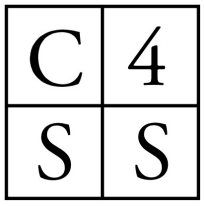
ALTHOUGH ENGELS RECOGNIZES THAT THE STATES OF HIS ERA ARE ENTANGLED WITH THE INTERESTS OF THE CAPITALISTS, HIS ASSUMPTION THAT THE STATE WILL CHANGE IN CHARACTER (SO AS TO NOT EVEN BE CLASSIFIED AS A 'STATE') UPON A CHANGE OF ITS WIELDERS AND CLASS INTERESTS IS THE ABSOLUTE HEIGHT OF LIBERAL NAIVETY.



ANTI-ENGELS BOOK REVIEW

"ANTI-DUHRING" BY FRIEDRICH ENGELS

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM GILLIS

characterizes liberalism is its naive theory of the state as neutral democratic site and managerial apparatus.

Although Engels recognizes that the states of his era are entangled with the interests of the capitalists, his assumption that the state will change in character (so as to not even be classified as a 'state') upon a change of its wielders and class interests is the absolute height of liberal naivety. Thus in the most important sense of the term, Engels is *just a liberal*.

Anarchists have long grouped state socialists and liberals together as essentially the same thing. When someone is ripping your mask off in front of the cops it matters very little what pins they wear and what books line their shelves. This is part of the reason that the Bernie revolution so smoothly took millions of people from a liberal progressivism to bible-thumping stale Marxist texts; the gap is actually not that wide, the conceptual reformulation not that deep.

The real work is to examine power at every scale, in every flavor and guise. Historical materialism studiously avoids this, as Engels is forced to make apparent in *Anti-Duhring*.

But again, totally just hitting that dopey cad Engels here. I've critiqued not one holy word of Marx here and so *who can really say* how much this critique applies to him. Your fave is secure. Perhaps even *strengthened* by this pruning of a hanger-on. What we do know is that after the messiah's death, Engels burned many of his letters from Marx. No doubt because the Messiah agreed with me (but a lowly scribe uncovering and preserving his eternal genius) entirely and Engels just couldn't live with the shame.

Recent years have seen a resurrection of a Great Man Of History Marxist scholasticism that fixates on some (easily accessible) Original Core Texts of supposed genius and discards all the complicated stuff afterwards, certainly everything in recent decades. This impulse is the product of a mass flocking to radical leftism wherein new recruits have little interest in assimilating to existing discourses. A "return to the masters" thus serves as a run-around of various gatekeepers and a shrinking of required reading lists. It also enables people to use online historical archives on their own, without much social immersion. Onboarding to the tacit knowledge, prefigurative experience, and diffuse zine-based discourses of anarchism has always been a many-years long process. The onboarding process to academic Marxism — while more hierarchically structured — is likewise similarly involved. Thus building up the immortal relevance of *early* historical figures is the only option for those seeking to quickly establish themselves and bypass the living, to say nothing of the last century. If Marxism was always prone to an embarrassing cult of personality and exegesis, this has been supercharged.

I care little about the internal problems of Marxists, but it has put anarchists in a weird spot. While there are similarly dusty texts like *Statism And Anarchy* we might turn to in response, and countless texts primarily responding to the Bolshiviks, few modern anarchists have written direct textual responses to Marx and Engels. Anarchist criticism of *Marxism* over the course of the two camps' long conflict is a vast galaxy, but even narrowly focused examples like Alan Carter's book *On Marx* inevitably contend with the wider diaspora and churn of "Marxism," much of which is *irrelevant* to those deliberately discounting anything

that their living elders might be into. Similarly, even well-worn fights about the LTV and the particulars of Marx's surplus value analysis rarely seem to interest this new crop. Critiques by Graeber as well as Bichler & Nitzan, reformulations by Carson, even the critiques of analytic Marxists like Roemer are dead on arrival. Instead we're left with a dogged bible-thumping that demands we respond line-by-line to texts that have been outdated for a century and a half.

The trap has two parts: the first is that the canon of Marx and Engels (less so Lenin, et al) is vast, and so any directly textual debate dissolves into a fruitless back and forth of bible references and tortured interpretations. The second is that Marx has somehow been transmuted into the original godhead and definer of leftism, communism, socialism, etc. To object to Marx, without at least the appropriate paragraphs of genuflection and in-group signaling, is thus to object to The Good Thing. Never you mind how wildly ahistorical this is, Marx's self-branding has stuck. He's become a totemic figure for class struggle, equality, liberation, etc. Anything that's not Marx is, *by definition*, liberal. While anarchists happily discard Proudhon and Bakunin as deeply compromised and limited figures of their time, *Marx*ists can do no such thing for Marx. And so any direct critique of Marx invariably stirs legions of defenders to overwhelm by sheer volume of responses — even if those responses contradict one another. Suffice to say that standard anarchist takes like *'it would've been great if Marx had been assassinated'* are certainly non-starters.

How can we reach these people? How can we even begin to enliven or enrich such a broken conversation, how can we catch these people up to the last century and a half? It's on us to find a crack in this armor. A way to address these core texts directly and in more or less their same language and style while avoiding as much of the blowback from the wider Marxist universe as possible.

Marxist entryists ruthlessly scheming and seizing what power accidentally exists are a staple around the margins of activist spaces, they need no pointers, and the messiah and Engels' own behavior in the IWA shows they haven't fallen far from the tree.

Those taught to dismiss ethical questions of values and strategies in favor of clunky accounts of causality in society inevitably teach themselves the same things they desperately avoid putting in explicit words. Since the only *true* causal force comes from material conditions, there can be no interrelation of ends and means; lying, obscuring, and ruthlessly socially positioning is thus written off as entirely neutral, simultaneously *necessary* in day-to-day scheming, and also irrelevant to the formalized doctrine of The Immortal Science.

While I wrote this in hopes of providing a one-stop collection of correctives that many recently-converted Marxists repeatedly express ignorance and bewilderment of, they are certainly, to many, blindingly obvious. And this is the source of many a sneer, that anarchists — with our attention to the genesis and mutation of moral values, the dynamics of interpersonal and political power, and concern with the centralization not just of political power but technological infrastructure — are not saying anything new or novel. Indeed what we're saying is often just the common sense of oppressed people resisting, plus a little radical consistency and long-term extrapolation. "There is no poison as deadly as power." Never mind that this has set us against the entire existing order, in a fractal opposition that leaves nothing unexamined (from factory farms to bedtimes). In much of the Marxist tradition, like old elite lodges of esoteric knowledge closed to the wider world, nothing could so repulsively mark someone as part of the wider status quo, so basically liberal.

And sure, from a perspective that sees the state as a mere secondary perturbation or epiphenomena of the economic, any critique of that perspective is necessarily "liberal," but, from the anarchist perspective that puts social power first, what primarily

merely an immanent critique and minor combative reformulation from within the classical liberal political economy discourse he is fascinated with, nor is an account of how material infrastructure and economic norms influence social patterns to be brokered as merely a matter of degree of emphasis. No, to completely demolish Duhring it must become a totalizing grand picture of all world history. A quick bit of rhetorical flare in the Manifesto must be defended to the point of establishing universal laws that turn all of history upside down.

Anti-Duhring is primarily remembered for Engels' passage on the proletarian capture of the state, but what I've tried to draw out here is how so many other topics he covers all serve to build blinkers around that passage. All of (European) history must be rewritten to reduce the question of political power to ultimately nothing more than something entirely determined by the economic. Issues of complexity, distribution, calculation, knowledge, etc., must be dismissed to both keep this historical revision afloat and, inevitably, to duck the managerial questions of the post-rev 'not-state.' With this must go all broader analysis of power, even though a sincere analysis here might've generated an actually useful response to Duhring's focus on force. And so too must questions of moral values, motivations, and strategies be handwaved away, so that no actually radical, actually bottom-up analysis can be made of incentives and actions with regard to state (and managerial) power.

It's beyond the scope of this text to lay out in exhausting detail the complex and varying strategies by which people seize power within political (and 'community') institutions, hopefully the quick sketches above should be sufficient to prove the point about the relevancy of politics and the paucity of handwaving appeals to the term "democracy." Some may object by way of an overly-narrow focus on solving the illustrative examples given, but I am disinterested in writing out a modern variant of *The Prince* for democratic assemblies and managerial committees. Disingenuous

Thankfully it's generally acknowledged in at least genteel Marxist circles that Engels was an incompetent fool, Marx's blundering himbo sugar daddy, who served as the source of rank-this and vulgar-that, the Paul who corrupted and derailed the immaculate messiah's word from inception.

