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Popper and Kolakowski: Two Challenges to Historical Materialism

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Abstract

Karl Popper and Leszek Kolakowski criticized Historical Materialism from different perspectives. Popper believed that the unpredictability of human knowledge development would invalidate the predictions made by Historical Materialism; his viewpoint constitutes a criticism based on internal theoretical logic. Kolakowski, based on the tortuous events in Soviet communist construction, asserted that Historical Materialism played an important role therein, thus criticizing its political effects. Popper's criticism fails to distinguish between different types of human knowledge and the original purpose of Historical Materialism, while Kolakowski exaggerates the connection between theory and fact.

Keywords

Historical Materialism; Karl Popper; Leszek Kolakowski.

1. Introduction

Today, people no longer fervently discuss the thought of Karl Popper. About twenty years ago, he was still a key subject of study within Chinese Marxist academia. Abroad, as early as the 1960s, Popper's works lost their former prominence and ceased to be primary references for scholars seeking to understand Marxism. For recent Western researchers, Popper is one of those scholars (probably like Sidney Hook) who, under conditions where Marx's works were not yet fully published, did their utmost to expound their understanding of this thinker, producing benchmark works of their era. However, their fundamental shortcoming lies in not having studied Marx's writings in their entirety. But a decline in research popularity does not mean that the value of Popper's works has been exhausted. He represents a particular type of critic who engages Marxism through its own internal logic, and it is precisely this methodological approach that makes his central critique of Historical Materialism so resilient—one that still awaits a comprehensive and definitive response.

On the other hand, as the most radical member among the Eastern European Neo-Marxists (according to Yi Junqing's evaluation[1]), Leszek Kolakowski (hereinafter referred to as Kolakowski) has also gradually faded from view in China after the initial wave of interest in Eastern European Neo-Marxism subsided, with only limited scholarly attention persisting. Upon his departure from Poland in 1968, customs records noted that he carried a manuscript[2]. This work, the eventual three-volume, 1,300-page *Main Currents of Marxism* (hereinafter *Main Currents*), mounts a sustained critique of Historical Materialism. Its novelty lies in directly connecting this theoretical critique with the historical practice of the communist movement, thus pioneering a new critical approach. However, given the scant attention paid to Kolakowski's critical thoughts on Historical Materialism within academia, this aspect of his thought naturally remains little known.

Thus, this paper confronts two distinct challenges to Historical Materialism: one is criticism based on the internal logic of the theory, represented by Popper. The other is criticism based

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on the negative historical effects of this doctrine, primarily articulated by Kolakowski. The tasks of this paper are: (1) To demonstrate the internal logic of their critical paths based on analysis of the original texts; (2) To examine the validity of their criticisms and respond accordingly. The imperative for this work is self-evident: a robust and veracious theoretical framework not only withstands scrutiny but thrives on it, leveraging critique as a platform to affirm its distinctive merit.

2. Popper's Criticism: The Impossibility of Historical Prediction

It seems unnecessary to reiterate the reasons for choosing Popper as a subject of examination. Since the publication of The Poverty of Historicism (hereinafter The Poverty) and The Open Society and Its Enemies, Popper has become the most famous challenger of Historical Materialism in academia. In the preface to The Poverty, he writes, "I have selected some events from the history of historicist thought, in order to illustrate its persistent and pernicious influence upon the philosophy of society and of politics, from Heraclitus and Plato to Hegel and Marx."[3] In Popper's eyes, Historical Materialism belongs to Pro-Naturalistic Doctrines of Historicism. Pro-Naturalistic Doctrines of Historicism are the kind of doctrine that attempts to imitate the natural sciences in predicting the course of history, i.e., they strive to obtain empirically verifiable predictions based on historical laws that are universally valid and unaffected by initial conditions.[3] Popper levels many criticisms against this kind of historicism, but not all are directed at Historical Materialism, nor are all of them worth separate examination. In our view, only one argument both targets Historical Materialism and warrants serious examination. This is the "Anti-Historical-Prediction argument" (name given by us) put forward by Popper in the preface to The Poverty. Its main content is:

The course of human history is strongly influenced by the growth of human knowledge.

