

## Do Life Forces Construct Consciousness?: Rethinking Karl Marx's Theory in Knowledge Economy of Creative Literature

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**Abstract:** This paper deployed poststructuralist theory to investigate Marxist historical materialism as a classical paradigm of the knowledge economy. After a probe into the mechanisms of economic determinism in literary narratives, the paper argued that the historicism of knowledge is essentially marked by skepticism in class conflicts and struggles, with alternative models of social democracy and anarchy. The influence of ideas, culture and geography was shown to be even more critical than the basic infrastructure of the economy or technology. Human consciousness drives the progress of technology and social relations of mankind. The transition to socialism did not take place in developed economies as was anticipated but no nation state has attained the status of a communist paradise because they are based on the inefficient infrastructures of state bureaucracies. Particularly poetry has the power to move people emotionally to take actions in unpredictable ways that are inconsistent with rationalist, economic infrastructures. Thus, literature is not merely an economic tool of propaganda for the ruling elites, but it can construct a powerful counter hegemonic order of its own. New issues like rights of people is more critical than the economic model of a nation state. Questions of efficiency and unfalsifiability in the literary narrative can play into the profitability metanarrative of capitalism.

**Keywords:** Consciousness, base/infrastructure and superstructure, knowledge economy, historicizing, determinism, unfalsifiability, social democracy, efficiency, human rights.

### INTRODUCTION

The knowledge theory of value in Karl Marx prioritized life forces based on economic factors, which he termed as the base or infrastructure. Marx famously declared that it is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being; rather, it is their life forces that construct their consciousness. What is the implication of this 'infrastructural' statement in the light of the current status of determinism in the knowledge economy? For example, the emphasis now is that STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines should be foregrounded. But, educational institutions are grossly inadequate and even outmoded to respond efficiently to this need because they are still stuck in the outdated past with its 'industrial paradigm' as opposed to the 'post-industrial model' that is needed in the contemporaneous epoch. The current educational institutions are 'cottage industries' that have no idea which direction they are to take, what conceptual tools (internet, computer, high tech) they are to deploy to move in that direction, and what dialogue they have to conduct within and outside the institution (Scardamalia and Bereiter 2008) (Tsai et al. 2013), (Bereiter 2002), (Bereiter 2005). (Gibson 2010). Secondly, the Marxist theory of value in knowledge economy prioritizes *certain* characteristics of knowledge such as infrastructure *over* others such as ideology. As a result, when knowledge is comprehended as a force of production, what is

unfortunately placed highly is that knowledge is a kind of product, utility or service that is to be used, re-used, stored, enhanced, bought and sold as a 'super-commodity' with market value transcending the products of physical labour. Knowledge becomes 'a thing and a flow' that can be exchanged, atomized, metered, repurposed, re-combined and updated (Norris, Mason, and Lefrere 2003). Unlike this type of commodified, infrastructural knowledge that is modularized as online 'learning objectives' and packaged for mobilization to users who pay for the service, there is another kind of knowledge that should be understood as an instrument of democratic decision-making and as a culture of Enlightenment. This type of knowledge is much more deliberative and sophisticated and comes from the humanities and literature.

The next implication of the Marxist knowledge theory of value is that it raises another very serious problem, namely, that of excluding the conceptualization of knowledge according to Habermas and critical theory as multiple and as derived from various constitutive human interests and therefore as fundamentally *contestable*. By erasing the *motivated* nature of knowledge and suppressing multiplicity and the interested character of knowledge, this Marxist inspired paradigm judges knowledge in terms of the criterion of 'performance' in learning objectives; *performative knowledge* emerges to substitute for

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Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas that determined the use and purpose of knowledge before the post-industrial age in the 1960s. Eurocentric Enlightenment defined the subjectivity of the individual human being as one with a destiny to achieve its full potentialities through the aegies of reasoning. The objective of learning was to realize the emancipation of mankind and the spirit life. Knowledge was produced for the purpose of guiding a nation state both spiritually and morally. In Africa and the Third World, the subjectivity of the individual human being was understood as a 'collective' identity. In the contemporary conception of knowledge, the emancipation of mankind and the achievement of the spirit have been set aside and what is prioritized now is the *addition of value*. Today, the market legitimates performative knowledge as opposed to the grand narratives of the pre-1960s that validated the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment narratives of knowledge (Polsani 2003) The production of performative knowledge was assumed to be effected by the 'community of science', an institution in mankind's civilization that possesses no formal beliefs nor ideologies, but an ethos with its own rules of conduct, similar to the Greek *polis*, an ideal republic of women and men who are free but are united by the quest for the truth.

The production of knowledge has been impacted by this Marxist emphasis on science, although Marx and Engels later pointed to the *ultimate* nature of the determinism in history. Nevertheless, because old habits die hard, knowledge in the contemporaneous practice was conceived as 'scientific' and therefore as disinterested and universal. This type of knowledge was envisioned as facilitating the technical decision-making process. This form of knowledge was based on instrumentation and calculation, whereas ideology is expressive and emotional. The technological form of knowledge has to be 'administered', unlike ideology that cannot be 'managed'. Although the 'scientific' and 'management' elements of this model of knowledge are prioritized, critical theorists like Barthes, Adorno and Horkheimer have perceived 'technological knowledge' as being 'ideological' in itself in the extreme and as being an exemplification of a myth at the critical level. This kind of knowledge form can be envisaged as denying any relationship with the human interest and its claim to corresponding to reality can be assessed as being absolute. From this light, simply showing how ideas originated and evolved minimizes their claim to naturalization of self-evident truth.

