

TOWARDS A MATERIALIST THEORY OF IDEOLOGY: The IQ Debate as a Case Study

Les Levidow

In the Race-IQ debate which has resurfaced in Britain and the USA since 1969, socialist critiques of IQ science have centred upon some notion or other of 'ideology'. That term has been invoked largely as an insult, intended to mean the opposite of 'truth' - as if the questions for revolutionaries were whether the claims made by IQ science are true or false, whether the claims are founded on reason or on mere rationalisation. If that were the question, then our task would be to show that IQ science - by virtue of its technical defects, social class bias, political origins, etc - violates the supposed rules and norms of scientific measurement. If so, then we could brand it 'ideological' and therefore 'unscientific' - concocted solely to justify the existing society.

I want to argue, on the contrary, that revolutionaries need to ask instead what kind of society IQ science helped to create. This means asking what kinds of new relations between people IQ science helped to mediate, and therefore what kind of science it is and what kind of truth it is. And, as for its ideology, this means asking what kind of 'ability' it defines and reproduces, what kind of social relations it represents as somehow rooted in the nature of things and therefore as natural and eternal.

My approach intends ultimately to suggest that IQ testing, seen in historical perspective, was less a matter of justifying an existing capitalist society than of constructing a new stage of capitalism. It is with a similar approach that we will need to confront testing in Britain today, where - in the Great Debate over schooling - particular notions of 'basic skills' are gaining increasing importance. Such rhetoric is directed less at justifying the present allocation (streaming) of pupils - be it 'meritocratic' or otherwise - than at representing so-called 'basic skills' as mere techniques for getting something done, as neutral facilities appropriate to any social circumstances. Accordingly, these 'thingified' techniques, as 'needs of industry', must presumably be more widely acquired by the future labour force in their (and society's) own best interests. So these 'basic skills', embodying the common or 'national' interest, are seen to be necessarily class-neutral because they are possessed apart from any particular social relations.

I want to argue, on the contrary, that we need to understand any particular form of 'ability' not only as socially constituted - rather than simply justifying 'society' from outside of it - but also as contradictory, just as any social relations entail conflicts. We need such an understanding so that we can recognise and build upon existing revolts against the

social relations of capital's practices. It is precisely such revolts that provide occasions for seeing the way that the social relations (such as 'ability' itself) are normally mystified through science in the form of things - their possession, their properties, and their relations. So, through the example of the IQ debate, I will want to suggest that the belaboured distinction between scientific and ideological practices is at most a problem for capital, not for revolutionaries, because the project of overthrowing capitalism cannot itself be 'scientific'.

Marxism vs. Science

I will continue by explaining how I came to treat the IQ debate in such an unusual way. My interest in a critique of IQ, and of science as a whole, dates from the period of 1972-73, a time of difficult changes for the (American) New Left milieu of which I had been a part for several years. The days were over when the institutions, universities in particular, would go out of their way to accommodate people of our ilk. No longer students with a 1960s-era licence ('repressive tolerance'), we were moving up in academia, or out of it entirely. So we were faced with new sorts of settings in which to challenge our given roles - while at the same time needing to preserve them.

In other words, we were coming to terms with the problem of re-ordering our lives in a way that could extend our past radicalism rather than submerge it. For many of us, this meant quite ambivalent attempts to plan careers, or at least to give them a try. Despite our political commitment, we found ourselves falling into a normalization of our lives, at least compared to the former fluidity. We were up against what seemed to be an 'objective necessity' imposed by the nature of jobs themselves, with the world threatening the bonds of comradeship on which we'd constructed our political identities.

At the same time, the Marxism that had been developed and rediscovered by the New Left's struggles was now in danger of becoming the exclusive property of the left sects, on the one hand, or of academic careerists, on the other. Whether this Marxism was an exhortation to party discipline, or just another academic discipline, it claimed to determine objective truths about the material world out there, so that our own practices could be seen to be constrained by the very nature of things. In this historical shift, 'truth' was seen as a superior knowledge discovered by specialists according to a scientific method in which they were especially trained and qualified. Even where Marxism was

connected to a sense of struggle, as in the left sects, its content was defined by ways of working together which reproduced much of the society that we'd set out to overthrow. In this degeneration, the rhetoric of 'scientific socialism' played a key role in disciplining ourselves not so much to real historical possibilities for collective struggle, but to 'objective laws of history', supposedly imposing their inescapable necessity upon us. The Marxism that we'd looked to for getting a political hold upon our lives was now helping to resign us to the narrow confines of the existing institutions.

