stage, the working class understands that the conflict between their interests and those of other social groups and classes is irreconcilable; it demonstrates that it is prepared to wage a struggle for economic and political state power.

Bauer’s reconstruction of historical stages within the development of proletarian political consciousness was significant to the theory of revolution, of
which ‘education towards socialism’ was a component. For Marx, the proletariat’s achievement of revolutionary consciousness was synonymous with the emergence of self-knowledge and therefore with the historical process itself, for in practice, the recognition of the sources of oppression meant its abolition. Lukács wrote about this in a similar vein. Nonetheless, many leading theoreticians of the Second International – Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Karl Vorländer and Gramsci among them – were sceptical as to whether the political and revolutionary maturity of the working class could develop spontaneously. Even before Bernstein’s appearance, history demonstrated, firstly, that the economically exploited and politically disenfranchised proletariat did not develop a revolutionary consciousness. Secondly, that a deteriorating situation resulted in apathy, while an improved situation increased the workers’ susceptibility to reformist and anti-revolutionary slogans. Bauer held the opinion that the proletariat left to itself was incapable of achieving a level of theoretical consciousness, i.e. consciousness of the laws and mechanisms that determined social development, and the capitalist formation in particular. Hence, Bauer stuck to the judgement also made by Kautsky, Lenin and Gramsci that consciousness needed to be brought into the ranks of the working class ‘from the outside’. Despite that, he did not endorse their method of engaging in agitational activity. Bauer also came out against the notion that it was the task of the bourgeois intelligentsia (Kautsky, Plekhanov, Vorländer and Gramsci) or party bureaucrats (Lenin) to raise revolutionary consciousness. He rightly feared that the propaganda war would degenerate into a scramble for political leadership or personal gain. Together with Max Adler, Bauer developed his own concept for spreading revolutionary consciousness among the working masses, drawing on ideas of education from Immanuel Kant, Johann Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. The task of raising ‘new man’ (a term coined by Max Adler) would be entrusted to educational and cultural institutions, and the intelligentsia, party members, and workers would participate in their efforts. Interestingly, the Social Democrats seemed to use the terms ‘theoretical consciousness’, ‘revolutionary consciousness’, and ‘socialist consciousness’ interchangeably, as if they were one and the same – nor were Bauer and the Social Democrats of his time aware of any problems with the idea of introducing socialism ‘from without’. It is worth remembering that this question was far from obvious in light of Marxist theory. One may conclude from Marx’s assertion that ‘social being determines social consciousness’ that only socialist relations of production can facilitate the development of socialist consciousness. Hence, one can hardly

54 See Lukács 1971, p. 76.
expect such consciousness to evolve in a capitalist social formation, unless as an artificial intellectual construct. The only knowledge one can carry into the working class is the explanation of the reasons for its oppression and the mechanisms of historical evolution as revealed by Marxism.

In his outstanding historical study Der Kampf um Wald und Weide (The Struggle for Woods and Pastures, 1925), Bauer ascribed the emergence of social classes and polarisation of capitalist society to the antagonistic structure of capitalist relations of production – circumstances that would inevitably lead to social revolution. The mode of existence in capitalist societies was the class struggle, its objective necessity determined by conflicts in people’s material sphere of life. Bauer regarded the contradiction between divergent economic interests as the driving factor behind human activity; he also considered the national component, although he viewed this as less essential. Furthermore, he looked into other elements of the class struggle – that is, elements of the primordial (biological, geographical, demographical) kind. Much like Karl Renner, he took his cue from Social Darwinism, interpreting the class struggle as a form of the individual’s fight for survival within social structures. Bauer believed that the proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie followed the pattern of natural processes – a viewpoint that left no room for a dialectical perspective of development. On what, then, is the mechanism behind proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie based? Bauer strictly ascribed it to the economic base, linking capitalism’s phases of boom to the economic and political victories of the proletariat – and economic collapse to the failure of the class struggle. The claim that the class struggle had no continuous character and did not gradually intensify served as the Social-Democratic party’s argument to justify political defeats.

The Austrian socialists believed that the working class had to wage an economic and social struggle for emancipation in order to defend its interests. The specificity of the Austromarxist concept concerned the means and methods: the struggle between the right-wing majority, which pleaded for the unity of classes, the centre, which favoured parliamentary means of struggle, and the left, which advocated the armed insurrection, intensified during World War I (we will investigate this question more closely when discussing political thought). In this debate, Bauer consistently argued that methods depend on the objective conditions of struggle. While insisting that the working class should use democratic means into the 1920s, he changed his mind in view of the fascistisation of Austria, conceding that the proletariat must employ revolutionary methods if it is to defeat the fascist dictatorship.