This paper proposes to deploy post-structuralist theory by methodologists in literary philosophy to the Marxist paradigm of knowledge economy in order to demonstrate that the implications of its determinism in the vulgar sense of the term are a

myth. While acknowledging that the later Marx showed that his theory is more sophisticated than was previously thought by imputing the critical role of the superstructures, the paper suggests that vulgar Marxist determinism can be a productive methodology for evolving a new model of historicizing practice in the knowledge economy.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

As a theoretical framework of the humanities, structuralism suggests that whether in linguistics, literature, sociology or anthropology, elements of human culture should be understood in terms of their relationship to a broader, overarching structure or system. The structures that underpin all the issues that humans perceive, do, think and feel in the humanities fields can be uncovered. As defined by Simon Blackburn [1], structuralism is a belief that assumes that all phenomena of human life are not intelligible unless they are considered through *interrelationships*. These interrelationships constitute a structure and underpinning any local variations in the surface phenomena, are constant laws of abstract structure. It was in the early 1900s of Europe and chiefly in France and Russia that structuralism developed, particularly thanks to Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics and the Prague, Moscow and Copenhagen Schools of linguistics [2, 3]. In the 1950s and 1960s, when structural linguistics was confronted with challenges from Noam Chomsky, some scholars in the humanities deployed Saussure's ideas in their fields of investigation. Claude Lévi-Strauss applied the structuralist mode of thinking to anthropology. Other scholars like the linguist Roman Jakobson, and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan applied the theory in sociology, psychology, literary criticism, economics and architecture. As an intellectual progression, structuralism was thought to replace existentialism [4]. Nevertheless, from the 1960s, structuralism's basic tenets were assaulted by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes. Although their writings carry elements of structuralism, they were referred to as post-structuralists. In the 1970s, structuralism was criticized for its *ahistoricism* and rigidity. Nonetheless, many of its proponents like Lacan continued to influence continental philosophy because the basic assumptions of post-structuralism are a continuation of structuralism [5]. The term *structuralism* influenced the structural Marxism of Nicos Poulantzas.

Ferdinand de Saussure's writings on linguistics, and the linguistics of the Prague and Moscow Schools laid the foundation for the theory. Structural linguistics propounded three ideas. Saussure maintained that there is a distinction between *langue* (that is, an ideal abstraction of language grammar) and

*parole* (that is, grammar as actually employed in daily life). He argued that the "sign" is comprised of both a "signified", an abstract idea and a "signifier", which is the perceived sound or visual image. Since different languages possess varying words to refer to the same objects or concepts, therefore there is no intrinsic reason why a particular *sign* is employed to articulate a given *signifier*. The signifier is thus "arbitrary". In this way, signs gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. According to Ferdinand de Saussure: "in language, there are only differences 'without positive terms.'" [6]. The English translation of this important book was effected by Wade Baskin [7]. Structuralist proponents maintain that a specific domain of culture may be understood by means of a structure which is modelled on language and that is distinct both from the organizations of reality and the organizations of ideas or the imagination, which is the "Third Order" [2, 3]. In Jacques Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis, for instance, the structuralist order of "the Symbolic" is distinguished both from "the Real" and "the Imaginary". In the same fashion, in Louis Althusser's Marxist theory, the structuralist order of the capitalist mode of production is different both from the actual, real agents involved in its relations and from the ideological forms in which those relations are comprehended. When one blends Sigmund Freud and Ferdinand de Saussure, he emerges with the model of the French (post) structuralist Jacques Lacan, who applied structuralism to psychoanalysis. Jean Piaget applied structuralism as constructivism, and considers structuralism as "a method rather than as a doctrine, because there is no structure without a construction, genetic or abstract [8]. Although Louis Althusser's structural social analysis engendered "structural Marxism", Althusser himself was not persuaded in that light because he associated 'structuralism' with ambiguity. Marx was interpreted as a 'structuralist' but with ambiguity, and ideology [9]. The feminist theorist Alison Assiter elaborated four ideas in structuralism, namely, that a structure determines the position of each element of a whole; every system has a structure, structural laws deal with co-existence rather than change and structures are the "real things" that lie beneath the surface or the appearance of meaning [10].

In de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, the analysis focuses not on the use of language (named as "*parole*", or speech), but rather on the underlying system of language (called "*langue*"). This approach considers language elements in terms of how they relate to each other in the current period and synchronically rather than diachronically. Saussure maintained that linguistic signs are comprised of two major parts, namely, a "signifier" (the "sound pattern" of a word, either in mental projection—as when one silently recites signage lines, a poem to one's self or in actual, any kind of text, physical realization as part of a

speech act, a "signified" (the idea or meaning of the word). The previous approach focused on the relationship between words and things in the world that they designated. Structural linguistics integrates other paradigms, namely, the syntagm and values such as "idealism" which is a class of linguistic units (lexemes, morphemes or even constructions) that are possible in a certain position in a given linguistic environment (like a sentence). The different functional roles of each of these members of the paradigm is named as "value".

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course* impacted on different linguists during World War I and II. Leonard Bloomfield developed structural linguistics in the US, Louis Hjelmslev did same in Denmark, Alf Sommerfelt in Norway, Antoine Meillet in France and Émile Benveniste, and Prague School linguistics like Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy did experimental research that was captivating. Nevertheless, during the 1950s, de Saussure's linguistic ideas were beginning to be criticized and ignored. Literary critics use *signifiers* and *signifieds*, with little reference to Chomsky [11]. But Prague School structuralism used phonemics rather than a compiled listing of which sounds occur in a given language, and how they were related. It determined that sounds inventory in a language should be investigated in terms of a series of *contrasts*. For example, in English, /p/ and /b/ represent distinct phonemes because there are cases (minimal pairs) where the contrast between the two is the only difference between two distinct words (e.g. 'pat' and 'bat'). By investigating sounds in the light of contrastive features, a comparative scope is also opened up that explains the difficulty Nso' speakers have distinguishing /r/ and /l/ in English given that these sounds are not contrastive in Lamnso'. Phonology thus became the paradigmatic foundation for structuralism in many different areas of scholarship.

