

The Origins and Ideological Function of Cultural Marxism

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As a consequence of the right's elitist conception of history, conspiracy theories abound in conservative historiography and social analyses when events develop in a manner contrary to their economic and/or cultural preferences. This is especially so on the fringes of the right, among its various fascistic and religious fundamentalist sects. Whether it be a cabal of malicious Zionists seeking to subvert gentile societies in order to achieve racial hegemony, or secular humanists unwittingly fulfilling the antichrist's unholy objectives through the promotion of non-religious educational curricula, conservative sociology is fundamentally based upon autonomous¹ human agents directing the course of history. This applies equally to when society happens to be in accord with the values conservatives espouse: the institutional hierarchy is thought to be occupied by men of principle in these instances. Thus it is predictable that conspiratorial narratives would be fabricated in an effort to explain why the contemporary West has come to exemplify certain values and behaviors antithetical to those favored by cultural conservatives. The specific conspiracy theory this paper is intended to address is that of "cultural Marxism,"² which has been gaining momentum among segments of the far right over the past decade.

Definition and Dimensions of the Myth

The definition subscribers of the conspiracy present is often rather crude: cultural Marxism is Marxism transposed from the domain of economics to that of culture. Such a proposition, at first glance, appears preposterous to those even vaguely familiar with Marxist theory. A logical

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¹ Autonomous insofar as structural constraints are concerned. The behavioral characteristics of actors are generally the only circumscribing elements acknowledged in such analyses.

² Although many other conspiracies could and should be examined by Marxist analysts, e.g., the so-called "New World Order" theory developed by the increasingly lucrative conspiracy industry since the 1980s.

cultural analogue to Marxism's foundational economic insight, i.e., the law of value, for example, is inconceivable in this scheme. But when one surveys the narrative which commonly follows the definition, it becomes clear what purveyors of the conspiracy theory have in mind when they speak of "Marxism."

The narrative varies depending on the political leaning of the individual disseminating it, but its standard rendition is as follows: a sect of German intellectuals (of predominantly Jewish descent), disillusioned by the failure of orthodox Marxist parties to mobilize the proletariat into conflict with the bourgeoisie, came to the conclusion that the original Marxist formulation was incorrect. Western workers possessed too conservative a disposition for communism's egalitarian rhetoric to appeal to them. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's dialectical theory of capitalism's internal contradictions generating a qualitatively higher mode of production—communism—was flawed; there were ideological obstacles preventing the transformation from being realized. The solution to Marxism's theoretical errors these thinkers arrived at was to replace class as the locus of struggle with culture. In other words, the traditional Marxist *Klassenkampf* was to be entirely replaced by a neo-Marxist *Kulturkampf*. This collective of assorted social scientists and literati came to be known as the 'Frankfurt school' due to their affiliation with the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University, located in Frankfurt, Germany.

Hence we find that the purportedly "Marxist" element of cultural Marxism solely concerns its emphasis on struggle—in contradistinction to conservative theories of class collaboration and hierarchical social harmony. Yet analysts have examined cultural matters from a Marxist perspective for well over a century; there is nothing particularly unique about the Frankfurt school in this regard, *sans* the relative weight its theoreticians placed on culture as an explanatory factor for social behavior and the broadly Freudian theory of mind they upheld. This, on its own, is of no societal consequence. Critical theory only becomes weaponized by way of Antonio Gramsci, who is alleged to have devised a clandestine plan to infiltrate and subvert the hegemonic cultural institutions of bourgeois society for the purposes of engineering citizens in a manner conducive to communist revolution years earlier.³ It is then claimed that the Frankfurt school actively pursued Gramsci's agenda, infiltrating academic departments throughout North America and Europe, thereupon corrupting the moral sensibilities of their pupils, many of who later became prominent figures among the Western cultural elite. Speech codes, multiculturalism, affirmative action, state secularism, mass immigration, hate crime legislation, and minority rights movements are all claimed to be the fruits of this surreptitious endeavor.

In its more overtly anti-Semitic iteration, the Frankfurt school's nefarious efforts are explained as group survival strategy (consciously or subconsciously engaged in, depending on the specific agent) with communism representing a veneer concealing this evolutionary imperative.⁴ The whole of Marxism, within this biological paradigm, is interpreted as a recent manifestation of an extensive history of Jewish hostility toward gentile populations.

³ The only basis for this claim is a quote misattributed to Gramsci, wherein it is claimed he speaks of a "long march through the institutions of civil society."

⁴ See Kevin B. MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements* (London: Praeger Press, 1998).

Before investigating the veracity of these claims, I believe it would be instructive to trace the origins of this theory, for it will reveal the ideological utility it possesses to the far right.

