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WHAT'S LEFT TO DO?*

or

Theses on a Flyer Back

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After almost twenty years of growth of Marxist scholarship in geography, it is reasonable to reflect on what there is left to do. The achievements are considerable, and worth taking pride in (Walker et al., 1989). Yet there has been a loss of confidence in Marxism's ability to explain things or to provide political guidance for progressive social change. The reasons are many: national political climate, women's increased militance, changing academic fashion, and personal resentments – not to mention the many real failings of left work to date. But criticism is essential to the growth of knowledge, and it is therefore worthwhile to enter the lists in the present debate with both a strong voice and a generous sense of the collective project and value of the left, in and out of geography.

The proximate cause of this discussion is David Harvey's having thrown down the gauntlet to fellow leftist geographers in his paper, *Three Myths . . .* (1987). Because he stepped vigorously on several toes, there have been quite a few howls of pain, and the resulting exchange has not been as enlightening as one might have hoped (see *Society and Space*, 1987). There is good reason, therefore, for the rest of us to step back and reflect more calmly on the situation that led to such heated volleys. There is still a good deal left to be said.

Harvey no doubt felt the need to respond to a growing chorus of criticism of marxist scholarship within the left (see e.g., Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Cagan et al., 1986; Roemer, 1986; Bowles and Gintis, 1986; for some responses, see e.g., Wood, 1987; Geras, 1987; Dews, 1987; Levine et al., 1987). I, too, wish to defend the

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* Thanks to David Harvey, Andrew Sayer, Erica Schoenberger and Michael Watts for reading and commenting on this paper. Their response leads me to believe it will be anything but boring. I have, in deference to their good judgment, removed the most outrageous passages – but left enough in to keep the reader entertained.

marxist achievement against misrepresentation and wrongful judgement. But it must be done in an ecumenical spirit, if we are to hold together and extend the broader *leftist* intellectual and political project against both external attack and internal disintegration. Because the two things, Marxism and the left, are not identical, one has to do some pretty nifty footwork to keep the argument in balance.

I offer up my opinions in the form of nine "theses" for the left academic trying to steer a course through stormy waters. It is by no means easy to be constant in the search for an instructive social science and a constructive politics. I therefore share with Harvey a serious disquiet about prevailing views on theory and method in the social sciences. But my overall assessment of left *geography*, in particular, is much more positive than his and I am more willing to take the good with the bad in our collective struggle for enlightenment and social justice.

First Thesis: Real Knowledge is Possible

or

Yes, Virginia, there is **not** a Santa Claus

To begin, it is first necessary to defend the project of social science itself. It may seem odd that the left, which has been so critical in the past of the scientism of positivist method, ought now to be defending social science against its detractors. After all, one of the chief arguments of the left, under the banner of "critical theory", has been to unmask the illusion of neutrality in social observation and the uses of knowledge in the interests of power (see e.g. Gregory, 1978). Yet the critics of Marxism now accuse it of being a closed discourse, self-referential and no more privileged than other voices (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). This is an extremely tricky problem because it involves a confusion of valid insights about epistemology with questions of ontology: that is, the human difficulty of acquiring real knowledge is transformed into the insubstantiality of real objects and the impossibility of ever knowing their ways-of-being.

Central to the defense of knowledge are the arguments of philosophical Realism, which have been taken up by the left in recent years (particularly in Britain) in order to bolster the case against Positivism, to refine the way we think about reality, and to prevail over skeptics on the left. Roy Bhaskar's "transcendental realist" position has been particularly influential in the philosophy of science (Bhaskar, 1978, 1979, 1986), and Andrew Sayer's careful

translation of Realism to social science has been immensely helpful to geographers (Sayer, 1984). I also recommend Sean Sayers (1985) and Eftichios Bitsakis (1987–88) for the clearest arguments that Realism *is* materialism, as it has always been understood by Marxists – that is, dialectical materialism (not cartesian or classic materialism). The great strength of the realist argument is not that it agrees with Marxism, but that it makes sense of what scientists actually do. That is, it shows why the experimental method, or carefully orchestrated human practice, yields knowledge about the natural world, and, in the process, refutes such speculative philosophies (ideologies) of science as Humean empiricism, logical Positivism and Kantian dualism (Bhaskar, 1978).

While not every realist is a marxist as regards theory of society (e.g. Harré, 1986), every marxist must be a realist – if they follow Marx's precepts as to ontological depth ('if everything were apparent on the surface there would be no need of science'), social laws (systemic processes that operate without being directly willed or even understood by the people involved), and the possibility of discovering the latter through systematic inquiry. In short, contemporary Realism, like Marxism at its inception, is a wholly salutary reaction against various forms of philosophical idealism. It has, furthermore, provided some essential clarifications about open and closed systems, in opposition to empiricism and misguided forms of holism. It is wrong to impute an anti-marxist vein to transcendental Realism as developed by its principal progenitors, as Harvey (1987) and Smith (1987b) do; it is wrong to consider the most sustained philosophical critique of Humean empiricism available to be a road back to empiricism (Archer, 1987); and it is wrong to say that the defense of science binds Marxism and Realism to the "ontological and epistemological turf of bourgeois science" (Storper, 1987: 423).

The opacity of reality to our meagre powers of reason and observation has led many to deny the possibility of certitude in human knowledge. Mysticism, skepticism and Kantian dualism have been some of the avenues of escape from the uncertainty and hard work of the struggle for enlightenment. While Kant tried to rescue reason from the skeptics and metaphysicians, he could not completely escape the limits of his own time, in which the scientific understanding of the world was quite primitive, and philosophy that much more speculative (Bhaskar, 1979: 5).[1] As a result, he fell back on thinking that reality is always just out of reach, knowledge rattles around inside the prison of our heads, and truth is ultimately unattainable (for further discussion of Kant, see Sayers, 1985). Modern-day Kantians, such as the reborn Wittgenstein

(1953), Popper (1964), Kuhn (1970) and Feyerabend (1975), have been terribly influential on the left with their critique of Positivism's smug pretenses to "the one true science". The ideology of science embodied in Positivism is itself a form of modern religion: a faith in pure knowledge obtained by mechanical means, and unsullied by the messiness of human language, work and jealousy. The human mind has, in this view, found an Archimedean point from which to grasp the world. One ascends to this heavenly spot by putting on a white lab coat and speaking in mathematical tongues.

Naturally, the discovery that language intrudes, nothing is ever absolutely verified, theories overlap and compete, and scientists are people, too, has come as a "bolt from heaven" that has shattered many people's faith in any sort of scientific truth. Relativism has crept back in, as a result. The ineluctable messiness, the inherent open-endedness, the constant uncertainty about the next step that characterize the growth of human knowledge (like all human history) are misconstrued as casting doubt on all truth. Truth becomes what we agree on. It has become almost impossible to stand up and defend the idea of "truth" in educated company these days; but one must do so, at the risk of appearing quaint or fanatical. Some things – and such knowledge is truly precious – we do, in fact know to be true. Newtonian mechanics is true, within the proper (very extensive) domain, and it is a popular error to imagine that Einstein's theory of relativity made Newton absolutely, rather than relatively, untrue. The error rests on a confusion of transcendence with negation (or simple replacement) in the historical succession of scientific theories (Bitsakis, 1987–88: 409). This forgets that the real world outside our heads acts as a check on the pretensions of the most decorated Scientist or most revered Theory. Reality *does* provide points of leverage by which the world may be understood; conversely, true insights provide the leverage by which the world may be moved – or, in the case of nuclear physics, blown up.