Structuralist anthropology and structuralism in social anthropology assume that meaning is engendered and reproduced within a culture via various practices, phenomena and activities that serve as systems of signification. Structuralism investigates activities as varied as food-preparation, religious rites, rituals, games, literary and non-literary texts, and entertainment to discern the deep structures by which meaning is generated and reproduced within a culture. In the 1950s, Lévi-Strauss studied cultural phenomena such as kinship (the alliance theory and the incest taboo), myths and food preparation. He enforced Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* in his search for the basic structures of the human mind, contending that the structures that form the "deep grammar" of society originate in the mind and function in people unconsciously [12]. In structural anthropology, the Prague School of linguists like Roman Jakobson investigated sounds based on the presence or absence of

certain features (e.g. voiceless vs. voiced). Lévi-Strauss integrated this in his notion of the universal structures of the mind, based on pairs of binary oppositions such as hot-cold, male-female, culture-nature, cooked-raw, or marriageable vs. Tabooed women. Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), who published on gift-exchange systems, was deployed by Lévi-Strauss to contend that kinship systems are founded on women exchange between groups (a position known as 'alliance theory') in contradiction to the 'descent'-based theory portrayed by Edward Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes. Lévi-Strauss's writings became widely popular in the 1960s and 1970s and they engendered the term "structuralism" itself. Scholars like the British Rodney Needham, Edmund Leach, and the French Maurice Godelier and Emmanuel Terray merged Marxism with structural anthropology. The American Marshall Sahlins and James Boon deployed structuralism to analyse human society. But structural anthropology was confronted with a number of problems because in the 1980s, it was not possible to verify assumptions about the universal structures of the human mind. Political economy and colonial rule were suggested by Eric Wolf as *signifieds* that should be prioritized in anthropology. Pierre Bourdieu argued that cultural and social structures are changed by human agency and practice in Sherry Ortner's 'practice theory'. However, the biogenetic structuralism group maintained that there is a structural foundation for culture as all humans inherit a similar system of brain structures. Neuroanthropology laid the foundations for cultural similarity and variation.

Structuralist criticism in literary theory links literary texts to a larger structure, such as a genre, intertextual connections, a universal narrative structure or a recurrent system of patterns or motifs [13, 14]. Structuralist semiotics contends that a structure exists in every text [15], and this explains why experienced readers interpret a text more than non-experienced ones. Everything written is governed by specific rules, or a "grammar of literature", that one learns in educational institutions and that are to be unpacked [16]. A potential problematic of structuralist interpretation is its reductionism: "the structuralist danger of collapsing all difference." [17]. An example of such a reading might be if a student concludes that the authors of *West Side Story* did not write anything "really" new, because their work has the same structure as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In both texts a girl and a boy fall in love (a "formula" with a symbolic operator between them would be "Boy + Girl") despite the fact that they belong to two competing groups that hate each other ("Boy's Group - Girl's Group" or "Opposing forces") and conflict is resolved by their death. Structuralist readings focus on how the structures of the single text resolve inherent narrative tensions. If a structuralist reading focuses on multiple texts, there must be some way in which those texts unify themselves into a coherent

system. The versatility of structuralism is such that a literary critic could make the same claim about a story of two *friendly* families ("Boy's Family + Girl's Family") that arrange a marriage between their children despite the fact that the children hate each other ("Boy - Girl") and then the children commit suicide to escape the arranged marriage; the justification is that the second story's structure is an 'inversion' of the first story's structure: the relationship between the values of love and the two pairs of parties involved have been reversed. Structuralist literary criticism maintains that the "literary banter of a text" resides chiefly in a new structure and not in the particularities of characterization development and voice in which that structure is expressed. Vladimir Propp, Algirdas Julien Greimas, and Claude Lévi-Strauss considered basic deep elements in stories, myths, and anecdotes combined in various ways to engender multiple versions of the *ur-story* or *ur-myth*. Structural literary theory and Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism, is also indebted to the anthropological study of myths. Some critics have also tried to apply the theory to individual works, but the effort to find unique structures in *individual* literary works runs counter to the structuralist program and have an affinity with New Criticism.

The 1940s and 1950s were marked by existentialism propounded by Jean-Paul Sartre. But structuralism rose to prominence in France in the wake of existentialism, particularly in the 1960s. The initial popularity of structuralism in France led to its spread across the globe. Structuralism objected to the idea of human freedom and choice and focused instead on the way that human experience and thus, behaviour, is determined by various structures. The most important initial work on this score was Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1949 volume *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. *Elementary Structures* considered as kinship systems from a structural point of view and it demonstrated how apparently different social organizations were in fact different permutations of a few basic kinship structures. In the late 1950s he published *Structural Anthropology*, a collection of essays outlining his program for structuralism. In the 1960s, structuralism adopted a single unified approach to human life that embraced all disciplines. The writings of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and Foucault (*Moore, Margaret*. "LibGuides: Literary Theory: 1910-2010: Post-Structuralism". [arthumref.libguides.com.](http://arthumref.libguides.com/)) constituted the points where structuralism intersected with post-structuralism and deconstruction because structuralism was criticized for being *ahistorical* and deterministic as opposed to the ability of people to act evidenced by the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, the student uprisings of May 1968, their impact on academia, questions of power and political struggle [18]. In the 1980s, deconstruction and its emphasis on