My 'Short March Through the Institutions'

From 1972 to 1974 I was one of many teaching assistants for an introductory biology course, as part of my work as a biology graduate student. In a largely unconscious way, there was a constant struggle over how I would relate to my students, as both teacher and evaluator, and how I would present the material. On one occasion I objected to the lecturer's use of particularly blatant capitalist metaphors (e.g. 'investment'), in the sense of challenging whether that's the way nature really is. Her reply was, for example, that certain economic concepts were simply the best pedagogical method for teaching the Krebs sugar oxidation cycle, especially for such urban students who had 'so little contact with nature', as she put it. Could I come up with a better method to teach the material, she asked. Something was seriously lacking in my Marxism if my challenge could be effectively silenced by such a reply.

Only much later did I realize that she was actually 'right', in the sense that Sir Hans Krebs discovered the oxidation cycle in the 1930s through conceptual categories drawn from John Maynard Keynes, just as Darwin had drawn upon Malthus. So the problem is not how we interpret or re-interpret the facts of nature, but rather how a society constructs nature historically. But that's jumping ahead in our story.

My next institutional setting was a 'special education' school designed for secondary school students judged as 'emotionally disturbed' and/or 'socially maladjusted', but at the same time as cognitively 'normal'. It was therefore deemed a worthwhile task for society to invest in skilling and disciplining them into responsible and productive citizens.

Given the school's well-defined niche, the state-related testing procedures not only bore upon administrative judgements about new admissions, students' progress and transfers, but also held a pervasive presence in the school's everyday affairs. That is, the testing was merely a more formalized version of how we tended to treat the students as repositories of individual responsibility and skills to be developed for their individual self-interest as future employees and consumers. It was our job constantly to counterpose that 'interest' to their mischievous impulses - whose irreverence often attracted me but usually left me unable to respond other than by defending my own authority role.

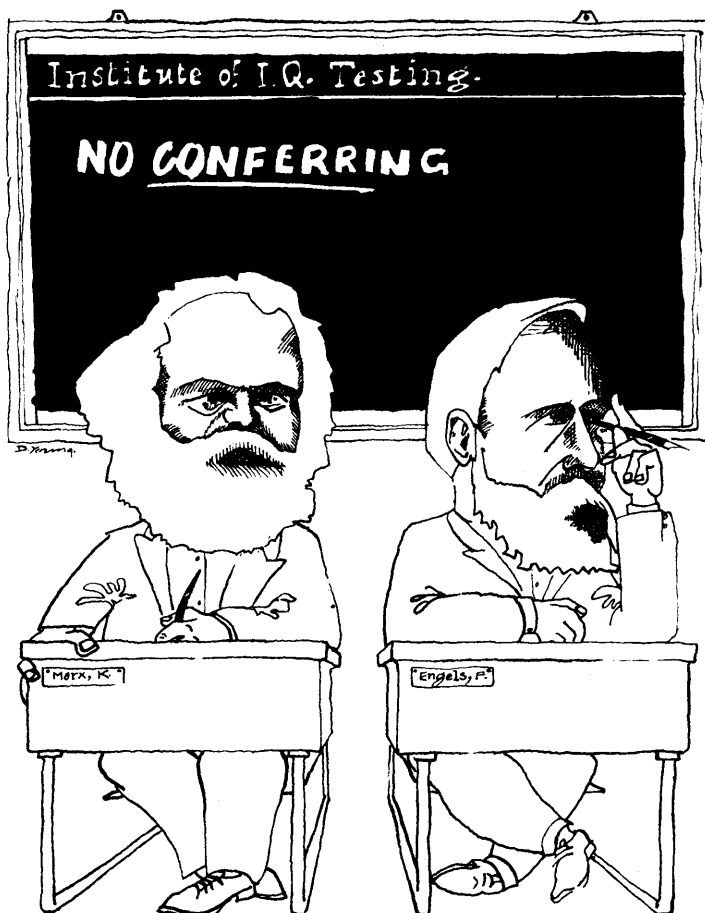
While holding no naively grand illusions of being a 'socialist' teacher in a capitalist society, I certainly had hoped to teach science as something other than a collection of facts. I expected to teach science differently, through a process of developing experi-