I would defend certain concepts that marxists hold dear, such as class, exploitation, value and capital accumulation, as offering true insights into the nature of the present-day capitalist world. They should be defended against obscurantist declarations that the world is just too complex, too changeable, too variable between places, for such big concepts to capture. In holding the ground already won, Harvey is quite correct. One must not, however, underestimate the difficulty of arriving at a correct understanding of the world. Scientific or other truths are not found hanging about for the picking, and one must be attentive to the "hard work" of acquiring knowledge. I therefore disagree with Harvey and Smith's tendency to equate cautions about knowledge claims (marxian or otherwise) with hostility to marxist positions or large theory, *per se*. A general grasp of such (correct) precepts as social contradiction, commodity fetishism or class conflict does not exhaust the possibilities for explanation. It is one thing to have a fine set of theoretical tools, and quite another to get the plumbing fixed right.

Raymond Williams captured more evocatively than anyone else the way in which we grope toward knowledge through what he called "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1977). He rejected the easy Althusserian dualism of science and ideology, as if we could by reflection alone know the difference. It misses the dialectical way in which we gain deep insight ("science", "truth") by refraction from, and reflection on, partial and shallow views ("ideology", "false consciousness"); hence the importance Marx ascribed to making a careful critique of political economy at the same time as formulating his alternative theory of capitalism. As a dialectical materialist, one takes all nature of ideas seriously, for, as reflections of the world, they contain at least some grain of truth (Sayers, 1985).

Second Thesis: Philosophy is Not Enough

or

There's madness in pure method

Some marxists have taken Realism to be the enemy of historical materialism (e.g. Burawoy, 1987; Harvey, 1987). They have done so because some critics of Marxism have seized on Realism as a putative alternative, or because of substantive theoretical claims made in the name of "Realism" with which they disagree. It is therefore necessary to defend Realism against both detractors and enthusiasts on the left.

Realism is a philosophical position about the nature of the world and of how we come to understand it. As such it is prior to, or at a higher level of abstraction than, theories of society (on the delicate dialectics of philosophy and science, see Bitsakis, 1987–88). Realists argue that science is possible and necessary, because mechanisms (structures) exist to be discovered; that they are not apparent to the naked eye unaccompanied by careful inquiry; and that such inquiry involves controlling for contingency and sorting out levels of causality (Bhaskar, 1979: 22–28). But Realism as a

philosophy (or what is commonly called "method") cannot provide an alternative to Marxism as a theory of society and history because it contains essentially no theoretical statements about human societies as they actually exist.

Thus, Realism does not stand or fall on whether one agrees with Andrew Sayer's attempt to write space out of deep social structure (Sayer, 1985), since Realism *per se* makes no claims about space. Similarly, appeals such as Lovering's (1987) to a "realist synthesis" on capitalism and the nation-state are misleading. Even though the substance of his argument is quite sensible, Lovering misrepresents the case as Marxism *versus* Realism, by the device of equating Marxism as theory of capitalism with Marxism as a putative philosophical reductionism. Thus, the theoretical question of the relative autonomy of the state from the capitalist mode of production is misconstrued as equivalent to the philosophical question of totalism versus Realism, with the latter offering a "solution" to the question. But it does not. All Realism does, in this context, is to provide some philosophical guidance against hasty imputations of causality in open and complex systems, or what Sayer (1984) has called "reading off" x from y without sufficient regard to intervening cause z. Of course, reductionism is wrong; but then, too, so is relativism and electicism, and Realism offers equally strong warnings against them, by virtue of its defense of necessary causes.

So where does Realism leave us? In about the same place as Marx left us a century ago. As a philosophy, contemporary Realism continues down the same path as Marxism. First there are the puzzles of relation, contradiction and relative causal weight between things such as "the economy" and "the state" that still defy easy theorization. For this, Marx made use of Hegelian dialectical reasoning, which is, simply put, a way of thinking that tries to grasp the subtle and complex more faithfully than standard logic or analytic philosophy. There is plenty of fuzziness in dialectical reasoning, to be sure, but it offers some useful rules for groping with an equally fuzzy reality. Realism in its contemporary form has helped immensely in clarifying our vocabulary about the dialectics of cause and contingency. I shall return to the question of the dialectics of social life below.

Second, Realism provides the same sort of antidote for idealist forms of reasoning about human society that Marx tried to administer through historical materialism. One meta-theoretical point on which Realism and Marxism are indelibly linked is that of the necessity of human praxis (labor) in the acquisition of knowledge (hence Sayer's repeated reference to the problem of "hard work" in social science: e.g., Sayer, 1987). A long standing pitfall of human reason is the attempt to understand the world by recourse to reflection alone. Whether it appears as religion, Hegelian idealism, "theoretical practice" or analytic philosophy, the error is the same: the products of the human mind push aside the products of human labor, which are the result of the interaction of mind and active experience. As a consequence, real knowledge (conventionally called "science" according to the ideology of our day) is jeopardized by the intercession of Divine Will, the World Spirit or Professors of Philosophy. Marxists have undoubtedly been guilty of idealism, as when the aphorism "the state is the executive committee of the ruling class" is converted into an article of faith. On the other hand, assertions as to the autonomy of the state are equally subject to idealistic distortions. In either case, nothing is solved by philosophy alone. An appeal to Realism, while helping to sort things out, in no way tells us how to weigh the relative powers of state and civil society, or whether Marx and Engels were closer to the truth than Theda Skocpol.

In defense of the much-maligned Althusser, it must be said that realist philosophy is very much in line with the Althusserian project of clarifying the language of cause and effect in marxist social science. "Mechanisms and events" sounds a lot like "structures and conjunctures", and "levels and contingencies" a lot like "relative autonomy and overdetermination". Hence the ease with which an "Althusserian" such as Doreen Massey could become a "realist". A good deal of the difference has to do with the particularities of French and English philosophical traditions and the circumstances of the 1950s versus the 1970s. Ironically, in the name of liberation from Althusserian structural-functionalism, Lovering's sort of argument replicates both Althusser's achievement of having recourse to philosophy to help people think out certain issues more clearly and his great failing of trying to resolve too much, in the name of science, by means of philosophical discourse alone. For all the problems of Althusser's overphilosophized analytics, of Marxian oversimplification of social complexity, and the unforgiveable reductions of Stalinism in its heyday, it is nonetheless possible and necessary to defend the method of dialectical and historical materialism on the very grounds set out by realist philosophy: as a way of coping with ontological depth, multiple causality and openness in social systems (compare Anderson's (1980) defense of causal reasoning against Thompson's (1978) intemperate rejection of everything Althusserian). In short, Marxism is still germane because of its Realism.

Third Thesis: Social Circles Cannot be Squared, But Can be Escaped

or

Coping with the dialectics of social life

Acceptance of a realist (dialectical materialist) ontology is no more than a beginning in the development of social science. Certain basic ontological dilemmas repeatedly force themselves on us, as realists, social scientists and historical-geographical materialists. Much of the disputation among social theorists revolves around the very real conundrums presented by the two-faced nature of society itself (epistemological contradictions reflect ontological ones, as we should expect). Unfortunately, these also form the basis for any number of false accusations of inadequacy in one another's work. Because of the dialectics of social life, explanation is rendered more difficult by far, and much of the recent work by left geographers has involved a gain in theoretical subtlety by recognizing rather than suppressing them. None of this progress in the least justifies rejection of the marxist project, however.