In this way Engels has operated on occasion as a kind of pressure valve in the longstanding war of anarchists and Marxists. The enlightened erudite Marxist who wishes to pretend that the projects and traditions of Marxism and anarchism aren't fundamentally at odds, gently takes the young anarchist at the union meeting by the arm and whispers "*have you had a look at that fellow over there? he's been talking shit about your mom*," in hopes that a good thrashing of *On Authority* can direct attention away from Marx the snitch-jacketing racist wannabe-tyrant whose studiously-point-missing critiques of Proudhon and Bakunin are hard not to laugh at. No, Engels is a safe scapegoat. It's not called "Engels-ism" after all, the whole affair doesn't hang on *his* reputation. Why he's basically a Kautsky! Just a groupie! Heck, I heard Marx was never into Morgan, never even met Dialectical Materialism! All was just that dastardly dopey Engels!

But they say never to deny your enemy a line of retreat. Direct critiques of Marx are an existential threat to "Marxists." And so, by democracy of noise and chaff, any critique of the Messiah is doomed to be drowned out in endless bloviating essays and snarky dismissive drive-bys — when it does not mobilize studiously silent blacklisting. Moreover there's a veritable galaxy of "Marxist" content taking every possible stance on Marx in preparation for any kicks — to make available respectable retreats and tut-tutting that you didn't address their particulars. By transmutation Marx becomes the entirety of Marxist discourse, or whatever corner of it is needed, from analytic marxist to materialist ecofeminist to Deleuzian to value theorist. And of course the discourse can be transmuted back to the Godhead, again as needed.

The Marxist trying to redirect the anarchist to kick Engels actually opens the door to a more effective way to have a go at Marx. Comparably few will tell you that Engels "doesn't really mean X." Engels, the crude popularizer, the hype-man, the scientifically illiterate builder of grand teleologies, can only be expected to put his foot in his mouth, to say directly or explicitly what Marx was too deft to say without deniability or too lost in the clouds from the practical space of ideas to even consider.

Engels' *On Authority* is the classic text anarchists dunk on, but it's something of a rorschach test because for example red anarchists have a tendency to focus in on how some particular form of democracy or another isn't authoritarian or at all like a state (usually patent nonsense) and green anarchists have a tendency to reject the foundations of the examples Engels poses by throwing out technology (so much for freedom as options). The more consistent anarchist approach is to recognize that technology can provide us with more options, or that is to say more physical freedom, but the forms of technological production can and must be decentralized beyond the need for any sort of collective command; proper technological development leading to more artisanal production with more individualized fluid relations and away from clumsy factory mass production.

But this focus on the limited managerial examples in *On Authority* tends to bypass often more salient issues between anarchists and Marxists over what *the state* is and what *power* is more generally.

In many ways I think *Anti-Duhring* is a more relevant text for anarchist criticisms because Duhring himself, while certainly no anarchist, centers on questions of ethics and *force*. Anarchism, as countless observers have noted, is a discourse on ethics and the micro roots of power, whereas Marxism is a discourse on politics that starts in terms of sweeping macro structures or forces. And the anarchist critique of the state is not the tepid Marxist objection that it's presently a tool of the capitalists, but rather the

WHY ALL THIS MATTERS

When it comes to power dynamics in general, we must, as Engels writes of the productive forces, "*grasp their action, their direction, their effects*." This is certainly not a *novel* task and so it may be understandably uninteresting to a middle class PhD seeking to establish a personal brand in a revolutionary movement. But it is nevertheless a task countless throughout history have focused on, and one that anarchists, since the advent of our modern movement with Proudhon's declaration, have singled in on.

By the time tanks had rolled through the workers of Hungary, most of the messiah's followers outside the gulag regimes grudgingly admitted the problem of the state, but they were loathe to acknowledge the grubby anarchists had gotten anything right, much less by anything other than dumb luck.

As their ideological legacy spawned corrective epicycles upon epicycles this no doubt provided a lot of ink for academics who found the sweeping aggregate social abstractions, conceptual demarcations, and general pretensions of Marxism useful in cranking out papers, but what is useful for activists seeking to radically change the world is not necessarily what is interesting or "novel." The truth is often plain and pedestrian.

The core sin analyzed in all of the above sections on *Anti-Duhring* is a drive to establish The Prophet as providing a uniquely novel account of the world that went dramatically beyond the anarchists, Ricardian socialists, and popular layman analyses of exploitation by the factory bosses.

To defend his bud's crown — and as a consequence his own stature in the socialist movement — Engels embraces rhetorical bombast that cannot frame Marx as merely extending existing discourse by degree, but must instead frame the situation as a complete and total break, a conceptual revolution on par with that of Darwin or Copernicus. Marx is therefore not performing

aggressively hostile to anyone who actually does.

far more fundamental critique that an institution of centralized violence creates perverse incentives to intensify both the centralization and the violence.

Naive revolutionary or insurrectionary anarchists are often quickly pressed into a bind by Marxists who want to collapse all possible forms of revolutionary violence into *the same thing* and suggest that anarchist critiques of the state in terms of its force must corner us into an irrelevant pacifism. Similar pressures are applied where causal influence and domination are conflated. Lost in this is the content of non-strawmanned anarchist moral critiques and our bottom-up analysis of *power*.

Thus *Anti-Duhring*, with its sneering dismissals of concern with morality and force, provides probably the best opportunity to narrowbeam in on some core differences of analysis between anarchism and... that dismissible dirtbeat hack Engels, *definitely not Marxism as a broader tradition*.

To begin teasing out these differences I want to single out the claim, stated most directly in *Anti-Duhring*, that the establishment of capitalism wasn't rooted in force or political power, but was inherent in property and exchange. This is *the* recurring tension Engels had with anarchists:

> *"While the great mass of the Social-Democratic workers hold our view that state power is nothing more than the organization which the ruling classes-landowners and capitalists-have provided for themselves in order to protect their social privileges, Bakunin maintains that it is the state which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital only by the grace of the state. As, therefore, the state is the chief evil, it is above all the state which must be done away with and then capitalism will go to blazes of itself. We, on the contrary, say: Do away with capital, the concentration of all means of production in the hands of the few, and the*

> *state will fall of itself."* [Letter, Engels to Cuno, January 24th, 1872]

And anarchists have been more than happy to meet these terms. As Carson succinctly responded to Engels',

> *"They say 'abolish the state and capital will go to the devil.' We propose the reverse."*
>
> *Exactly.*

At obvious stake is the question of whether it's even dreamable to have widespread markets (networks of exchange of titles to the usage of things) without capitalism (massive concentrations of wealth and economic control giving a small class of owners huge leverage against a dispossessed class of wage laborers with no alternatives, all framed by a host of very skewed norms around property, exchange, etc). But, beyond mutualist interests, what's also at stake is the so called vulgar Marxist focus on material economics as a base prior to the political and cultural, to say nothing of the ethical. And more broadly it will allow us to cut to questions of power, coercion, and the "authority" that Engels so infamously shits himself over.

None of these processes can be stopped by "making a law against them" or writing some constitutional document. Pieces of paper don't magically stop the cops from realizing they hold all the guns and can just threaten to murder the mayor's family. Even if you can get wings of government to fight one another, they're rarely balanced forever and there are so few competing wings of the state that collusion or centralization is the inevitable direction. Moreover, no law can ever be structured with the particularity necessary to handle the complexities of actual social life. Every law, by nature, generalizes in ways that regularly inflict pain. And, of course, every law needs an escalatory mechanism for those that entirely disregard it and its enforcers.

The state is, in short, a runaway collective action problem. Centralized institutions of violence impose clumsy edicts — whether through democratic, technocratic, or dictatorial means, it does not matter — which drives out problem solving via building consensus or finding ways to diversify.

The state interrelates with the economic, but is not reducible to it. Nor would abolishing class conflict remove the opportunity and incentive for domination via the state, even if it's renamed as some mere managerial assembly.