ments to answer questions about the world. Little did I realize, though - and so learned the hard way - that the testing paradigm actually defined what counted as knowledge. As it turned out, the students felt threatened by anything but the familiar 'learning' by rote, and they didn't hesitate to show their hostility to my attempts at doing otherwise.

At the same time, with my difficulty at coming across to them personally - a difficulty compounded by my anxieties over the need to maintain control - the students felt bored by almost anything conventional, often to the point of simply ignoring me. They also took full advantage of the ambivalence with which I demanded their attention and handed them moralistic imperatives (much to my own surprise!).

As a *modus vivendi*, I somehow managed eventually to devise a formal teaching method where my 'personal' relation to them centred upon my commending them, in effect, for submitting to a particular work discipline. By having them do simple readings together as a group, I was able to give all of them the chance to prove themselves 'good students' by diligently finding the right answers to fairly mechanical questions. So, at least on the surface, they were 'learning' - even doing 'real science', as they put it - and I was managing to 'get results' without having to shout at them so much.

But any interest they displayed in the work - or in me personally - was bound up with their desire (however ambivalent) to be judged as worthwhile people by me, as the official dispenser of commendation. So the personal rapport was itself a lie - albeit a 'necessary' one for me, as a welcomed relief from the previous chaos and (literal) nightmares. But with my nascent 'professional success', I came to be taken over by that lie as a deadening, alienating routine which I came to resent at least as much as the students did.



The Radical Science Movement

It was from such confines that I began to turn to the radical science movement, whose activists were attempting to confront their own roles as scientific workers. The great stumbling block that I came up against from the very start was the movement's tendency to assume that there is an essence of science exempt from capitalism, or at least potentially so. They saw capitalism as abusing science or mis-representing reality through science. The radical project, then, was to defend science from penetration by capitalist ideology and from abuse by capitalist applications. In other words, there was a pure core or method of true science which we needed to distinguish and salvage from all else.

So they attacked the more blatantly objectionable aspects of science by invoking a narrow rhetoric of deviations from science, with insults such as 'pseudo-science', 'abuse of science', or even 'bad science'. Despite the epithets, some imaginative insights were developed, but as a whole this approach proved most unhelpful for getting a hold upon our intimidation by science, seen as a body of ideas or methods. With such an approach, we could claim only that capitalism was mis-interpreting the facts, which were of course neutral, value-free products of scientific experiments. Missing here was any critique of how the facts themselves were produced by practices which are capitalist.

In particular, the IQ debate intrigued me as a symptom of how we remained entrapped by capitalist categories of practice and knowledge. IQ presented an enigma to any model that saw facts as simply having values and applications added onto them, because with such a model we could go no further than challenging the scientific rigour of experimental facts and their interpretation. We were stuck with an endless dispute over statistical methods and results.

To get out of that morass, we would have to claim that IQ scores were themselves ideology. But such a claim tended to be put in terms of IQ testing as a con, in that it's not at all about 'measuring' abilities (or anything at all) but merely a ruse to allocate individuals in the capitalist hierarchy - for example, by 'testing' for compliability or respectability. This means that IQ would be distorting or ignoring the true material reality of abilities, in favour of justifying an entirely different material reality.

But if we deny, in effect, that IQ is real, then how could we explain the successful transmission of the IQ ideology? To say that capitalism needs some way of justifying its hierarchy is to reduce IQ testing to a more or less arbitrary ruse. It is also to explain the credibility of IQ in an idealist way, in terms of the power of ideology - as mere ideas - brought in from the outside of a situation. Clearly we needed a better analysis to solve the enigma.

