

REACTION PAPER I

The "EXPLORING LONG TERM SYSTEM CHANGE AND RELATED THEORIES" section got me thinking about the intersections of each article. In *Paths in Utopia*, Buber talks about how Marx viewed the 10 hour law as a "triumph of principle," while in *The Communist Manifesto* Marx speaks of how capitalism is digging its own grave—that is creating situations for in which the proletarians will unite and overthrow the existing society. It seems counterintuitive for Marx to praise an intermediate triumph that would ultimately make it more difficult for the conditions he deemed necessary to bring communism into existence to develop. Sassoon notes something similar to this in *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, saying, "while attempting to repress [the socialists, bourgeoisie society] adopted their ideas.

The contrast of Marx's view of the evolution of human society and Beaud's description in *A History of Capitalism* reminded me of the uncertainty principle. Not Heisenberg's quantum indeterminacy principle in the strict sense, but rather the more general notion that it is impossible to observe a system and have it remain unchanged by doing so. Beaud describes the history of mercantile capitalism after the fact, and shows how the entirety of the European economic system changed as the aggregate result of many localized responses to stimuli. Whether it was the "exploitation" of peasants in feudalism or nation-states trying to create trade deficits to increase their wealth, each of the changes occurred on a localized scale without any direction from an intellectual. Marx, on the other hand, described the movement "going on before [his] own eyes." He noted how capitalism was bringing about its own demise and described the restructuring that was happening—or rather, the restructuring that was to happen—and published it in the manifesto. The irony in doing so was that instead of letting events run their course, the manifesto caused people either to create revolutions when the conditions sufficient for them were not yet met, or to take the necessary safeguards to prevent such a revolution from happening.

My key realization here is that the sustainable long term system changes did not have a

theoretical spark plug; they were merely responses to new situations. This notion was reinforced by reading the articles of the second section, “SYSTEMS, IDEAS AND MOVEMENTS FOR CHANGE IN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE.”

Each of the movements described had some sort of physical antecedent. In *The Contours of American History*, these conditions were simultaneous American prosperity and despair. In *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, even though it is not explicitly stated what each group was reacting to, answers can be found with supporting documentation, such as Hayek’s introduction in *The Road to Serfdom* where he notes that his book is a response to the quickly degenerating rights and freedoms witnessed in socialist nations across the pond, or rather, the Bering Strait. Even in *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of American Consensus*, Perlstein describes growing discontent with segregation in the south and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Powledge brings even more supporting evidence in *Free At Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It*, with, “The civil rights movement did not grow out of the dream of any one man, or woman, or even a small group of people...The people who made up the Movement were almost as diverse as America itself.” Again, these were people acting independently who converged in response to some sufficiently powerful antecedent.

Finally, in “THE END OF HISTORY” I came upon my favorite article of the bunch, *The End of the World As We Know It: Social Science For the Twenty-First Century*. Its appeal came in that Wallerstein used very familiar examples of changes in world history to illustrate his model (or maybe the model of many sociologists, I am not familiar with the discipline) of analyzing world history. I have always had trouble with the ways in which I have learned history. Everything is always presented as a linear, seemingly deterministic progression of events. This vantage point is so familiar that timelines have become a ubiquitous tool of those attempting to explain history. Wallerstein’s historical system

approach looks at all of the intersecting forces that shape history, an unfamiliar but pleasant departure from my previous perspective. Moreover, he marvels at something that I am awestruck by as well:

The concept that the processes of the universe are explicable and ultimately orderly without being determined is the most interesting contribution to knowledge of the natural sciences in the last decades and represents a radical revision of the dominant scientific views that had previously prevailed in the modern world.