There *are* ways to impede, erode, exploit, and sometimes collapse states, but these methods of resistance are obviously quite hard. It takes an extraordinary amount of energy to stop a state once it's been started. In the longest-term perspective for all humanity, it's worth investing in stopping the state and setting up robust social antibodies (normalized individual strategies, etc.) against its reemergence. But the barrier to accomplishing this is high. The thing about incentive traps is it can be quite costly to eventually get out of them.

So it matters quite a lot when someone is trying to seize influence in revolutionary circles, but hasn't got the slightest fucking analysis on the table of how to avoid catastrophe, and is also

fungible. To accomplish *any* ends, one must first go through the matrix of the state. And so it increasingly makes sense for individuals to drift into elevating the occasional instrumental goal of capturing state power to a universal instrumental *or even root* goal. People have limited cognitive capacity so they prioritize effective strategies in their context, which, in the context of a (state) society where social power can get you anything, means power.

This doesn't just incentivize prioritizing the fervent pursuit of political power, it incentivizes individuals to preserve (and expand) the state's capacity. Why put away or whittle down an army or police force when you might need them in a few years? Why tolerate this check on state power when another person in power later might have a similar opportunity to remove it?

Beyond the ratchet of inexorably growing state power, other asymmetries build up in state policy around how hard it is to skew the state in one direction versus another as a consequence of *external* asymmetries. So, for example, those with more concentrated power, wealth, popularity, information-flow-capture, or whatever, can mobilize more resources than more diffuse actors, and so they win political contests for the state's power. The state thus reproduces general accumulative tendencies beyond the state, deepening inequalities in not just wealth (if any sort of property titles exist) but also in myriad other things like popularity.

Because the state can impose a sweeping universal conclusion, it allows for the outright suppression of competition in ways otherwise not possible. In capitalism, this looks like e.g. conglomerates shutting out small firms or capital winning in its competition with labor. Under state communism, it looks like those with the right *connections* shutting out those outside their patronage networks. For example, captured state power allows one to shut out scientists not part of the social capital network, weakening necessary competition and diversity in science.

THE NECESSARY ORIGINS OF CAPITALISM IN FORCE

Speaking of the shift to capitalism and the emerging supremacy of the bourgeoisie in *Anti-Duhring*, Engels writes,

> *"The whole process can be explained by purely economic causes; at no point whatever are robbery, force, the state or political interference of any kind necessary."*

Much can hang on how contorted a notion of 'explanation' one wants to go with. One motte-and-bailey retreat to inanity is to chicken-and-egg the interplay of force and politics with "economic causes" so that in every step in the infinitely regressing chain you gloss over the particulars introduced by that iteration of force and emphasize the presence of any remotely economic prompt or context.

But Duhring's core thrust is that capitalism could only come into existence via political force. And there's no question that actually existing capitalism involved loads of it — you don't have to take an anarchist's word for it — Marx and many Marxists recognized that the shift to capitalism involved the application of immense institutional violence and pointed out examples of it. The enclosures, dispossessions, enslavement, and all other measures for the creation of a destitute and desperate class of wage laborers worldwide were systematically backed by violence. A huge chunk of the end of Capital: Volume 1 is just surveying this, including a very amusing footnote in turn quoting Molinari whining about stray examples of a free market *eroding* capitalist wealth, as in cases in America when slaves are freed *without* the state introducing new forms of violence to bring workers to heel:

> "*Simple workers have been seen to exploit in their turn the industrial entrepreneurs, demanding from them wages which bear absolutely no relation to the legitimate*

share in the product which they ought to receive. The planters were unable to obtain for their sugar for a sufficient price to cover the increase in wages, and were obliged to furnish the extra amount, at first out of their profits, and then out of their very capital. A considerable amount of planters have been ruined as a result, while others have closed down their businesses in order to avoid the ruin which threatened them"

Another sweeping account of capitalism's blood-soaked foundations from a Marxist (albeit more anarchist-friendly) perspective is *The London Hanged* which goes into far greater detail on the violence necessary and consciously applied to create a class willing to work for peanuts on infrastructure they didn't own or have any say in.

To frame all this massive and systemic violence as an *unnecessary epiphenomenon* is to create a truly blinkered account with dangling epicycles.

But Engels is forced into implying that the systemic violent upheavals that by all reasonable accounts launched capitalism were themselves unnecessary light shows, and that there would have been a transition to the economic norms of capitalism *without such*.

In the most direct version of this, we are required to consider a counterfactual timeline in which the catalyzing market activity in the free cities or burghs of medieval Europe never got its massive helping hand from the state, but still *inevitably* developed capitalism through some kind of inevitable logic baked into the pre-capitalist commodity form, or more particularly a slow accumulation of capital through imbalanced trade and other feedbacking dynamics by which the rich got richer before anyone was getting a wage at a factory. This possibility is not without *some* remote plausibility, but there are strong reasons not to think it a foregone conclusion.

any goal. Not only does this reinforce the state's monopoly on means of doing *anything*, but said increasing monopoly also warps individuals' *perceptions* of what's possible. Sunk-costs of specialization encourage continuing to fight over the state rather than choose different means.

States can accomplish some goals fast (particularly if the goal is simplistic economy of scale like "produce a billion nails", and all the more so if years of state violence have subsidized structures of capital that are similarly centralized). But states are at the same time incredibly inefficient at integrating complex distributed information like diverse subjective individual desires and their local particulars. And, beyond *taking in* information, the state is a complete clusterfuck applying responses to particularized contexts. The centralization of the state simply doesn't have the bandwidth to solve complex problems in complex ways. As information needs to go towards the center (whether a supreme leader or the agenda board of a general assembly) it needs to be collected, compressed, and parsed. This is notoriously hard and inherently lossy.

All this skews *what* the state can accomplish, but it also skews the imaginary of those preoccupied with the state as a means. Those who specialize/focus on state-capture and state-direction begin to think entirely in terms of *only* the goals the state can obtain. First the state replaces other means regarding a set of problems it can actually solve, then, with other means weakened and marginalized, it becomes a more immediately useful tool *by comparison* for an even wider set of things — even if less efficient than said other means used to be. Finally, as the state becomes more and more of a monopoly on means to any given ends, the other social means become not only not readily available, but increasingly inconceivable, so people don't even think to create alternatives when still more efficient.

The state allows social or political power to function as a widely fungible currency — and increasingly perceived as *universally*

boutique definition of "state" basically conjured on the spot.

It's a similar kind of twist of language as that he pulls in *On Authority*, "*Authority, in the sense in which the word is used here, means: the imposition of the will of another upon ours*" which might seem reasonable for a second before you realize he's working to reduce questions of domination to questions of causality. And thus to bypass the question of overall choice as well as conflate the act of resisting and disrupting systems of constraint of one's agency with *any* influence upon the wider world, including tyrannical net-constraint of others. Since everything is causally bound to everything else, Engels can thus call, for example, being gay in public an authoritarian imposition on others. Lost is whether one has choices, how many, of what depth, and what they are. To say nothing of aggression and self-defense.

Someone persuading some friends and broader community to contribute in certain ways to a project through conversations might well be "imposing their will" in a causal sense, but it's worlds apart from having no other option but bringing a proposal on the project to be voted up or down by a crowd at the homeowner's association meeting. And if you give that homeowner's association all the guns?

Because the state is not merely any social structure or association, nor is it even equivalent to the centralized organization form Engels seems to take as default and inescapable in *On Authority*. The state is a social institution of centralized *violence*. Whether a gang, chiefdom, private security firm, or westphalian nationstate, states severely warp the landscape of options and reduce net possibility and agency.

Once a state exists it's easier to accomplish some goals via simply winning control over the state and its capacity to sweepingly impose violence — which means that all other approaches to problem-solving wither. This compounds until there's no resiliently diverse solutions OR bottom-up consensus reaching for

Very briefly: Markets have been around for thousands of years in both stateless and statist societies (from unregulated town markets to stateless civilizations at the scale of the Harappans), and to varying degrees of integration with or separation from formations of political violence. Often markets are sites of resistance to political violence, providing sites of complex illegible cooperation that bypass the state's capacity to surveil and control. Communities and individuals can retreat to the market to resist taxation, to secure options and means of survival and flourishing that are otherwise outlawed, or to develop lines of connection, trust, and flight beyond parochial communities. Stateless markets deal with certain unique risks and thus tend towards more profit sharing and complex measures to build trust. This is not to say that examples of force didn't occur endogenously in some markets, or that there weren't some dynamics of wealth concentration that didn't bootstrap off of the consequences of systems of force. But when the effects of violence weren't skewing the scales, and particularly when robust decentralized societal or cultural antibodies suppressed violence, there was never wealth concentration anywhere near that of capitalism from mere commodity trade itself.