the ambiguity of language as opposed to a logical structure became popular. By 2000, structuralism was considered as a historically important School of thought, but the movements that it spawned, rather than structuralism itself, commanded attention [19]. Structuralism was criticized by the French hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricœur [20] and criticized Lévi-Strauss for constantly overstepping the limits of validity of the structuralist approach, ending up in what Ricœur described as "a Kantianism without a transcendental subject" [20]. The anthropologist Adam Kuper [21] maintained that "'structuralism' came to have something of the momentum of a millennial movement and some of its adherents felt that they formed a secret society of the seeing in a world of the blind. Conversion was not just a matter of accepting a new paradigm; it was, almost, a question of salvation [21]." Philip Noel Pettit [22] called for an abandoning of "the positivist dream which Lévi-Strauss dreamed for semiology" arguing that semiology is not to be placed among the natural sciences [22]. Cornelius Castoriadis [23] criticized structuralism as failing to explain symbolic mediation in the social world [23]. Structuralism was seen as a variation on the "logician" theme, and he argued that, contrary to what structuralists advocate, language—and symbolic systems in general—cannot be reduced to logical organizations on the basis of the binary logic of oppositions [23]. Critical theorist Jürgen Habermas [24] accused structuralists, such as Foucault, of being positivists; he remarked that while Foucault is not an ordinary positivist, he nevertheless paradoxically uses the tools of science to criticize science [25]. The sociologist Anthony Giddens [26] drew on a range of structuralist themes in his theorizing, by dismissing the structuralist view that the reproduction of social systems is merely "a mechanical outcome [26]".

## RESULTS

The Marxist literary paradigm is premised on the hypothesis that literature (i.e. tacit knowledge) should be comprehended in relation to the social and historical reality of the economy. The Marxist paradigm postulates that the economy is the *base* or *infrastructure* of a society that determines the nature and structure of the ideologies, institutions and practices (such as literature) of society, which are collectively called the *superstructure*. According to 'vulgar' Marxism, there is a straightforward deterministic relationship between the *base/infrastructure* and the *superstructure*, and literary texts are *causally* (or mechanically) determined by the economic *base/infrastructure*. One of such vulgar Marxists is Christopher Caudwell [27] and in his *Illusion and Reality*, he adopts this position in analyzing Victorian poetry. Therefore, Marxist literary criticism investigates literature's role in the class struggle. Karl Marx (1992, 2011, 1976, 1996) was chiefly an economic historian, who had as project to investigate

social organizations and changes in a scientific way and perceived human history as consisting of a series of economic struggles between different classes, namely, the oppressing class and the oppressed class. In the same way as Charles Darwin hypothesized *genes* in human biological evolution, Sigmund Freud posited the *unconscious* of sexual energy in human endeavour, Ferdinand de Saussure envisioned linguistic dialecticism as the driving force of human civilization and Charles Darwin envisaged biological selection as the engine of human evolution, 'vulgar' Marxism postulated that the *economic* base or infrastructure of society is the *only* determining factor in constructing the ideological structures and political institutions and practices and all of these organizations form the *superstructure* of nation states. For Marxists, that is, those who had the view that there is a straightforward relationship of determinism between the base and the superstructure, the literary text is causally (directly) determined by the economic base and Wharton [28] adopts this positionality in his discussions on Victorian poetry. Historical materialism eventually became the most important intellectual foundation of Marxist theory [29-31] that proposes that modes of production take the form of technological infrastructures (and this includes advances made in areas such as the Internet, ICTs and e-commerce in contemporary society) that inevitably trigger changes in the social relations of production (Marx, Karl. "The Poverty of Philosophy. Marxists Internet Archive." 1955. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/>).

Marx believed that 'historical materialism' was the ultimate dynamic force, propelling the distribution of resources, gain, production and development of human society but also that the conflicts generated by the encounter between the superstructures and the base/infrastructure were the 'artistic' impulse and real propulsion behind the historical *longue durée*. The Marxist economic and 'political' paradigm became a literary theory based on the assumption that literature must be comprehended in relationship to economic experience as social and historical reality. This economic base/infrastructure of society supports, is reflected by and influences the ideological superstructure, which encompasses politics, international relations, culture, religion, history, law, geography, anthropology, psychology, sociology communication and all other aspects of humanity's ideological consciousness [32]. In this way, historical materialism examines the causes of developments and changes in human history in the light of the economic, technological and, more broadly, material factors as well as the conflicts and clashes that emanate from these material interests among communities, tribes, social classes, races, ethnic groups, genders, bodies, generations and nations. The institutional superstructures such as law, politics, the arts, literature,

morality and religion are understood by Marx as *reflections* of the economic base or infrastructure of society.