Conspiratorial Precursors

The preponderance of conspiracy theories directed against Marxism have historically been anti-Semitic in nature, as adversaries found (and continue to find) Karl Marx's Jewish lineage a convenient fact to manipulate for counterrevolutionary purposes. Its value is obvious: it serves to ethnically and culturally distance Marx from the predominantly gentile proletariat he astutely analyzed and politically supported, thereby enabling reactionary opponents to ascribe ulterior motives to him with relative ease. This reprehensible activity was not unique to the conservative right, however. Indeed, anti-Semitism was so ubiquitous during Marx's career that even fellow leftists regarded the notion of Marx harboring ill intent for gentile workers as plausible, due to his ancestry. The esteemed communist theoretician Eugen Dühring perhaps went the furthest in this direction. Best remembered today as the target of Friedrich Engels's 1878 broadside *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, Dühring was of the opinion that Jewish involvement in the labor movement, in general, reduced to nothing more than a selfish interest in positioning themselves at the managerial fore of the emerging cooperative commonwealth, once writing: "In that Jewish kingdom which calls itself communist, the members of the chosen people are liable to be in future managers of the common treasuries of the nations and to oversee their gold, their silver and their clothes, as they have done since their first social undertaking in Egypt."⁵ As for Marx himself, Dühring considered him the very "scientific portrait of misery"⁶

The revered anarchist philosopher and stalwart revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, who deeply respected Marx's scientific contributions to socialist theory, also believed Marx's Ashkenazi heritage accounted for his character flaws and theoretical shortcomings.⁷ Like his friend and mentor Pierre-Joseph Proudhon,⁸ Bakunin was further convinced that Jews' ethnocentrism exceeded their commitment to universalist emancipatory projects, such as the liberation of the working class from capitalist exploitation⁹—though, unlike Dühring, he spared including Marx in this in-

⁵ Dühring quoted in Shmuel Ettinger, "The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism," in Michael R. Marrus (ed.), *The Nazi Holocaust, Part 2: The Origins of the Holocaust* (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 1989), p. 226.

⁶ Dühring quoted in Rolf Hosfeld, *Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 162.

⁷ In Bakunin's opinion, Marx's German upbringing was the source of his statism, and his excessive vanity was unquestionably Jewish in origin; see Bakunin's 1872 letter "To the Brothers of the Alliance in Spain," found in full at <http://bakuninlibrary.blogspot.com/2014/03/bakunin-to-brothers-of-alliance-in.html>

⁸ In his private notebook, Proudhon had written an entry in 1847 expressing his desire to compose an article about the Jewish race which called for their "expulsion" or "extermination." His chief source of grievance was the Jews' apparent eagerness to insert their opinions into matters of which he felt they had no right commenting, while abstaining from assimilating into their host populations. To read the passage in full, see *Les Carnets de P. J. Proudhon* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1960), p. 338.

⁹ In 1871 Bakunin made clear his thoughts: "The whole Jewish world constitutes one exploiting sect, one people of leeches, one single devouring parasite close and intimately bound together not only across national boundaries

dictment, insisting that the latter's commitment to the working class was, in fact, sincere.¹⁰ Views analogous to these did not begin to significantly recede on the left until the early 20th century.

On the right, one of the earliest and most influential attempts to associate Marxism with a broader plot of Jewish domination is contained in the notorious tsarist fabrication *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion*, wherein the successes of "Darwinism, Marxism, [and] Nietzsche-ism" are claimed to have been carefully orchestrated by Zionist agents in order to vitiate the *Weltanschauung* of the gentile intelligentsia, therewith compromising Western civilization itself.¹¹ *The Protocols* were instrumental in garnering support for counterrevolutionaries following the Bolshevik's conquest of state power in Russia, and became especially popular among right-wing völkisch associations in Germany, including those which would later constitute the National Socialist German Workers' Party.¹²

The Nazis' view of Marxism is worth examining closely, for it bears a striking resemblance to certain renditions of the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory.

One of German fascism's¹³ distinguishing characteristics was its firm conviction that the races of mankind are engaged in a perpetual struggle for existence. The priority placed on intergroup conflict over intragroup competition distinguished it from earlier Anglo-Saxon varieties of social Darwinism, and its emphasis on race separated it from southern European strains of fascism. The Nazi's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels argued this view of life represented the very essence of the party's conception of nationalism:

Nature. . . wants mankind composed of many different peoples and races, among which the strongest will ever hold its own against the weak. We have recognized this fact, and are willing to act accordingly in order to help our German nation forge the weapons it needs in the struggle for existence on this Earth, so that it can assert itself in this world of struggle and of triumph of the stronger over the weak. That's what we call being nationalistic!¹⁴

but also across all divergences of political opinion"; Mikhail Bakunin quoted in "Rapports personnels avec Marx," in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen, 1960), pp. 208-209.

¹⁰ Before engaging in an anti-Semitic tirade against Marx to his anarchist comrades in Spain, Bakunin praised Marx's "superior intelligence" as well as his 'sincere devotion' to the cause of proletarian emancipation; see Bakunin 1872, *op. cit.* In addition to Marx, elsewhere Bakunin listed four more exceptions to the supposed rule of Jewish chauvinism: Jesus Christ, Paul the Apostle, Baruch Spinoza, and Ferdinand Lassalle; Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx: A Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) p. 340.