In the actual course of the experiment, the personality of the operator was regulated to the background by making our procedure as mechanical as could be, using a written form of instructions to be recited to each boy at the beginning of every new test... (p102)

- Cyril Burt, 'Experimental Tests of General Intelligence', British Journal of Psychology 3 (1909)

IQ as Social Relations

Back then my intuition for a way out of this quandary - an intuition which I've since worked out through collective work - was to see IQ as a social relation which is mystified by the way it is represented, so that it can be both real and ideological. But to work out this problem, we had to grasp science as practices which define entire forms of knowledge, by way of constructing nature in particular ways. By this method, we could see that facts contain both values and applications, since they assume certain social relations of production.

As I was in the process of studying the history of IQ, one of my breakthroughs came from an incident that occurred during my one year of science teaching at a secondary school whose pupils were all black or Puerto Rican. I happened to be present while the school psychologist was administering the Wechsler test to one of the black pupils. To the question, 'What is the thing to do if you find someone else's purse?', the pupil grinned and replied, 'Do you want the whitey answer or the nigger answer?' I couldn't help but burst out laughing, and the pupil as well. But the psychologist remained unmoved. So the pupil broke the awkward silence by capitulating; he asked the psychologist to repeat the question, so as to re-establish the formal test situation. The psychologist complied, so that the 'measurement of intelligence' resumed according to the rules.

For experiments upon young and untrained subjects such as ours, there is a further advantage in using none but the simplest apparatus. To boys, strange apparatus is distracting. Clock-work mechanism arouses irrelevant interests. Electric wires and keys inspire needless apprehensions. Consequently, in dispensing with elaborate instruments, the sacrifice of the mechanical regulation of objective conditions is often more than compensated by the exclusion of subjective irregularities and unstable attitudes of mind. (p98)

There are many such examples of recalcitrance by testees, such as Indian children who refuse to answer a test question to which other children present may not know the answer, so as not to shame them; or children refusing to indicate that they've found the answer until all the other children present are ready to do so. In the incident I've described, the pupil was isolated, apart from my laughter, and so had to draw upon his cultural identity in a more explicitly verbal way to defend himself from a question that probably struck him as an assault upon his being.

Now, these examples of recalcitrance tend to be seen at most as evidence of test bias, in the sense that such test questions cannot accurately measure the intelligence of any but white middle class children. Some critics have gone a bit further by locating the problem in the test situation itself as one alien to other cultures. However, even the most subtle critiques tend to reduce cultural considerations to 'social factors' that impinge upon the test from the outside and thereby distort the test score from its otherwise true, fair value.

It is rarely suggested that the test situation - indeed, the power relation between tester and testee - is integral to the alleged 'measurement of intelligence'. I want to argue precisely that; i.e., that IQ testing is no matter of a subject determining facts about an object, but is rather a particular

social form of mental labour. To the incident I described, the pupil subverted his role as producer of answers to alien hypothetical questions, and tried instead to make human contact with the tester, the intended recipient of answers. But the tester, as a personification of capital, couldn't take the joke, except at the price of surrendering control over the test situation. My telling of the incident is intended to suggest that 'intelligence' is a social relation, and that it's precisely the revolt against that relation which helps us to reveal the mystifying processes underlying the normal test situation, which we might otherwise take for granted.

To understand IQ testing as ideological, in any meaningful sense of the word, I found it necessary to draw upon the critical concepts that Marx developed for understanding how commodity exchange could be both ideological and 'objectively' real. As it turns out, the act of commodity exchange abstracts not from the material to the ideal but within material reality, so that material reality itself could be ideological, by virtue of the way it is socially reproduced. So it is within the act of commodity exchange itself that Marx could locate the material basis for both political economy and his critique of it as ideological. Let us briefly sketch his critical method:

Commodities can be exchanged at all only on the basis of their having different use values, and therefore containing different types of labour. However, the act of commodity exchange entails abstracting from those different qualities their common quality of embodying human labour in the abstract. This 'exchange abstraction' is not done intentionally or consciously, but simply by virtue of exchanging commodities in definite proportions according to the respective amount of average socially necessary labour they contain.