We cannot predict, by rational scientific or methods, the future growth of our scientific knowledge.

We cannot, therefore, predict the future course of human history.

This means that we must reject the possibility of a theoretical history; that is to say, of a historical social science that would correspond to *theoretical physics*. There can be no scientific theory of historical development serving as a basis for historical prediction.

The fundamental aim of historicist methods is therefore misconceived; and historicism collapses.[3]

Why does this argument deserve serious examination? The reason is provided by Popper himself. He says this argument summarizes his overall refutation of historicism: "for strictly logical reasons, it is impossible for us to predict the future course of history."[3] So, why does this argument target Historical Materialism? (Popper does criticize many scholars in The Poverty). A relevant clue is in the note to proposition (1). Popper points out there: "The truth of this premise must be admitted even by those who see in our ideas, including our scientific ideas, merely the by-products of *material* developments of some kind or other."[3] Among existing doctrines, only Historical Materialism strongly emphasizes the dependence of thought on matter in its genesis and development. As Marx said, "The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. "[4] If he did not intend to direct this argument at Historical Materialism, Popper would not have needed to add this superfluous note.

Here, we focus only on the first three propositions of the entire argument, because propositions (4) and (5) specifically target "Pro-Naturalistic Doctrines of Historicism" (only this kind of historicism likes to imitate theoretical physics), but Historical Materialism is *not* "Pro-Naturalistic Doctrines of Historicism". The reason is: Historical Materialism never considered

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the historical laws underlying its historical predictions to be unaffected by initial conditions, like natural science laws. In the words of Rodney Peffer: "It seems wildly implausible that he thought these "laws" or tendencies or trends would continue no matter how initial conditions changed. "[5] Regarding human history, Marx and Engels did make various predictions. The two writers pointed out in *The* The German Ideology that humanity would enter communist society, but this is first predicated on the initial condition of the continuous development of productive forces. They said: "This "estrangement" [*Entfremdung*] (to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers) can, of course, only be abolished given two *practical* premises.... both these premises presuppose a great increase in productive power, a high degree of its development. "[6] Therefore, there is no reason to regard Historical Materialism as "Pro-Naturalistic Doctrines of Historicism".

So, how exactly do propositions (1), (2), and (3) refute historical prediction? According to our reconstruction, its logic is as follows:

1. The development of knowledge strongly influences the course of history (Fact)

There exists a type of knowledge *k*, whose development cannot be predicted by rational or scientific methods (Fact)

Therefore, one cannot rationally or scientifically predict the impact of *k*'s development on the course of history, i.e., the changes in the historical process caused by the development of *k* (From 1, 2)

For any form of historicism *A*, if *A* holds true, then it must be able to predict the course of history (Given)

Since the changes in the historical process caused by the development of *k* cannot be rationally or scientifically predicted, *A* cannot predict the course of history, therefore *A* does not hold true (From 3, 4)

Thus, because the impact of knowledge development on the historical process cannot be rationally or scientifically predicted, predicting the historical process is impossible. Since the historical predictions of Historical Materialism are untenable, its claim to be able to predict the future is erroneous. H.B. Acton, building on Popper, proposed a similar argument: "For in the eyes of the Marxists science and technology are fundamental features of society, and if the whole society depends upon science and technology, and their future is unpredictable, then the future of the whole society is unpredictable."[7]

