A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY



THE CONTRADICTIONS OF KARL MARX

Dialectical inquiry, free minds, competitive markets, and the refusal of intellectual masters

PANINI

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I. The Measure of a Great Philosopher

Karl Marx was one of the greatest philosophers in human history. His influence crossed the boundaries of universities and entered factories, legislatures, revolutions, and the political imagination of entire continents. Drawing critically upon Hegel's dialectics and Feuerbach's materialism, he made human labor, institutions, production, and historical conflict central objects of philosophical investigation. His work changed how millions understood capital, exploitation, property, and the relation between ideas and the circumstances of human life. In breadth of historical influence, one may compare his place in political thought with the place of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad in religious history, without pretending that their doctrines or achievements were equivalent. Such comparisons concern the creation of enduring intellectual movements, not a contest over the worth of their founders. Marx was also a fallible human being, formed by nineteenth-century European disputes, limited sources, inherited prejudices, and intellectual ambitions larger than any one life could fulfill. To recognize his greatness is not to certify every proposition he advanced. To identify his errors is not to deny his discoveries. The distinction between intellectual respect and intellectual obedience governs everything that follows.

I am not a disciple of Marx, and I do not propose to become his prosecutor merely to prove my independence. I take from him whatever survives criticism, just as I take from other thinkers whatever survives the same

ordeal. The material world is my starting point, not a deity, and the proposition that it exists independently of my wishes remains open to philosophical challenge. Dialectical reasoning is a heuristic, not a prophecy that history must advance toward a predetermined destination. Economic class is a powerful explanatory category, not a universal key that opens every historical lock. Competitive markets are my presumptive institutional preference, not an economic sacrament. Human dignity and intellectual liberty matter to me, but their defense requires arguments rather than reverence for an inherited label. I am married to none of these positions, for an attachment that cannot survive correction has ceased to be inquiry. My allegiance is to disciplined investigation, and even my methods must answer for their results. I will not rescue a theory from inconvenient evidence merely because I once found it illuminating.

II. Four Claims That Must Stand Separately

Marx's reputation often obscures the fact that several distinct arguments travel beneath the single name of Marxism. Philosophical materialism asks whether the world exists independently of consciousness and how minds relate to material reality. Historical materialism investigates how production, property, labor, and social reproduction shape the development of institutions. Marxian economics advances particular claims about value, surplus, accumulation, competition, crises, and tendencies within capitalism. Revolutionary politics raises different questions about class power, collective ownership, political emancipation, and the institutions that might replace capitalist rule. These positions are related historically, but a relation of intellectual origin is not a relation of logical necessity. A philosophical claim can survive when a historical prediction fails, and an economic diagnosis can be sound without validating an entire political program. Nor should Soviet central planning be placed without qualification in Marx's own mouth, as though every institution developed after his death were an explicit instruction from him. The expression dialectical materialism itself became established in later Marxist traditions and was not Marx's standard name for his philosophy. I therefore examine each proposition by the evidence and reasoning appropriate to it, rather than buying an ideological package whose parts cannot be returned. [1]

This separation is neither opportunism nor an attempt to take the attractive parts of a doctrine while escaping its demanding implications. If historical

materialism predicts that a specified economic transformation will produce an identifiable political result, that causal prediction can be investigated. If a theory of value proposes a particular explanation for prices or profits, its premises and explanatory power can be compared with alternatives. If a revolutionary program promises emancipation, the institutions created in its name must be examined without automatically confusing their failures with a proof that every Marxian insight is false. Some propositions may withstand inquiry, others may fail, and still others may require a narrower domain of application. A philosopher who insists that all four claims must stand or fall together has assumed the conclusion that needs demonstration. Bertrand Russell's criticism of Marx is relevant precisely because he refused to make empirical economics hostage to metaphysics. I accept the burden that follows from that distinction, for my preference for markets cannot be deduced merely by declaring myself a materialist. Every claim must show its own credentials. Philosophy begins to lose its integrity when the prestige of a thinker replaces the proof of a proposition.