¹¹ Victor E. Marsden (ed.), *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (Austin: RiverCrest Publishing, 2011), p. 28.

¹² Esther Webman (ed.), *The Global Impact of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion: A Century-Old Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 4.

¹³ I am referring to Nazi ideology as understood by its principal theoreticians in this section, not its historical role as a bulwark against revolution in a period of capitalist decline, aptly described by Leon Trotsky in *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Joseph Goebbels, *The Nazi-Sozi: Questions and Answers for National Socialists* (Valley Forge: The Landpost Press, 1992), p. 22.

Adolf Hitler expressed the sentiment more starkly, famously stating: “Those who want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight, in this world of eternal struggle, do not deserve to live.”¹⁵ The history of all hitherto existing societies, within this impoverished conceptual framework, is the history of race struggle, the outcome of which is contingent upon a race’s innate potential and the quality of its leadership.

A categorical refusal to acknowledge mankind’s capacity to cooperate in an egalitarian¹⁶ manner within and across populations¹⁷ is standard practice among conservative ideologues, and it assists in explaining why the Nazis considered notions of proletarian internationalism fanciful ploys contrived by Jewish Marxists for the purpose of deceiving Aryan workers into battling against the latter’s racial kinsmen in the bourgeoisie. According to the German fascists, Jewish revolutionaries had no intention of constructing a communist order—which was considered infeasible, regardless—but instead sought to forestall the establishment of a mutually beneficial (i.e., to labor and capital) corporatism.¹⁸ Owing to their parasitical nature, the Jews were rather intent on ensuring national *schaffende Kapital* remained subordinated to the forces of international finance. In the words of Adolf Hitler, Marxism’s entire *raison d’etre* was to place the worker unconsciously

into the service of that power which he believes he is fighting. By making him apparently storm against capital, one can most easily make him fight just for the latter. Thus one always cries out against international capital, whereas in reality one means the national economy. The latter is to be demolished so that on its field of carnage the triumph of the international stock exchange may be celebrated.¹⁹

Nazi propaganda concerning “Jewish Bolshevism” stressed that the Soviet Union existed to fulfill this objective of world Jewry as well, although Hitler’s private conversations establish that he

¹⁵ Hitler quoted in William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 86.

¹⁶ By “egalitarian” in this context I mean cooperation conducted in a manner which excludes relations of exploitation, coercion, or oppression. Conservatives rarely doubt humanity’s ability to cooperate, they simply deny such behavior can manifest absent the mediation of class, material incentives, and hierarchical differentiation, and are pessimistic regarding the extent to which the behavior can be scaled and expected to obtain over competitive social relations.

¹⁷ Meticulously detailed by Peter Kropotkin in his seminal 1902 work, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.

¹⁸ The founder of the NSDAP, Anton Drexler, discusses this theme at some length in his autobiography *My Political Awakening: From the Journal of a German Socialist Worker* (Fairbury: Third Reich Books, 2010). On page 51, for example, he criticizes the Social Democrats’ administration of the German economy by highlighting their failure to address the problem of finance capital. He proceeds to suggest it was because the party was controlled by Jews: “Amidst all the shouting ‘Down with capitalism,’ not a single black curly hair of stock market and loan capital has been harmed. Should one not come up with the idea that the curly-haired and their ‘German’ helpers meant by the slogan: ‘Down with the capitalism!’, namely the German, English, Russian, French, American, and Italian capitalism and up with international Jewish capitalism?” Ironically, the Social Democrats had in fact nationalized several banks during their tenure in government which the Nazis later privatized; see Germà Bel, “Against the Mainstream: Nazi Privatization in 1930s Germany,” *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1, pp. 34-55 (2010).

¹⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941), p. 440.

had personally come to reject this view by the 1940s,²⁰ and at least one of his early economic advisors had never been persuaded by the theory at all.²¹ Ever Machiavellian, the narrative's expediency in discrediting political parties associated with the Soviet Union and, later, the Axis forces during the Second World War, demonstrate why it was never abandoned by Nazi propagandists.

Politics were not the only means by which Jews were accused of debasing Aryan civilization, however. Upon assuming power, the Nazis embarked on a *Kulturkampf* against "Weimar degeneracy," for which Marxism was claimed to be partially culpable.²² The media, film industry, social and natural science departments, and art institutions were 'Aryanized' and tightly regulated so as to, as it were, purge German society of pernicious Jewish influences. Among the works the Nazis banned due to their "harmful and undesirable" content were those authored by virtually every Marxist and non-Marxist socialist of any notoriety.²³ The interests of German capital were served by the regime in the course of this project when the Nazis banned competing political parties and independent trade unions, and incarcerated even moderately left-wing activists—including those of a nationalist persuasion.²⁴