Bauer authored sharp analyses of the class struggles in Austria, including the struggle of the peasantry against aristocratic landowners since the fourteenth
century, the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy, the petty bourgeoisie against the bourgeoisie during capitalism’s transition from its liberal to its monopolistic phase, and the proletariat against the bourgeoisie during the early days of imperialism. His study led to the following conclusions: the history of class struggle determines the course of history in general. The class struggle constitutes the basis for historical progress, as every class struggling for its emancipation and against the outmoded, decrepit elements of the existing system strives to obtain a higher level of rationality, morality and culture. Therefore, the class struggle always has the features of a struggle for values. True to his scientistic perspective, Bauer, like Max Adler, assumed a position of axiological determinism, according to which the dissemination of values – rather than conflicting material interests – was the source of progress. The author of *The Struggle for Power* borrowed the idea that historical progress had a continuous and unidirectional character from positivism. In its struggle against the bourgeoisie and for its liberation, the proletariat was the successor of all progressive classes in history. Bauer believed that the struggle of the working class represented the final and highest stage of class struggle. The proletariat stood for a classless society that would return freedom to the individual. It was therefore the only class whose sectional interest was consistent with the common interest. Socialism was, according to Bauer, not only a necessity, but also an ethical goal to which the labour movement ought to aspire.

Much like Marx, Bauer never gave up faith in the coming of a proletarian revolution and the victory of socialism. He emphasised its historical necessity at every opportunity, not least for propagandistic value. Drawing on Marx, he pointed to three tendencies that indicated that socialism was coming: the concentration of capital; the increasing power of capital; and the numerical rise of the proletariat. However, he viewed the victory of socialism as much more than just a consequence of objective historical tendencies – his theory merged deterministic and voluntaristic elements. Bauer stressed that social will must be present as much as a historically founded tendency. The will would release mechanisms that constituted a precondition for historical change. According to Bauer, the will did not spontaneously develop as a correlation of a particular social position. Rather, it was based on recognising that the goal of the struggle represented an objectively significant moral value. If the socialist idea were to become a material force that captured the masses, it had to unite a historical and moral order in itself. This subject brings us to our discussion on the relationship between Marxism and ethics.
3 Marxism and Ethics

Bauer and the Austromarxists’ views were characterised by a specific approach to ethics that developed at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two opposing perspectives on evaluative assumptions and theses in Marxist theory influenced it. The first was that of Marburgian neo-Kantians, as the ethical socialists were also called. The second was the perspective coined by Kautsky, author of the 1906 paper *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*. Notably, anarchist attempts to propagate a ‘socialism without ethics’ in the 1870s – see Mikhail Bakunin’s *Catechism of a Revolutionary* – and the Marxists’ neglect of the ethical question, which remained apparent into the 1890s, both fed into the notion that Marx had wholly abandoned the axiological perspective.55 For the Social-Democratic movement, however, the ethical legitimacy of socialism was of fundamental ideological and practical importance. That is why the neo-Kantian project of uniting the philosophies of Kant and Marx at an ethical level was welcomed in Social-Democratic circles.56 Nevertheless, it provoked a sharp reply from Kautsky, who took to defending the axiological neutrality of socialism. Both positions – Kautsky’s and the neo-Kantians’ – will be the subject of closer investigation. The reasons for this are, firstly, that the Marburgian perspective strongly influenced Bauer’s views on the place of ethics in Marxism, and secondly, because Bauer’s proposition evolved in response to Kautsky’s negative stance towards moral theory.

The Marburgians – Hermann Cohen, Karl Vorländer, Rudolf Stammler, Ludwig Woltmann, Franz Staudinger, and Conrad Schmidt – espoused the view that Marx had not entirely thought through his basic axiological assumptions. Their doubts as to whether it is possible to integrate individual aspirations into a system of class goals, or of society as a whole, were not wholly unjustified. The Marxist ambition to liberate humanity through revolutionary violence was also met with resistance. The Marburgians all agreed that Marxism contained no imminent theory of values that might justify the necessity of socialism. In and of itself, the historical inevitability of socialism as derived from the assumptions of Marxist theory says nothing about its moral value. It is not clear why

55 It is not the subject of this work to decide if, and to what extent, such a perspective is immanent in Marxism. However, I am inclined to the view that an evaluative orientation is a fundamental component of the Marxian theory of socio-economic progress.