This empirical relationship isn't magic. There are several specific dynamics that severely constrained the positive feedback of wealth as well as eroded it. Firstly, most historical market transactions weren't anonymous, and as a result the woman with a stall in the town square knew if money meant less to you because you had more of it and would charge the rich more dearly. Secondly, there were many severe diseconomies of scale that saw diminishing returns or even negative returns past a point of investment, wealth, reach, marketshare, etc., from internal-transaction, maintenance, management costs, etc. Thirdly, insofar as robust competition could emerge and thus lead to price-taking, profit margins would shrink to near zero. Fourthly, without force to impose market and property norms, and to assign 'objective' title or value to things like the theft of thousands from a rich man as

more of a crime than theft of a penny from a pauper, norms of trade of title can only emerge and stabilize as mutually-beneficial detentes. A community that recognizes titles whose broad terms everyone has a stake in can, in contrast, just refuse to recognize the title claims of a monopolist whose claims are cancerous. This is a more fluid dynamic to ownership and titles that Engels never even considers, assuming that property titles emerge fixed and universal. These various wealth-eroding dynamics permit some perturbations from complete "equality" of distribution for the sake of incentives, but (unless externally perturbed or severely overwhelmed by systemic violence) can stabilize in orbit around an equilibrium point of rough equality.

Now it *is* the case that, over a thousand years of feudal Europe, traders and the market-using folk of the free cities built up wealth contra other classes. But the initial seeds of the burghers' victory over the gentry and aristocracy was, insofar as it was market-based, a matter of efficiency benefits plus a relatively quickly mobilizing complexity that exceeded the capacity of more conventional powers to parse and contain. Engels, hater of anything unruly or lumpen, snottily describes them as originating in "*all manner of serfs and villains*" and it's certainly true that early traders and merchants were often a grubby sort of hustler. Those that could escape from fixed feudal relations and into the limited market space could exploit serious efficiency gains because markets provide computational, informational, and connectivity benefits. Pre-capitalist markets saw *overall* profits not off of "unequal" exchange (such would average out to zero net profit in the overall market sector), but off more efficiently *routing* goods between varying distributed agents with complex desires and benefiting from the arbitrage opportunities, the positive sum aspect of the market. Engels largely ignored the question of routing, but you can see routing itself as a form of labor if you're particularly welded to the LTV. It's this *overall* wealth generation in the burghers that is a far better explanation of the rising status and capacity of their class. And it was the myriad violent

Note that we don't have to hypothesize the construction of a *specific* bureaucratic class for this worker's state (or "socialized" managerial institution) to go nasty. Domination frequently exists outside class patterns, often quite sharply. The mere existence of a centralized bottleneck in social relations and information communication provides opportunities for power. It doesn't matter if the managerial function is overseen by universally inclusive direct democracy, there are still numerous exploitable dynamics; from who is involved in formulating the propositions put to vote, to who has what level of participation in committees or the like. And of course majoritarianism itself is a form of domination; if one is to postulate "checks and balances" within this institution to protect society from, for example, deciding to ritualistically murder the least popular person every week (or just sharply skew production away from their needs), one is obligated to lay out a *political theory* of how checks and balances can prevent abuse, corruption, the runaway accumulation of power, etc. Particularly in light of there being absolutely zero cases of such schemes ever working in the long run with any existing state.

This all is to say almost nothing about the inability for an individual's one vote to reflect the degree of their personal stake in an issue, or the degrees of inefficiency introduced to getting things done by having them talked out and politically decided. The neighborhood assembly met today to evict you for having painted your house a color a majority finds garish and afterwards the vote on grain transfers was held up with procedural maneuvering by Karen who is keeping everyone hostile until she gets even more things her way.

In all this I've been charitably reading Engels' description of the socialized state, but of course, by "the administration of things and by the conduct of processes of production" it's important to note that Engels has not avowed an institution of centralized violence. He has merely asserted that in a classless society the state would not be "repressive" and thus not technically meet a

and no one can even imagine seeking the advantage. This would be a bit awkward of a causal flow after emphasizing the ways that material desires and conditions determine social structures. But hey, slap some invocations of "dialectics" on that and then never consider the causal messiness of an arbitrarily proclaimed transition period whereby social dynamics, for the first time ever in Engels' picture, start substantively overwriting the previously dominant material drives of individual agents.

Or maybe what makes the proletarian revolution and onset of communism unique is that it conquers material needs, and with one's *material* needs met can a transformation of individual perspectives, values, etc. finally take place. And yet this depends upon a cleaving of "needs" and "wants" that is inescapably arbitrary, or at least social rather than raw material or biological fact. Do you *need* to live to see old age? What age specifically? Do you *need* food more complex than nutrition paste? How about fruits laboriously grown in other climes and shipped at great environmental cost? Any 'common sense' notion we might use to draw particular lines between need and want immediately reveal cultural conditions and norms that themselves demonstrably shift. And wherever you draw the lines there seem always to be individuals quite motivated by material "wants" far beyond their "needs." This is to say nothing of resource-costly art projects or the like. In any case, Engels seemingly cuts off this line of retreat for himself by explicitly using the phrase "means of subsistence *and of enjoyment*."

Any presence of such individual interests derail the picture of the socialized state apparatus as irrelevant to anything beyond managing universal interests.

Politics involving competing interests will continue and indeed have all the more impact. The managers of the 'former' state can't simply dispassionately calculate "true needs" from a godlike vantagepoint outside human society.

exclusions of the serfs from these markets that meant these profits weren't evenly shared.

This is all not to suggest that the burghers' market dynamics were particularly advanced, to say nothing of morally praiseworthy or entirely clear of wealth accumulation (in particular, as Marx pointed out, the *order* in which individual serfs escaped their bondage to the cities created a hierarchy of prior access and thus wealth disparities), but the point is they could still grasp efficiencies that had been locked up in most of feudal Europe. This mattered all the more when energy reserves (from the peat of the lowlands to the coal of Britain) enabled rapid technological development — markets excelling at general adaptation in contrast to feudal power structures.

Markets in much of the feudal context were often more like what "grey markets" denote today, not quite outright black markets, but not beloved by formal powers either. The fact that the benefits of market activity were somewhat unevenly distributed into the hands of a few is partly to blame on insufficiently developed market/social norms and strategies (as a consequence of state limits) but it's also the direct result of the state creating barriers to entry in the market. To give hopefully a universally salient example, when modern states banned weed it escalated the degree of risk in the weed market and thus the inequality of resulting wealth distributions from punitive impacts, but another factor was the cost to getting established as a hustler in the first place. Similarly, in far older times, greater wealth concentrations in the market were an inevitable result of the *political* struggle, the feudal powers had to constrain and contain the potentially ungovernable exception or line of flight the market presented to their power structures. Even violence exercised by the burghers to enforce guild monopolies or curtail women's rights to property were enforceable in large part because of the pressures of the wider feudal context that left relatively isolated marketplaces amid a sea of manors. Sporadic distributions of wealth *within* the

maroons of the free cities was thus the product and reflection of the immense sea of violence they were surrounded by.

The same is true with economies of scale more broadly within these island marketplaces. Whole communities had to band together to protect sites of flight from ossified feudal relations to timid markets, precisely because they needed to scale up past a threshold to survive and counter-weigh the barriers to entry in the market. This centralization into communal structures helped propagate what inequality there was within local markets.

Yes, the market provided material efficiencies that eventually overwhelmed the feudal power structures, but this wasn't due to wealth accumulation by mere fact of capital ownership. The wealth differentials of the pre-capitalist market were totally insufficient to spawn a class of dispossessed wage-laborers with no real bargaining power who would settle for a measly fraction of profits from an owner class. No, the bourgeoisie had to *use the state* — a preexisting site of power in a social context where antibodies to power had atrophied — and the bourgeoisie could only emerge as a distinct marginal class with enough wealth to influence the state *because* of that state's suppression of market competition and creation of sharp arbitrage possibilities.