3. Kolakowski's Criticism: The Political Effects of Historical Materialism

Unlike Popper, Kolakowski is not well-known in Chinese academia as a challenger of Historical Materialism. But abroad, he is clearly regarded as one of the most outstanding critics of Marxism. Kolakowski's status was established by the publication of Main Currents, whose reviewers included prominent contemporary Marx researchers like David McLellan[7], Tom Rockmore[8], and Jon Elster[9]. Senior scholars like Sidney Hook[10] and Alfred G. Mayer[11] personally wrote reviews for the book.[12] As an authoritative reference work in the English-speaking world for Marxist studies, A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, edited by Tom Bottomore, not only lists Main Currents as recommended reading under multiple entries but also calls it the most thorough critical examination in recent years.[13] And in the ***A Very Short Introduction*** *series* on *Marx*, author Peter Singer considers Main Currents a sweeping overview of the entire development of Marxism, a work one should not miss.[14]

Therefore, choosing Kolakowski as a subject of examination is meaningful, especially since he did indeed criticize Historical Materialism. Interestingly, his criticism of Historical Materialism begins with a very "theoretical" question. This question is the evaluation of the superstructure. Evaluating a superstructure means analyzing the role it plays in social life and, based on that, judging whether it should be accepted. Regarding the social role of the superstructure, on the

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one hand, we cannot deny the shaping effect of relations of production on it; a superstructure originating from certain relations of production often serves those relations. On the other hand, Marx and Engels never claimed that the *entire* social role of the superstructure was *only* to serve the relations of production—especially the class relations within them. Marx's analysis of ancient Greek art in Grundrisse has already indicated this point[15]. Engels also said: "The basis of the law of inheritance...is an economic one. But it would be difficult to prove, for instance, that the absolute liberty of the testator in England and the severe restrictions imposed upon him in France are only due in every detail to economic causes."[16] Thus, not all activities of all superstructures aim at specific economic/class interests; their social roles are not fixed.

In short, one superstructure's social role may be independent of the relations of production and class, or it may be an instrument serving the development of both. Based on this, we have two different standards for evaluating the superstructure. Taking one kind of superstructure *A* as an example: First, since *A* has its own internal logic of development, one can consider *A*'s social role as unrelated to class relations, therefore the standard of evaluation lies within *A* itself (e.g., art criticism based on purely aesthetic principles); Second, according to Engels's view, one can consider *A*'s social role as ultimately serving a specific class, so the standard of evaluation is *A*'s relationship to that specific class. This relationship includes both the service relationship and the genetic connection between *A* and a certain class.

Of course, one might say these two standards are not conflicting, because *A*'s social role is multifaceted. Within a society, *A* may be unrelated to class relations but simultaneously play a role in promoting the interests of a specific class. But the problem is that evaluation requires a clear result; the statement above offers no guidance for evaluating a superstructure and taking measures. Therefore, we still lack an effective method to determine which standard to adopt. The superstructure has its own trajectory of development, but to what extent? This leaves a vague area. Furthermore, there are no specific criteria for accurately judging the class object served by *A*. Thus, the ambiguity in evaluating the superstructure leads to two consequences: (1) The standard for evaluating the superstructure oscillates between itself and its relationship to a specific class; (2) There are no clear criteria for judging the specific class object served by the superstructure.

The above is the underlying logic of Kolakowski's criticism. He believes that the aesthetic thought of Franz Mehring prominently exhibits result (1). Kolakowski points out that Mehring, on the one hand, argues that the standard for evaluating art cannot be based on its social origin and purpose, yet on the other hand, he claims there is no purely aesthetic, ahistorical (i.e., unrelated to relations of production and class relations) standard.[17] This constitutes a self-contradiction. Plekhanov has the same problem. Plekhanov says the class origin of art is the standard for evaluating it, but also tries to retain a purely artistic standard of evaluation. Of course, Plekhanov might have seen the tension between the two standards and tried to offset it, but Kolakowski asserts he only resolved it with useless tautologies like "in the last resort the value of a work of art is determined by the specific gravity of its subject matter"[17]