56 At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous articles about the socialist position on ethics and the relationship between the theories of Marx and Kant were published. On the 100th anniversary of Kant’s death in 1904, the role of his philosophy was particularly emphasised.
the working class should aspire to socialism in the name of society as a whole. According to the ethical socialists, it was impossible to prove the historical and moral necessity of socialism based on Marx's theory of social development. Historical materialism could only provide empirical knowledge about reality and thus serve as a basis for prognoses concerning social development. In his paper *Ethics of Pure Will*, Hermann Cohen went so far as to claim that it is impossible to deduce an ethical ideal from the empirical notion of society employed in Marx's work. Cohen proposes to introduce a transcendental understanding of society in parallel to a reality-based conception and thus establish the ideal transcendentally. Let us note in advance that Bauer integrated these elements into his concept drawing on Cohen.

According to Cohen and other neo-Kantians, Marx committed two fundamental errors. His first error was the way in which he understood the relationship between economics and consciousness. Because of this, he (1) downplayed the realm of ideas as an independent driving force of social life, (2) traced back ideas to the material conditions of human life in historical-materialist fashion, and (3) conceived ideas in the spirit of positivism and ascribed to them a psychological or social colouring. In their critique of Marx, the neo-Kantians asserted that ideas such as the good in man, justice, and freedom, had transcendental features, i.e. they were purely moral principles with regulative power. Marx's second fundamental error was linked to the fact that he, fol-

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57 There are pre-established, transcendental social bonds at the basis of a society thus conceived, which, in turn, are determined by the sphere of common moral goals. This double approach to conceiving of society means that there also exists an ethical society aside from the society made up of producers of consumer goods: i.e. a human community that has free, autonomous, natural goals. While the former view is determined by economic principles, the latter is based on a formal moral principle rooted in the idea of humaneness as a goal in itself – see Cohen 1910, p. 223.

58 In neo-Kantianism, Rudolf Stammler attempted to reverse the Marxian relationship between economics and law. See Stammler 1896 and 1920.

59 Karl Vorländer writes: 'The transcendental ideology leads to a system of cognition that is not a principle, but which is indeed an indicative target towards which one can plan' (our translation). Original: 'Die transcendentale Ideenlehre führt auf eine Systematik der Erkenntnis, die zwar kein Prinzip ist, von dem sich das Besondere ableiten kann, wohl aber ein Richtziel, auf das hin projektiert werden kann' – Vorländer 1955, p. 374. One might add the following: a social history of origins, or else the reality of an idea, cannot be found, because being and the ideal are two different forms of appearance: one is an objectivation of nature; the other is an objectivation of the mind. Being is a fact that is accessible to scientific experience, while the ideal is a fact that is accessible to philosophic realisation. The opposition between the two is a permanent factor in integrally conceived
lowing Hegel, negated the dualism of Sein (being) and Sollen (ought), i.e. what is and what ought to be. Furthermore, he suspended the opposition between causal and teleological perspectives on which the socialist idea as a principle of objective must be based. A consequence of the Marxian idea was that the scope of the causal principle was illegitimately applied to the sphere of morality, where, according to the ethical socialists, the teleological principle applied. Based on their own assumptions, the Marburgians attempted to reconcile the opposition between the two methods drawing on a core thesis of their philosophical system, namely the ontological unity of subject and object. Because of this, they viewed both principles as general laws of human consciousness. Moreover, they regarded the principle of causality as a method of regulating scientific cognition, and the teleological principle as one of practical cognition. In their understanding, the two principles were not only reconcilable, but also complementary, as they pertained to different realms of existence. Cohen based this argument on the claim that the real play of forces and moral ideas are types of pure consciousness – hence, there was no basis to differentiate between the two as Marxism had done.\textsuperscript{60} From these claims, Cohen – and later his disciples – drew a far-reaching conclusion: if one adequately modified historical materialism (i.e. idealistically), one could merge it with the viewpoint of Kantianism without contradictions. Thus, it would become possible to rectify Marxism’s fundamental error, i.e. the lack of an independent and creative role for ethical ideas. For this purpose, it is sufficient to complement Marxism with Kant’s ethical ideal.