In this way, the equivalent 'exchange values', derived from equal quantities of dead labour, can take the mystified form of a physical property of the commodities themselves. Exchange value itself appears to derive from the physical nature of things, because the social relations between commodity producers take the form of a relation between things. In this way, historically specific social relations take a social form - exchange value - which represents those relations as natural.

Equality in the full sense between different kinds of labour can be arrived at only if we abstract from their real inequality, if we reduce them to the characteristic they have in common, that of being the expenditure of human labour in the abstract. - Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p166

Through generalized commodity production, and then wage-labour, labour power itself becomes a commodity. Unlike other commodities, this labour power (capacity to work) must be exploited by the capitalist by setting it to work. Nevertheless, like other commodities, labour power is exchanged at its value, determined by the average socially necessary labour time required to reproduce it.

However, wage-labour, and therefore political economy, mystifies this exchange by representing wages as the 'value of labour'. This is an ideological term because it assigns an inherent value to a particular sort of labour, the magnitude of its value arising from its physiological properties. The 'value of labour' mystifies the selling of one's labour power, as if it were fundamentally similar to an individual commodity producer selling the

finished product of his/her labour..

The material basis for this mystification lies in capitalism's historical tendency to treat labour power as indifferent to any particular sort of labour. In other words, capitalist wage-labour abstracts from the particular qualities of labour its universal quality as labour power in the abstract. As with commodity exchange, people do not consciously set out from different types of labour power (or use values) and then ideally abstract out equivalent exchange values; on the contrary, by selling their labour for a wage, people daily engage in an 'exchange abstraction' without necessarily realizing it. This is because capitalism regulates labour not directly, according to the particular 'use values' produced, but rather indirectly, according to the comparative exchange values produced by different labours.

... a social relation, a definite relation between individuals, here appears as a metal, a stone, as a purely physical, external thing. - *Grundrisse*, p239

So wage-labour, the sale of and setting to work of labour power, is a relation of class struggle which takes the form of a thing, the 'value of labour'. This is as if what's being exchanged were a fixed quantity of labour, assigned a value by virtue of its physiological properties. Hence, the 'rate for the job' and 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'. So here, as with commodity exchange, a social relation takes the form of a thing or a natural property of a thing. In this example, an exchange abstraction within material reality permits us to locate ideology within that reality.

The IQ Debate Proper

If we now return to IQ testing, then we can employ a similar method to analyze 'things' in terms of the social relations which both produce them and mystify them - in this case, to analyze 'intelligence' as mental labour in the abstract. When I speak here of a 'similar method', I do not at all intend to equate IQ scores with commodities, as if the reproduction of labour power for capital - in schooling, family, etc - had to be modelled exactly upon commodity exchange itself. But neither do I intend a merely formal analogy between IQ testing and commodity exchange (or between IQ scores and exchange value), since my purpose certainly is to grasp IQ - and the entire IQ debate - as a mediation of capital.

To do that, I will examine three of the issues which have arisen in the IQ debate, concerning the measurement of IQ, its causes, and its effects. These issues actually tend to arise in a much cruder form; I have tried here to formulate them in the most sophisticated way possible so as to lend my critique the broadest application.

(1) 'How well does the IQ test measure intelligence?'

This question assumes that 'intelligence' is a pre-existing property of individuals already residing in the testee, and then asks how well a 'test' - as a thing - can determine the amount of that property. Furthermore, in this question the power relation between tester and testee takes the form of the power of the 'test' to determine something about the testee.

This mystification is not merely a distortion of material reality, but has its material basis in the testing process itself. Namely, the social context of the test situation does not call up test answers

for any immanent concrete purpose, nor certainly for any immanent interest of the testee. (Nor does the wage-labourer's sale of labour power require the seller or buyer to have any interest in the concrete use-values produced.) Rather, the sole purpose of the test answers is for them to be judged against a pre-defined standard for comparison with other individuals' answers. By this process, the mental labour by which answers are socially constructed abstracts from all particular qualities the universal quality of mental labour in the abstract. It is by comparing testees' scores that their qualitatively different mental labours are equated as abstract mental labour.