Karl Marx theorized that human beings are *products* of their own social and economic environment. Marx suggested that the economic conditions of life, which are the *base* or *infrastructure*, are comprised not only of raw materials but also of technological developments and the social organization of the workplace. The economic *base* or *infrastructure* has a powerful *effect* on the superstructure, which includes the world of ideas. Marx defined the confrontation of base/infrastructure and superstructure in terms of *consciousness*, that is, the ways that human beings eventually think about and view their social reality. Marx famously declared that: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" [33]. In other words, the ideas of human beings are moulded by the material and economic conditions of life. The challenge for us is therefore how to investigate literature as one of the superstructures, thoroughly influenced by the economic base/infrastructure, and also inquire into how literature reacts back on the economic base/infrastructure in ways that are undecidable. Marxian dialectics (i.e. the encounter between economic base/infrastructure and superstructures) viewed literature as a propaganda machinery for the ruling classes. For instance, in nomadic societies, stories celebrating the handsomeness and generosity (*pulaku*) of herdsmen revolve around their possession of lots of cattle (economic base) and are very much appreciated. In chieftaincy rulership societies, panegyric verses in oral literature glorifying the physical and spiritual might of the king (compared physically to a lion, leopard, etc) are framed out around economic activities of farming, fishing or hunting but are also designed to censure him around political and social issues of intelligence, kindness, etc (by drawing inspiration from characters like tortoise, chameleon, etc). In feudal societies, tales are appreciated thematized, for example, on chivalric romances, that is, on stories that tell about knights struggling to acquire the honour of fighting and winning wars, imposing a hegemonic order with its economic classes (e.g. aristocratic, bourgeois, proletarian) and winning the love of their fair ladies. After the French revolution of 1789 and with the collapse of the aristocratic regime of Louis XVI 'Le roi soleil', a new epoch of capitalism was ushered in where people appreciated the films of James Bond that glorify the glamorous lifestyle of the modern, capitalist, risk-taker, self-conscious gentleman, who is always the ladies' preferred man because he is dressed in expensive attires, lives in a mansion and drives fast automobiles in deserts or yachts on big waves of seas. In these *cultural* fantasies of literature, it is the bourgeois class that comes to

humanity's rescue and envisions itself as 'saving' mankind from imaginary 'villains' (i.e. socialists, communists, anarchists, primitive people, etc) that seek to destroy the capitalist *status quo* in order to enforce another order. In socialist societies, literature serves to strengthen *consciousness* about the exploitative character of capitalism. For example, the writings of Senghor [34] and Diop [35] portray what is seen as the ravages of this order. This consciousness [36] in literature addressed issues like the economic depression [37, 38] the role of the creative intelligentsia in maintaining the status quo [39, 40].

At a general level, democratic socialists and social democrats object to the idea that human societies can achieve socialism and communism only via *class conflict and struggles* leading to a proletarian revolution. A number of anarchists also object to the necessity of a stage of the transitory state before that of the emancipation of mankind. Some thinkers discarded the basics of the Marxist paradigm such as the labour theory of value and historical materialism and critiqued capitalism by advocating socialism through the employment of other arguments. Many Marxists agree with aspects of Marxist thinking as realistic, but contend that the *corpus* necessary to come to such conclusions about the state of humanity is incomplete and sometimes outdated from the light of various economic, political and social theories. Thus, the problem of evidence in Marxism was posed by historians like Paul Johnson, who argued that Marx's details about evidence are so superficial that they open up to skepticism about factual data [41]. For example, Paul Johnson challenged the whole of Marx's Chapter Eight of *Capital* as a deliberate falsification in order to justify his thesis about the facts of human materialist nature. So, these thinkers typically combine Marxist ideas with other ideas from theorists of the Frankfurt School such as Max Weber.

Many critics have argued that Marxism is an oversimplification of the real character of society and claim that the influence of ideas, culture and other aspects of what Marx called the *superstructure* are just as important as the economic *base* to the course of human history, if not even more so. However, Marxism does not claim that the economic base of society is the only determining element in society as demonstrated by the following letter written by Friedrich Engels, who was Marx's long-time collaborator:

*According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this, neither Marx nor I ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one he transforms that*

proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase [42, 43].

Nevertheless, this also creates another problem for Marxism. If the *superstructure* also influences the base, then there is no need for Marx's constant assertions that the history of society is one of economic class conflict. This then becomes a classic 'chicken or the egg' argument as to whether it is the *base* or the *superstructure* that comes first. Peter Singer proposes that the way to solve this problem is to understand that Marx saw the economic base as *ultimately* the real engine driving history [44]. Marx believed that humanity's significant characteristic was its means of production and thus the only way for mankind to liberate itself from tyranny was for it to take control of the means of production. Marx conjectured that the goal of history and the elements of the superstructure acted as *instruments* of history (Ibid). Even if Singer's reading of Marx's insights on the 'goal of history' is close to Marx's uniquely dialectical intent, that still would not make this perspective necessarily factual. Murray Rothbard revisited historical materialism by maintaining that Marx assumed the *base* of society (its technology and social relations) constructed its *consciousness* in the *superstructure*; yet, building on the opinions of Ludwig von Mises, Rothbard maintained that it is *human consciousness* which drives the progress of technology and social relations in the first place. Rothbard suggested that Marx ignores how the base arises, which obscures that the true *causal* path is from the *superstructure* to the base, as human beings determine the development of technology and the social relations they wish to pursue. Rothbard cites von Mises, who declares that:

*We may summarize the Marxian doctrine in this way: In the beginning there are the 'material productive forces', i.e., the technological equipment of human productive efforts, the tools and machines. No question concerning their origin is permitted; they are, that is all; we must assume that they are dropped from heaven.*  
[45].

