MARXIST ARGUMENTATION: THE "PROBLEMATIC" AND PRAXIS

John Stephen Martin

Underlying Marx's ideas of history, which adherents label "scientific," are important rhetorical considerations. Indeed, Marx might be called a theorist of rhetorical argumentation as well as an exponent of scientific history. This is because as with every theory of rhetoric, his theory of history incorporates three key factors: a personal purpose for the public speech situation and act, a process of invention, and a form of argumentation that fulfils and justifies invention.

However, my thesis is more specific: I wish to outline that Marx depended on rhetoric to solve what is termed the "problematic" of his "science" of history and that his method of praxis, or the practical steps one takes towards utopia, is a specific form of argumentation intended to resolve the "problematic."

In brief, I argue that this "problematic" is the situation of defining and clarifying how existing social conditions are deficient because they inherently represent but one historical phase, unjust in nature. It is the Marxist equivalent of rhetorical "invention."

Subsequently, I take up the notion of praxis, the procedures of implementing policies that are supposed to lead to utopia. I contend that because an audience must acknowledge the logic of praxis in order that utopia replace the current historical phase, praxis may also be said to be the Marxist equivalent to argumentation.

Marx's purpose, however, is more than the liberation of the proletariat. The praxis vindicates ultimately the invention of intellectuals who stand opposite to the zeit-geist, or the ideology of a phase of history, and who alone understand history as a process that is moving towards utopia. Thus, if the praxis achieves utopia, then the intellectual can be sure that his vision of the "substructure" is an empirical demonstration of his authentic relationship to the substructural reality.

The awareness that the "problematic" is part of the rhetorical process is negated by social scientists and philosophers of history who

prefer to hammer out the inherent ambiguity of Marx's use of the term "ideology." This ambiguity is present in Marx's study entitled *The German Ideology*. In it, Marx first speaks of "the distorted form in which the sanctimonious and hypocritical ideology of the bourgeoisie voices their particular interests as universal interests" (194). These words suggest that ideology consciously serves class interests and that the bourgeoisie effect a masking of reality to keep the proletariat enslaved. Later in the same work, however, Marx speaks of ideology as a condition of history, as he says that "German liberalism" is "the ideological reflection of real liberalism," and liberalism is "the idealistic expression of the real interests of the bourgeoisie" (214). Here, ideology is a matter of cultural expression or the reflection of the underlying hegemony of power in a single historical phase. Thus, instead of class conflict making for ideology as an instrument, ideology is a neutral battleground where the class conflict shows its existence.

The "problem" here is that if ideology is a system of semiotic signs and behaviour which gives presence in the mind to what is fundamentally materialistic and therefore sub-verbal, how can one ever articulate an alternative to the expression of an age which ultimately reflects the "substructural" realities of material forces?

From the position of metaphysics, the "problematic" is a question of whether the will is free and can choose other than what reality appears to be. And rhetorically, it is whether Marx can motivate the proletariat to take power, and whether he should even try if an inevitable process of history is moving on its own to correct the economic and social injustices enacted by the bourgeoisie during a single phase of history.

More specifically, if the consciousness of individuals is an effect caused by the ideological mind-set of the social reality during a phase of history, how does one gain freedom from the ideological context of the existing stage of history to desire what does not presently exist? Or, yet once more, if consciousness is necessary to decipher the ideological battle between classes, how does one experience a change of consciousness merely by observation of a present moment that is in a process of evolution towards the future?

From a rhetorical perspective, the "problematic" undermines rhetorical argumentation by cause and effect, for there is no room for

persuasion if one can believe only what the belief-system, caused by material factors, permits to exist. Furthermore, because the rhetoric of a political argument reflects only the tokens of an era's ideological consciousness, there can not be any immediate understanding of the non-verbal material forces, which operate in what Marx called the "substructure" of life: we stand, as it were, in Plato's cave gazing at shadows.

This is where praxis comes in. Marx believed that praxis was a "scientific method" to fulfilling history. It tokenized the material forces moving history, so that if individuals accepted history as a process, they would act and implement what was ordained by nature. The "invention" of praxis was actually an insight or means, as I shall discuss, of seeing phenomenal experience as a series of possible options or alternative policies to satisfy the indefinite human impulses, tendencies, or desires, which remain subverbal within the material factors of the "substructure." At this point, Marx satisfies the view of tendacious desire held by the "liberal mind," which one finds in the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Mills. The liberal mind says that tendacious desires initiate policies of making means to attain ends. Furthermore, I would add that one can "prove" policies, not metaphysical arguments, by empirical demonstration because policies can be shown to satisfy human desires which directly express the materialistic "substructure" of life. As says Kenneth Minogue, in speaking in *The Liberal Mind* of this Western Tradition, "wherever a policy existed, there must also be the desire of an individual to sustain it" (23).