III. India and the European Limits of Marx's Historical Vision

Marx's articles on British India in 1853 reveal the contradiction between his formidable powers of criticism and the limits of his historical information. He denounced colonial brutality, commercial exploitation, and the hypocrisy of a ruling power that proclaimed civilization while impoverishing those it governed. Yet he also presented British intervention as destructive and potentially regenerative, as though imperial domination could serve as an instrument of historical modernization. He wrote that Indian society had no history of its own, adding the qualification that it had no known history, and described a persistent social foundation beneath successive conquests. That language did not merely record the existence of colonial change, for it placed India's development within a framework strongly influenced by European industrial experience. His sources included colonial administrative documents and European accounts, among them the writings of François Bernier and Thomas Stamford Raffles, rather than a comprehensive investigation of India's internal historical debates. This limitation matters because the categories through which evidence is collected can predetermine the appearance of the evidence itself. India possessed changing agrarian relations, commercial networks, political systems, intellectual schools, and struggles over power long before Britain established imperial control. Caste oppression and religious authority were among India's profound contradictions, but they did not render the civilization historically inert. An empire can transform a society without

earning either the moral right to conquer it or the historical credit for every alternative path that conquest prevented. [2]

The strongest criticism of Marx here is not that he welcomed every cruelty of empire, since his own articles contain an unmistakable indictment of colonial conduct. It is that he sometimes judged non-European histories through an insufficiently examined theory of European progress. His later writings complicate this indictment, and an intellectually responsible critic must allow the complication its proper weight. In correspondence with Vera Zasulich in 1881, he refused to treat the Western European route to capitalism as a compulsory sequence for Russian peasant communes. Marx also recognized the political force of colonial and national struggles, which makes the flat accusation that he saw nothing but class historically indefensible. Indeed, historians working within Marxist traditions have helped uncover the complexity of Indian agrarian and social history that his early journalism inadequately represented. Their scholarship shows that a method may produce corrections to its founder, provided the evidence is allowed to discipline the method. The lesson is not that European philosophy is disqualified because it is European, for an idea's birthplace cannot determine its truth. The lesson is that India must be studied as India, not as an unfinished version of somebody else's history. No civilization has to enter the courtroom of reason as a defendant whose inferiority has already been decided. [3]

IV. The Philosopher and His Own Prejudices

Marx's 1844 essay *On the Jewish Question* offers a different but equally instructive contradiction. He argued against the proposition that Jews must surrender their religion to gain political emancipation, thereby distinguishing civic rights from a state's preferred religious identity. That defense of emancipation was important, and an account that erases it would misrepresent the text. Nevertheless, the essay used degrading associations between Jewishness, money, and commercial self-interest that drew upon established anti-Jewish stereotypes. His Jewish family background does not remove the prejudice from those formulations, and his criticism of bourgeois society does not excuse their generalizing language. Nor does this evidence license the claim that every aspect of Marx's philosophy was motivated by hostility to Jews. The stronger judgment distinguishes what he argued well from the language and assumptions that deserve rejection. A philosopher can challenge the prejudices of his society while failing to escape all of them. A philosophy devoted to emancipation gains credibility by admitting that possibility rather than suppressing it. If Marx is to be examined historically, the historical examination must apply to Marx himself. [4]

V. Class Struggle Before Its Strongest Critics

My principal disagreement concerns the priority assigned to economic class in explanations of historical conflict. Class relationships are real, since ownership, wages, bargaining power, and control of productive resources shape the possibilities of human life. Marx's achievement was to show how capitalist institutions generate structured tensions that cannot be understood through the intentions of isolated individuals alone. The intelligent Marxist response to my criticism is not to deny nationalism, religion, or culture, for major Marxist thinkers have analyzed all three. Engels's letter to Joseph Bloch gave political and ideological factors real historical influence while retaining economic determination in the last instance. Gramsci investigated hegemony and consent, Edward Palmer Thompson treated class as historically formed through experience, and Eric Hobsbawm examined the construction of nations. Marx himself wrote about the antagonism between English and Irish workers and recognized how nationality could divide people with shared economic interests. These contributions defeat a caricature in which Marxists believe that every event is directly caused by a quarrel over wages. My criticism must therefore address the most powerful formulation rather than the easiest target. The real question is whether economic relations deserve explanatory priority even when other institutions appear to do more of the causal work. [5]