A similar process occurred in the United States during the Red Scare campaigns of the 1920s and '50s, despite the fact anti-Semitism was not a significant component of the strategy. As in Germany, communism was portrayed by the government as an impracticable mode of production which, if attempted, would result in unconscionable human misery, and Marxist political philosophy was routinely presented as fanatically opposed to religion, national identity, and family values. This tactic, being conducted before, during, and after major World Wars, was highly effective in imbuing in the population a jingoistic zeal anathema to class consciousness and proletarian internationalism. Longstanding socialist organizations were dismantled and effective labor organizers were arrested and occasionally deported on charges of sedition.²⁵ The disinformation circulated by the press regarding the intentions of those radical individuals and institutions resulted in the public largely reacting to this display of state tyranny with indifference. The benefit to the bourgeoisie this colossal project of state directed social engineering had, when

²⁰ See Hitler's remarks on Stalin and the latter's regime in *Hitler's Table Talk, 1941-1944: His Private Conversations* (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), pp. 95, 587, 657, 661-662.

²¹ According to Lorna Waddington in *Hitler's Crusade: Bolshevism and the Myth of the International Jewish Conspiracy* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p. 22, the Nazi's early economic strategist Gottfried Feder—one of the figures who attracted Adolf Hitler to the party, and unaffiliated with the Strasserist faction thereof—felt that the Bolshevik revolution, while objectionable, had still eradicated finance capital in Russia, not aided in its international ascendancy.

²² Shearer West, *The Visual Arts in Germany 1890-1937: Utopia and Despair* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 191-192.

²³ The comprehensive list is published in Reichsschrifttumskammer (ed.), *Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums* (Leipzig: Reichsschrifttumskammer Veröffentlichung, 1938).

²⁴ The case of the 'National Bolshevik' theorist Ernst Niekisch is illustrating. Niekisch's conception of nationalism was essentially indistinguishable from the Nazis', but due to his state socialist sympathies, he was incapable of supporting Hitlerism. He was branded a "traitor" as a consequence and received a life sentence in 1937 for his illicit political activities; see Robert S. Wistrich, *Who's Who in Nazi Germany* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 179-180.

²⁵ A decent account of this history is Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919-1943* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000).

combined with the social welfare legislation enacted during the New Deal²⁶ and position of relative economic privilege *vis-à-vis* its competitors the United States occupied following the Second World War,²⁷ cannot be overstated. It reinforced false consciousness to a profound extent and succeeded in causing immeasurable harm to American socialism, for which the revolutionary left has failed to recover.

Assessing the Conspiracies

Contra the claims of the aforementioned anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists, Karl Marx's biography is sufficient to dispel the notion that he could be described as a Jewish chauvinist, or even philo-Semitic. Marx's economic, sociological, and philosophical influences were nearly exclusively gentile in origin,²⁸ and although of Jewish descent himself, his father's conversion to Protestantism resulted in Karl being raised without a keen sense of Jewish identity. This possibly explains why Marx found no difficulty in sharing in many of the anti-Semitic prejudices common in Germany during his lifetime. The most startling example is that Marx was convinced Jews 'monopolized' international finance in such a way that they exerted inordinate influence over geopolitical affairs.²⁹ Given his outspoken opposition to finance capital in general, and Jewish financial practices in particular,³⁰ it is a mystery how Nazi ideologues like Anton Drexler and

²⁶ Adam Cohen documents the profound extent to which the depression radicalized ordinary American workers and the role the New Deal played in extinguishing those sentiments in *Nothing to Fear: FDR's Inner Circle and the Hundred Days that Created Modern America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

²⁷ The so-called "golden age" of American capitalism is seldom honestly communicated as having been achieved as a consequence of the United States becoming the leading manufacturing base following the Second World War, and secured by one of the most violent labor histories in the global north. Instead, idealistic notions of 'American exceptionalism' permeate mainstream accounts of this period, liberal and conservative alike.

²⁸ Epicurus, Aristotle, G. W. F. Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Ludwig Feuerbach, Adam Smith, Charles Darwin, and Lewis H. Morgan, to name but a few. See Bob Jessop and Russell Wheatley (eds.), *Karl Marx's Social and Political Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1999) for an overview of Marx's influences.

²⁹ This is best expressed in Marx's article "The Russian Loan" (New York Tribune, January 4, 1856) in Eleanor Marx Aveling (ed.), *The Eastern Question: A Reprint of Letters Written 1853-1856 Dealing with the Events of the Crimean War* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1897), wherein he writes: "Thus we find every tyrant backed by a Jew, as is every Pope by a Jesuit. In truth, the cravings of oppressors would be hopeless, and the practicability of war out of the question, if there were not an army of Jesuits to smother thought and a handful of Jews to ransack pockets. . . . The Hopes lend only the prestige of their name; the real work is done by Jews, and can only be done by them, as they monopolize the machinery of the loan-mongering mysteries by concentrating their energies upon the barter-trade in securities, and the changing of money and negotiating of bills in a great measure arising therefrom. . . . Here and there and everywhere that a little capital courts investment, there is ever one of these little Jews ready to make a little suggestion or place a little bit of a loan. The smartest highwayman in the Abruzzi is not better posted up about the locale of the hard cash in a traveler's valise or pocket than those Jews about any loose capital in the hands of a trader. . . . Thus do these loans, which are a curse to the people, a ruin to the holders, and a danger to the Governments, become a blessing to the houses of the children of Judah. This Jew organization of loan-mongers is as dangerous to the people as the aristocratic organization of landowners."