A policy is actually an hypothesis about human activities, rather than rational conceptions of truth. In a discourse of policy, individual terms are not linked logically or semantically--as in the statement "all children have parents." Rather the terms gain validity--that is, "apparent applicability"--only when the ends of the entire policy are demonstrated empirically, as when we say that "an acid is present when a material corrodes, and if one desires to etch engravings, use an acid." In other words, an acid is known to corrode, but this "truth" is validated only when an etching is made into a metal plate.

In sum, the liberal concept of policies assumes the direct tokenization of factors of the "substructure," and a policy, expressed as words about actions, is validated when specific factors affecting consciousness are made demonstrably causal. One becomes

"conscious" in the socio-political world, if one follows the analysis of Marx by Joe McCartney, by noting the syntax that conjoins the tokens between sets of phenomena (26-31, 113-14). The "syntactic" relationship is supposedly between the "substructure" *and* the phenomenal images of the substructure which are the basis of policies formulated about the "substructure." Indeed, the syntax is an hypothesis that conjoins the individual phenomena, and lends credibility to tokens used to articulate the phenomena. Syntax is a relationship which Max Weber suggested exists between the rise of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism--whereby examining one set as a phenomenon outlines the other as "substructural" force, and both together manifest a composite synthesis betokening an ideology which can explain either set. In such a manner, Marx thought, he could avoid a "semantic" orientation which made individual terms of one set reflect directly the elements of the "substructure," and which he thought made for an inadequate evaluation of historical change by isolated and idealistic aphorism (2, 26)--in effect, an evaluation of an isolated period through an historian's bias.

To be sure, Marx in a well-known quotation warns us that this process of formulating "social existence" in terms of policies is different from the idealistic tokenization of the world to make one's goals a matter of consciousness: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* 21). Marx objected, one remembers, to "the idealist ontology of the primacy accorded to concepts, and sought a materialist ontology of experience" (McCartney 86).

And Engels is clearer, even when he makes the confusion so human as he writes: "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces" (*Selected Correspondence* 541). In distinction, Marx's intent is that one must find a syntax of tokens which make the audience directly conscious of pre-verbal experience through a recognition of policies, and not rely on the words which give only an idealistic idea of experience, once removed.

What made this "proof" so believable to Marx was that it raised praxis into a "science." Praxis is above the debate of being a merely contentious policy based on an individual's consciousness and the manipulation of terms which supposedly makes a logical argument "transparent" or self-evident (McCartney 20-1, 63).

The history of ideology clarifies the "problematic," and points to Marx's attempt at a rhetorical solution through praxis. A full study of ideology would begin with Destutt de Tracy's late eighteenth-century understanding of how sensationalism constructs the ideas of the mind in accord with Locke's paradigm of psychological understanding. Here, ideas are not traditional, abstract, and prior to experience; rather, they are irresistible because they are discovered within a field of phenomenal experience. The purpose of de Tracy in studying what he termed ideology was to differentiate truth from what earlier philosophers had called "false opinions" (Cooper 97-99; Barth, 1-16; Manning 1-11). De Tracy argued from cause and effect, implied in Locke's paradigm. In doing so, de Tracy understood that he could speculate about the future because a present "idea A"--assumed to be the "highest good"--could determine an individual's "action A." This meant that if one was inculcated to believe that "idea A" is good, then one must will "action A" to follow, and "sensation A," the ultimate cause, must also be good. He concluded that to know "idea A" enabled one to evaluate "cause A" since "idea A" was just as much a fact of nature as was the sensation that gave rise to it.

De Tracy's argumentation was, thus, a form of "semantic" evaluation, and simply brushed aside the "problematic" of how one could have original ideas when ideas were formed experientially by a political hegemony. Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism, which said that the mind could choose to implement ideas on the basis of "the highest good," was not a true praxis because it lacked a concept of utopia based on a psychological explanation of the will. However, Marx's notion of praxis was a breakthrough because it refashioned the argument rhetorically, positing the notion of utopia not only as a purpose for discourse but also as criteria based on the immediate demonstration of psychological experience.