By "dialectics of social life" I refer to such reciprocal relations and internal oppositions as: structure and agency, individual and society, thought and action, the spatial and the social, stasis and change, function and dysfunction, interests and morality. Great reputations have been made by the periodic "rediscovery" of the dilemmas posed by life's dialectics, as in the recent case of Anthony Giddens (e.g. 1979, 1981, 1984). Giddens has usefully amplified certain of the niceties of the interplay of structure and agency, ideas and practice, and the like. Nonetheless, "structuration" is no substitute for Marxism. While Giddens has made some valuable clarifications at the meta-theoretical level (system versus structure, space and time, etc.), he has not been able to advance an alternative theory of human society to historical materialism. There are no substantive categories comparable to class, mode of production or interest-bearing capital with which to carry forward the research agenda (cf. Harvey and Scott, 1989: 9).

Harvey is rightfully upset with those who falsely accuse marxists of ignoring social dialectics. Simply because historical materialism offers positions that cut through the thicket and comes down firmly on one side or another of the various reciprocally causal relations, it is not a form of reductionism. If we try to point out the force of social systems over individual choice, we are "totalizers"; if we speak of the way capital works, we are "functionalists"; if we use dialectical reasoning to capture the nuance of internal

relations, we are "obscurantists"; if we refer to material interests we are "vulgar materialists"; and so on (see e.g. Giddens, 1981; Duncan and Ley, 1982; Jay, 1984; Elster, 1985). It is irksome that Michael Storper (1987) should feel that, in putting forth a completely reasonable position on the importance of alternative paths of capitalist development, he should require the straw man of "totalizing discourse" in marxist geography.[2] Such criticisms evade the really hard questions of just how much weight is to be given in explanation to capital versus class struggle, to technology versus market prices, to self-interest versus liberation theology, and so forth. Alas, if one is to get on with social theory, some firm steps have to be taken, and these necessarily involve – in the first instance – simplifications. Rational abstractions can indeed grasp social structures without choking the life out of them.

I take particular exception to so-called "post-structuralist" solutions to the dialectics of social life, which dissolve quickly into idealism and relativism. The "social construction of reality" view propounded by Gordon Clark and Susan Christopherson (in this issue) falls into this camp, which also includes various strains of hermeneutics, Foucauldian theory, deconstruction, structurationism and feminism. Objection must be raised to three fundamental misconceptions about social dialectics and social structuring that lead to the denial of social structures, solipsistic interpretations of social meaning, and the questioning of social scientific analysis. The first is the privileging of "human agency" over social structuring. This rests on the belief that because willed action by individuals is necessary to all social processes, such action is not compelled or enabled by deeper structures. It forgets that people do not come innocently into society or its situations: social relations are inculcated in the way we think and imbricated in every choice we make. As a result, the vast bulk of our actions falls into well-worn channels that do not disrupt social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977). This does not exclude the creative agency of people – indeed, social reproduction requires the most energetic exercise of creative powers – nor does it deny systematic change in social configurations. But it is more important, when studying, say, modern industry to focus on the structuring force of the microelectronics revolution than on the individual choices that led Robert Noyce and others to launch their semiconductor firms in Silicon Valley. For our individual and collective activity gives rise to entities, such as capital, that have causal powers above and beyond any of the individuals who handle it, direct it or beget it.[3]

A second error holds that because people think before (during and after) they act, ideas (values, meanings) drive social existence.

Yet, thinking and acting are reciprocal parts of human practice, and while we think before we act, we also learn as we live. Ideas are shaped by the social circumstances in which individual lives are played out, ordinarily in ways that contribute to rather than undermine the social order. It is very hard to think one's way out of social convention, and societies are usually quite unfriendly to those who do. Similarly, social circumstances are also imbued with meaning, thanks to the evaluative powers of human beings; but as long as meanings fall into systematic relation to objects or to one another, they are potentially susceptible to interpretation. The inverse of this position is that because social reality is interpreted by every person, social scientific ideas are but one more such interpretation; social scientists hold no privileged position. But social science is precisely about rising above practical competence acquired in everyday life to seek deeper insight into the way social systems operate (Giddens, 1979). There is, indeed, a dialectic of science and ideology. As Bhaskar puts it (1979: 28): "In contrast to hermeneutics, [Realism] can sustain the *intransitivity* of both beliefs and meanings, while insisting on their susceptibility to scientific explanation and hence *critique*, in a spiral (rather than circle) which reflexively implicates social science as a moment in the process that it explains."[4]

A third fallacious claim is that power irretrievably distorts knowledge to its own ends (Foucault, 1979). This potent argument correctly points to the force of power in human affairs, to the distortions inherent in the ruling ideas of any epoch or institution, and to the harm done in the name of good-works imposed on the powerless. But is there no way out, other than spontaneous resistance or moral outrage by the oppressed? Power is neither as complete as it appears in Foucault's panoptical world, nor as impervious to critique. Even Foucault has, in the end, to refer to certain external gauges by which he implicitly condemns the totalitarian efforts of the powerful (Dews, 1987). In the hands of Lyotard (1984), concern with oppression gives way entirely to a seductive celebration of the "post-modern" condition in which nothing is secure, including truth. But might does *not* make right, and the view that power creates knowledge is a tenet of fascism, as various critics have pointed out.

Much worse than the well-intended efforts of post-structuralists to take cognizance of social dialectics are those resolutions that achieve clarity and certitude by abolishing the dialectics of social life altogether. Whole methodologies and schools of thought have been erected on this or that "solution" to the difficulties: holism, methodological individualism, behaviorism, structuralism, action

theory, historicism and so forth. One particularly deleterious movement from within the left is the so-called "analytical Marxism" or rational choice theory. The only "real" social unit in such formulations is the individual and the only form of collective action is the game (as in game-theory). The leading light of the movement, Jon Elster (1985), is very good at dissecting Marx's logic with a sharp philosophical blade, but utterly incapable of grasping what Marx was talking about or offering any positive theory of history at all (Burawoy, 1986). If one wants to see reductionism at work in Marxism, here it is.

The point, then, is that the social circles in which academics frequently go round (and round) are not easily squared by non-dialectical methods. At the same time, just because squaring the circle was a hopeless puzzle of the ancient Greeks does not mean that one cannot say a good deal about the geometry of circles, nor that one cannot treat the history of Greek society or Greek mathematics without getting bogged down in the meanings which ancient geometers attributed to a bogus problem.

Fourth Thesis: Stay Level-Headed
or
The problem of ontological depth

A vital problem of explanation, to which the discussion of Realism has contributed measurably, is recognition of intermediate levels of causality. Therefore, a good deal of attention has been going into middle level theories about the "meso-structures" of capitalism. Harvey's critique misses the importance of this development, I believe, but so, too, does much of the philosophical stage-setting by those smitten with Realism. Even Bhaskar and Sayer, having established the point about levels of reality, quickly move on.

The term "contingency" covers a very broad spectrum from trivial happenstance to powerful (if subordinant) causal forces, and must be understood as involving sets of intersecting mechanisms operating at various depths in social systems. For example, left-handedness is a widespread condition with a certain causal force, from playing baseball to coping with telephone booths. It is, nonetheless, a rather shallow force, easily suppressed in most societies. Gender is a much more powerful social relation lodged much "deeper" in the social order and with greater efficacy in human history. Althusser – dare I say it – was on to this with his concept of "relative autonomy", which has been very helpful to more limber thinking on the left. The simple dualism of necessity

and contingency in Realism is not, however, a "rascal concept" as Smith (1987b: 382) calls it, or merely an invitation to vacilate, as Harvey (1987: 373), declares. It is a ground-clearing distinction that poses the question and solves nothing, as is to be expected of philosophical principles. As Cox and Mair emphasize (in this issue), simple dualisms such as necessity and contingency, abstract and concrete, theory and data, while useful in making basic philosophical propositions, must quickly be gotten beyond in actual social investigations. The difficulty, again, is figuring out just how relative is "relative", and how much determination to attribute to one "structure" or another in complex, messy and imperfectly integrated societies (Thrift, 1987). We're back to the problem of theory and practice in the progress of social science, and here again nothing is to be solved at the level of philosophical declarations about complexity or concrete abstractions.