## DISCUSSION

Politically and from an evolutionary viewpoint, Marxism was predicated on the assumption that human civilization will evolve from primitive nomadism to chieftaincy rule, feudalism, bourgeois capitalism, socialism and finally to the stage of utopian communism [46]. It was envisaged that in the stage of bourgeois capitalism, the privileged bourgeoisie class will depend on the proletariat class, a labour force that is responsible for its long term survivability. But Marx also theorized that in order for capitalism to endure, profits generated by the system have to be reinvested in

the social welfare of labour forces. The absence of such a re-investment *only* in the creation of more factories can create a situation where workers would become poorer and poorer until no solution would be envisaged for saving that class. The outcome will be a crisis in which revolt will lead to re-structuration of the capitalist system. A new political system would then emerge called socialism, which will only be a transition to communism. In a communist state, the proletarian underclass has to own the means of production. The government, security or police force, multinationals, etc, do not own the means of production. As a political regime, communism was envisioned as not yet in existence. A number of projects were set up that approximated communism such as certain first-century Christian communities. Contrary to popular belief, the USSR, the European Eastern Bloc, China or Cuba do not really meet the criteria for a communist order (although they provide social services like health and education to all) because they are actually associated with state-run forms of capitalism. Marx famously maintained that: 'Religion is the opiate of the people' [47] and Lenin later on dwelt on this topic. Lenin was persuaded that the proletarian labour force is largely unconscious about their own oppression because they are convinced by the state to be self-sacrificing and generous.

At the sociological level of the capitalist superstructure, literary criticism originated with the Greeks. The application of the sociological to literature in terms of genesis and functions originated with Plato's *The Republic*. Plato proclaimed poetry as propaganda and warned that the greater its charm, the greater its potential to create effects and the greater the danger that people will be moved emotionally to act in unpredictable ways. As a result, he declared that all but certain forms of harmless or useful art shall be banned from his ideal state. From a socio-psychological viewpoint, Aristotle's idea of the social origins and functions of art was based on the dichotomy between the *catharsis* of passion and the *stimulation* of passion. Horace adopted a socio-ethical and socio-legal perspective and reduced form to a 'sugar coating' for the functionality of content in such a way that, from the origins, the functions of poetry were to set the boundaries of public/private property, the confines of the sacred/secular in order to avoid *concubinage* and *promiscuity* and found a marriage ritual. The poet's role was also perceived as one of establishing a civic order and recording the laws. In these performances, the honour and reputation of divine poetry and bards came into being. This classical view of the sociological origins and functions of poetry was revived during the Renaissance period with scholars like Lodge in his 'Defence of Poetry' [48]. Later Marxists challenged what was seen as Marx's naive characterization of literature as merely 'propaganda'. For instance, the

Italian communist scholar Antonio Gramsci [50, 51], used the concept of *hegemony* to describe the way in which ideology (a system of beliefs) is not simply oppressive and coercive, but also involves elements of consent. People do not just go to see a James Bond film, even when the lifestyle portrayed may be unachievable, or purchase writings of the African Writers' Series (AWS), for examples. In this way, there has to be a *reason* (and therefore consent) for them to watch or read it. In order to legitimate literature's role, the cultural critic Raymond Williams [52] argues in *Marxism and Literature* that every historical period has rivaling hegemonies. The dominant hegemony promotes ruling class interests such as those of contemporary nation states, while the residual hegemony defends the cultural belief system of the previous era such as panegyric verses that celebrate chieftaincy rule, nomadic communities and feudalism. The emergent hegemony such as that of communist movements shares revolutionary ideas that may later become dominant. In this way, literature reveals to us the spirit of the times and the questions that matter to communities. While entertainment is a function of literature, literature is not merely about delight or escapism; it is a manifestation of economic class struggles.

According to Marxists, literature is a reflection of social institutions out of which it emerges and is itself a social institution with a specific ideological function; it is also a reflection of class struggles and materialism: the quest for wealth conventionally defines characters in literary texts. So, Marxists generally view literature "not as art created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as a 'product' of the economic and conceptual determinants specific to a particular epoch. Literature reflects an author's own class structure and analyses its class relations, however penetrating or superficial that analysis may be. The Marxist critic is therefore a careful reader or viewer who keeps in mind issues of power and money, and any of the following kinds of questions preoccupying Marxist literary critics: What place does class have to play in the work? What are the author's own readings of the issue of class relations? How do the characters in a work of art overcome oppression?

In what ways does a work of art serve as propaganda for the *status quo*?

- Does the work of art attempt to undermine it?
- What does a work of art reveal about tyranny?
- Are there any social conflicts that are blamed on other ideologies different from the dominant one?
- Does a work of art suggest any forms of utopian vision that can be used as a prophylactic for the problems faced by people?
- Is the work of art a mirror of social values?

- Is the work of art a form of propaganda for the bourgeois class?
- Can the work of art challenge be used to challenge any social norms?

At the ideological level, although Georg Lukacs, a Hungarian Marxist bases his analysis on the Hegelian tradition and portrays literature as a reflection of socio-economic reality, he objects to the understanding that there is a simple deterministic relationship between the economic *base* and *superstructure*. He maintains that the greatest works of literature do not simply reproduce the dominant ideologies of their time, but integrate a critique of these ideologies in their forms. In this way, the realism of the Nineteenth-century novel was not simply imitated; but the contradictions within the society of the bourgeoisie class were also slotted in the art. Realism was achieved in the writings of Balzac, for example, but at the same time, the author breaks with the mimetic tradition by exaggerating the portrayal of his characters. Lukacs drew from the artistic criterion of 'typicality', that is, more emphasis on content than on form, to speak of determinism. From this light, a work of art may be realistic or naturalistic but it may concentrate on the *bizarre* or the *untypical*; form and technique may be stressed much more than content and a Lukacsian view would qualify it as critical realism, socialist realism or anti-modernism. But this Lukacsian view was also criticised by Marxists [53, 54], who maintain that a truly revolutionary art has to break radically with traditional forms because art that employs conventional techniques to assault capitalism will only amuse the bourgeois audience that is used to it and will 'consume' it accordingly. From this light, a socialist artist has to stress on production (content) rather than on consumption (style or form) by employing radical techniques, as evidenced by Brecht in his epic theatre, designed to show the relationships of production and to induce the audience to espouse a political stance towards them.