Before we continue, let us note that the Marburgians’ efforts to employ Kantian ethics to justify socialism played the most crucial role in Bauer’s ethical considerations. In their view, the neo-Kantians attempted to invoke Kant’s theses that prefigured socialist ideas and demonstrated unity in the mode of thought. The Marburg School’s most passionate proponent of uniting the theories of Kant and Marx was Karl Vorländer, who was closest to the Social-Democratic movement among neo-Kantians.\textsuperscript{61} Vorländer viewed Kant as the

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\textsuperscript{60} See Cohen 1921, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{61} The author of a series of lectures about socialism at the University of Münster in 1914, co-author of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany’s Görlitz programme of 1912. He dedicated a separate text to the relationship between the theories of Kant and Marx – see Vorländer 1926. In another text, he observed: ‘The way of liberalism, in the true sense of the word, leads not just historically, but also logically to Marx’ (our translation) – Vorländer 1920, p. 46.

experience. Maria Szyszkowska interestingly depicts the neo-Kantian critique of Marxism in Szyszkowska 1970, pp. 78–87.
forerunner of German socialism. For them, Kant’s and Marx’s ideals of the state, the democratic ideals contained in their respective theories, and their negative attitude towards colonialism, militarism, and privileges grounded in birthright – i.e. landed property – testified to a substantial convergence in their thinking.62 However, his argument carried far more weight on an ethical level. In fact, Vorländer thought that the Marxian ‘association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’ was analogous to the Kantian ‘community of men of free will’ as a goal in and of itself. This convergence provided sufficient reason to seek principles for the socialist movement in Kant’s ethics. They were impossible to deduce from the materialist view of history, which was limited to analysing economic phenomena and explaining the world in terms of cause and effect. Kantian ethics, in contrast, accepted reason – defined by its general and objectively valid requirements – as a foundation for morality. It stressed the universality and timelessness of ethical principles.

In accordance with Kant, the Marburgians assumed that morality had a universal, timeless character and encompassed all human beings. At the same time, they argued that the socialist idea must be based on morality conceived in this way. That is to say, the question on how far the system of the future would live up to their requirements – i.e. general justice, equality, and freedom – could only be answered with reference to universal and general ethical ideas that could not be relativised. These ideas defined the general validity of moral values and made for a paradigm according to which a desired social model could be shaped. Hence, the Marburgians concluded that the pursuit of socialism must rest on conscious, rational will, meaning it had to be a postulate of practical reason. The idea of socialism, then, was purely regulatory: ‘The social ideal is merely a formal method with which to govern and judge the empirically intruding material of historical justice and social will according to the communal idea. This idea serves as the fundamental law of human purpose’ (our translation).63 For the Marburgians, one question mattered the most: why should socialism be the one crucial goal of social struggle and objective of moral aspiration? Their answer was, essentially, that socialism ought to be considered an aim in and of itself, because it represented an ethical ideal. It could also serve as a basis for a social order that had overcome the contradiction