Many of us in geography followed Doreen Massey into the middle level of industrial studies because they offered a better handle on variance in the fate of regions during the contemporary era of capitalist crisis and restructuring (Walker et al., 1989). In my case, it spoke to a glaring omission of the productive base in my analysis of suburbanization (cf. Scott, 1986). Similarly, Ed Soja (1983, 1986) began looking at the workings of the city under his nose, L.A., as a way of giving content to his abstract conception of spatiality in social life ("Los Angeles" is a middle-level abstraction if ever there was one!). The British localities research project (CURS), initiated by Massey and led by Phil Cooke, involves a large measure of this sort of meso-social analysis, which tries to capture a larger number of intersecting forces by zeroing in on particular places (Cooke, 1987a, 1987b, 1988). Michael Storper and I have recently come up with a theory of geographical industrialization that tries to integrate regional, national and even international development theory by arguing for the way local implantations of new and dynamic industries become generalized (Storper and Walker, 1989; Storper, 1987).[5]

It is wrong to read all this as merely a descent into empiricism or localism (Smith, 1987a,b; Harvey, 1987; Harvey and Scott, 1989). Rather, it is an attempt to make the connection between the abstract and the concrete. It is probably fair to say that Harvey tries to explain too much from basic forces (and abstract theory). By a certain inattention to specifying intermediate causes, he has invited doubt as to the reality of the basic mechanisms, and the hasty dismissal of Marx's theory of capitalism by those less able or inclined to see the big picture. Of course, he *can* be more specific, but one or two brilliant essays like the one on Paris (in Harvey,

1985b) are not going to prove this to everyone. By the same token, he misses much of the strength of correlative developments in left geography, by failing to see how much work has gone into filling the gaps in the wide-grained marxist framework that he has been laying out (cf. Ball, 1987).[6]

On the other hand, those who think Harvey tries to explain everything simply in terms of *Capital*, Volume I, are committing an equally grievous error (e.g. Redfern, 1987). What he has done has been to develop Marx's theories of rent, money, fixed capital and the like in order better to fill in the middle ground (Harvey, 1982). Harvey and his critics are too often at loggerheads over a largely shared agenda, as if one side were merely "essentialists" and the other "empiricists". Such mutual incomprehension detracts from the collective effort. It also leads in circles, as when John Lovering, himself accused of empiricism, is found warning the CURS researchers of the dangers of getting lost in the details of locality studies! (cf. Lovering, 1986; Harvey and Scott, 1989).

In this context, something more needs to be said about the problem of *specification* (usually called "scale") in social explanation, which is frequently confounded by the rhetoric of essentialism versus empiricism. Specification means bringing social phenomena under a finer and finer focus in order to explain more specific circumstances or events. That is, one can extend multicausality to the *n*th degree to arrive at the reason I ate granola for breakfast this morning. The question is why should one want to do this? It is often taken for granted that specification is a good thing, and this becomes an ideological hammer with which to strike at "grand theory". But specification is not equivalent to explanation. Greater specification is chiefly valuable if one wants to explain more specific happenings. The virtue of this over explanation of large-scale circumstances is mostly instrumental: it depends on what you want to account for and how feasible it is to get that specific. Several erroneous claims are often made, however, for the self-evident merits of specification.

One such claim is that more specific (fine-grained) analysis is more concrete; but to be "concrete" means, in philosophical terms, closer to actual circumstances and events, which may occur at a large or small scale. A falling GNP is a concrete event but not a specific one. Of course, the number attached to it is a specific datum, but the event is very diffuse and large-scale. We require a middle-level abstraction, "Gross national product", to comprehend the event, but it is nonetheless a concrete event, for all that. A related notion is that specificity means getting closer to the "facts". This is an empiricist illusion. Data about specific events

are no more useful than data about general social conditions. For example, facts about the dollar's fate on international currency markets over a thirty year period are much less specific than facts about my office, but much more helpful for understanding social conditions in the world today. Specification is also not equivalent to a more "powerful" explanation. It is, rather, a matter of what one is trying to explain (e.g. is South Berkeley being gentrified?). This is a valid purpose, especially for local political interventions, but must be complemented by studies of capitalism at the highest levels of historic and geographical generality.

Then, too, explanatory specification is not the same thing as giving more credence to individual choice in history, because of the structuration of agency, noted previously. This is not to say that specific actions by the great or small, Hitler's orders to invade Poland or DeForrest's invention of the vacuum tube, do not matter; they do, and even the grandest social theory must take them into account – not as details but as part of the historical process which the theory claims to render more comprehensible (see e.g., Mandel, 1986). Moreover, the situation of particular people may provide a window into general social process (Cooke, 1987: 410). But the activities or thoughts of individuals hold no privileged place in social processes. I therefore disagree with Thrift's emphasis on individual "subjectification", as in the case of wanting to know how the people could be made who would carry out the genocidal acts of the Nazi camps (Thrift, 1987: 406); on the contrary, it is more important to know, given that there are always individuals around who will gladly butcher their fellow humans, why they achieved such unrestrained freedom to act under the Nazi regime.

Finally, specification is not coincident with the "local", although a reduced geographic scale is a good way to focus on more specific circumstances. When Harvey and Smith warn of the dangers of the localist turn, they are right to worry about getting lost in undue specificity. Smith is certainly correct that "there is nothing philosophically, theoretically or politically privileged about the local scale . . ." (Smith, 1987b: 381).[7] Nonetheless, as argued above, locality studies can be of good use for capturing middle level and even large-scale processes, as Harvey's work on Paris and Baltimore and Smith's on New York demonstrates. Locality studies (i.e., research that is place-specific) is part of the bread and butter of our work as geographers. Done well, they illuminate such processes as capitalism, patriarchy or imperialism (e.g., Warde, 1988; Cooke, 1984). After Sayer's immensely helpful defense of the "case study" of this sort against the aggregation

mania of the data-mongers and statistical generalizers (Morgan and Sayer, 1985), it is tiresome to have to repel attacks from the left on a necessary and reasonable practice by which one can get a handle on difficult social processes. The problem in the case of the CURS program is not the use of locality studies *per se*, but that this project may well lack a coherent theoretical focus (or focii) and thereby end up as a dissipative rather than integrative effort (Gregson, 1987).

Fifth Thesis: Place Matters
or
Yes, Santa Claus, there is a Virginia

It is my impression that David Harvey came to a boil gradually over the last decade as the challenge to Marxism increased. But the boilover came in the smallest pot, geography. This is unfortunate because the left in geography is probably more vibrant and less guilty of the sins Harvey exposes than the left of any other discipline. Consider the neo-classical Marxism of John Roemer in economics, the social democratic leanings of Adam Przeworski in Political Science, or the latent Positivism of Eric Wright in Sociology. In turning his heavy artillery against the closest target, Harvey has done a disservice – comparable to that done by Russell Jacoby when he carves up David Harvey for being an obscurantist academic leftist (Jacoby, 1987: 56–57).