³⁰ While of the view Jewish involvement in finance was "perhaps no more than a historical coincidence," Marx nevertheless considered it "timely and expedient to expose and stigmatize their organization"; *ibid.*, p. 606.

Dietrich Eckart—and indeed many neo-fascist adherents of the cultural Marxism conspiracy theory—could seriously accuse Karl Marx, or his subsequent followers, of being in league with those very banking dynasties. Moreover, to Marx, Judaism was merely a religion of “egoism” and “huckstering,” whose “secular god” was but money. In his opinion, this was nothing more than an early spiritual representation of the ethos capital induces in populations subordinated to the laws of accumulation. Thus, by transcending capitalism, humanity would simultaneously be destroying the material basis of this contemptible mentality, therewith emancipating itself from Judaism.³¹ Suffice it to say, it is a strange Jewish chauvinist who welcomes the annihilation of the religion which has preserved the cultural heritage and ethnic identity of his people for millennia.

Another facet of Marx’s biography which belies any suggestion he qualified as a Jewish chauvinist is the vitriolic behavior he exhibited towards fellow Jews in the labor movement. Instances include his description of the prominent German socialist reformer Ferdinand Lassalle as “a greasy Jew disguised under brilliantine and flashy jewels,”³² whose hybrid Jewish-Negro ancestry was the source of his peculiar physical appearance and ‘importunate’ personality.³³

The Jewish radical Moses Hess was another frequent target of Marx and Engels’s ire, as they found his ethical variety of communism overly idealistic and counterproductive to the struggle for proletarian emancipation.³⁴ As it happens, Hess eventually came to embrace the materialism of Marx’s scientific socialism and became a fervent Zionist shortly thereafter, prefiguring many of Theodor Herzl’s arguments in favor of Jewish nationhood. And despite their later antipathy for him, Hess was, in fact, an important early associate of Marx and Engels; assisting in bringing the latter to the communist movement. This link between Marx and a pioneer of Zionism is an additional source behind many anti-Semitic conservatives adducing Marxism as a doctrine of ‘Jewish supremacism.’³⁵ But such a conclusion is unjustifiable considering Moses Hess’s nationalism was not as a doctrine of ethnic chauvinism. On the contrary, Hess was a life-long humanist who believed that national identity, while a legitimate source of self-identification, in no way eclipsed one’s ethical commitments to members of other nationalities.³⁶

³¹ Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), pp. 26-53.

³² Marx quoted in *The Merchant of Modernism: The Economic Jew in Anglo-American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 169.

³³ Letter from Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 30 July, 1862 in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 41 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), p. 388. Coincidentally, Lassalle strongly disliked Jews too, once joking “There are two classes of men I hate: journalists and Jews. Unfortunately, I belong to both”—further demonstrating how widespread anti-Jewish sentiments were among leftists at the time; Lassalle quoted in Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 164.

³⁴ Marx and Engels’s scathing criticisms of “German socialism” in *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964), pp. 101-106 were primarily directed against Hess.

³⁵ A recent example of this can be observed in David Duke’s latest article of propaganda, *The Secret Behind Communism: The Ethnic Origins of the Russian Revolution and the Greatest Holocaust in the History of Mankind* (Mandeville: Free Speech Press, 2013), p. 248.

³⁶ Shlomo Avineri, *Moses Hess: Prophet of Communism and Zionism* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), pp. 201-208.

More importantly, Marx never embraced Zionism nor Hess's Spinozist monism. Like numerous other ethnic Jewish figures in the history of Marxism, Marx regarded Jewish national identity as ephemeral and certain to vanish upon the global ascent of communism.³⁷

In truth, the only individual with whom Marx was capable of maintaining steady and amicable dialog was Friedrich Engels, a German gentile—who the 'left-wing' Nazi Otto Strasser once alluded to in a futile effort to convince Adolf Hitler that the origins of socialism were not at all Jewish, incidentally.³⁸ Engels's critical role in the development of Marxism as a distinct school of thought is, as one might expect, frequently omitted by those who would have people believe Marxism is a Semitic instrument of domination. In the few instances Engels is mentioned without being trivialized, it is not uncommon for him to be accused of having also been a Jew, albeit of the crypto variety.³⁹

The final indication that Marx cannot legitimately be accused of exemplifying Jewish ethnocentrism is his family life. After all, he married and fathered children with a gentile of aristocratic European lineage—Jenny von Westphalen. And Jewish cultural rituals, as far as historians are aware, were not observed in the Marx household.