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62 Compare Kolakowski 2005, pp. 556–7.
63 ‘Das soziale Ideale bezeichnet lediglich eine formale Methode, den empirisch sich aufdrängenden Stoff des geschichtlichen Rechtes, des sozialen Wollens nach dem Gemeinschaftsgedanken als dem Grundgesetz der menschlichen Zwecke zu leiten und zu richten’ – Stammler 1896, quoted from Vorländer 1926, p. 132.
between sectional and common interests, and granted the same degree of freedom to every individual (the Kantian ethical community of a ‘purposeful state’, a Zweckstaat). Vorländer, Woltmann and Conrad Schmidt were all convinced that the formula of the categorical imperative was congruent with the central idea of socialism.\textsuperscript{64} The moral necessity of socialism, argued the Marburgians, was a duty placed upon us by the categorical imperative. This duty was not subject to the passage of time, as it was rooted in autonomous reason. Socialist morality could not be taken as a given, nor could it be adopted once and for all, but was a system of values that had to be continuously fought for. The formalism implicit in the neo-Kantians’ conception excluded the possibility of establishing a general ethical law through gradual moral transition. Ethical values were merely goals for the socialist movement to orientate itself towards – they possessed the quality of postulates only in the Kantian sense. The question as to how they should be obtained (indeed, their complete fulfilment was impossible) was of little interest to the Marburgians. As can be seen in their statements, they did not believe that the fight of the working class to bring about a new socio-economic system would decide over the demise of capitalism and arrival of socialism. Rather, this would occur when the people became conscious of their longing for freedom and collective respect of justice. According to the Marburgians, the socialised ownership of the means of production would provide the legal foundation to regulate co-operation between human beings in socialism. In contrast to Marx’s position, though in accordance with the idealist basic assumptions of their own system, they did not view socialisation as the core of the new system, but as a tool to change consciousness.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{64} Schmidt writes: ‘It is quite clear that this type of ethical-social idealism, which is otherwise completely independent of Kant’s specifically rationalist moral philosophy, and whose principle ultimately derives from the freedom and development interest of the species, is not necessarily – as one would think – a cloud-cuckoo-land outlook that puts its trust in the sheer persuasive appeal of the ideal’ (our translation) – Vorländer 1926, p. 167. According to Woltmann, the socialist idea, ‘same rights and duties regardless of sex and ancestry’, corresponds to Kant’s idea of a general legislation that embodies the highest moral principle – see Woltmann 1974, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{65} Compare Szyszowska 1970, p. 87. Hans-Jörg Sandkühler, a German philosopher at the University of Bremen, criticised the ethical position of the neo-Kantians sharply: ‘To sacrifice a historical perspective in favour of an anthropological or metaphysical restitution of reason as substance is not without consequences: it involves limiting ethics to a formal transcendental theory of morality. (…) The material abstractness of the “categorical imperative”, which is inadequate for the political requirements of socialism, makes clear that neo-Kantian ethics, as a theory of ought, was unable to fulfil its purpose as a complement to Marxism because it insufficiently considered Marxism’ (our translation) – Sandkühler
Marburgian neo-Kantianism made an impact upon Marxist theory due to the writings and speeches of the founder of revisionism, Eduard Bernstein. While the idea of merging Marx and Kant was alien to him, he certainly shared the neo-Kantians’ view that it was necessary to distinguish between being and ought. Bernstein criticised Marx from this standpoint, claiming that there was a descriptive and axiological incoherence to Marx’s theory, i.e. it presented socialism as an impartial science, yet also a moral ideal that social movements were striving to accomplish. In Bernstein’s view, the contradiction between science and practice that arose on the ground of this theory was a result of the legacy of utopian thought, but, above all, a consequence of the adopted materialist worldview. Frankly, Bernstein was not convinced of the validity of Marx’s combination of factual claims and value judgements – as a scientistic, he did not accept value judgements as an immanent component of the historical process. Furthermore, he found the Marxian theory of socialism as a historical necessity unconvincing. According to Bernstein, this ‘necessity’ was, in fact, the result of Marx’s unjustified adoption of Hegelian schemata of social development. He rejected this ‘necessity’: in Bernstein’s interpretation of historical materialism, the emphasis was on the role of consciousness (knowledge of the mechanisms of social and historical development), will (interests), and ethics (moral knowledge) in the historical process.

The degree of acceptance that the positions of Bernstein and the ethical socialists enjoyed in intellectual circles and among Marxists, prompted the stalwarts of Marxist orthodoxy – Kautsky, Franz Mehring, and Plekhanov – to investigate the question of ethics in Marxism thoroughly. Voicing his convictions in *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*, Kautsky in particular regarded it as a matter of duty to defend the monistic and materialist character of Marx’s theory.⁶⁶ Kołakowski, Waldenberg and Rudziński already subjected the interpretation of ethics that he accomplished in this text to closer ana-

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⁶⁶ See Kautsky 1910.
I will therefore focus my attention on the elements that became causes of disagreement in the polemic between Kautsky and Bauer. Kautsky did not acknowledge that a transcendental world might exist beside the empirical world. Nor did he, like the neo-Kantians and Austromarxists, think of the epistemology of values as a philosophical question. Rather, he thought that it was only possible to solve the question of value judgement by researching the real historical and social process. Kautsky negated the dualism of being and ought, arguing that by investigating the causal relationship, the question of morality could be resolved in the sphere of experience. In other words, it was necessary to find out why humans make one moral choice instead of another under given conditions. Hence, he considered the descriptive-genetic explanatory mode as the only correct approach to the value question. As is well-known, Kautsky only granted the status of a science to descriptive ethics, while placing normative ethics entirely outside the scientific realm. Like the Austromarxists, he was sceptical about the scientificity of normative reflection, even if their starting points were different: Kautsky assumed the unity of knowledge on values and facts, whereas the Austromarxists held the opposite view.

For Kautsky, the socio-historical process was an extension of the processes occurring in nature. He therefore believed that early forms of morality could be found in the animal world. Darwin demonstrated that the struggle for survival among social animals and humans produced drives and instincts that regulated relationships between humans in communities and served the survival of the species. Basing his theory on Darwin’s findings, Kautsky transferred the social drive from the animal world directly onto the world of humans, thus tracing the roots of morality back to the natural essence of humanity. However, his line of argument was certainly not free of naturalistic simplifications. Indeed, Kautsky assumed that the struggle for survival guaranteed the continuation of human history, which depended on three fundamental innate drives that originated in the animal world: the self-preservation, reproductive, and social drives. The emergence of the social drive, which was decisive for the development of morality, originated in the earliest forms of organisation based on animal and human struggle for survival. Material conditions forced humans to adopt moral norms to regulate social life (Kautsky draws a veil of silence over the fact that normative agreements might have preceded these moral norms). One might conclude from Kautsky’s contemplations that moral law is rooted in the social