The phrase in the last instance may name a serious structural hypothesis, but its defenders must explain what observation would count against it. If

every religious war, nationalist revolt, and caste struggle is redescribed as ultimately economic whatever the evidence, the explanation becomes immune to possible refutation. The proper procedure is to compare specific accounts of specific events and identify which causal links each account can substantiate. In India's Partition of 1947, one must examine colonial policy, communal mobilization, constitutional failure, political leadership, territorial claims, and material interests without presuming one category has already won. In Bangladesh's emergence in 1971, shared religion failed to neutralize the interacting pressures of language, unequal political representation, regional economic grievances, and national identity. In caste relations, property and occupation matter, but hereditary status, endogamy, exclusion, and ritual hierarchy also operate through their own institutions. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* exposed why an account confined to ownership would not automatically dissolve graded social inequality, while his own politics also took capitalist power seriously. A capable Marxist can analyze all these facts, and no honest critic should pretend otherwise. Yet the ability to redescribe them within a theory is weaker than a demonstration that the theory explains them better than competing accounts. Economic class deserves the greatest weight where the evidence gives it the greatest weight, and nowhere else. [6]

The same standard applies to more ordinary conflicts in power and technology. A salaried official may command licenses and sanctions that determine the survival of an entrepreneur who owns productive assets, revealing a relationship of administrative authority not captured by property labels alone. A factory worker may become a successful

innovator, while an established proprietor may lose his enterprise through technological obsolescence, revealing how economic positions can change. Neither example abolishes class, and both are compatible with sophisticated Marxist accounts of the state and productive development. Their significance is methodological, because a category describing one structure of power must not be mistaken for a complete inventory of power itself. Workers with comparable incomes may stand on opposing sides of a national conflict, while owners and workers may cooperate against foreign occupation. A theory explaining these alliances must identify institutions, incentives, memories, and beliefs rather than hide them beneath a single convenient label. Where class provides the best explanation, I accept it without embarrassment. Where religion, nationality, caste, or political coercion explains more, I follow that evidence without asking Marx for permission. Class struggle is one major contradiction in human history, not the hereditary monarch of every contradiction.

VI. Religions, Arguments, and the Intellectual World Marx Did Not Master

Marx's social criticism of religion is important because religious institutions exist within material circumstances and often operate through property, authority, patronage, and social power. Yet a causal account of why people adopt a belief is not an argument establishing that the belief is logically false. The distinction matters most when a philosopher attempts to turn an explanation of religious institutions into a verdict upon entire philosophical traditions. Marx knew aspects of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Indian religions, but his major works did not systematically confront the sophisticated arguments of the principal Buddhist and Jain epistemologists. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti investigated perception and inference, and their traditions disagreed sharply with rival Indian schools about the conditions of valid knowledge. Nāgārjuna examined the concept of intrinsic existence and argued that things lack the independent nature attributed to them by certain metaphysical theories. Candrakīrti developed Madhyamaka criticism, while Jain thinkers formulated accounts of many-sided reality and carefully qualified predication. These were not interchangeable versions of a single religion, nor were they early illustrations of Marxism awaiting European terminology. To describe the monasteries, courts, and material patrons who supported a debate is worthwhile historical work, but it cannot decide whether a particular inference is valid. The social history of a philosophical argument and the

philosophical merits of that argument are distinct questions that must both be asked. [7]

The distinction becomes especially instructive when a historical materialist encounters arguments that challenge materialist assumptions. Some influential interpretations of Dharmakīrti's later epistemology move toward Yogācāra idealism, creating genuine difficulties for a philosopher who presumes the independent existence of external objects. Nāgārjuna's critique of intrinsic nature cannot be assimilated to Hegelian contradiction without defending each proposed connection. Jain *anekāntavāda* concerns the many-sidedness of reality, while *syādvāda* develops conditional forms of predication rather than declaring every incompatible statement equally true. A materialist may reject these conclusions after examining the arguments, but cannot reject them responsibly by assigning their authors to an allegedly reactionary or idealist social category. Nor should an admirer of Indian civilization declare the ancient arguments correct merely because their authors were Indian. Historical origins do not settle validity in either direction. The proper encounter is a confrontation of reasons in which any participant may expose a defect in another's assumptions. Such an encounter could make Marxian analysis more exact, or reveal the limits of philosophical doctrines inherited from India. Intellectual independence requires allowing both results to remain possible. [8]