Literary criticism made a huge contribution to develop Marxist economic and political theory. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the post-World War II and the Cold War, a number of writers in the US and the UK such as V.F. Calverton, James Farrel, Granville Hicks, Christopher Caudwell and Stephen Spender, changed the intellectual climate from capitalism to socialism and communism. From this infatuation emerged the neo-Marxist literary criticism that continues to regain respect in academic circles. Karl Marx set forth the idea of the 'superstructure' in the preface to his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in the following words:

*In the social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable*



*and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of the relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society – the real foundations on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life.*

At the capitalist stage of economic development, the relations of production that constitute the economic structure incorporate the proletarian class that sells its labour power to the capitalist class and the capitalist ownership of the means of production. The economic base gave rise to superstructures such as 'government', religion, the law, and education that have been serving to validate the capitalist order.

Marx's idea of history is a variant of historical determinism [55] which is connected to his dependence on dialectical materialism as an endogenous mechanism for social change [56]. Marx wrote that:

*At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure*  
(Karl Marx. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*).

The notion of the dialectic arose from the dialogues of the early Greek philosophers, but it was in the early Nineteenth century that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel raised it into a conceptual structure for considering the often opposing forces of historical evolution. Historical determinism, nevertheless, fell into disuse [25], because, as Terry Eagleton argues, Marx's writings "should not be taken to mean that everything that has ever happened is a matter of class struggle. It means, rather, that class struggle is most fundamental to human history" [57]. In a sense, the status of Marx as a determinist is a "myth" [58], Available at: [www.marxmyths.org/peter-stillman/index.php](http://www.marxmyths.org/peter-stillman/index.php)) because Friedrich Engels himself cautioned about considering Marx's ideas as deterministic. Engels also remarked that: "younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it". Although historical materialism was considered as a materialist theory of history, Marx did not claim to have produced a master-

key to history and the materialist formation of history is not "an historico-philosophic theory of the *marche g n rale*, imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circumstances in which it finds itself". Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar criticised the narrow conceptual basis of Marx's ideas on historical evolution. In the 1978 book *The Downfall of Capitalism and Communism*, Ravi Batra pointed out vital modifications in the historical determinist approaches of Sarkar and Marx:

Sarkar's main apprehension with the human constituent is what instructs universality [59]. In this way, while social evolution is governed chiefly by economic conditions, according to Marx, to Sarkar, this dynamic is propelled by forces varying with time and space: physical prowess, high-spiritedness, intellect in dogmas, intellect in the accumulation of capital; in short, the sum total of human experience and nature.

A number of thinkers maintained that a communist state would, by its very nature, erode the rights of its people owing to the hypothesized powerful revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat, its syndicalist nature, dependent on "the masses" rather than on historical determinism, individuals and the centrally planned economy. Milton Friedman contended that under socialism, the absence of a free market economy would inescapably lead to an authoritarian political rule. Friedrich Hayek also shared this view and thought that capitalism is a precondition for liberty to emerge in a nation state [60, 61]. Any redistribution of material property comes with a form of coercion [62]. As some scholars [63] have argued: capitalism is a deception and a scam. Declaring itself individualistic, it organizes cooperatively in order to encourage the objectives of a few people. Socialism, on the other hand, would secure to the labour class, the products of its toil, now appropriated by the few people, and, in this way, it would preserve to the labour class, the majority of the population, a greater individuality than that which they now attain. Socialism enables individual freedom and liberties for emancipatory projects, but that accomplishment demands that people cooperatively construct a society where each one is endowed with enough life chances and possibilities in order to achieve each one's own potentialities. Nevertheless, anarchists believe that a centralized communist system will only lead to coercion and state domination. Mikhail Bakunin offered the idea that Marxist states trigger a tyrannical control of the population by a new aristocracy [64]. Even when this new aristocracy is proletarian, Bakunin argued that their new-found power would basically transform their assessment of society and thus lead them to look down on the working masses.

Some scholars have argued that Marxian economics is unworkable [65]. *Acemoglu and*

James [66]. But there are also misgivings that the rate of profit in capitalism will increase. The labour theory of value is one of the most commonly challenged core tenets of Marxism [67]. For example, the Austrian School devalued the basic theory of classical economics and the British economist Alfred Marshall attacked Marx by saying that: price or value is determined not merely by the supply of labour, but also by the demand of the consumer [68]. Labour, for him, does not contribute to cost; rather it is the wants and needs of consumers. This shift from labour as the source of all value to subjective individual assessments creating all value weakened Marx's economic theories because total labour value cannot be compared to the total price value of multiple economic sectors. It is also very difficult to quantify a way to size up abstract labour, other than through assumptions [33]. These assumptions involve circular reasoning. The challenge raised by Austrian School economist Ludwig von Mises in 1920 and illustrated by Friedrich Hayek is how socialist economics or a centralized socialist planned economies can distribute resources in ways that are rational in a fluid economy [62, 69].