This is not simply an ideal abstraction from material reality, but an abstraction within material reality. In other words, mental labour of different individuals is not first compared directly and then subjected to an ideal abstracting out of a universal quality. Rather, the mental labour is compared indirectly, by relating different individuals according to their respective quantity of abstract mental labour.

In this way, an ordinal scale of intelligence can assign positions to individuals according to the respective amounts of 'intelligence' that each possesses. (Likewise the 'value of labour' mystifies the exchange value of labour power as the physiological property of a thing.) In IQ testing the social relations of the production of answers, or the expenditure of mental labour power, takes the form of a quantifiable property of the testee, a quantity of a thing to be 'measured' by the test. So to ask how well the IQ test 'measures' intelligence is to accept the ideology of IQ testing, which represents 'intelligence' as a natural, quantifiable quality of individuals; it thereby represents mental labour as naturally a separate thing from manual labour on the one hand and from social relations on the other. We might just as well ask how well wages 'measure' the 'value of labour'.

Next, let us move on to a question as to the possible causes of IQ, taken as a particular quantity of intelligence.

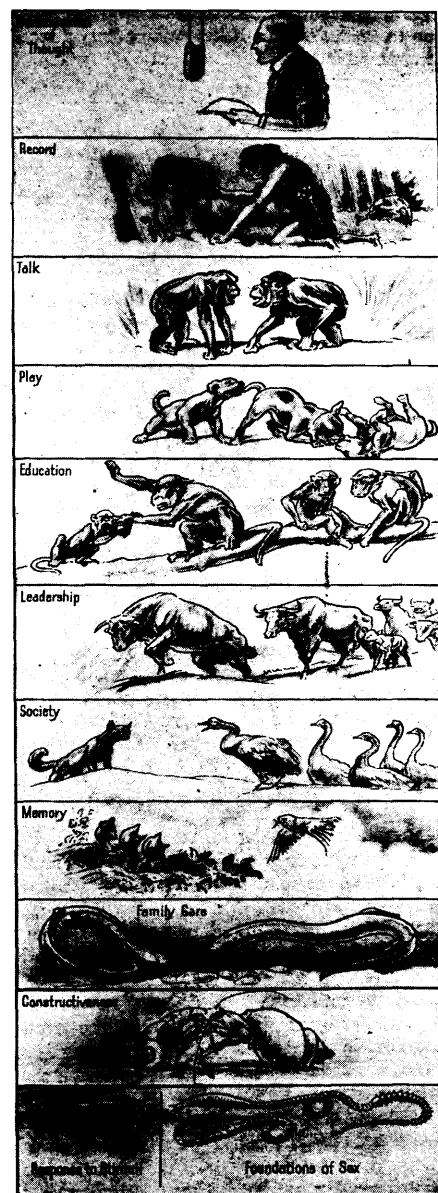
What does a solely quantitative difference between things presuppose? The identity of their qualities. Hence, the quantitative measure of labours presupposes the equivalence, the identity of their quality. - *Grundrisse*, p173

(2) 'How much of individual variation in IQ is due to heredity and how much to environment?'

As in the previous question about the measurement of intelligence, the question also takes intelligence as a natural quality of individuals differing in the quantity thereof. The question then proceeds to ask what determines those differing quantities, as products of two causal factors. With the category of 'environment', the social relations through which individuals construct their future selves take the form of a thing impinging upon them from the outside, beyond their immediate control. With heredity, genes are taken as naturally empowered to contribute quantitatively to the quality of 'intelligence'. Then, quantities of these two causal factors are seen to add together - or interact - to produce a quantity of yet another thing, IQ.