That is, only an hypothesis of policy could tie related but not identical images of experience together syntactically to reflect a composite picture of an ideology that was limited to a phase of

history. Likewise, only an hypothesis of policy could make the ends justify the means, and so subsume segments of experience to demonstrate for the individual that the flux had evident teleological direction. Besides demonstrable argumentation, praxis is a cognitive demand upon the will of what must be done in order to judge and eradicate the privilege of unjust social, political, and economic conditions and bring society to fulfilment or utopia. Consequently, if an individual is persuaded by praxis as observed experience, praxis thereby becomes the ultimate purpose of ideological rhetoric which makes the present moment meaningful.

Praxis is now rhetorical argument, based on a psychological experience. However, a logical explanation of praxis remained a problem. Relying upon cause-and-effect, de Tracy was compelled to say that "sensation A" made for "action A," since "sensation A" was actually an "effect" of what the hegemony of the day permitted. This, we noted, was a naive view of praxis because cause-and-effect explanations did not explain how a person would receive an "idea A" and yet react to it in a way that could alter the future by causing "action B."

This is where Marx's personal purpose becomes noticeable as a solution. Supplemental to the ostensible purpose of liberating the proletariat, Marx addressed himself specifically to a class of alienated bourgeois intellectuals, similar to himself. These intellectuals are related to the proletariat who are alienated from their work, their products, and the economic and social system of competition. However, since the proletariat are unaware of desires for hypothetical policies of change, they have no adequate consciousness of their condition. In contrast, the intellectual could understand that there are laws of psychology which, allied to the pre-verbal desires we noted earlier, can lead to alternatives for existing social patterns. In sum, the intellectual did nothing but isolate his own subjectivity to rediscover primal desires. Moreover, alienation confirmed, experientially, that some individuals have "fallen between the cracks," so to say, of the contemporary moment of history and actually had different images in mind as the reference for their thoughts. To be alienated from the contemporary moment of history enabled one ironically to find or invent terms which formed a policy and thus duplicated in the mind the process of material history not seen or understood by the oppressed at present. Consequently, such

intellectuals are constantly struggling with signifiers; they bypass the signs that appear natural and commonsensical to most persons and instead invent arguments based on how sets of phenomenal happenings provide a syntax to a discourse for contemporary ideology.

In sum, then, Marx considered that he solved the "problematic" of choices of consciousness by the argumentation of praxis which, in effect, was based on a psychological process of intellectual contrariness, a kind of supreme dramatic irony in which the initiate had a syntax that permitted discourse about the controls restraining history and oppressing the naive individual. This process was a science of the mind that made its devotees enjoy a certitude above or prior to rhetoric, much as Plato's Philosopher King was superior to those rhetoricians who relied on passion or ecstasy, and emphasized semantics. As for the others, the followers, Marx assumed that the study of "scientific" argumentation would make possible a change of consciousness in them, much in the manner in which a psychiatrist might say that the terms of a neurosis are metaphors pointing to its origins, and to understand the origins would free one of the neurosis.

The method, at closer scrutiny, asserts that the psychological processing of ideas begins by noting the anomalies or tendentiousness of desires which cannot be satisfied by the contemporary ideological beliefs. An alienated individual would find such tendentiousness to be referring to his subjective impulses or desires which are contrary and lead to ironic scenarios or policies. However, the follower would explore the impact of ideas structuring history, and from this, would understand how praxis worked. At that point, the method of praxis, pointing as it does to the fulfilment of impulses at the time of utopia, would convince the student that history is a process in which truths change; as such, praxis could prove that greater goods, desires, or impulses can be realized.

What Marx had done, if one notes this aspect of his argumentation by praxis, is that he complemented a causal notion of sensation, ideas, and actions which de Tracy might have presented, by a dialectic of intellectual contrariness, thereby allowing for what Derrida might term "differance" between moments of consciousness in reading a text (26-8). "Differance" too is ambiguous, as befitting a dialectic, especially in Derrida's terms of "absence" suggesting "presence" because "difference" leads a reader to fill gaps in "the

becoming-space of the spoken chain" (27). Mankind, it seems, has a rhetorical urge to make sense of phenomena by utilizing words "semantically," but must, when the words fail, find such words "syntactically." Thus, on the one hand, any moment of sensed "differance"--when terms become suddenly opaque and an apparent obstacle to continuity--compels the reader of a text to explain and smooth out a gap in consciousness. On the other hand, to smooth out the breaks, one has ironically to entertain what was not immediately present but must be summoned up from commensurate experiences (212, 221).