Result (2) is reflected in Kautsky's ethical studies. Kolakowski emphasizes that Kautsky was arbitrary and capricious in explaining some specific ideas. For example, Kautsky said the utilitarian views of the Enlightenment were characteristic of the emerging bourgeoisie because they used hedonism to oppose feudal asceticism. However, one can find hedonism in the thought of the feudal aristocracy as well, while asceticism is also embodied in the thought of Calvin during the capitalist era. The result is that both asceticism and hedonism can seemingly be claimed as characteristics of the emerging bourgeoisie's thought. In Kolakowski's view, this arbitrariness is essentially due to the lack of precise criteria for linking spiritual phenomena with their material origins.[17] Bertrand Russell also noticed this point, commenting on Historical Materialism: "It is said that love of the eternal is characteristic of a leisure class... on

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the contrary, that the conception of heaven as a place where nothing is done is that of weary toilers who want nothing but rest."[18]

So, it seems that the ambiguity inherent in Historical Materialism itself led the Marxists of the Second International into various contradictions on the issue of art evaluation. However, the criticism so far remains purely theoretical. It is only when Kolakowski discusses Lenin's views on this issue that he expresses this criticism at a deeper level.

When commenting on Lenin's understanding of the social role of the superstructure, Kolakowski emphasizes its instrumentalist character: "To Lenin philosophical questions had no meaning in themselves but were merely weapons in the political struggle; so were art and literature, law and institutions, democratic values and religious ideas."[17] If so, a natural conclusion is: philosophical criticism and the use of force are not different in nature; they are both merely tools of class struggle, differing only in their applicable arenas. This instrumentalism directly leads to a kind of spiritual nihilism, "since it means that we cannot judge human thought by any purely intellectual criteria of empiricism or logic: all cultural achievements will seem equally permeated by class-interest, from the crudest political propaganda to the sublimest products of the intellect "[17] Accepting or rejecting a superstructure becomes a purely technical matter here.

Kolakowski believes that Lenin indeed moved towards a certain nihilism, because in his view, whether it served the interests of a specific class was the evaluation standard for all superstructure. This principle gained practical efficacy after Lenin's thought became dominant in the state. "After the seizure of power, the maintenance and strengthening of Soviet rule becomes the sole criterion of morality as well as of all cultural values."[17] According to this standard, superstructures that failed to maintain proletarian interests had to be governed. During Stalin's time, this manifested in the "anti-cosmopolitanism campaign" during Zhdanov's tenure and interference in natural sciences and even logic. People generally view the events after Lenin as the practical results of Stalinism (if there a clearly defined "Stalinism" exists), but Kolakowski insists that the standard for evaluating the superstructure was continuous between these two periods. As Kolakowski says, "The slogan constantly met with during Stalin's dictatorship, 'Stalin is the Lenin of our day,' was thus entirely accurate."[17] Here, we can discern A. Avtorkhanov's influence on his work, as the same expression appears in Avtorkhanov representative work Proiskhozhdenie partokratii (1973).

Clearly, Kolakowski was extremely dissatisfied with the Soviet Union's measures governing social and cultural life. One only needs to look at his evaluation of the development of Soviet philosophy to know this.[17] The existing analysis shows that Kolakowski believed Lenin's instrumentalist understanding of the superstructure and the resulting spiritual nihilism were the ideological motivations leading to these historical events. Regardless of whether this view is correct, we must ask: what does this have to do with the Historical Materialism expounded by Marx and Engels? Kolakowski's answer is: the doctrines of the classic writers laid the ideological foundation for Lenin's relevant arguments.