In this way, heredity and environment are separated out into the 'natural' and the 'social', as two separate things which then meet in the individual's development. The quality of intelligence, in reality

PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH THE AGES



THE LADDER OF INTELLIGENCE
From the response to stimuli by ameba to the transmission of thought by radio.

a social construct, is projected onto nature - not as the social construction of nature by a particular society, but as an inherent property of genes, as a purely a-social thing, which then interacts with social things to produce a technical thing, a quantity of intelligence. Just as it is ideological for the political economists to ask what parts are played by nature (and society, respectively) in the determination of exchange value, so it is ideological to ask how much of the variation in IQs is due to heredity, even if the empirically 'discovered' answer is zero.

The degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, or by the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour, is shown, among other things, by the dull and tedious dispute over the part played by nature in the formation of exchange-value. Since exchange-value is a definite social manner of expressing the labour bestowed upon a thing, it can have no more natural content than has, for example, the rate of exchange. *Capital*, I, p176

Next, let us move on to a question about the possible effects of IQ.

- (3) 'How much of the inter-generational transmission of economic success is due to the transmission of cognitive ability?'

This question warrants some elaboration before demolishing it. Given that socio-economic status is somehow 'transmitted' from parents to their children, how much of that transmission across generations is due to a transmission of cognitive abilities? To its credit, this question intentionally begs the question as to how much those abilities are 'acquired' by heredity or environment. Because, if it could be shown that the inter-generational transmission of economic success is independent of cognitive ability, then raising IQs would not necessarily raise economic success, so that the entire nature/nurture controversy over IQ would be rendered utterly irrelevant to any question of social policy aimed at economic equality.

However, the problem is that this question is concerned with the allocation of individuals to positions in a socio-economic hierarchy, and asks, in effect, whether such allocation is done according to cognitive abilities or instead according to personal ('social') traits. In so asking, the question separates out cognitive abilities from 'social' ones, as if technical abilities were not social as well. By defining such abilities as a property of individuals, the question must satisfy its own empirical requirements by taking IQ scores as a quantitative 'measure' of cognitive abilities.

As for economic success, also defined as a property of individuals (literally), this must likewise have its empirical requirements met by quantifying it as 'socio-economic status'. Instead of looking at the social relations by which labour power is reproduced, the question accepts the way that those relations take the form of 'status' (or distribution), as a quantifiable thing. In this question the only possible significance of cognitive ability is as a particular quantity of individual property, which may or may not be the cause of each individual's having a particular quantity of yet another property, status. The question doesn't ask whether cognitive abilities and socio-economic status might be related by virtue of their both being relations of the reproduction of labour power, social relations which take a similarly mystified form. Instead, the question simply takes for granted their social form, and asks to what extent the quantity of one thing (IQ) causes a quantity of another thing (socio-economic status).

The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.

- Karl Marx, 6th Thesis on Feuerbach

The Historical 'truth' of IQ

I have cited these three examples from the IQ debate to suggest that, in class society, material reality (including nature) tends to be ideological, by virtue of the way that the reality is socially constructed and reproduced. That reality gives meaning to particular forms of knowledge, rendering them 'true', since they 'work', yet at the same time historically limited, since their truth depends upon and reinforces the particular power relations that constitute them.

In capitalism in particular, the forces of production (humans' relation to nature) take the form of merely technical things - technology, labour power, even 'ability'. The relations of production (humans'

relation to each other) are thereby seen to follow inexorably from the inherent properties of those 'thingified' forces. For example, commodity exchange follows on from the exchange value of the products of labour; wage-labour follows from the 'value of labour'; and divisions of mental/manual labour follow from the hierarchical ranking of IQ scores, the ordinal scale of 'intelligence'.

With the new science of IQ testing, historically new divisions of mental/manual labour could be attributed to the very nature of mental labour. Of course, this 'nature' was not being simply 'discovered' but actively constructed, as a more interchangeable, technically-defined abstract labour power. In more subtle ways, the rise of IQ testing could be connected to Edwardian liberalism in Britain and Progressivism in the USA, especially the way that each recast the individual as citizen/producer contributing efficiently to the national good, and as consumer needing to be serviced scientifically. Indeed, in that same historical period there was crystallized a new middle class whose model for practice was the professional-client relationship taking the form of an exchange of technically defined consumption needs (including information itself), in principle independent of the particular people involved. In this way, IQ testing could provide a material/ideological basis for the 20th-century meritocracy, the occupational hierarchy of abstract 'mental ability' possessed by individuals.