Concerning the previously mentioned evolutionary explanation for why Jews have historically been disproportionately featured in Marxist organizations, the suggestion makes little sense in light of the evidence. The group benefits⁴⁰ conferred onto Jews by joining political parties hostile to the very notion of Jewish national identity, which sought to abolish class exploitation and the economic privileges associated therewith by establishing a society based upon joint ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange are exceedingly difficult to detect. Proponents of the theory are wont to invoke early Soviet atrocities committed by Bolsheviks of Jewish descent as proof Jews utilized socialist movements to fulfill tribal revenge fantasies against their former gentile oppressors, but one could just as easily point to the many Jews involved in *libertarian* socialist associations during the same period who staunchly condemned those actions, along with all acts of state violence.⁴¹ Other factors must account for the relatively high number of Jews represented in 20th century socialism, and I surmise they are historical and cultural origin. Whether Jews collectively benefit from the introduction of more liberal cultural policies is a separate issue, but neither traditional Marxism nor Soviet state socialism can be said

³⁷ This encompasses Jewish Marxists with favorable attitudes toward nationalism as well. See, for example, Otto Bauer's comments on Jewish identity in *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

³⁸ Otto Strasser, *Hitler and I* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1940), p. 11.

³⁹ One such case is found in Jüri Lina, *Under the Sign of the Scorpion: The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Stockholm: Referent Publishing, 2002), p. 68.

⁴⁰ The validity and psychological implications of the group selectionist model are hotly contested in evolutionary biology and exceed the scope of this paper.

⁴¹ Alexander Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002) and Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923) being common examples.

to have been of much service toward that end.⁴² And evidently the Jews disproportionately involved in the early Italian fascist movement were not of that opinion.⁴³

Apropos the portrayal of Marxist political philosophy by the American government during the Red Scare campaigns, practically every aspect was intentionally designed to mislead and frighten American workingmen and women. The reality is that Marxists have never been of a uniform opinion on cultural affairs; they have held views ranging from the libertine to the conservative. Hence while communists like Antonio Gramsci opined that monogamy would discontinue with the abolition of capitalism,⁴⁴ one can observe Friedrich Engels writing that the establishment of ‘free marriage,’ following the dissolution of the bourgeois form, would result in ‘true monogamy’ coming to characterize romantic relationships,⁴⁵ just as the Marxist theoretician James Connolly later argued in his polemical dispute with Daniel De Leon.⁴⁶ Likewise, while some communists believed nationalism would cease as a consequence of nations agglomerating into larger territorial units upon freely associated labor superseding the dictatorship of capital,⁴⁷ others held that communism would reinvigorate national identity.⁴⁸ Even the matter of race was contentious among Marxists, with some espousing conventionally racist views⁴⁹ and others

⁴² With the possible exception of the legal penalties introduced for the incitement of race hatred in the USSR, although doubts exist regarding how effective these were in combating anti-Semitism; see Stephen H. Norwood, *Antisemitism and the American Far Left* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 188.

⁴³ Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), p. 22.

⁴⁴ Gramsci’s economic interpretation of sexual relations is most clearly articulated in the following passage, in which he reduces the practice of monogamy to its service in the task workplace discipline under capitalism: “It seems clear that the new industrialism wants monogamy: it wants the man as worker not to squander his nervous energies in the disorderly and stimulating pursuit of occasional sexual satisfaction. The employee who goes to work after a night of ‘excess’ is no good for work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfected automatism”; Gramsci quoted in Michael Ekers, “Gramsci and the Erotics of Labor: More Notes on ‘The Sexual Question,’” in Michael Ekers, Gillian Hart, Stefan Kipfer, and Alex Loftus (eds.), *Gramsci: Space, Nature, Politics* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 222.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1902), p. 99.

⁴⁶ Austen Morgan, *James Connolly: A Political Biography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 55-56.

⁴⁷ Such was Rosa Luxemburg’s position; see Horace B. Davis (ed.), *The National Question: Selected Writings by Rosa Luxemburg* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

⁴⁸ Otto Bauer went so far as to hypothesize that “socialism will make the nation autonomous, will make its destiny a product of the nation’s conscious will, will result in an increasing differentiation between the nations of the socialist society, a clearer expression of their specificities, a clearer distinction between their respective characters. . . . Drawing the people as a whole into the national community of culture, achieving full self-determination by the nation, growing intellectual differentiation between the nations—this is what socialism means. The community of culture encompassing all members of the people, as it existed in the time of the communism of the clans, will be brought to life again by the communism of the great nations following the end of centuries of class division, the division between the members and the mere tenants of the nation”; Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 96, 98.