In fact, the left in geography has never had more to offer to the field, to the rest of social science, or to public understanding in general. The influence of left geography does not today rest as much as it once did on the reputation of Harvey, as it now has a considerably larger mass of proponents than a decade ago. In addition, the focus of work has shifted from urban (especially residential) to industrial change, with which Harvey has been little concerned. Massey deserves special recognition for her leadership in this direction (Massey, 1978, 1984). There is a large corpus of work on industry and region that is just now coming to a head, by Phil Cooke, Allen Scott, Michael Storper, Ed Soja, Susan Christopherson, Kevin Morgan, Andrew Sayer, Gordon Clark, Meric Gertler, and Erica Schoenberger, among others. Nor should one overlook contributions on other topics, such as Neil Smith on gentrification, Margaret Fitzsimmons on agriculture, Michael Watts on peasant transformations, or Suzanna Hecht on Amazonian development. The list could be made very much

longer. But the point is plain: there is an enormous outpouring of superb and exciting work by left geographers. I see no reason at all for despair in the face of some putative drift into aimless and trivial concerns (Walker et al., 1989; cf. Watts, 1988).

What is more, left geographers have propelled their discipline into the forefront of the social sciences in the 1980s. We have provided one of the precious few claims to originality and significance for geography in many years. In the 1970s, when Marxism was a rising tide in geography, the discipline was headed for a crisis of major proportions in American universities owing, in part, to its lack of substantial contributions to social science. In despair at the theoretical aridity of so much mainstream spatial science and cultural geography, leftists turned to other fields for more powerful insights into social processes and their spatial outcomes. They were further impelled by a prevailing view outside geography, such as that enunciated by Manuel Castells in *The Urban Question*, that spatial relations have little efficacy in human affairs (Massey, 1985; Pudup, 1988; Soja, 1989). Harvey, it should be said, was one of the most resistant to this error. Today, we are finally getting our message about space and place across to other leftists and social theorists. Considerable credit for this goes to those who have hammered home the theme that the geographic dimension matters, including Massey (1984; Massey and Allen, 1984), Ed Soja (1980, 1989), Allan Pred (1984, 1986) and David Harvey (1985a,b). But the proof is in the pudding, and it is the substantive contributions that left geographers have made to the debates on flexible production complexes, industrial restructuring, or African famine that have had the greatest impact outside the confines of the discipline.

There is another way that geography matters: in the localism of our own work. I have already commented on the substance of the "locality debate" (see also Cox and Mair, this issue). Here I am concerned with the way we all make such fine statements about the role of space in social life, and ignore it so completely in our own. On reading the contributions to the recent dispute, one is immediately struck by the geographic specificity of it all, firmly rooted in the traditional separations between, and debates within, English and American social science. I am astonished by the expressions of rancor that greeted Harvey's parry on returning to England after many years teaching in the United States. In any case, the substance of his critique revolves around two classic themes in English Marxism: its parochialism and its empiricism. This is the same battle made famous by E.P. Thompson (1978) and Perry Anderson (1980). One cannot universalize from England to

the virtues and defects of all Marxism or even leftist geography, however.

In particular, Harvey, Allen Scott and Neil Smith – all expatriate Britons – believe empiricism to be the leading error of the contemporary British left in geography (Harvey, 1987; Harvey and Scott, 1989; Smith, 1987a). This is quite amusing to an American who is used to regarding his own country(wo)men as the chief purveyors of scientism in our time, and the English marxists from Hobsbawm to Hilton as masters of the grand historical sweep! But empiricism is not the real issue here at all. While it can be a pitfall of any poorly theorized research program, the principal differences between Harvey *et al* and their opponents are rooted in *theoretical* conflicts about what is significant in contemporary capitalism. Harvey stresses the dynamic flux of capital in space, and its fiercely disequilibrating force on societies and geographies (1982; see also Smith, 1984, 1986). Scott has refocused economic geography on the power of urban places as flexible production complexes (Scott, 1986, 1988a, 1988b). From their perspective (and mine, too), the critical weakness in Doreen Massey's and Andrew Sayer's recent work is not empiricism but undue reliance on relatively static and corporatist models of the spatial division of labor (cf. Massey, 1984; Morgan and Sayer, 1985; Storper and Walker, 1989).

Ideas must be situated in their place (and time) of origin to be properly appreciated. The manifest variety of the capitalist world allows of many angles on the nature of the system, and from different starting points there are many fruitful paths of inquiry. One may surmise, for example, that Phil Cooke's long involvement with the question of singular locales is closely tied to his Welsh heritage and political commitments (e.g., Cooke, 1982). Doreen Massey turned to industrial restructuring just as British manufacturing headed downward, grabbed onto spatial divisions of labor as the UK took a dramatic lurch toward the South, and focused on locale to make sense of the decline of Labour in the Dark Age of Thatcherism (Massey, 1978, 1984). The same applies on this side of the Atlantic. Marshall Berman's youthful bewilderment with the destruction of his beloved South Bronx led to his historical investigations into urban renewal and "modernity" under capitalism (Berman, 1982). A number of leftists have tried to come to grips with the decline of the US Northeast, in its various manifestations (Tabb, 1979; Bluestone and Harrison, 1982; Peet, 1987). Gordon Clark's work on the geography of labor has the deep imprint of his sojourn in the American Midwest (e.g., Clark, 1986, 1989). David Harvey (1973, 1985b) came to marxist explanations of urbanism in trying to puzzle out what he saw in

Baltimore's housing markets. One may have significant differences with these writers' explanations, but never without learning from their thoughtful efforts and weighing into the balance how their experience has pushed their thinking in specific directions.[8]

My own perspective has been dramatically shaped by the good fortune of being a Californian. This amazing state is now to be numbered among the mightiest industrial economies on earth, having just caught up with Great Britain in Gross Domestic Product, and serves as the core territory for the aerospace, microelectronics and entertainment industries, a *troika* of powers for good and ill like none other in today's world. While the rest of the world but dimly perceives California as a place of sea and sunshine, we continue to send them such gifts as Ronald Reagan, the personal computer and Star Wars. My geography helps account for the overriding emphasis I have given to the processes of economic growth and geographic expansion in modern industrialization (Storper and Walker, 1989). One sees a similar emphasis on capitalist dynamism in the work of Scott and Soja, from their base of operations in Los Angeles, which they call "the capital of the twentieth century" (Scott and Soja, 1986). Our strength in redirecting geographic inquiry at this time will also be our weakness for someone else "whose head's in a different place" (as we say in Californese). I can easily imagine being accused of being dazzled by technology, enamored of Los Angeles sprawl, and lost to the socialist tradition, owing to the hasty readings of rather foreign experiences by those sitting in the midst of the decay of Liverpool or Buffalo. Our problem will not appear to be theirs. For the same reason, I think Harvey and Smith have been somewhat uncharitable in their readings of the work of Massey and Cooke.

Sixth Thesis: The Intellectual is Political
or
The problem of commitment

If it is true, as the feminists say, that the personal is political – because our individual lives bespeak larger forces of sex and domination – then it is also true that our academic scribblings are caught up in the winds of a political world. Intellectuals are more the creatures of worldly conditions than their creators, little as we like to acknowledge that. Harvey is correct to argue that left thinking has been altered and even demoralized by the successes of Thatcherism and Reaganism. How could it not? One could remain resolute in the 1980s only so long in the face of disaster.