Were it not for the existing power structures capitalism would never have been a thing.

Engels must desperately avoid this because in his account the capitalist owned factory with wages a small fraction of profit is an inevitability baked into exchange and property itself. But the workers largely had to be forcibly ***made*** to work in the factories, and across the board ***made*** desperate enough to have almost no bargaining power for wages actually balanced only against whatever actual labor and risk the capitalist invested.

The bourgeoisie were able to leverage their increasing economic wealth and efficiencies to wheedle their way into existing power structures, but what Engels calls the "*decisive advantage*" of the

> *really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production."*

The holes in this are large enough to drive a genocidal state-capitalist empire through.

Putting aside the absolute absurdity of redefining "the state" in terms of who "runs" it... Without class tensions there's nothing left to repress? There's no incentive to repress?

Why shouldn't a *specific* proletarian hero, upon seizure of the state administrative apparatus, seek to gain influence over some corner or aspect of it so as to increase their own personal gratification in some way?

Putting aside for a second how the magical "socialization" of the state to just be an administrative apparatus without coercion might happen, we've already talked about sources and dynamics of power outside physical force. Even if all trace of centralized coercive force evaporated, centralized administrative dynamics still create chokepoints of information flow and social relations that enable abuse and power more generally. Taking the case of just a newspaper with democratically recallable editors, it's easy to see myriad ways such roles can be leveraged with the centralized infrastructure for power and catalyzed into relative immunity from any democratic action or sanction.

Of course one can postulate that the abolition of class — the supposed engine of all prior history — and the solidarity forged in proletarian struggle, might radically transform individual motivations to the point where everyone's desires are in harmony

CONFLICT, INCENTIVE PROBLEMS AND THE STATE'S 'WITHERING'

Marx, at his best points in *Capital*, crawls out of the Hegelian mud and tries to examine the economic patterns of his time in plain terms of individual incentives (albeit largely preempted in most important respects by Smith, Proudhon, the Ricardians, et al.). But in privileging the economic he applies almost no such microscope to the state, which is basically just taken as captured and shaped for the benefit of the bourgeoisie as a class. Our target Engels — suddenly reentering the stage to cover for his master like a squawking clown — infamously doubles down on this to the point where it opened the door to that hack and sociopath Lenin:

> *"The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production in the first instance into state property. But, in doing this, it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state. Society thus far, based upon class antagonisms, had need of the state, that is, of an organisation of the particular class, which was pro tempore the exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited classes in the condition of oppression corresponding with the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom, wage-labour)... As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the state*

economic in this context was not and is not a universal advantage. First off it's worth noting there are plenty of cases throughout history where various forms and dynamics of power trounce or ignore market efficiency, especially because the efficiency of markets is in routing goods between diverse decentralized desires, which is often *the opposite* of the centralized efficiencies the state wants. But there are also cases where anything remotely economic (in the limited sense Engels is using of material goods) is trumped by differing interests of power. More on such in a minute.

Engels has to write off these 'exceptions' as averaging away by virtue of the need for states with greater economic advantage outcompeting other states. It's certainly the case that with two exactly equal states the one that can't produce machine guns will likely get conquered by the one that can, but there's a couple important things to note...

Firstly there are different ways by which power can relate to economic productivity other than enslaving it within itself. Marauders, raiders, and total-war armies often found workarounds whereby their economically simple force could exploit and conquer powers with immensely complex or 'developed' economic forces. Nice impregnable city wall you've got there, be a shame if us oh-so-simple chucklefucks just surrounded you and starved you into surrender. Technology and economic productivity isn't some linear ladder whereby those higher up necessarily win, or even win on average. A few thousand insurgents with antiquated weapons can bring the most economically developed empire in history to its knees. This reality of asymmetries and exploits is in no small part a matter of complexity dynamics and the informational limitations of certain systems.

Secondly there are many dynamics that can be far more important to the success of a power system than material productivity *or even physical force*. A state that is better able to control and subjugate its own population will have an advantage,

and there are myriad ways to do that without depending on material productivity.

What's more in this vein, allowing for material productivity in some forms and contexts may *hinder* the self-perpetuation of a state. A form of material productivity might contribute nothing to comparative war efforts between states but instead increase the illegibility of its own population. So for example a state dependent upon grain taxes is threatened by the cultivation of alternative crops that are more efficient at providing nutrition and calories per labor, but are not countable or seizable by the tax man. The incentives of power here are to burn and outlaw the new crop, lest the state collapse as a result of its propagation.

Productivity is not linear because there's always the question of productive at what for who? Similarly, efficiency is always *directed*. There are different directions of material productivity and different directions of economic efficiency. Engels implicitly takes the state as the judge, the deciding perspective on whether something constitutes progress or not. He smuggles in the centrality and relevance of force through the backdoor by making it such an inherent assumption as to be invisible.

If force is innately *given*, then one can look at a long interplay of economic and state effects, and always say for any state effect upon the economic that this in turn was driven by the economic. *Given* that there are states competing with war, economic changes that provide advantages at state warfare will emerge, even if a given state for some period rejects such changes. *Given that there are states*.

Of course Engels — clumsy lout and pale afterimage of the One True King that he is — doesn't stay at such an airy distance and directly takes the bait on Duhring's claim that the root of capitalism's emergence was in political violence, not an economic form or exchange value itself. We've seen how untenable that is. But one could patch the poor buffoon up, and reassert the immolate for the greater good. So the anti-abuser coalition can *collectively* punch harder.

This is all a matter of game theory, and it's also ***mutual aid*** in the very literal evolutionary systems sense meant by Kropotkin and other scientists. It's also how antifascists win against nazis. Any specific individual anti-abuser partisan might get crushed, jumped, or run out, but the overall strategy wins. *Sacrificing for one another can grow from a few individuals – or even one – into a hegemonic strategy.*

In this way, individual values and choices can absolutely change the world via catalyzing bottom-up transformations of social relations. Some of the most impactful folks have been anonymous or isolated individuals who were willing to light themselves on fire to stop fucked up shit.

Of course the strategic context can get really complicated, as with institutions.

This is distinct from a strategy like "always fight back" or "seek revenge no matter the cost." That base strategy is very good (on repeat interactions) at carving out respect for boundaries, which can dissuade those who would seek to subjugate. But it's not particularly *viral*.

Stateless egalitarian societies are not characterized by the mere *absence* of catalyzing domination strategies, they're characterized by the *presence* of catalyzing anti-domination strategies. The ones that last lock that shit in culture, habit, practice, (decentralized) law, etc.

To give a contemporary example, "believe survivors" as a personal strategy alone is toothless, an eyedrop against an ocean, it takes "believe survivors *and ostracize defectors*" to make it into a catalyzing strategy and — more importantly — a distinct movement or congealing social space. Because "ostracize abusers and their defenders" creates spaces more concentrated with those who sincerely care, it enables the testing of strategies that atomized and besieged altruists would have no time for, like more nuanced assessments of claims re abuse. These strategies get tested more frequently and there's horizontal transmission of successful strategies. This means that while "believe and follow survivors and punish defectors" is not particularly detailed as a *starting* strategy, it creates the conditions to cultivate more complex and nuanced strategic particulars towards the same ends (rather than deviating all over the place). We might say it *unfolds* into a more complex strategic framework increasingly better able to integrate complexities and parse nuances.

You might think that this specific example would never accomplish much beyond breaking a community into coalitions of old boy abusers and insurgent survivor-defenders. This is true enough for some contention points, but not others. While both coalitions punish people for associating with the other coalition, in this example the abusers (and loyalists) are largely self-interested and the anti-abusers in contrast are willing to self-

dominance of the economic over such violence by cutting things down to the claim that, sure violence is part of the mix, but such violence itself is always itself a consequence of economic realities. The emergence of the feudal power system had many motivations and causal influences. And was fuedalism in turn not an advancement in underlying economic production over slavery? Engels spends a lot of time on more distant history precisely in order to preserve this fallback.

POWER AND PRODUCTION IN THE OTHER TRANSITIONS

But this misses that feudalism emerged in the collapse of the Roman empire *not* as any clear "advancement" in modes of production and productive force, or even by following some inevitable internal logic or ratchet (or thetan dianetics) in some economic plane.