67 Compare Kołakowski 2005, pp. 382–6; Waldenberg 1976, pp. 144–6; Rudziński 1975, pp. 48–65.
drive, which, essentially, is of the same character as the self-preservation and reproductive drive. Kautsky wrote:

Because the moral law is the universal instinct, of equal force to the instinct of self preservation and reproduction, thence its force, thence its power which we obey without thought, thence our rapid decisions, in particular cases, whether an action is good or bad, virtuous or vicious; thence the energy and decision of our moral judgement, and thence the difficulty to prove it when reason begins to analyse its grounds. Then one finally finds that to comprehend all means to pardon all, that everything is necessary, that nothing is good and bad.68

One may notice that Kautsky did not attempt to explain here, or anywhere else in Ethics, the criteria upon which to judge actions. Nor did he disclose the principles humans should adopt so that their actions might be morally condoned. One can therefore assume that he preferred standards of action beneficial to human development. He was not convinced that behavioural norms had a transhistorical or universal character, a quality he attributed only to biological factors. Moral norms, in contrast, depended on the mode of production and technological progress. According to Kautsky, they were determined by the class structure of society.

Kautsky reiterated Marx’s idea: economic development goes hand in hand with intensifying class contradictions, leading to the emergence of a new social class. Its victory in the class struggle is synonymous with the formation of a new morality. Even so, this new morality does not set, according to Kautsky, any new objectives; its role is limited to negating the existing morality. Goals of action cannot be deduced from ethical ideals since such a position would presuppose an extra-empirically existing ideal. As to the relationship between consciousness and social being, Kautsky also championed a Marxian perspective. He looked at three aspects of this relation: ontological (consciousness as

68 ‘Weil das Sittengesetz ein tierischer Trieb ist, der den Trieben der Selbsterhaltung und Fortpflanzung ebenbürtig, deshalb seine Kraft, deshalb sein Drängen, dem wir ohne Überlegen gehorchen, deshalb unsere rasche Entscheidung in einzelnen Fällen, ob eine Handlung gut oder böse, tugendhaft oder lasterhaft; deshalb die Entschiedenheit und Energie unseres sittlichen Urteils, und deshalb die Schwierigkeit, es zu begründen, wenn die Vernunft anfängt, die Handlungen zu zergliedern und nach ihren Gründen zu fragen. Dann findet man schließlich, dass alles begreifen alles verzeihen heißt, dass alles notwendig, nicht gut oder böse ist’ – Kautsky 1906, pp. 63–4, compare Kautsky 1909, pp. 97–8.
a product of social being); objective (consciousness as a reflection of material conditions of existence); and functional (ideas and values disseminated at a certain level of social development are determined by the class structure). Consequently, he assumed that goals grew out of the historical process itself. Individuals could judge their actions as good or bad, but the objective value of such a judgement depends on whether their actions corresponded to norms and goals established by the practice of the class at the time. With reference to the revolutionary potential of the class, Kautsky regarded the struggle of the proletariat and its class consciousness as the most important ethical factors in the historical process. Furthermore, although Kautsky was an advocate of moral relativism, he viewed the goals of the proletariat from the perspective of axiological universalism: the class interest of the proletariat determined universal human values and goals in the long term. Therefore, science (Marxism) decided what goals were adequate under existing conditions, and the class struggle decided how these goals were to be achieved. The socialist idea contained a vision of the liberation of the proletariat, yet this necessity, according to Kautsky, had no moral value. As Kołakowski and Rudziński pointed out, the theory outlined above in no way explained why that which is historically necessary should be desired by the people, nor why it is morally justified.69

The theses developed in *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* triggered an immediate reaction on the part of Bauer and Max Adler (in an article in 1906). The Austromarxists concurred with Kautsky that all social developments, including all moral developments, were determined by changes in the realm of production and technology – yet they did not accept this as a sufficient solution to the ethical question. Quite rightly, they accused Kautsky of anthropologism with respect to his conception of the animal world. Criticising the limitations of historical materialism, they observed that, even though it helped to gain knowledge about changes in social practices, it could only demonstrate changes in the content of values and point to the reasons for the withering away of old values and the birth of new ones. Hence, Kautsky merely revealed that the emergence and change of moral norms and ethical ideals were socio-historically determined. Yet the real ethical problem starts beyond these genetic observations. As Adler wrote: ‘The material conditions do not produce the ethical ideal; they only give it historical content. They determine how it will be implemented’.70 For the Austromarxists, the primary