It has been a hard decade, and not least in the way Marxism, at the very moment of its triumphant return to intellectual life (and the universities) began to erode as the primary force in critical social theory. There are many reasons for this, which have been better analyzed by others (Anderson, 1987; Jacoby, 1987). The most important are the shifting political tides that produced despair with the left in France and Italy and vicious defeats in Britain and the United States; the absorption of left intellectuals in the smothering embrace of the Universities; disillusionment with socialism as practiced in a Breshnevian Soviet Union, post-Maoist China and elsewhere; and the appearance of new challenges to the established order from women, peace-activists or greens that did not draw their inspiration, by and large, from the socialist tradition. One could even add generation shifts to this list, as we are now the greybeards defending an orthodoxy against restless minds and insidious careerism. But the main reason has been the political disarray of the left in the face of a resurgent right and a wilting liberal and social democratic center. The result has been a crisis of confidence in marxist theory, in socialist politics, and even in unified explanation itself. One cannot dismiss a concern with this regrettable trend as mere Stalinist rectitude; it is not just old-fashioned piety to seek to reaffirm a vision of marxist explanation and socialist practice in the face of a splintered and wavering left.

Yet, here again, one must choose targets carefully to avoid useless sniping and infighting among those who still care about the left project. Harvey's rather sweeping accusation of loss of political will on the British left is uncalled for. It is striking how vigorous debate and activity has been in the UK during the 1980s. In scolding left geographers for losing their way in the desert of Toryism, Harvey appears to exaggerate the role of will in social change. He forgets the first political lesson of historical materialism: that agency must encounter opportunity provided by the development and contradictions of the social order. Cut off from successful political movements, hemmed round by an agile ruling class, it is difficult to see a way out. Thatcher and the City must stumble, or all the good intentions in the world won't make an iota of difference.

From this side of the Atlantic, things look a bit more promising. Reagan is on his last legs, in more ways than one. His closest associates are gone, many to jail. His Central America policy lies in a shambles, having succeeded not at all in wresting power from the Sandinistas or snuffing out the FMLN, let alone eliminating Castro. Gorbachev is now the most popular politician in the

world, and has outflanked Reagan to win a disarmament treaty. The stock market has crashed, and a long economic upswing has not reduced the trade or budget deficits substantially. Reagan has failed to reverse the long, slow decline of US economic and political hegemony in the world, proving once again that political will – even on the right – cannot alone reverse real limitations on imperial power owing to nuclear weaponry, the Soviet bloc, and the mobilization of people in the Third World for liberation and development (Wofsy, 1986). Thanks to Reagan's impasse, Nicaragua has survived for 9 long years as a small revolutionary beacon to the whole world (Burbach and Nunez, 1987; Massey, 1987). Domestically, Jesse Jackson is the most visible manifestation of an awakening of social conscience and popular movement from their long slumbers in an era of cramped humanism and craven politics. Jackson's movement threatens to bring the issues of race and class back into the center of political – and academic – discourse in America (Navarro, 1987).[9]

The flip side of politics' influence on intellectuals is the contribution of academics to political activism. It is impossible not to have mixed feelings about the academic left on this score. We must always grapple uneasily with our own political relevance and practical behavior. No doubt our shortcomings are many. One part of this is the "academic" nature of our calling. The way universities and professional careers suffocate left inclinations is quite real, as Russell Jacoby observes in his book, *The Last Intellectuals* (1987). The result is not only too few public voices, but too few truly committed left scholars, and even fewer activist professors. Academics are prone to equivocation, conflict avoidance, careerism and preoccupation with institutional and personal matters. After many years of campus organizing at Berkeley, I am still working with much the same modest cadre of the committed. Michael Dear (1987) says that we need a "new politics", but I would be quite happy with simply more of the old kind – people who will meet regularly, lick stamps, make calls and make events happen. I should add that this level of practical activism requires not so much a perfected model of capital logic or Leninist party-building, merely a "practically adequate" knowledge of class, sexism, racism and imperialism. That is, the best activists on, say, Central America, have a very solid feeling for the workings of U.S. imperialism that cuts through the disinformation of the government or the press, a willingness to learn more about the currently relevant political situation in Guatemala or El Salvador, and a moral commitment to social justice and social change. They are marxists and Socialists at heart, but not overly concerned with

orthodoxy or exclusion of anyone who shares their general outlook.

At the same time, the relation between practical activism and worthwhile scholarly analysis is surprisingly loose. Good left scholarship on Central America, for example, is indispensable to the overall anti-intervention movement (e.g., Fagan et al., 1986), because of the grounding it gives the larger group of active people. Good left scholarship also helps immensely in the work of teaching, by captivating good minds, showing them how to reflect critically, and explaining the shortcomings of the current social order. But there is an extended division of labor here, in which the finest scholarly insights often lie at a considerable distance from the action. The best activists are not by any means the best scholars on a given subject. Gordon Clark is right to complain about "paper-thin measures" of political commitment in this regard (Clark, in this issue).[10] Nonetheless, commitment in scholarly outlook is essential, and commitment to Marxism still proves efficacious. To take a suitably ambiguous example, Noam Chomsky is so very valuable to left politics in the United States because he is both brilliant and *virulently* opposed to imperialism and injustice; he is not satisfied to use his gifts only on the perplexing problems of linguistics, but applies them as well to more immediately vexing problems of human existence, such as torture. He does so, without fanfare, in a largely marxist fashion – though I vigorously dispute his tendencies to neglect class (e.g., Cagan et al., 1987) or to equate US and Soviet imperialism (cf. Wofsy, 1986; Harvey, 1985c; Navarro, 1987). Compared with Chomsky's commitment, weak pledges to merely "critical" or "emancipatory" social theory by left academics such as Gregory (1978), Saunders and Williams (1987) or Sayer (1984) cannot bear the weight of this world and its evils. What they euphemistically call "transformative practice" is liable to be a nasty business, as Nicaraguans, Cubans and Angolans have learned the hard way. It can help to have an organized working class, a mobilized peasantry, a political party, a state apparatus and guns in making such transformations. We academics are understandably uncomfortable with such means, but the historical record, alas, does not support the view that social progress and human liberation advance very much without them (cf. Halliday, 1988).

Seventh Thesis: The Personnel are Political
or
Are we not men? We are scholars!

It is hard for intellectuals, with their broad horizons, to be sufficiently attentive to the more restricted, but more immediate, stage of professional life. Here, "transformative practice" may be as humble as how one styles oneself as a social scientist, how one treats graduate students, or how one relates to women. As has become painfully clear in the last few years, the Leading Lights of left geography are largely white males. This bespeaks a pattern of injustice in our profession and society at large, and it is uncomfortable, to say the least, to realize that the long struggle for a left voice in the universities – as important as it is compared to the emptiness before – is not enough if it is only white and male (and, one might add, upper middle class). Christopherson (in this issue) rightly points out this festering sore on the "body academic." A major political task for those of us who have made it to professorial rank is to recruit, train, hire and pay close heed to women and people of color. And there is much left to do in securing real commitment to, let alone carrying out, this task.

The persistence of sexism, arrogance and racism in geography presents some awkward problems for the pursuit of knowledge. If "we" are men, then social science will have a male tint. No doubt, the practice of social science by white men is different from that which would be produced by an academy dominated by women of color, and there is no use in hiding behind the defense that "we are all scholars" reasoning together. It is not enough to uncover the injustices done by the different forms of oppression through "the geography of women" or "the geography of race", moreover. Given the failings of theory and practice in regard to race and gender, major transformations still must be made in the way we see the world, and ourselves.

This does not justify the claims of certain "post-marxists", however, that the new social movements have rendered the classic marxian concern with capital and class obsolete (Laclau and Mouffe, 1986). Feminist theory has not replaced Marxism, but rather transcended and transformed important parts of the left world view and social science, in the way that progress in knowledge always proceeds. As far as I can see, the method of the best feminist thinkers remains firmly historical materialist, though not always avowedly so. The works of feminists such as Gerda Lerner (1986), Sandra Harding (Harding and O'Barr, 1987) or Nancy Hartsock (1983; 1987), for instance, have not only broadened our knowledge of social history, but actually moved our grasp of sex, class and science to a higher ground. Theories of racism have not enjoyed the same explosive development as theories of gender in recent years, but there is nonetheless some excellent work being done in the historical materialist vein (e.g., Montejano, 1987).