⁴⁹ The American socialist politician Victor L. Berger is among the most notable of the Marxist racists. In addition to declaring in the 31 May, 1902 issue of *The Social Democratic Herald*, “There can be no doubt that the Negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race,” maintained that the United States’ “brilliant culture” is “by right an inheritance of the white race”; Victor L. Berger, *Berger’s BroadSides* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Company, 1912), p. 100. Another Marxist racist worthy of attention is Kate Richards O’Hare, who authored a pamphlet in

staunchly opposing all expressions thereof.⁵⁰ Nor were Marxists agreed on the subject religion.⁵¹ Many of these cleavages continue to persist because, despite the insistence of right-wing detractors, Marxism is not a doctrine of authoritarian social engineering. Rather, it is a conceptual framework developed for the purpose of understanding history and political economy. Its sole practical commitment is to the realization of a society devoid of exploitation and alienation. Individual Marxists can, of course, affirm whatever cultural policies they wish, but their advocacy of those causes is unconnected to their Marxism. When Marxists *qua* Marxists generally speak of culture under communism, they are speculating on the manner by which those practices may adjust in response to a transformation in society's substructure. Those faithful to the tenets of scientific socialism are most decidedly not drawing blueprints for how governments ought to coercively mold their citizenry.

Returning to the Frankfurt school and its alleged conspiracy of "cultural Marxism," the overly voluntarist structure of the narrative is a sensible *a priori* reason for judging it of dubious currency. The notion that agents promulgating a subversive set of ideas can shape the dominant cultural institutions of a modern class society is utterly implausible. The bourgeoisie has never and would never abide the dissemination of ideas or cultural practices inimical to its reproduction as a social class. At best, capitalism can integrate those practices which are neutral to the process of accumulation. What is more, if one carefully dissects the phenomena cultural conservatives sometimes impute to the Frankfurt school from a materialist perspective, it is not difficult to discern how these policies are actually of utility to that imperative.

Mass immigration's benefit is obvious: it saturates the domestic market with surplus labor, thereby putting downward pressure on wages in certain sectors of the economy⁵² and erecting barriers to the formation of class solidarity.⁵³ Speech codes, affirmative action, multiculturalism, and general 'political correctness' can best be understood as liberal mechanisms to regulate behavior in a manner which fosters racial tolerance while simultaneously solidifying the belief that capitalism's class divisions are structured along genuinely meritocratic lines—meritocracy being the bourgeoisie's principal self-legitimizing ideological construct in the 21st century.⁵⁴ As Noam Chomsky observed, racist attitudes in particular interfere with capitalism because identifications

1912 entitled *Nigger Equality*, the thesis of which argues that the behavioral differences between Caucasians and African-Americans renders territorial segregation a desirable undertaking.

⁵⁰ Leon Trotsky's celebratory remarks concerning the 'mixing' of nationalities in *The Revolution Betrayed* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004) p. 120 expresses the stance the majority of the left currently takes with respect to race.

⁵¹ One thing, however, is perfectly clear: to the extent self-identified Marxist parties have attacked religion in the past, they were acting in defiance of the historical materialism that represents the very core of Marxist sociology.

⁵² See Cameron H. King, Jr., "Asiatic Exclusion" in *International Socialist Review*, Vol. VIII (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1908), pp. 661-669. King's empirical data is clearly antiquated, but his analysis of the role immigration plays in the class struggle remains sound. His characterization of the pro-immigration left as reflecting non-Marxist, idealistic assumptions is also timely.

⁵³ Friedrich Engels believed the ethnocultural heterogeneity that arises in the wake of immigration was an additional factor explaining the failure of the United States to establish a popular socialist party; see his letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge dated 2 December, 1893 published in *Science and Society*, Vol. II, No. 3 (1938).

⁵⁴ Walter Benn Michaels's research in *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006) is most enlightening on this particular subject.

based on race counter the “basic ideal that people should be available just as consumers and producers,” exploited “interchangeable cogs” to be marketed to and disposed of once they no longer serve this function; ergo one can reasonably expect anti-racist policies and sentiments to manifest in capitalist societies over the long term.⁵⁵

The frequent opposition one encounters from mainstream conservative commentators to the aforementioned regulatory system established to augment the public’s perception of capitalism as a meritocratic class system may *prima facie* appear to negate the argument it is being implemented for instrumental purposes, but this assumes a uniformity of opinion regarding strategy within in the bourgeoisie that does not exist. A plurality of approaches are endorsed by the ruling class and implemented by their bureaucratic representatives. To be sure, much of the rhetoric targeted at, *inter alia*, immigration is merely posturing right-wing parties engage in to maintain the support of their electorate, but there is undoubtedly a dwindling segment of the bourgeoisie which sincerely believes ‘political correctness’ and multiculturalism are contrary to their class interests.