Derrida's similarities to Marxist methods are striking, although Derrida emphasizes reading not historiography, and finds a fundamental difference between literary and spoken language (28). To be sure, Marx did not recognize fully that his method of formulating policy sought to make written discourse able to encapsulate phases of historical change, and so, unawares, used a form of literary language played against spoken language and its communal connotations of the age. Consequently, Marx did not see that the notion of praxis was an ironical--a rhetorical--notion derived from the play between a belief in the continuity of a process working towards utopia and an initial, inventive stage, in which current continuities were broken by sensed moments of "differance" and "presented" new notions, virtually "out of the blue."

For Marx, then, praxis was "scientific," not rhetorical. The means of production had alienated certain individuals who could no longer function according to the ideology of their times, and had so sensitized them to "otherness" that they understood "presences" of implicit policies merely by observing contemporary ideological moments of "absences." In this light, the special feature of his rhetoric is that Marx offers his audience of alienated, or potentially alienated, individuals a scientific equivalent of argumentation by ironic dialectics; its purpose is to acknowledge human impulses or wilful desires to reflect a larger pattern of history, not limited to one individual. The instigating impulse is the desire to eradicate the despair of alienation, of the separation of the self from power and the ensuing sense of being enthraled by the "alien powers" of the bourgeois hegemony (Minogue, *Alien Powers* 41-68).

Marx's praxis, in conclusion, fulfils the three key demands of any theory of rhetoric. Students of rhetoric know that prior to the stage

of invention, there may be a pre-invention stage in which what confronts us is tendentious. That is, before contentions arise which arguments are to work out, there is a situation in which ideas, values, perceptions, and so forth, are equally true or false, equally right or wrong, but change according to contingent factors which give rise to impulses or desires, such as I have noted about Marx and the intellectuals of alienation.

As invention is a turning within to the tendentious possibilities, it resolves itself into contentions which hypostatize factors of possibilities into negotiable tokens of an articulate argument. Invention hypostatizes argumentative points about nature, authoritative texts, cause and effect, analogies, and testimony into terms that allow a speaker to approach an audience with various appeals necessary for persuasion or enlightenment--logos, pathos, and ethos.

The traditional rhetorical stance is that of a speaker who refers to his hypostatized ideas within his arguments as a text which he can elucidate for his audience. However, Marx seemingly downplays the process of invention, preferring to pose a stage of "discovery" since discovery implies a turning to the evidence of direct experience which persons may perceive for themselves. The stance of the speaker is that of one who finds what others may find for themselves as long as they are open and unbiased in their perceptions.

Consequently, if the completion of praxis validates the invention of utopia, and is the ostensible purpose of Marx's argument, praxis also has made the dialectic of contrariness possible for the true initiates. At the same time, this dialectic has led, in turn, to the praxis which validates for the student that an individual may triumph over the phases of history which deny him ontological significance.

The "problematic" and praxis are not simply two separate items of Marx's scientific method, but are, together, the heart of Marx's rhetoric which legitimatizes the wonder-working aspects of "scientific history." They make for an hermeneutical circle, of the ends being proven by the method which allows the hypothesis to get into motion. It unites time present and time future into one moment, and as such, is akin to a religious revelation. What this argumentation does is change the nature of "experience," so that an individual can experience transcendence of one's time and have a experiential vision

of utopia, and yet within historical time, find epistemological, ontological, and teleological significance.

Uniting charismatic initiates and devoted followers, such an insight is the modern equivalent of a religious movement. With ideologues, the praxis is both an argument for the studious to follow to utopia as well as a constant revelation for those who can pierce the veil of illusions, for every moment suggests a dialectic opposite. Praxis is invention to the visionary apostles, but also the major form of argumentation to the studious followers.

To be sure, Marx's rhetoric may not be what a traditional rhetorician expects, and social scientists may remain sceptical that Marx was a rhetorician when he ostensibly theorized about scientific history. In response, I would emphasize that if Marx's praxis is equivalent to a religious experience, it is because he has made it the argumentation to enact a faith as well as to explain a faith about man's place in a material universe. Thereby, Marx has become both Paul and a church father who interprets the writings of Paul, and thus a rhetorician in the older, traditional sense of the word.

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