69 See Kołakowski 2005, p. 385, and Rudziński 1975, p. 65.
70 ‘Die materiellen Bedingungen schaffen also nicht das sittliche Ideal, sondern sie geben
reference point was the opposition between being and ought, rather than the coexistence of different values in society. They aptly pointed out that an ethics that contented itself with describing modes of moral behaviour did not offer any criteria for moral behaviour. The mere observation that humans make one choice or another under certain conditions did not say whether that choice was right or wrong. Bauer and Adler’s critique of Kautsky revealed another important contradiction: on the one hand, Kautsky deduced a moral ideal from the class struggle. Yet at the same time, he recognised the interaction of frequently opposed moral ideals, all of which were rooted in the position of the respective classes. This left open the question as to which of these ideals one should endorse if there were no objective criteria for judging their validity.

To illustrate the poverty of naturalist ethics and to prove the necessity of normative ethical reflection in Marxism, Bauer constructed the example of an unemployed worker who contemplates whether he has the right to become a strikebreaker when his family’s livelihood is under threat. When individual interest conflicts with class interest, Bauer argued, Kautskyan arguments – such as ‘the struggle for existence triggers social drives from which the moral law emerges’, ‘the proletariat is a force that enters the stage of history embodying the highest morality, as well as the future’, or ‘socialism will come by virtue of the necessary laws of social development’ – did not help to determine the worker’s moral duty. In Bauer’s opinion, Kautsky’s theory did not offer a justification for a proletarian ethics. This led the Austromarxist to pose a more general and fundamental question: did the theory of socialism contain a valid criterion for moral judgement? Could Marxism ethically justify socialism at all? Here, Bauer brought another important element into the open: if Marxism was to serve as a theory for the conscious change of reality, then it had to contain normative judgements pointing to objective criteria by which the validity of actions might be judged. He solved this problem in a Kantian spirit, drawing on a simplified form of the Marburgians’ arguments.

As mentioned earlier, Bauer, inspired by Kantianism, argued in favour of a dualism between being and ought and the differentiation between the knowledge of values and the knowledge of facts.71 The latter belonged to the sphere

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71 In Marxismus und Ethik (Marxism and Ethics, 1906), he wrote: ‘The matter of imperatives belongs to the historian’s field of research – in this, the materialist conception of history is the guideline of research. Even there, however, Kant turns to the formal law of morality. His task is completely different from that of a historian. Because he operates in a different
of experience and science – and, according to Bauer, ‘[t]here is no such thing as a science of ought’. Max Adler took a similar view, arguing that Marxism was a casuistic science. According to him, such a model of science did not offer any ethical justification of politics, nor did it set any guidelines for practical action. Marx’s analysis of changes in moral consciousness merely demonstrated the relativity and historical changeability of ethical phenomena, while not saying anything about the justification for moral behaviour. In short, Marxism was ethically neutral and did not contain any moral guidelines. For Bauer, it was only possible to solve the moral question by adopting the formalism of the moral ideal. Hence, insights of Kant’s practical philosophy that substantiated the formal correctness of ethics and offered a basis for moral judgement were, in his view, of crucial importance to Marxism. The Kantian categorical imperative, as a formal norm constituting the necessary condition for every rule, allowed for the judging of which norms functioning in society were correct. Bauer notably directed his adoption of the Kantian solution against the ethical relativism favoured by the bourgeoisie of his time. In this context, it also had an ideological function: it demonstrated that Marxism, complemented by Kantianism, offered the working class a clear and indisputable criterion for moral judgement. Bauer argued that Kant had provided the normative groundwork for a proletarian ethics – although for him, this was not synonymous with solving the most important question that faced the workers’ movement. The real problem was to figure out how Kant’s categorical imperative could be utilised as an efficient instrument of political action in the proletarian struggle for