This brings me to the claim, raised at the Phoenix meetings of the AAG, that Marxism has been at best irrelevant to – and at worst complicit in – the evils of racism and sexism. Such a charge cannot stand, whatever the shortcomings of marxist analysis and politics. One cannot brush off so lightly the real contributions of socialists to the fight against racism and sexism. The Communist Party USA was well ahead of its time on racial equality (Foner, 1978; Foster, 1952). Some of the most important contributors to the study of race in the United States have been white, male marxists, such as Phil Foner, Eugene Genovese, Herbert Aptheker and Herbert Gutman. Many of the Freedom Marchers in the 1950s and 60s were former communists or their offspring (not to mention Rosa Parks). And many leading feminist scholars, such as Nancy Hartsock, Barbara Epstein and Donna Harraway are explicitly socialist-feminists. Admittedly, many marxists have in the past argued that race and patriarchy are secondary "diversions" from the real business of overthrowing class oppression, and the male left in the 1960s was notable for its unreformed gender politics. But it can hardly be said that the male left of the 1980s is perniciously unfeminist or racist, whatever its continued failings on those scores. Finally, even if the left were no more virtuous than the society in which it dwells, that does not make it a significant cause of racism and sexism.

I must once again vigorously defend our hardscrabble bits of real learning against false accusations of corruption. Because there is an external world against which to judge the claims of human knowledge, it is possible to sift the wheat from the chaff in everyone's views. Different standpoints generate different viewpoints, each containing some truth and some falsehood. In this, gender, class or race position are no different than locale. We must, of course, criticize strenuously both the errors and the blindness engendered by the condition of being white, male or bourgeois. A claim can also be made that the eyes of women or of blacks see reality more clearly; the oppressed do, in certain ways, speak for the liberation of all humankind. But it is not true that science is inherently a masculine, oppressive enterprise, nor is it enough to deconstruct white man's geography. We must *reconstruct* knowledge and social relations on a higher plane by building on the

correct parts of past achievements while enlarging the whole foundation and letting in light from new directions.

Eighth Thesis: Resist Trendiness
or
The disruptions of intellectual fashion

Having taken the plunge into the sociology of the discipline, I wish to concentrate for a moment on the intellectual currents that periodically sweep us all up in their eddies. Several fashionable movements come quickly to mind: Giddens and structurationism, Hagerstrand and time-geography, Foucault and post-structuralism, Roemer and the rational-choice marxism, Kristeva and deconstruction, Bhasker and Realism, Habermas and communicative interactionism, Jameson and post-Modernism, Althusser and structuralism, Sabel and flexible production. The list could easily be extended. Intellectuals are creatures of fashion, and this, too, affects the fate of ideas. The ebb and flow of fashion is, at least, exhausting and, at worst, quite pernicious to progress in social science.

The reader may be offended by the inclusion of her favored discourse on the list. Obviously I do not mean to dismiss any of them in content or in consequence. Indeed, some of them I quite favor, as in the case of Realism and flexible production. This is not the place to make a sustained defense or critique of such an imposing array of social theory. I simply call attention to how quickly they come and go, and, to the costs this imposes on us all. One faces, in terms of sheer mass, a daunting prospect of ever mastering the slate of critical theories available, both for the young and impressionable and the old and resistent. It makes for an unending job of putting out intellectual brush-fires in and around the terrain already staked out.

Every wave of fashion has the force of good ideas and good intentions behind it. But there is more to the way people climb aboard each passing train of ideas than disinterested pursuit of scientific advance. Each wave opens up new horizons for young and agile minds looking for their own niche in a crowded occupation. Moreover, each one seems to offer answers to old quandries, and therein lies its promise. Each approach sheds at least some light from new angles on vital issues – especially in the supple hands of brilliant progenitors. But often they merely resuscitate old chestnuts, repeat old errors, or create new confusions into which everyone can read their own hopes and fears. Giddens

(1981), for example, could have saved us all a lot of trouble if, before repeating his lengthy attacks on "functionalism", he had simply read Cohen's (1978) succinct dismissal of such charges against Marxism. It is wise, therefore, not to fall in too quickly with every new enthusiasm that sweeps onto the academic shores.

Too often, new meta-theories cannot deliver on the expansive promises of their zealous advocates. For example, despite some wonderfully supple statements about social theory by those intrigued by time-geography and structuration theory, historical works undertaken in this vein appear to be only marginally different from old-fashioned historical materialism (e.g., Gregory, 1982; Pred, 1986). In a way, we expect too much of our intellectual heroes and heroic ideas, and keep hoping that the keys to knowledge will fall into our hands. It is no secret that Marxism has often been treated in this fashion. The quickness with which some people have embraced and then rejected Marxism illustrates the danger in the pursuit of revelation in place of hard work in social theory. The works of Foucault, Althusser or Bhaskar, similarly, do not hold the secrets to the universe, to which the uninitiated are blind. Better that we hold more steadily to our course of inquiry, and try to puzzle out the answers from investigation of reality, than to swerve from pillar to post in hope of revelation. Too often, the failure of revealed truth or the shortcomings of the new heroic idea leads to consternation among the young, and even disillusionment with the whole project of social science. Look at the disastrous turnabout of the Althusserians Hindness and Hirst or the retreat from an overconfident historical materialism by the estimable G. A. Cohen (compare 1978, 1983).

In the worst cases, the new theoretical fads are directly antithetical to Marxism, pernicious to critical thought, and inimical to good social science. DeMan has lately been unmasked as a Nazi collaborator, and this cannot be held coincidental to his intellectual project of undermining all certainty in the reading of texts.[11] Foucault, for all his brilliant insights, had a deeply anti-marxist agenda that undermined the specificity of class oppression by reference to a general notion of power, the possibility of liberation from the oppression of power through a specific project such as socialism, and the explanatory tools of historical materialism by an exaggerated deference to the autonomy of ideas. Foucault was not innocent when he sponsored the "Nouvelle Philosophes" in their march to the right in the 1970s. And, in the 1980s, while Lyotard and the post-modernists have been busy celebrating the fragmentation of contemporary life – and of the communist left in Europe – the neo-fascist Le Pen has pulled together an impressive

movement of the strictly modernist type. For the social sciences, the solvent of all these clever "discourses" has so corroded the hard outlines of reality that explanation and political action have themselves been put in jeopardy.

Ninth Thesis: Let Us All Hang Together
or
On being inside a collective project

The debate about Marxism in geography has swirled around the head of David Harvey (*Society and Space*, 1987) because Harvey epitomises "Marxist Geography" for many people. Because great thinkers are important, it is right to focus on them; but even the best minds cannot do it all by themselves. Hence the project of building and sustaining a left presence in geography – and more generally – is of necessity a collective one. It is important to acknowledge the collective nature of the left project, and to maintain considerable tolerance for the paths other left scholars travel.

One of the insoluble dialectics of social life is that of criticism and consensus in any collective project. The subtleties of this have suffered in the current debate. From one perspective left geography appears as a closed discourse around a marxist orthodoxy, badly in need of fresh voices from outside (Saunders and Williams, 1986). From the opposite perspective, the left is badly fragmented and adrift in the political winds, and much in need of new injections of marxist theory (Harvey, 1987). Both are lopsided representations.