The free market solution prioritizes a price mechanism in which people individually decide how a product should be distributed based on their willingness to give money for it. The price embeds information about the abundance of resources as well as their desirability, which in turn allows, on the basis of individual consensual decisions, corrections to be made in order to prevent shortages and surpluses. Mises and Hayek argued that this is the only possible solution and, without the information provided by market prices, socialism would lack a method to rationally allocate resources. The socialist calculation debate also meant that income sharing would reduce individual incentives to work and therefore incomes had to be individualized [70]. The argument went even further that in any society where everyone holds equal wealth; there can be no material incentive to work, because one does not receive rewards for work well done. The tendency is for incentives to augment productivity for all workers and for the loss of such effects to trigger stagnation. This is the reason why in *Principles of Political Economy*, John Stuart Mill (1848)/[71] declared that:

*It is the common error of Socialists to overlook the natural indolence of mankind; their tendency to be passive, to be the slaves of habit, to persist indefinitely in a course once chosen. Let them once attain any state of existence which they consider tolerable, and the danger to be apprehended is that they will thenceforth stagnate; will not exert themselves to improve, and by letting their faculties rust, will lose even the energy required to preserve them from deterioration. Competition may not be the best conceivable stimulus, but it is at present a necessary one, and no one can*

*foresee the time when it will not be indispensable to progress.*

However, he later altered his views and became more sympathetic to socialism, particularly Fourierism, adding new chapters to his *Principles of Political Economy* in defence of a socialist outlook and defending some socialist causes. The economist John Kenneth Galbraith criticised communal forms of socialism that promoted egalitarianism in terms of wages or compensation as unrealistic in their assumptions about human motivation:

*This hope [that egalitarian reward would lead to a higher level of motivation], one that spread far beyond Marx, has been shown by both history and human experience to be irrelevant. The human beings do not rise to such heights. Generations of socialists and socially oriented leaders have learned this to their disappointment and more often to their sorrow. The basic fact is clear: the good society must accept men and women as they are.*

Galbraith [72]. The inconsistency of the claims were a prominent feature of Marxian economics and the debate surrounding it organized by Sraffian economists such as Ian Steedman, Paul Sweezy, Gary Mongiovi, David Laibman, Nobuo Okishio and John Roemer. John Maynard Keynes referred to Marx's *Capital* as an obsolete textbook that was not only scientifically erroneous but without interest or application for the modern world [73] economists regarded Marxist economics as an irrelevant dead end; in fact, the Marxian idea of society was seen as basically flawed [74].

The Marxist stages of history, class analysis and theory of social evolution were criticised. This caused Jean-Paul Sartre to conclude that "class" was not a homogenous entity and could never mount a revolution; but, he continued to advocate Marxist beliefs. Marx had accepted that his theory could not explain the internal development of the Asiatic social system, where much of the world's population lived for thousands of years (Conquest, Robert. "Reflections on a Ravaged Century. WW." (2000). In addition, Marx had a flawed approach to epistemology. The laws of dialectics, which are at the very basis of Marxism were fundamentally flawed: some were unsubstantiated truisms while others were philosophical dogmas which could not be scientifically proven. Some Marxist "laws" were vague and read variously and in flawed ways. Nevertheless, economist Thomas Sowell [75] wrote that:

*What Marx accomplished was to produce such a comprehensive, dramatic, and fascinating vision that it could withstand innumerable empirical*

contradictions, logical refutations, and moral revulsions at its effects. The Marxian vision took the overwhelming complexity of the real world and made the parts fall into place, in a way that was intellectually exhilarating and conferred such a sense of moral superiority that opponents could be simply labelled and dismissed as moral lepers or blind reactionaries. Marxism was – and remains – a mighty instrument for the acquisition and maintenance of political power [74].

Karl Popper, David Prychitko, Robert Allen, and Francis Fukuyama argued that many of Marx's predictions had failed. For example, he predicted that wages would tend to depreciate and that capitalist economies would suffer worsening economic crises leading to the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist system. The socialist revolution would occur first in the most advanced capitalist nations and once collective ownership had been established, then all sources of class conflict would disappear. Instead of Marx's predictions taking place in industrialized countries like the United States or the United Kingdom, communist revolutions took place in undeveloped regions in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Popper argued that both the idea of Marx's historical method as well as its application were *unfalsifiable* and, thus, it was a pseudoscience that cannot be proven to be true or false. The Marxist theory of history invested in the character of the 'coming social revolution' and the predictions of the historian were not only testable but also falsifiable. Yet, Marxist adherents re-interpreted the theory and the evidence in order to make them agree. In this way, the theory was protected from refutation; but this was done at the price of irrefutability. A 'conventionalist twist' to Marxism was projected and this strategy minimized its claim to scientific status.

Marxism was initially scientific because it was hypothesized on predictability of history. But when Marx's predictions were not borne out, the theory was saved from falsification by addition of postulations that attempted to make it compatible with facts. Marxist literary criticism is intrinsically unfalsifiable and therefore is not readily yielding to any large-scale historiographical ideologies. Dialectics is a method to evading critique but at the same time it can be deployed to respond to questions of human progress as a universal law. Paradox is a powerful strategy to deal with the complexities of history and Marx himself incarnated it by professing as an atheist while at the same time engaging with the cosmic optimism of human history that only theism could account for and justify.

## CONCLUSION

This paper was an attempt to deploy post-structuralist theory by methodologists in literary

philosophy to demonstrate that the implications of Marxist theory of the knowledge economy in the vulgar sense of the term are a myth. While acknowledging that the later Marx showed that his theory is more sophisticated than was previously thought by imputing the critical role of the superstructures, the paper suggests that vulgar Marxist determinism can be a productive methodology for evolving a new model of historicizing practice in the knowledge economy literature. It has demonstrated that the Marxist base or infrastructure is an important knowledge perspective from which to approach knowledge economy as an embedded narrative. Marxist theory prioritizes the 'economy' as the ultimate factor in the consciousness of mankind's civilization. But other human drives are critically important in re-determining the economic base or infrastructure. Therefore historicizing mankind's evolutionary culture must involve an imbrication of both narratives, namely, that of consciousness and that of life forces of being, rather than prioritizing only the one over the other.

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