First, Kolakowski believes that Lenin's extreme emphasis on the instrumental role of the superstructure stemmed not only from his strong practical personality but also from Historical Materialism itself. "On this point he not only cannot be reproached with deviating from Marxism, but it can rather be said that he applied the principles of historical materialism more thoroughly than Marx."[17] Why so? The reason is that the classic writers repeatedly affirmed the superstructure's social role as a tool of class struggle. This provided a basis for interpretations that instrumentalize spiritual life. "There is nothing easier than to find passages in Marx which support the view that the superstructure is an instrument of the base and both must be described in class categories"[17]; "One can find many quotations in Marx and Engels to the effect that throughout human history the 'superstructure' has been at the service of the corresponding relations of property in a given society...the law cannot but be a weapon of class

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power. "[19]Therefore, if people completely regard the superstructure as a tool of class struggle, this is merely further developing the original viewpoint of Historical Materialism. Although Lenin's understanding of the superstructure's social role was not entirely identical with Historical Materialism, the latter nevertheless served as its ideological foundation.

Second, Kolakowski emphasizes that Lenin's spiritual nihilism also originated from Historical Materialism. Since the classic writers had affirmed the instrumental role of the superstructure, it was a logical conclusion to hold that their standard of evaluation depended on whether they served the interests of a specific class. The principle in Historical Materialism that the superstructure must serve the economic base is its origin. Therefore, "if there are new relations of production reflecting the interests of the proletariat, the superstructure—politics, law, literature, art, and science—must conform to the demands of these relations as interpreted by the conscious vanguard of the proletariat."[17] Thus, when Lenin said literary creation "must become part of the common cause of the proletariat"[20], and morality is "entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle. "[21], this was in line with the internal logic of Historical Materialism. For Kolakowski, the excessive interference in social and cultural life during the Stalin era must be understood in conjunction with this spiritual nihilism, and the origin of the latter should be traced back to Historical Materialism through Lenin as the intermediary. "It is therefore arguable that universal servility as the guiding principle of cultural life in the Stalinist system was a proper deduction from the 'base-superstructure' theory."[19]

Thus, by constructing a overarching thread running through the communist movement, Kolakowski completed his criticism of Historical Materialism. Marxism was the source of Lenin's thought, and this includes Historical Materialism as a component part. Based on Historical Materialism, Lenin ultimately developed an instrumentalist and nihilist doctrine. And when Lenin's thought became the dominant ideology of the new state, Historical Materialism as interpreted by Lenin became the guiding ideology for the Soviet Union in governing social and cultural life. If this governance was essentially improper, then the relevant criticism must be traced back to its guiding ideology and its original starting point. This is why Kolakowski claimed, "It would be absurd to say that Marxism was predestined to become the ideology of the self-glorifying Russian bureaucracy. Nevertheless, it contained essential features, as opposed to accidental or secondary ones, that Marxism contained features that made it adaptable to this purpose."[17]

4. Response to Popper

Does the "Anti-Historical-Prediction" argument successfully refute historicism? At least in Peter Urbach's view, it does not. He believes the entire argument actually implies a proposition, namely, "We cannot predict, by rational or scientific methods, events which are strongly influenced by events which cannot be so predicted."[22] Against this, Urbach raises an important critical point: there exists a historical law x, whose validity is compatible with unpredictable factors. He takes natural science laws as examples: many natural science theorems involve numerous unpredictable factors at the micro level, Boyle's law being one example. However, these unpredictable factors at the micro level do not affect the validity of the entire theorem at the macro level. There is no reason to think historical laws would not be the same.

Due to space constraints, we cannot detail Urbach's views here. Logically, Urbach's rebuttal to the entire argument seems valid: the existence of unpredictable micro-level factors does not affect the validity of macro-level laws. But unlike Urbach, our response is based on the theoretical logic of Marxism itself.

Popper considers the influence of knowledge development on the historical process to be "strong," indicating he acknowledges to some extent that factors influencing the historical

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process can be divided into "weak" and "strong." Weak factors themselves have limited influence on the historical process; the impact of their development on the course of history can be neglected. Therefore, we can say that even if the development of weak influencing factors is unpredictable, it will have little effect on the historical process. Thus, a historical prediction based on grasping the development trend of strong factors can remain unaffected by the unpredictability of weak influencing factors, unless those weak factors can, under specific conditions, influence the development of strong factors.