Rather, changes in the dynamics of political power drove changes in economic organization at the sites of production. The Roman *state* and its ecosystem of tributary power structures maintained great record keeping; as the state collapsed *politically* so too did the administrative capacity of estate holders. Combined with increased transaction costs that impeded specialization and promoted resiliency in localism, there was neither the capacity to handle complex exchange, nor much benefit to it.

The collapse of political power led to a collapse of technical managerial capacity, which led to a change in social and technical relations of production, which also hampered or at least dramatically restructured the material infrastructure.

Now you could try to say that the slave model of Rome gave way to feudalism *because* the feudal model ultimately embraced the use of technologies like the water mill the Romans avoided, but the problem is that the popular adoption of such tools only happened centuries after the slave economy had collapsed to the feudal mode. Was the economic world-spirit somehow consciously collapsing the Roman empire with the magical foresight that it would eventually enable productivity centuries later?

And this raises the deeply troublesome question of ***why*** the Romans avoided certain labor saving technologies for centuries. Almost as if folks placed value in the social relations of domination in-and-of-themselves. Almost as if material

Whether one classifies these constraints of mathematics, etc., as "idealist" or "materialist" in origin, the fact remains that they can press upon the individual's *mind* in ways that *then* affect society at large.

And — without getting into the full extent of ethical philosophy and its dynamics that might be relevant to the social, economic, and historical picture Engels is interested in — here's where we can examine some bare discussion of the bottom-up emergence of *mutual aid*, from individual values and strategies to general social patterns.

Domination is an example of a value and strategy that often catalyzes: In some nasty situation a single individual might seek to dominate others and as a result those individuals are pressured to change their strategy to act likewise. As the conflict ratchets, those for whom domination of others is not their ultimate goal may find themselves at a disadvantage. They don't want it badly enough, they have other occasionally conflicting values or interests. Without fully internalizing the drive to dominate they may simply not spend comparable time scheming as their adversary. Thus are they incentivized to change their core value. Perhaps only gradually, a little bit here and there, but eventually it's all but a done deal.

But this is of course an incomplete picture. There are many strategies that can push in the opposite direction, against domination. Some examples are: disrupting the mechanisms that underpin means of control, introducing cataclysmic means of retaliation to force detentes, and increasing complexity/illegibility so as to diminish the capacity for anyone to control.

One of the most classic catalyzing strategies is "sacrifice everything to counter those who dominate *and also to sanction/banish those who defect from this strategy*." For example, those who snitch to the cops get jumped and *those that assist or defend those who snitch* do as well.

convergence would happen in the space of individual *desires*, *values*, and *strategies*.

One very minimal and protean example can be trivially stated: a mind that values not thinking above all other values is very soon no longer a mind and thus that precise value configuration is constrained from the space of emergent value configurations. It's a triviality, but note that it's something we can in a quite meaningful sense evaluate *prior* to particularities of social, cultural, and technological context.

Engels wants to treat ethics/morality as a cultural formation pressing economic conditions down upon the individual, rather than an emergent matter of individual cognition intruding and pressing out upon the social. Now certainly, different given social or material contexts will facilitate such self-development and its expression to varying degrees, and institutions or even classes can develop pressures to alter or skew popular notions. But the same is of course true for science; the fine-structure constant is what it is, regardless of what a regime manages to convince the broader populace. Whatever pressures a society might bring to bear against an individual with an emergent idea, the emergent idea presses back. Cognitive dynamics constrain society.

The trick here is that humans are not undifferentiated clay infinitely molded by our social context, but rather sites of generalized cognition. Our reconfigurability is *itself* a firm constant. This is how we are able to independently access mathematical or physical relations in vastly different contexts, with different prompts. And just as a processor capable of general computation is still constrained and directed by certain emergent laws of general computation, so too are we. Our inability to, for instance, violate constraints of computational complexity within our brains is not a product of socio-cultural conditioning, although it has immense consequences for social formations. A king (or gosplan bureaucrat) is constrained in his ability to process and control.

productivity wasn't always as relevant to the perpetuation of power structures as other dynamics.

I'm not saying hard technical dynamics can't influence political power, we might, for instance, talk of the transition from ancient Rome to feudalism being about the adaptation of power to computational constraints on its operation over vast regions and peoples. The Roman state faced diminishing computational capacity against the complexities it was trying to eat, and so the feudal system was the reformation of power on a more decentralized level, as lords seized the dynamics of surveillance and taxation previously limited to the Roman state proper, in effect the state power dynamic adapted to its limitations by subdividing into a patchwork of microstates. And it was very much in the interest of those microstates to constrain connectivity, lest their imprisoned peoples grow more complex or escape. That is until one class of escapees built up a positive feedback loop whereby connectivity reinforced connectivity. But you see the danger, not only are these "non-material" questions of complexity operating directly in the realm of political power rather than economic production... the idea that there are complexity constraints on things like decision-making and knowledge-gathering has pretty grave consequences for the entire dismissal of the "*anarchy of production*" to say nothing of dreams of unified collective planning.

Of course Engels is free to brush off something as particular as a thousand years or two, declare the whole "other transition" between the ancient form to the feudal form as merely a minor perturbation or epicycle in the golden mechanism of the materialist dialectic.

Yet the trap that Engels is in is that the first instance of power doesn't seem to be a very direct product of the material/economic, it's not like one person invented and built swords and chains to enslave everyone else. And that's a big deal because it poses the problem that whatever those primordial

sources of power are, they could still be relevant today and lend the political and social distinctly emergent relevance, crushing the world historical Copernican revolution of Our Messiah.

And here's where Engels' infamous concept of authority creeps in...

> *"In each such community there were from the beginning certain common interests the safeguarding of which had to be handed over to individuals, true, under the control of the community as a whole: adjudication of disputes; repression of abuse of authority by individuals; control of water supplies... They are naturally endowed with a certain measure of authority and are the beginnings of state power."*

We might call this the *managerial* account of the rise of political power.

In this there's the faint spark of an understanding of the importance of information and computation, but at the same time there's the lurking faith in the unlimited cognitive capacity of the central planner or at least a cavalier dismissal of the challenges they face. Rather than seeing the centralization of adjudication or planning as an emergent inefficiency, Engels sees it as the inverse. Again, this is the perspective of the tyrant and what's efficient *for his interests*, not some objective perspective or the perspective of 'the people.'

Freer societies endorse decentralized adjudication and mediation systems to integrate distributed information and viewpoints as well as to avoid power concentration and use competition to ensure decisions don't become biased or otherwise skewed. The suppression of abuse by individuals inherently requires decentralization, agile whisper networks, etc., because centralization poses inescapable misincentives.

Any child quickly learns the dangers of appointing one person as

of ethics, the whole project is obviously bunk. This is actually *interesting*, because for all his historicism I'm pretty sure Engels would cede that there are a priori facts of reality that are independently discoverable upon reflection by independent observers. At least when we note that these facts are the structural relations and entailments involved in mathematics. Seems weird to not even respond to the diverse array of philosophers who see ethics as an a priori question similar to mathematics. That little has been resolved universally seems of little relevance as a response. Few people on the planet grasp the proof of Fermat's Last Theorem, only a small crew have successfully worked through it. Moreover there are myriad unsolved questions in mathematics of incredible importance to the world. Few would confidently claim that there is no solution to whether P=NP, it's simply the case that no human has yet captured that solution beyond hazy graspings and general suspicions.

Now one can retort that whatever self-consistent formalizations one makes (comprising various branches of or approaches to ethics), there's still a sense in which breaking symmetry between them, or even believing that there are other conscious ethically-relevant entities in the world, requires some dirty empiricism. And granted when we get to the a posteriori, Engels' has streettcchhhed quite a bit to frame even physics in dialectic terms. No modern scientist (and few of his contemporaries) would take that shit even remotely seriously, and I'm not going to waste breath engaging there either. And Engels could retort that my derision is akin to his discarding of every philosopher who thinks some moral claims can be established a priori, — and fair's fair, I suppose, no one can take the time to respond to every argument. But let's posit for a moment that modern physics does in fact reflect universal patterns and structures, however partially, and that therefore convergently similarly structured encapsulations to our own can be reached by alien minds in alien contexts upon some sufficient degree of reflection and material engagement. It seems quite weird to simply deny from the outset that no similar

MORALITY AND RESISTANCE

The central sneer through *Anti-Duhring* is that Duhring believes in morality — the daft dinosaur — failing to grasp that any moral values are obviously just social norms and thus artifacts of Duhring's historical context.