VII. Indian Communism and the Test of Intellectual Independence

I therefore challenge Indian Communist scholarship with a demand for reciprocal intellectual seriousness, not with the false assertion that it has never studied Indian philosophy. Rahul Sankrityayan engaged extensively with Buddhist materials, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya examined Indian materialism, and Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi joined historical materialism with formidable scholarship on Indian history. Leaders of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), including E M S Namboodiripad, acknowledged this scholarship and discussed the importance of India's philosophical inheritance. The party's organizational reporting also describes systematic political education, including teaching material covering twenty-two topics across seven subjects. Such evidence rebuts a blanket allegation of intellectual neglect, while leaving unanswered the relative attention devoted to particular Indic philosophers in actual curricula. My deeper question concerns whether Marxism supplies only one interpretive framework among others or remains the judge before whom every Indian tradition must plead. If Nāgārjuna or Dharmakīrti is studied merely to identify an ancient anticipation of dialectics, the comparison risks replacing independent inquiry with confirmation of an existing doctrine. Genuine engagement need not end in agreement, and it need not end in a changed conclusion, since serious criticism can sometimes strengthen a justified position. Its test is whether the argument is understood accurately, evaluated on its own terms, and permitted in

principle to overturn the investigator's assumptions. The philosopher must not be allowed to choose the verdict before hearing the evidence. [9]

The February 1951 consultations between Indian Communist leaders and Soviet authorities offer a separate historical illustration of the problem of intellectual authority. The surviving record identifies Chandra Rajeswara Rao, S A Dange, Ajoy Ghosh, and Makineni Basavapunnaiah among those who discussed Indian revolutionary strategy with Stalin. Stalin advised on the agrarian character of the struggle, the treatment of the national bourgeoisie, and the dangers of mechanically borrowing China's military path. Such advice was not automatically irrational, and the Indian delegates were neither identical in outlook nor incapable of disagreeing among themselves. But the record also shows the considerable political weight assigned to Soviet guidance and the intention to reconsider the party's tactics in its light. The relevant question is not whether a foreigner may offer useful advice, for knowledge does not acquire a nationality. It is whether an Indian political movement possesses institutions strong enough to challenge that advice when the evidence of Indian conditions points elsewhere. Determining the precise consequences of the discussions requires comparison with the party's subsequent documents and its internal debates, not an accusation based solely upon the prestige of Stalin's name. Yet the archival episode provides a concrete reason to investigate how international ideological authority influenced strategic judgment. A materialist movement betrays its method whenever the authority of a person becomes more decisive than the conditions it claims to study. [10]

VIII. Dialectics Under the Discipline of Evidence

I call my philosophical positions heuristic because I refuse to confuse a useful lens with a discovered law of the universe. Materialism is my provisional working orientation toward a reality not manufactured by my beliefs, but I do not pretend to have demonstrated every thesis historically attached to materialist metaphysics. Dialectic directs my attention toward opposing tendencies, internal tensions, and institutions that generate pressures against their own conditions of operation. It does not entitle me to assume that every conflict has a predetermined resolution or that every change constitutes progress. Consider a competitive industry in which successful firms acquire scale advantages, market power, or control over networks essential to new entrants. Competition may thereby create circumstances that restrict future competition, but the tendency must be studied rather than merely announced. Evidence about entry barriers, prices, markups, concentration, innovation, and consumer welfare can establish whether the proposed mechanism actually operates. A contrary result would not be dialectics mysteriously confirming itself through its own failure, but a reason to reject or revise the particular claim. A concept that explains every possible observation by changing its meaning has explained nothing. I keep dialectical reasoning as a generator of disciplined questions, not as an oracle whose answers survive without examination. [11]