So, is knowledge development a "strong" factor influencing the historical process? This needs further exploration within the Marxist perspective. The development of productive forces is the decisive force for historical progress. This is not only a fundamental tenet of Marxism but also a basic fact of human historical development. At the same time, productive forces are continuously generated in the human production process. A factor influencing the historical process is "strong" only if it participates in and dominates the production process, thereby affecting the development of productive forces. In a given historical stage, many factors can dominate the production process, including production technology. In contemporary society, knowledge development is indeed a major factor affecting the development of production technology. One might assume that knowledge, mediated by production technology, can dominate the production process and ultimately affect the development of productive forces. However, this first presupposes that it can combine with production technology. Only then can knowledge constitute a major factor in the development of production technology. We can categorize knowledge capable of combining with production technology as production-applicable knowledge. If one kind of knowledge advances only in the purely theoretical realm without connecting to production technology, then it cannot promote the improvement of production technology. Consequently, this kind of knowledge cannot dominate the production process of human society and exert a strong influence on the historical process. Therefore, within the Marxist perspective, purely theoretical knowledge belongs to the category of "weak" factors.

However, Popper does not explain in detail what type of "knowledge" he is referring to. If the "knowledge" in the argument is limited to knowledge existing in the purely theoretical realm, then as a weak factor, the unpredictability of its development would not directly affect the level of development of productive forces. Thus, historical predictions based on grasping the level of development of productive forces would not be disturbed by the unpredictability of the impact of purely theoretical knowledge development.

Popper might raise an objection: even if the "knowledge" in the entire argument refers only to purely theoretical knowledge, we cannot predict the future status of a theory *z* that is not currently connected to production technology. Because *z* could very well transform into applicable knowledge in the future and dominate the production process, ultimately affecting the level of development of productive forces and changing the historical process. In short, since all theoretical knowledge has the potential to become production-applicable knowledge in the future, thus becoming a "strong" influencing factor in the Marxist view, and since this transformation process cannot be known in advance, the unpredictability of the development of purely theoretical knowledge cannot be considered "weak" in its impact on the development of social productive forces. Marxist historical prediction still needs to face the challenge of the unpredictability of theoretical knowledge development.

But does all theoretical knowledge really have the potential to combine with the production process in the future? It is hard to imagine that metaphysical philosophical knowledge possesses this capability. Even if all theoretical knowledge had the potential to transform into production-applicable knowledge and thereby affect the development of production technology, this does not mean it will necessarily realize this potential. American scholar Richard Hudelson, in his article "Popper's Critique of Marx", points out: Marx believed

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that under capitalist conditions, the development of scientific research is increasingly constrained and serves the need for capital accumulation. If this is an empirical fact, then the laws of historical development proposed by Marx would be immune to Popper's critique[23]. Hudelson's meaning can be understood as: there exists a situation where, under capitalist conditions, the primary purpose of purely theoretical knowledge is to serve the need for capital accumulation. Considering that the nature of capital is profit-seeking rather than developing productive forces, knowledge serving this purpose might focus on areas outside the immediate production and reproduction process. Although knowledge applied in other fields can also affect the development of social productive forces, its influence can no longer be described as "strong." Therefore, it is possible that, in a situation where theoretical knowledge universally serves capital accumulation, Marxist historical prediction is not disturbed by its unpredictability.