72 ‘Eine Wissenschaft vom Sollen gibt es nicht’ – Bauer 1979e, p. 874.
73 See M. Adler 1978, pp. 76–7.
74 Kautsky was not fully content with Bauer’s solution. In his reply, he conceded that his ethics did not offer a criterion to unite contradictory interests, i.e. individual and collective interests. However, he far from agreed with Bauer that the problem could be solved by a formal principle. Rather, he thought that one had to investigate the social causes of conflict, and, furthermore, assess the possibilities of a solution by drawing on scientific insights gained from earlier experiences. See Kautsky 1983, pp. 48–9.
socialism. Bauer did not strive for originality in addressing this question. Noting that the problem had already been solved convincingly by the Marburgian neo-Kantians, he simply reiterated their statements. Essentially, they claimed that the content of the categorical imperative was congruent with the content of the socialist ideal: during the struggle for socialism, the working class aspired to attain the goals set by Kantian ethics. However, it would be wrong to conclude that Bauer adopted the Marburgian ethical position in its entirety. What he had in common with the neo-Kantians was the notion of a dichotomy between the formal and material elements in ethics, and the ethical justification for socialism, including the claim that values had the status of transcendental ideas. On whether there was a historical necessity to socialism, however, Bauer took a different view. He rightly noted that the Marburgian concept lacked a unifying element between the universal, super-temporal ideal and reality – it was the price at which they had abandoned the dualism of being and ought at their very point of departure. Bauer started with the same assumption, yet unlike the neo-Kantians, he was too weak a philosopher to realise that it was impossible to integrate formally defined goals into social life. He believed that it would be enough for the working class to recognise that the crown of historical development indicated by Marx, the socialist state order, embodied the Kantian ideals. This way, it would discover in Kantian ethics the principles towards which the socialist movement should orientate itself in the class struggle. Bauer did not wish to acknowledge two problems. Firstly, for Marx, communism was a condition that society would usher in. Rather than being an ideal according to which reality would be shaped, it was a real movement that would abolish the capitalist system due to the objective laws of historical development. This also included ideas to the extent that the masses identified with them. Secondly, Kant's ethics affirmed the ideals of enlightenment humanism and did not have a specifically socialist content. Moreover, their formalist perspective bore no relation to the fundamental assumptions of historical materialism. Bauer's was a proverbial attempt to unite fire and water: two different perspectives based on different premises and different theoretical and philosophical assumptions. His attempt to provide the foundations for a normative ethics in Marxism was not particularly fruitful.

Let us consider another important element in Bauer's theory: his desire to incorporate Kantianism into Marxism was linked to a judgemental interpretation of socialism. He regarded the socialist order as twofold: sociological (a classless society of producers) and axiological (a social order that grants individuals general and equal participation in social, political, and cultural life). Bauer gave absolute priority to the latter dimension. However, he did not assume that the socialist order would emancipate humans completely. In this
respect, his judgement was close to Marx’s: as long as the economic compulsion to work persisted, there could be no talk of full freedom. Bauer referred to a Hegelian motive that was also present in Marx: freedom as a prerequisite for the realisation of subjectivity. Socialism was, according to this concept, not just a political order under which social and class inequality had been abolished, the division of labour had vanished, and a prosperous society indulging in consumer goods (à la Lafargue) had emerged. It was also a socio-political order that returned freedom to the individual – that is, freedom in a Kantian sense in the sphere of ethics, and freedom as a democratic ideal in the sphere of politics:

We must counter Prussianism with a different state idea that is genuinely, radically opposed to it: a socialism rooted in the individual’s urge for freedom, originating in the self-activity of the masses, and aiming for the self-government of all working people … Nothing is more essential to German socialism than an element of true democracy with individualistic roots, which seeks its realisation in the English notion of industrial self-government, i.e. social transformation through the self-activity and self-education of the masses.76

Bauer, like many socialists of his time, faced a serious dilemma: how could one preserve the culture and democratic achievements of an earlier period, while at the same time supporting the proletariat’s struggle to shake off its socio-political yoke? Marx’s theory, which made a point of the necessity of revolutionary violence, was at odds with the basic premise of its ethical standpoint, i.e. the defence of individual freedom. A solution to this dilemma was contained in the ‘third’ way to socialism, the key component of the Austromarxist notion of revolution. We will investigate this in the fifth chapter.

75 Marx 1959, p. 820.
76 ‘Wir müssen dem Preußentum eine andere, ihm wirklich radikal entgegengesetzte Staatsidee entgegenstellen: einen Sozialismus, dessen Wurzel der Freiheitsdrang des Individuums, dessen Quelle die Selbsttätigkeit der Masse, dessen Ziel das selfgovernment aller Werktätigen ist. (…) Nichts tut dem deutschen Sozialismus dringender not als ein Einschlag jener echten, aus individualistischer Wurzel entsprossenen Demokratie, die im englischen Gedanken des industrial selfgovernment der sozialen Umgestaltung durch die Selbsttätigkeit und Selbsterziehung der Masse, ihre Verwirklichung sucht’ – Bauer 1976c, pp. 356–7.