This position requires an explicit response to logical empiricism and to Karl Popper's criticism of unfalsifiable historical doctrines. Logical

empiricists disputed the cognitive status of many metaphysical propositions, while Popper insisted that scientific claims expose themselves to conceivable tests. Neither position resolves every philosophical question, and the verificationist tradition itself faced serious objections concerning meaning, observation, and theory. Nevertheless, their challenge to grand historical predictions cannot be evaded by invoking the dignity of dialectics. Claims about inevitable revolution, perpetual immiseration, or predetermined class polarization must be specified carefully before one declares the historical record either favorable or fatal. Marx's writings contain qualifications and changing arguments, so a critic must identify the exact claim, the relevant period, and the conditions under which it was advanced. Major economic transformations and political revolutions did not follow a single simple sequence, while real wages and occupational structures developed in ways that challenge crude readings of some Marxist predictions. Other Marxian concerns, including capital concentration, instability, and political power generated by economic inequalities, remain proper subjects for empirical research. No useful philosophical method can prohibit such mixed conclusions. The dignity of reason lies not in protecting certainty but in permitting correction. [12]

IX. A Market Presumption, Not Market Worship

My defense of free markets is an argument about institutions rather than a conclusion secretly derived from ontology. Prices, entrepreneurship, competition, and voluntary exchange can coordinate knowledge dispersed among millions of people who neither possess nor require a central planner's complete picture of the economy. Hayek explained the informational significance of dispersed knowledge, while Schumpeter illuminated the disruptive role of innovation in transforming productive arrangements. A firm that succeeds through superior production may still become a monopolist capable of suppressing the competition that made its success possible. A market that rewards invention may simultaneously displace workers and impose costs upon communities excluded from the transaction. Private wealth may capture public authority, while excessive regulation may protect established interests against new competitors. These tensions are genuine reasons for institutional scrutiny, not embarrassments to be hidden by defenders of economic liberty. Calling a market dialectical would prove nothing if it meant only that transactions occur and circumstances change. The more useful claim is that competitive markets often supply decentralized procedures for discovering errors and attempting correction, though those procedures can themselves be obstructed. My preference remains conditional upon their demonstrable consequences for freedom, productivity, innovation, and human welfare. [13]

A rigorous market argument must also confront the record of successful state participation in economic development. China and Vietnam expanded market incentives, foreign trade, private initiative, and commercial experimentation without abolishing state direction or one-party political control. Their histories therefore cannot honestly be presented as uncomplicated victories for unrestricted capitalism or for comprehensive planning. East Asian industrial development more generally has combined markets with public education, infrastructure, finance, export discipline, and industrial policy in differing arrangements. The same evidence that supports decentralized discovery may support collective investment where private incentives are inadequate. Public health, basic scientific research, environmental protection, and natural-monopoly networks offer particularly important reasons to consider public financing, regulation, or ownership. Kenneth Arrow's analysis of medical care demonstrated why uncertainty and information asymmetry complicate the assumption that health services behave like ordinary commodities. Public officials can fail through corruption and ignorance, just as private firms can fail through monopoly and fraud. The relevant comparison is between feasible institutions under identifiable conditions, not between an imperfect reality and a fictional ideal. The economy exists to serve living human beings, not to vindicate either Marx or Adam Smith. [14]

Because I demand that economic theories answer to evidence, I must identify what evidence would alter my own preference. I would favor greater public provision where repeated credible comparisons showed it delivering better quality, accessibility, affordability, and long-term results

than realistically available competitive arrangements. I would favor stronger regulation where monopoly, ecological damage, or fraud persisted despite genuine opportunities for competition and proportionate enforcement. I would favor public investment where social returns to basic research, infrastructure, or disease prevention could not be secured adequately through private incentives alone. Conversely, I would favor market entry and decentralization when public ownership or rigid planning produced persistent shortages, stagnation, patronage, or constraints on individual initiative. These judgments require attention to the quality of institutions, the distribution of benefits and costs, and the risks of political capture. They also require humility about causal inference, since an economic policy's apparent success may depend upon institutions, historical conditions, or simultaneous reforms that cannot be reproduced elsewhere. I do not pretend that an all-purpose formula can settle disputes about health financing, housing, climate policy, or the regulation of large digital platforms. My presumption in favor of markets stands only so long as it remains open to stronger evidence for specific alternatives. A preference that forbids the circumstances of its own defeat is a dogma, not a conclusion. [15]