And what if the "knowledge" Popper refers to includes the entirety of knowledge, including production-applicable knowledge? As a whole, knowledge is clearly a strong factor affecting the development of productive forces. Responding to this statement hinges on understanding Historical Materialism's attitude towards historical prediction. In Popper's view, when historicism puts forward historical predictions, it firmly believes it can accurately predict history. However, this is not a view consistently held by Historical Materialism. For Historical Materialism, its historical predictions are based on numerous prerequisite conditions; it acknowledges that these conditions are not always and everywhere satisfied. Even if the unpredictability of knowledge development's impact on the historical process necessarily affects the level of development of productive forces, this would not pose a substantial threat to Marxism, because it does not operate on the intellectual stage as a historical prophecy. Yet Popper insists on this point. This inevitably leads one to suspect whether he has bestowed excessive honor upon Historical Materialism. As the British scholar Z.A.Jordan said: "Numerous recent studies have given rise to considerable doubt as to whether all the views which are subjected to Professor Popper's penetrating analysis may be justifiably ascribed to Marx"[24]

5. Response to Kolakowski

Main Currents has influenced many scholars' understanding of Marxism. For example, Richard Rorty claimed he agreed with Kolakowski's view in Main Currents that Marxism was quite different from the goals of socialism. He said, "Like many of us in the Anglo-American tradition, Kolakowski does not see Marx as an embodiment of socialism, but as a deviation from it."[25] A.J.Ayer, in his later work *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, skipped over 20th-century Marxism because he felt the relevant discussions in Main Currents had reached an unparalleled level.[26] Agreeing with Main Currents' commentary on Marxism means simultaneously accepting all of Kolakowski's criticisms of Marxism. Theoretical progress certainly needs criticism, but some criticisms lose their positive effect due to their inherent bias. Kolakowski's criticism of Historical Materialism is one such example.

We have seen that Kolakowski criticizes Historical Materialism from its historical effects rather than its theoretical logic. Thus, Historical Materialism becomes the ultimate bearer of responsibility for later trouble. The difficulty in responding to this critique lies in, on the one hand, it is indeed based on the theoretical consensus within Marxist research—that Lenin inherited and developed Marx's thought; on the other hand, the Soviet Union did experience some twists and turns in communist construction. Clearly, Kolakowski seized upon this and exploited it extensively. But his criticism is not unassailable; in our view, it has the following two problems:

First, Kolakowski, without referencing the historical context, one-sidedly judges Lenin's view of the superstructure as instrumentalism and spiritual nihilism. Although Kolakowski quotes

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numerous statements from Lenin to demonstrate these two points, these quotations mainly come from Lenin's Pre-October Revolution works. At that time, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, were engaged in resolute struggle against the Tsarist government. The harshness of Russian political life implied that there was no room for compromise between the opposing sides, necessitating the use of all available methods. Under such conditions, Lenin's emphasis on understanding the superstructure as a tool of struggle and evaluating it based on its role in the class struggle was in line with reality. But for Lenin, the standard for evaluating the superstructure was not solely class interest; it was the revolutionary situation that required him to measure the superstructure from the perspective of class struggle. If this were not the case, it would be difficult to explain historical facts that after the establishment of Soviet Russia, non-communist philosophical works could still be published under certain conditions, and a large amount of Western thought entered Soviet Russian academic and cultural circles during this period (which Kolakowski also noted[17]). Because, logically, these non-communist theories were "merely" tools for the propertied classes to maintain their own interests; allowing them to appear in a proletarian society would only endanger the ideology of society's members. The Soviet Russia under Lenin's ideological leadership evidently saw no need to do this. Therefore, Lenin held a concept of cultural continuity; he acknowledged that the superstructure had roles beyond being a tool of struggle. We can see this from Lenin's own life: according to his wife Krupskaya's recollection, "Vladimir Ilyich not only read, but reread multiple times, the works of Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*. In general, he was very familiar with the classics and loved them."[27]

In short, we cannot directly assume that Lenin's understanding of the superstructure was entirely as Kolakowski describes, i.e., "the meaning of all human affairs, ideas, institutions, and values resided exclusively in their bearing on the class struggle."[17] To say that Lenin inherited the basic principles of Historical Materialism is correct; to say that Lenin, on this basis, embarked on a biased path and used this to condemn Historical Materialism is one-sided.