Although the left in geography still revolves around a marxist core (Thrift, 1987), many divergences and disagreements are in evidence. Indeed, the sources of discord could be very much greater than they are, if we were all to vent our spleen about every failing of reason or politics on the part of our colleagues. In this glass house of academe, it is altogether too easy to see the shortcomings in one's associates. Let us reason together. Every group must be open to new ideas, internal criticism and debate. In a collective venture, one has to be tolerant or find oneself alone. Squaring off in angry debate can be quite detrimental to the conditions of intellectual labor and the broad aims of left politics (Sayer, 1987). Both Harvey and Saunders and Williams think that we've all been far too chummy, and need a bit of shaking to regain

our collective senses. Frankly, I thought the right had been jarring our sensibilities quite enough, thank you.

On the other hand, we must be intolerant of what are plainly wrongheaded ideas that lead away from the truth and back from progress already made in left social science and geography. I choose to end, therefore, where the Harvey debate began, its proximate cause being an editorial in *Society and Space* by Peter Saunders and Peter Williams (1986). It is remarkable that anyone took this bit of scribble seriously. Yet both Harvey and Sayer respond to Saunders and Williams in virtually the same breath as they respond to each other. This is nonsense. The Saunders-Williams diatribe against Marxism (always referred to by a code name, "The Orthodoxy") is a petty, scurrilous piece, which cannot be put on the same level as the differences between Harvey and Sayer. It lamely repeats every hackneyed attack on Marxism we have heard for years: that it cannot be empirically disconfirmed (p 393); never engages with work from other points of view (p 394); cannot deal with unique events (p 394); generates its own findings without regard to empirical research (p 394); has a unique pipeline to reality (p 395); has its theory of capital contravened by pension funds, corporations and public shareholding (p 396); ignores the state (p 396); fails to see that socialism is not the popular choice of workers (p 396); pays no attention to what people actually say or think (p 397); clings to an outdated category, class, and lumps everyone indiscriminately in two classes (p 397); treats gender and race as secondary factors and political caricatures (p 398); is blinded by political programmes (p 398). Harvey rightly draws the parallel with what was said of Owen Lattimore, but I can bring it closer to home: this sounds remarkably like the report by which the University of California rejected my tenure case twice round. So now, who's the orthodoxy, and what is the new conservatism?

To contest Saunders and Williams on every point would mean repeating everything Harvey, Massey, Sayer, Cooke *et al* have said over two decades. Suffice it to say that on the broadest philosophical grounds their Popperian position won't hold (cf. Popper, 1964). That is, calls for open competition among theories (1987: 427) do not resolve anything; the invisible hand fails in the marketplace of ideas, too. Theories are judged by reference to reality not just to each other. For this reason, I am also suspicious of Michael Dear's liberality in maintaining that the journal *Society and Space* must "keep its pages open to all theoretical persuasions" (1987: 365). He cannot possibly mean this, except as a polite bow to civility: are Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Nathan Podheretz to be

invited in on a regular basis? Indeed, that the Saunders and Williams piece was put forth by Michael Dear as a responsible editorial in a "left" journal is *not* tolerable, in my view.

Some twenty years ago many of us in geography began a long climb out of the shadows of ignorance and ideology that obscure capitalist social reality. Through hard work and reflection on the horrors before us on the streets of the ghettoes or the Brazilian countryside, we came to grasp the force of class power, of capital accumulation, or of military repression. While these do not exhaust the causes of evil, and we must continue to learn and expand our understanding of the world and how it must be changed, historical geographical materialism remains an irreplaceable tool for social scientific insight and political direction. I'll be damned if I will give up our hard-won knowledge about class, capital, patriarchy or other core social relations in favor of philosophical and analytic dead-ends such as methodological individualism, neo-classical economics, post-modernist discourse or political pluralism.

Yes, there is much we do not know and that Marxism does not answer. But without building on what we *do* know and with the tools we have painfully made ours, however imperfect, we are condemned to repeat the whole bloody business all over again. Because knowledge is so hard to come by, it must be defended all the more vigorously against fallacious attacks. In the end, therefore, I still come down hard on the side of Marxism. We need to have a collective purpose and not just drift along in anarchy; we must resist every trendy idea that appears in view; we must not abandon hard-won insights into how society works in the face of difficulties; we must not be unduly limited in vision by local concerns; and we must have a political vision against capitalism and for socialism – which has come to have a more vital meaning as more of society is included in the vision. I therefore regard as all to the good the very spectre that haunts Saunders and Williams: that there has been a largely unspoken marxian "orthodoxy" in urban and regional studies. May it last for many more years, so that we can continue making progress.

I have a cartoon pinned on my door that shows a scowling lecturer being introduced to a crowded hall, with the words, "Professor Farrow, this afternoon's speaker, is steady and reliable and unswayed by trendy thinking". It is painfully close to the truth that such adherence to a consistent path might make one a mirthless curiosity. "Orthodoxy" is equivalent to sin in the liberal faith, and with much of the left in the wake of Stalinism. Yet Marxism is worth defending against glib dismissals by those who

little understand its depth of analytic power or powerful link it forges between knowledge and change.

Notes

1. The same fate befell Hegel. This gives the lie to the notion, repeated by Storper (1987), that the 18th century "Enlightenment" was the embodiment of reason, and that progress in philosophy consists in giving up the notion of making too much sense of history! Like relativism, this is a position which contradicts the urgency with which it is made. In fact, the Enlightenment period yielded many important insights on which further knowledge has built. It is not true that we are captive to the delusions of the Enlightenment's Faith in Reason, however, since the reasoning of faith was rather greater then than now, all in all.
2. What is one to make of such wild accusations as "(Marx) could not abandon teleology, since it is an inherent correlate of dialectics" (Storper, 1987: 422)? Such phrases recall the vituperative moments of Karl Popper (1964), although Storper appears to have been most deeply influenced by the characterizations of Marxism in Martin Jay (1984) and Lyotard (1984).
3. This is not to say that agency does not also alter structure, but if it did so continuously, there would be nothing systematic in social history, i.e., we have historicism. Rather, as Neil Smith (1987b) indicates, "The crucial question is what kind of agency can alter what kind of structures." Marxist theory is predicated on the possibility and hope for just such agency.
4. Those post-structuralists of a literary bent who stress language and meaning are the first to point the finger of "reductionism" at marxist attempts at social explanation; yet they can be equally accused of reductionism for their resistance to admitting the causal force of technology (for example) in human affairs.
5. Whether we are right or wrong is a different question. But it is possible to agree with Harvey and Scott's stand against the idea that the unity of capitalism is currently dissolving without agreeing that this means that the issue of the local is not "potent" (Harvey and Scott, 1989: 10).
6. I say this even though I share Harvey's belief in the massive impact of capital and class on everyday life and even though I do not think he should be held personally responsible for explaining everything. Nonetheless, our differences do not turn simply on the need to fill in the big picture, but on the processes by which capitalism operates.
7. Though he does not make clear just who has made such a claim.
8. My suppositions about the personal sources of research agendas are meant to be no more than educated guesses, and may be way off the mark; nonetheless, the point holds as to the role of personal biographies in the intellectual formation of every one of us (cf. Pred, 1986).
9. This was written before the disastrous Dukakis campaign, which has left us in line for a long period of neo-Reaganism.
10. Which ought to apply to Redfern's (1987) admonition to David Harvey to go to work at his local Labour Party office.
11. Some will take umbrage at this raw attribution of intent to DeMan's literary theory, but I think it is worth the risk in order to keep the issue alive.

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