X. Bertrand Russell's Warning Against Philosophical Captivity

Bertrand Russell identified the central logical error in treating Marx's economics and metaphysics as an indivisible body of truth. In his discussion of dialectical materialism, Russell first allowed that philosophical materialism might be true without claiming that its truth could be established with certainty. He next argued that Marx's Hegelian inheritance encouraged an unwarranted belief in the rationality and necessary progress of historical development. His third point was that Marx's economic theory could be **“true if his metaphysic is false, and false if his metaphysic is true”**, and he questioned the idea that an empirical economic matter should depend upon abstract metaphysical premises. His fourth point was not a wholesale rejection of Marx, for Russell considered the economic interpretation of history an important contribution even while denying that it explained everything. These four judgments belong together, and extracting only one clause would weaken the philosophical force of the passage. Russell's criticism does not prove my market preference correct, nor does it entitle me to ignore Marx's insights into capital and labor. It establishes that economic assertions require independent standards of evidence rather than borrowed certainty from a metaphysical system. The same principle applies when I use materialist language to examine Indian caste, religion, political authority, or technological transformation. I refuse to let a philosophy certify a fact it has not investigated. [16]

This distinction also guards against a more subtle form of self-deception within my own project. I cannot call my philosophy provisional and then announce that materialism has permanently defeated every possible rival metaphysics. I cannot call dialectics heuristic and then interpret every conceivable historical outcome as its confirmation. I cannot defend empirical inquiry and then exempt the economic institutions I prefer from inconvenient data. I cannot demand that Indian Marxists study Indic philosophy honestly while treating Nāgārjuna or Jain thought merely as ornaments proving the brilliance of my own framework. If a Buddhist account of cognition exposes a difficulty in my assumptions, I must meet the argument rather than shelter behind the word materialist. If a public institution outperforms a competitive alternative under credible scrutiny, I must examine the evidence rather than invoke the word freedom as a substitute. If a Marxist explanation better accounts for a historical conflict than its nationalist or religious rival, I must accept that result even when it injures my expectations. Every one of these obligations follows from one elementary rule: my arguments enjoy no special immunity because they are mine. The principle of correction is meaningful only when it can cost the thinker something he previously believed.

XI. Five Instruments, No Permanent Allegiance

My working framework contains five instruments, and I refuse to turn their names into five sacred commandments. Materialist inquiry directs attention toward the world and its historically specific relationships, while dialectical analysis helps formulate questions about structured conflict and change. Logical and empirical discipline asks whether those questions have been answered through clear reasoning and adequate evidence. Secular humanism requires a defensible account of dignity, suffering, freedom, and responsibility rather than the pretense that moral duties can simply be read from the existence of matter. Free minds protect the public conditions in which errors can be exposed without the permission of a priest, party, government, or intellectual hero. Competitive markets provide opportunities for exchange and experiment while remaining subject to institutional correction when their operation undermines human welfare. These instruments are not guaranteed to agree, and their disagreements cannot be abolished by declaring that they belong to the same workshop. Economic liberty can conflict with ecological responsibility, state intervention can protect some rights while threatening others, and a materialist assumption can exceed what evidence establishes. The proper response is to investigate each conflict through the reasons and facts relevant to it. One instrument does not rule the workshop, because the workshop exists for inquiry rather than the glorification of its tools.

I am married to none of my philosophical views. The sentence is not a gesture toward fashionable uncertainty but a commitment to the consequences of independent judgment. I will use a proposition while it illuminates reality, revise it when a stronger explanation becomes available, and abandon it when evidence defeats it. I will not preserve Marx's economics merely because I admire Marx, or preserve market economics merely because I currently prefer markets. I will not accept the authority of a European philosopher as proof of truth, or grant an Indian philosopher authority merely through ancestry. I will not confuse a tradition's social origin with the truth of its arguments, or the moral urgency of a cause with the accuracy of its analysis. I may reach firm conclusions, but firmness is not the same as the refusal to reconsider. A mind incapable of reaching judgments is helpless, while a mind incapable of revising them is imprisoned. Reason requires both the courage to decide and the courage to correct. That discipline, rather than allegiance to any named school, is the philosophical position I defend.