Second, Kolakowski directly links the relevant events of the Stalin period to Lenin's view of the superstructure without specific analysis. We see that cultural governance policies during Stalin's time, such as the "anti-cosmopolitanism campaign," violated the Marxist aim of achieving the comprehensive development of human spiritual life; this is an indisputable fact. Even though Historical Materialism has confirmed the instrumental characteristics of the superstructure, and even if this instrumental characteristic requires us to evaluate various superstructures from the perspective of class interests, it also acknowledges that the superstructure has its own developmental logic independent of economic activities. As Engels said, "Every ideological domain, including philosophy, constitutes a division of labour within a particular realm, and has as its premise specific thought material handed down to it by its predecessors, from which it develops."[16]We cannot assume that philosophers choose this material solely based on class interests; otherwise, this would negate humanity's inherent intellectual interests and reduce philosophical activity to undifferentiated, singular behavior. Human motivation in the realm of the superstructure is a unity of class character and non-class character. Neglecting either aspect leads to bias in thought and practice. Take Zhdanov's speech at the discussion on Alexandrov's History of Western European Philosophy as an example: he said, "Since materialism grew and developed in the struggle against idealist trends, the history of philosophy is also the history of the struggle between materialism and idealism."[28] Clearly, Zhdanov ignored the internal developmental logic of philosophy and, one-sidedly, defined the entire history of philosophy based on its relationship to the class struggle. This is the truly instrumentalist attitude towards the superstructure. And as we have shown, Lenin's view of the superstructure was not a combination of instrumentalism and spiritual nihilism; it is therefore quite forced to claim that he shared the same theoretical logic as Zhdanov.

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However, Kolakowski strongly insists on this point. Regarding this, we already have sufficient basis to respond to his view. As Yi Junqing pointed out, "For example, in the analysis of the theoretical construction of Leninism and the socialist practice led by Lenin, Kolakowski saw some superficial commonalities or similarities between Lenin's practical explorations and the later Stalinist model of socialism, but he failed to reveal the differences between the two through concrete historical analysis."[29] Without detailed analysis, we cannot simply assume that all cultural policies of the Stalin era inherited Lenin's (conditionally proposed) view of the superstructure, let alone conclude that Historical Materialism, through Lenin, directly served as its guiding ideology. This general and abstract nature of analysis largely determined Kolakowski's extreme attitude towards Historical Materialism.

In summary, having demonstrated that Lenin's attitude towards the superstructure was not one of instrumentalism and spiritual nihilism, and that the historical events of the Stalin period are unrelated to Lenin's relevant thought, Kolakowski's criticism of Historical Materialism is unfounded.

6. Conclusion

The reader will notice that the narrative of this paper differs significantly when dealing with the two different scholars. The response to Popper relies more on logical dissection, while the refutation of Kolakowski's challenges requires us to adhere to a three-fold unity of standpoint, historical facts, and logic. The author cannot claim to have achieved a complete and comprehensive refutation of the relevant issues, but this is nevertheless an attempt to comprehensively respond to two distinctly different yet convergent critical viewpoints within a limited text. We believe this paper has not only basically accomplished this task but also made some contribution to future in-depth research.

In fact, Popper and Kolakowski do have something in common: both were once adherents of Marxism. Popper briefly joined the socialist secondary school students' association (*sozialistische Mittelschüler*) but declared his departure from Marxism before his 17th birthday (for reasons that seem quite peculiar today).[30] Kolakowski, in his youth, was a rising star in the Marxist academia of socialist Poland. But after leaving Poland, he gradually changed his stance, publicly positioning himself against Marxism through works like Theses on Hope and Despair (1971) and My Correct Views on Everything (1974). Regarding this, we should not confine ourselves to criticizing their abandonment of ideals and beliefs; we should also see the tension between personal choice, truth, and history: people often discard truth like worn-out shoes due to temporary setbacks, but the answers to the riddles of history have always withstood the test of time, as recorded on the parchment in the hands of Clio (Κλειώ).

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