To the extent that the left protests at the 'inequalities' of that meritocracy - or its 'unscientific' basis - such protest unwittingly claims the legacy of IQ testing as its own. By demanding the full and free development of all individuals to their fullest potential - even if in the name of socialism - the left attempts somehow to extract the 'virtues' of bourgeois society from its nasty distorting defects. And more broadly, by speaking of objective conditions and forces, historical imperatives, and technical requirements - all abstractly 'thingified' apart from our own social existence in the capitalist order - the left reproduces capital's science, the knowledge that informs the extension of capitalist social relations.

This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories - despite their validity for all epochs (precisely because of their abstractness) - are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.
- Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp104-05

For revolutionaries the task is to create practices which attempt to make our own constituent power relations historically self-conscious and transparent. Such a project develops methods of collective work which avoid reproducing professional or scientific 'expertise' in the social form of competitive private property. If it doesn't, then our allegedly revolutionary theory becomes just another academic discipline or a 'correct line' about the objective world 'out there', divorced from any struggle against our own material relation to capital. Revolutionary theory cannot imitate the virtues of capital's science but must inform our struggle against the power relations that make that science 'true'.

for the status of mysterious exceptions - to whom history is pleased not to apply.

My claim that knowledge is 'entirely active' was very poorly expressed and deservedly misconstrued. Rashly, I left unspoken my assumptions, that a thorough analysis of the notion of activity reveals its logical interdependence with a notion of objective and independent reality, and that the 'pure action' of classical idealism was an incoherent concept. This is not a question of absolute alternatives (passive or active), but a question of what to emphasise so as to understand what knowledge is and so as to combat the forces which obstruct it in our time. Nothing can be active which does not also have its passive aspects. The power to affect other processes can only be present in a process which in turn 'pays the price' of being itself liable to the causal influences of other processes. All of which is to say no more than that the processes we are considering are always natural, never supernatural ones.

I am puzzled when Norman first quotes my sketch of what Marx saw as a central problem for 'the old materialism', and then serves up as the answer to it the very one given by the materialist Enlightenment, which Marx claimed to show was inadequate, namely that a causal and objectivist science is after all our best tool for changing and improving the world. Of course this is true, though we also need things not so easily listed under that heading, such as loyalty, discipline, solidarity and revolutionary skills. But Marx started out from the apparent inconsistency between the natural-scientific world-

view of the Enlightenment and its radical politics. He may have been wrong in thinking there was any such inconsistency. Or he may have failed to produce any answer to the problem. I am very interested in serious discussion of either hypothesis, which contributes to the critique of perhaps the upraising (Aufhebung) of Marxism. But I am not very interested in what appears to be a line of thought which simply opts for the certainties of pre-Marxist materialism and disregards the problems which Marx and others thought they gave rise to. Much more is needed to give a materialist answer to those problems (i.e. one which does not cheat by driving ontological wedges in between human beings and the rest of the universe) than an invocation of the efficacy of natural science along the lines so well worn by the empiricist philosophy of capitalism. For, unlike the capitalists, we are seeking to change the whole which includes ourselves, and are not merely trying to use our powers to change some parts of reality in order to preserve other parts against change.

So much, then, in response to some of the most basic issues raised by Norman's comments. I hope I may have satisfied him in some respects, or at least clarified our points of disagreement. But I realise there are important issues I have not touched on yet, such as that which he raises about the presence of ideology in the thought or knowledge of different social classes, and the related question about the special access to knowledge and philosophical insights which Marxism attributes to the historical development of the working class.



NOTE + BIBLIO. FOR 'TOWARDS A MATERIALIST THEORY OF IDEOLOGY'

NOTE:

This article is a more formal version of a talk (by the same title) that I gave in a workshop at the January 1978 Radical Philosophy conference, convened on the general theme 'Philosophy and the Critique of Ideology'. The talk was, in turn, based upon the more detailed argument that I make in my RSJ article.

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