Hypersexualization is another feature of contemporary culture groundlessly accredited to cultural Marxism. Interestingly, Freudianism does bear some accountability in this development, although definitely not in its quasi-Marxian, Frankfurt school manifestation. Instead it can be traced to Sigmund Freud’s nephew, Edward Bernays. Often heralded as the “father of public relations,” Bernays was hired by several large corporations throughout the course of his life to consult on ad campaigns, and one of his main contributions was to recommend that these companies appeal to mankind’s baser instincts in order to more effectively instill in the public a desire for their commodities.⁵⁶ His advice resulted in greater sales, and since then sexual themes have become a cornerstone in the capitalist marketing effort.⁵⁷ But this Freudian connection is purely coincidental, as the commodification of sex—horrendously inhumane and distorting as it is—was just as inevitable a development of capitalism as labor power being mediated through the cash nexus. Nothing is sacred before the laws of accumulation, or as Karl Marx expressed it: “Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!”⁵⁸

Lastly, the decline in participation in organized religion witnessed in the global north often blamed on the Frankfurt school, while not necessarily of service to capital, is attributable to material developments which have transpired during the bourgeois epoch. Empirical data points to reductions in precarity and privation that social welfare systems provide as being the foremost impetus behind the precipitous reduction in religiosity witnessed in recent decades.⁵⁹ The triumph of evolutionary biology in disclosing the origins of mankind should not be overlooked as

⁵⁵ See Chomsky’s comments in John Schoeffel (ed.), *Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky* (New York: The New Press, 2002), p. 176.

⁵⁶ Frederick F. Wherry, *The Culture of Markets* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp. 31-32.

⁵⁷ To observe the deleterious effects this has had on children, I recommend readers view the 2008 Media Education Foundation documentary film *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*. Online: <http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=134>

⁵⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 742.

⁵⁹ Nigel Barber, “Country Religiosity Declines as Material Security Increases,” *Cross-Cultural Research*, Vol. 47, pp. 42-50 (2013).

an explanatory factor, either. Nonetheless, belief in a deity remains fairly high even within secular countries, and I conjecture it will remain so for the foreseeable future because faith in an afterlife is an effective means of coping with mankind's acute sense of mortality. What people appear to be exasperated with are authority figures attempting to micromanage their personal lives and the rampant corruption found in religious institutions.

While the materialist hypothesis outlined above provides an alternative explanation for the liberal direction Western societies have taken in terms of their cultural practices, it does not answer the question as to whether or not the Frankfurt school exercised appreciable influence during this evolutionary process. That is because the answer is ultimately unimportant. To the extent individuals affiliated with the Institute for Social Research did—and it should be emphasized that they were far from being a homogeneous school of thought, as the Marcuse-Adorno conflict of 1969 attests⁶⁰—it is because the concepts derived from their idiosyncratic readings of Freud and Marx were of service to capital in some capacity. Were they anything but, they would have surely been confined to subcultures and the avant-garde. And although there is little doubt the school's influence has been grossly exaggerated by the progenitors of the conspiracy,⁶¹ there is no way to conclusively settle the matter since empirical research into the Frankfurt school's influence on academia, and academia's role in shaping culture, has yet to be undertaken by social scientists. Indisputable, however, is the fact Freudianism, and by extension the various sub-disciplines it generated, is largely regarded as an irreparably flawed research methodology by intellectuals today.

Conclusion

What separates cultural Marxism from its conspiratorial antecedents is that the former's primary function is to provide fringe conservative movements with a narrative explaining why contemporary culture is in disaccord with their ideological preferences—in a manner absolving capitalism of any responsibility therein—whereas the myth of Jewish Bolshevism and the Red Scare campaigns were chiefly utilized by elites to assist in preserving the status quo. Its secondary function is to defame cultural liberalism by associating it with “Marxism,” a term which often elicits fear among Americans and citizens of many Western European countries. Conspicuously absent in the propaganda which features cultural Marxism is what an abject failure the Frankfurt school's enterprise would be on its own terms, were it true. Far from the means of production being collectivized and welfare provisions expanded in tandem with cultural degradation, the exact converse has been witnessed in Europe and North America in recent decades.

⁶⁰ See Philip Bounds, “Just Say No: Herbert Marcuse and the Politics of Negationism” in David Berry (ed.), *Revisiting the Frankfurt School: Essays on Culture, Media and Theory* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 49-71.

⁶¹ One need look no further than William S. Lind's essay “Who Stole Our Culture?” in Ted Baehr and Pat Boone (ed.), *The Culture-Wise Family: Upholding Christian Values in a Mass Media World* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2012), pp. 178-186.

They further neglect the many other philosophical conduits to cultural liberalism in existence, e.g., utilitarianism, existentialism, and Rawlsianism, which, if one is to seriously entertain idealist or conspiratorial interpretations of social phenomena, are just as tenable in explaining the disintegration of cultural conservatism.

In the final analysis, the conservatives heretofore critiqued have matters exactly backwards: cultural liberalism (deceptively termed “cultural Marxism”), at least in its current incarnation, is not corrosive to capitalism; it is its ideological compliment. It accommodates and expands the opportunities for accumulation, while contributing to the mass delusion that all things are possible in life except transcending class relations and generalized commodity production.