And here is where Engels really delights in edgelording it up at length to deliver lines like, "*Without the slavery of antiquity no modern socialism*." and then cleaning up with what he assumes is a knockout argument:

> *"It is very easy to inveigh against slavery and similar things in general terms, and to give vent to high moral indignation at such infamies. Unfortunately all that this conveys is only what everyone knows, namely, that these institutions of antiquity are no longer in accord with our present conditions and our sentiments, which these conditions determine."*

But *does* all moral objection really amount to nothing more than a statement of present conditions and resultant social norms? Engels is revealing himself a moral nihilist who sees morality as a social construct resulting from economic context rather than anything emergently reachable upon individual reflection.

Certainly this tension between flippant Marxist nihilism and a studious anarchist focus on moral questions is a recurring and much commented-on feature of the century and a half of conflict that followed, but I'm less interested in covering or relitigating those galaxies of discourse than exploring how this take helps props up Engels' whole frame.

Engels doesn't really bother with any sort of engagement with ethical philosophy, he takes the standard pothead bypass route and thinks that because there was no full instantaneous and simultaneous convergence everywhere upon the exact same details a central coordinator and in the rare situations where such might be found useful independently re-invents things like rotating roles. The idea that our distant ancestors stumbled into political power structures because they somehow needed one planner or adjudicator is just foolish as hell, sure Engels didn't have all of modern anthropology to contradict him, but a little thought should have sufficed.

Of course, to be fair, Engels somehow swallows the liberal claim about the state that having a central planner provides social benefits, and further that political power hangs on providing economic value, or, at very least, not impeding economic productivity:

> *"the exercise of a social function was everywhere the basis of political supremacy; and further that political supremacy has existed for any length of time only when it discharged its social functions. However great the number of despotisms which rose and fell in Persia and India, each was fully aware that above all it was the entrepreneur responsible for the collective maintenance of irrigation throughout the river valleys, without which no agriculture was possible there."*

Yet, as previously noted, people can hold social power in ways hostile to engineering and productivity, destroying and *stopping* productivity is in fact often critical to maintaining power.

We look at the police and politicians calling for the abolition of the internet and 3d printing and laugh, but history and even very recent social struggles are filled with situations of political power successfully suppressing inventions and more productive implementations or infrastructures. The maintenance of intellectual property was early on declared an impossibility, the math was against them, the technology was against them, there was no way to hold back the massive productivity and efficiency gains of pirating. And yet, after a brief spurt of progress and a few

stray later exceptions like scihub, the struggle has broadly been in retreat for decades. A major part of this was a *cultural* push of narratives that convinced much of a new generation that they were temporarily embarrassed future creative class success stories, giving them an irrational investment in the overall institution of IP. About a third of US GDP today derives from the intellectual property regime, so while its abolition would mean vast improvements in productivity across the board, existing power is dependent upon the *constraint* of productivity, and there is a vast global apparatus of force, infrastructure, and culture built specifically to keep it from blossoming.

Capitalism itself, as the suppression of markets, is yet another example of the war of power against efficiency. Capital concentrations aren't the transition of the market into the superior efficiencies of socialism, they're the choking out of market efficiencies by power in order to create more power. Power thrives on inefficiency, *depends* on it. Specifically inefficiency at satiating the diverse and distributed desires of the many, and this happens through a variety of strategies.

> *place and in another place, being in one and the same place and also not in it."*

And Engels is hardly limiting himself to a humble evaluation of a tiny sliver of human history, like Jesus' disciples desperate to assert that their dead bro is totally coming back with God's army behind him any day, the whole fucking game is to proclaim the inevitable development of a timeless and universal communism that functions as the end of history. The contradictions in capitalism are not being claimed to be merely one more fleeting example of social contradictions like countless other configurations and tensions throughout thousands of years. No, these contradictions are *the* contradictions. The final and ultimate ones that will determine all history.

It never really occurs to Engels to probe beyond the frame in which he is operating, to evaluate its limits, the things it is papering over or consigning to the margins, and consider how these could resurge to fuck over his grandiose universal proclamations. Of course not, because the main function of "historical contingency" has always been to *license* Engels to opportunistically compose and flog theory as a political cudgel as he and his buddy cop wrangled for personal power within the revolutionary workers associations of Europe. Indeed, when Bakunin points out *obvious* and trivial problems with things like the seizure of the state, he must be aggressively cop-jacketed as a czarist spy and the anarchists run out.

But what *fun* you can have with incoherencies when you feel no obligation to have an honest go at constructing anything like a timelessly rooted theoretical framework! As a poor analytic Marxist tasked with making sense of the bible, Jon Elster said of the messiah, "*it is difficult to avoid the impression that he often wrote whatever came into his mind, and then forgot about it as he moved on to other matters*." Truly, a poster's poster!

deviations — the source of many diminishing returns in various strategies of control by the state and other institutions. Whatever top-down account or schematizations you give will have to plaster over particularities, and when those particularities are the incredibly dense and fast singularities of individual human brains, there will always be unforeseeable horizons beyond which your framework breaks down.

Of course, on some level, Engels explicitly recognizes this. The dialectic is precisely supposed to account for the inability to ever describe the relevant dynamics of society entirely, in all possible configuration states and times. A minor dynamic that seems irrelevant today and fine to gloss over might yet emerge in the attention of some future society as a critical or central dynamic. Engels is not focused on a true radicalism that gets to the universal absolute roots of all things, but rather a rough-and-ready framework that is geared towards a goal within a context and admits its probable breakdown beyond that context. At best this sort of dialectical framing looks like "*everything is dependent upon everything else and is in a state of interaction and that's all rather complicated*," to crip snark from Michael Heinrich, and thus any statement you make can preempt its own eventual irrelevancy or contradiction. This is a flippant and deflective humility. It is designed to provide ammunition to ignore Engels' critics — "*all your ideas are just products of your historical context, whereas my ideas are the only ones that fully embrace that*!" — and then, riding that self-congratulatory wave, immediately pivot into new sweeping universalisms with even less justification. So Engels can sweep up all of history — even hard scientific questions of nature — in terms of his grand dialectic framework. At places this involves truly silly interpretations of scientific ideas through bad philosophy,

> *"Motion itself is a contradiction: even simple mechanical change of position can only come about through a body being at one and the same moment of time both in one*

POWER BEYOND THE ECONOMIC

Let's revisit *why* Engels is fighting so desperately to reduce the foundations of capitalism to an economic base that drags power along.

Because his target Duhring is focused on *physical coercion* — from which he views economic dynamics as secondary — Engels must of course sneer that this *isn't new* and in turn evangelize for the totally amazing, totally new Marxist theory which is framed as saying the exact reverse. Structures of social power — and specifically force — must flow from and be shaped by the economic. The tail wags the dog.

But isn't power *just about* material interests? This is another Engels claim:

> *"Subjugation has always been — to use Herr Dühring's elegant expression — a "stomach-filling agency" (taking stomach-filling in a very wide sense), but never and nowhere a political grouping established "for its own sake"."*

And we've seen before Engels zeroing in on the comparative advantage that more efficient production gets you. But he goes further, how can you even dream to primordially enslave another person, much less multiple people, without having *physical instruments* to coerce and chain them? And we might reformulate this central question as, "How does the first instance of power emerge?" Specifically considering situations where physical capability, distribution of access to resources, etc., are functionally equal.

There are two issues here: 1) what motivation could anyone actually have for social power in-and-of-itself or simply to ends other than material ones? 2) what even are ways of acquiring and wielding power except through material tools gained through

economic advantage?

Now, let's quickly get out of the way that "stomach filling" in the broadest possible sense could be taken as the satiation of any desire, or action potential function in a neural network, which then can be applied trivially to almost anything. Because we live in a material universe and thought itself is a material process there is an absolutely trivial sense in which *everything* is "material." Every thought in our head has some causal path, every instinct some biological basis. But of course this would also be inclusive of the social, political, ideological, cultural, etc. A program running on a computer is ultimately comprised of electrical states in a circuit, and in that sense someone's ideological or moral orientation is a physical and material reality. But this is clearly and trivially not the distinction between materialism and idealism that Engels (*or* the prophet himself) is using to establish an explanative primacy of modes of production over political power.