XII. Conclusion: The Sovereignty of Reality

Marx illuminated relations of capital and labor that cannot be discarded by slogans about freedom, enterprise, or national identity. He also made judgments that deserve criticism, including assumptions about colonial progress and language that repeated anti-Jewish prejudice. His most capable interpreters have moved beyond crude class reductionism, and their arguments deserve more serious attention than any caricature of economic determinism. Yet no refinement of Marxism permits class to claim explanatory victory before a particular historical conflict has been investigated. India requires an inquiry capable of holding caste, economic inequality, religion, language, nationality, and political authority within the same field of examination without declaring one permanently sovereign. It also requires the intellectual courage to study European and Indic thinkers as disputants whose arguments may correct one another. A good theory sharpens the mind's contact with evidence, while a bad loyalty protects the theory against that contact. I favor materialist inquiry, dialectical questioning, empirical discipline, secular humanism, free minds, and competitive markets because I presently find these instruments useful. Their continued usefulness is a question for investigation, never a verdict signed in advance. Philosophy is honorable only when it remains answerable to what exists independently of its author's wishes.

When Marx illuminates reality, I learn from Marx. When Marx contradicts reality, I choose reality. The same standard applies to Hegel, Feuerbach,

Russell, Hayek, Nāgārjuna, Dharmakīrti, the Jain philosophers, and every other intellectual authority I encounter. It applies equally to the sacred texts of religions and the inherited traditions of civilizations. To say that reason supersedes religion and civilization is not to abolish either, but to deny their claims to exemption from criticism. The discoveries of the past are an inheritance to examine, not a sentence of intellectual obedience imposed upon the living. A philosopher may supply a tool, a question, or a powerful explanation, but cannot acquire ownership of another person's mind. I offer no new infallible system and demand no disciples for my conclusions. I demand only the right, and accept the responsibility, to follow arguments wherever the evidence leads. **Reality is not the servant of philosophy; philosophy must remain the servant of reality.**

Numbered Endnotes and Sources

1. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845–46); Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845); and the historical discussion of the later term *dialectical materialism* in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

2. Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India" (1853), together with "The British Rule in India" (1853).

3. Karl Marx, drafts of his 1881 reply to Vera Zasulich; Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*; Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins* (2010).

4. Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*, published in 1844.

5. Friedrich Engels, letter to Joseph Bloch, September 1890; Karl Marx, letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, April 9, 1870; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*.

6. B R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936); historical literature on India's Partition and the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971.

7. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Dharmakīrti"; "Nāgārjuna"; "Mind in Indian Buddhist Philosophy".

8. “In Some Ways: Syādvāda as the Synthesis of Anekāntavāda and Nayavāda in Akalaṅka’s Philosophical Treatises,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (2024), article.

9. E M S Namboodiripad, “Remembering Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya”; CPI(M), *24th Congress Report on Organisation*, “Party Education”; D D Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (1956).

10. Record of Stalin's discussion with CPI leaders, February 9, 1951; discussion of the subsequent tactical line.

11. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Hegel's Dialectics”; relevant economic literature on market concentration and barriers to entry.

12. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963); Karl Marx, *Capital*; Engels's letter to Bloch cited in note 5.

13. Friedrich Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” *American Economic Review* 35, no. 4 (1945); Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942).

14. World Bank and Development Research Center of the State Council, *China 2030* (2013); Anja Baum, “Vietnam's Development Success Story and the Unfinished SDG Agenda” (IMF, 2020); Kenneth Arrow, “Uncertainty and the Welfare Economics of Medical Care”, *American Economic Review* 53, no. 5 (1963).

15. See the institutional comparisons and policy limitations in sources 13–14; specific sectoral recommendations in this essay are proposed empirical tests rather than findings established by any one study.

16. Bertrand Russell, *Freedom and Organisation, 1814–1914* (1934), chapter 18, “Dialectical Materialism,” later reproduced in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*; full four-part passage available here. Only a brief excerpt appears above; the remaining clauses are accurately paraphrased.