If we restrict this to *material* desires in the more limited sense of Engels' context, then subjugation is trivially often established for the sake of other things. To give an example everyone should be intimately familiar with, many people dominate children and pets not for their labor or any material benefit from them, but to help reinforce one's own internal narratives and emotional experiences. Pretty sure everyone experienced at least one teacher who desperately wanted to re-do high school as a popular kid and who leveraged their institutional power to achieve some cringe simulacrum of this. Even if certain human instinctive needs for connection, belonging, identity, etc., have biological origins in the general evolutionary fitness they provide, these are decidedly not about filling one's belly and can incentivize societies to be *inefficient* at economic production.

Further, one of the core dynamics of power is that it has its own emergent ideology or perspective; power is a means that rapidly becomes its own ends. It presents itself as a universal or near-universal means, a gateway to every other possible desire (material of reflection is thought to be preconditioned by external causes. What is lost from this is an understanding of the complex connectivity involved in the brain, where vast fields of causal inputs are tightly integrated and processed over. This iterative process and density of connection creates novel structures and behavior not predictable from the causal inputs without something comparably complex to a human brain.

And because the available bandwidth of information flow between individual brains is dramatically limited, the individual is always more complicated than the social pressures that can be transmitted to them (and what broader social structures can be built above them). As social scale increases, the average speed of internal information flow is basically the speed of bits conveyed by language or writing, which is ridiculously slower than the speed of neuron-to-neuron bitflow. Thus, whatever the initial causal *inputs* that flow in, the twists and turns inside an individual's head can dramatically outpace and disrupt control mechanisms operating at the speed of social organizations.

This much should hardly be contentious. Anyone who's ever been to a meeting knows the dystopian horror of your thoughts racing faster than the sluggish pace by which ideas can be expressed in language, much less verbalized, every party trapped together in a mutually-constraining molasses.

Individuals and the ideas that take root in them, their motivations and strategies, cannot be handwaved away. While social context, like institutions and tendencies, of course influence the individual, they cannot reduce the individual to the same cog.

As a consequence, any hazy patterns we discern and name in macroscale society are always going to be rough simplifications or reductions imposed over an impossibly complex tapestry of individuals and their thoughts.

This is part of why schemes relying upon such notions inevitably fray and fall apart in the face of unpredictable individual

general circulation.

Material conditions can and do intersect with all these, reinforcing or weakening a given dynamic, but the *existence* of these power dynamics is orthogonal. These dynamics are relevant in a world of scarcity and a world of superabundance. Suffice to say that it is nowhere near sufficient to, for example, have material abundance with equal access to all, to abolish power. Combatting power requires combating dishonesty and various impediments to the sharing, flow, and processing of information more generally.

In the above I've focused on power as a constraint of others' choice, because that's the only coherent and useful definition, but there's a notable Marxist-derived tradition that tries to cast power as "productive." This tradition primarily treats the word "subjectivity" as essentially a *perspective*. So "subjects are created" in this conceptual schema and vernacular. It shouldn't be surprising that this tradition tends to deny freedom is a coherent concept. In contrast I follow a modern economics perspective in treating subjectivity as a cognitive constraint. The bounds of our skulls, the limited bandwidth of our input and output channels, the finite resources of our brains, constrain our ability to have perfect knowledge of the universe. This constrains our ability to choose and thus overall freedom.

In this lens it's not so much that power *creates* a specific possibility, it inherently curtails overall possibility. Power is about limiting and constraining, slicing away at the possible to select an arbitrary subset. And, in turn, freedom is about widening the overall expanse of what is possible, in no small part by *connecting* rather than *disconnecting*. As Bakunin said,

> *"Liberty is... a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection."*

In the far more fixed lens of those who see individuals entirely created by their social contexts there is no *choice*, because the loop or not), and then through slippage in the human mind the instrumental desire becomes elevated and calcified as a terminal desire. We seek social power as a universal currency, and then we gradually forget the other ends, so fixated on power as a gateway. This habituation of instrumental goals into terminal goals for-themselves is a core part of how the human mind works and a byproduct of how it escapes crises when its ontology needs radical revision.

We've seen Engels' account for the rise of the state in terms of managerial value where the managers capture the surpluses of economic production and use this to acquire winning physical force. But let's examine some other pathways power can bootstrap from dynamics that have nothing to do with instruments from economic surplus *or even necessarily with force*. Specifically two classes of exploits: 1) the accuracy and inaccuracy of people's models of reality, and 2) dynamics of trust and obligation in social context.

On first glance it's obvious that a set of epistemic strategies that's generally better at figuring out the joints of reality, predicting whether a tiger will attack, etc., is going to triumph over a set of epistemic strategies that's not. But there's a complication: strategies that reduce *other* people's epistemic accuracy will grant you power in relation to them.

In the most simple example, you lie about or withhold information about the options someone has so they don't take certain options, and sometimes take specific others instead. Typically this involves leveraging some things you know they know in combination with failing to divulge certain other things, so as to lead them or skew their analysis in a specific direction that you know (or suspect) is incorrect. Lying about having your tubes tied or being free of STDs might lead someone into evaluating having sex with you as the better option than not, whereas *if they had a more accurate picture* they would make the opposite decision. This is very clearly and indisputably an act of

power that does not involve most notions of violent physical force. Similarly, selling someone a product you know to be rotten while obscuring or misleading about that fact.

Now there's often the quick response that in a wide enough body of people the liars will be exposed and people will gravitate towards the full truth tellers, thus making individual lying impossible to bootstrap into massive power, but this assumes a lot about a social context. Societies are networks of actors who instantiate varied mixes of strategies. Such strategies can be at varying scales of complexity or contextual fitness. In repeated interactions between given individuals, it is generally *on average* optimal to play a tit-for-tat approach that is *slightly* skewed towards mutual aid. But in a society with a large number of simultaneous players there's space for a mix of strategies, and even if an overwhelming majority of players stabilize in *tit-for-tat with slight mutual aid*, there is often an uneliminable minority who trend to a more exploitative strategy. If the minority grows too large it suffers diminishing returns, but if it shrinks too small then any shift of strategy to scumfuckery is rewarded. Similarly there's pressure for more complex metastrategies by individuals to evaluate when it's a good idea to get up to fuckery.

Further, actually existing societies are irregularly connected, and this can involve extreme variations of social topology. These social links between individuals can range from things like who listens to who, who *trusts* who, who *owes* who, who will assist who, who is invested in cultivating a stronger or specific relationship with who, etc.

Social strategies for power involve highly connecting yourself and weakening the connections of others. But this can involve more complex network structural dynamics. So e.g. a) placing yourself in arbitrage positions at network flow chokepoints and maintaining those chokepoints, b) lumping up the network so that information doesn't flow as rapidly. If you get cancelled in one circle you can just reinvest in another circle, while doing what you can to avoid the two circles communicating.

Individual epistemological dynamics of course interplay with social dynamics and in some sense give rise to them. For example, you can mislead someone into only considering a subset of possible social strategies. Indeed this is how most social strategic contexts bootstrap, via path-dependent tactical actions that build up into network asymmetries. On the other hand social conditions can be created that punish certain types or directions of rationality, inquiry, etc., likely to give them more complete or objective pictures. You create social conditions wherein the best strategy is to avoid rational deliberation and diligent investigation, defaulting instead upon simple heuristics, and over time this can influence one's deepest priors away from engagement. Most abusive parents do this to children, *punishing* them for thinking, so that they grow up *rationally evaluating* that rationality itself is a bad strategy.

Another example, a site of power genesis in band societies to say nothing of medieval guilds, is to capture critical knowledge within an exclusive club. Only initiates of the 42nd order are allowed to see the critical step to making the special ink. Only the elders hold the oral knowledge necessary to do a thing, and certain amounts of deference and indebtedness must be built before they induct you. Sometimes the captured information is encoded in a format specifically built to be esoteric or obscure, requiring all the more costly displays of commitment and sacrifice. This exclusion is maintained socially because each knowledge keeper has strong incentives to maintain their social advantage via withholding. And in small-scale intimate societies, it's much easier to identify and punish defectors who liberate elite information. This pattern of social enclosures of information (and production of information asymmetries) can of course be found in academia, but also in activism where 90% of the work is dependent upon knowing people and the remaining 10% is dependent upon craft and tacit tactical knowledge that isn't in