The Interesting Ideas of Eric Hobsbawm

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Hobsbawm's modern world originated in the big bang of the eighteenth century, and it was extinguished in an implosion almost exactly two centuries later. To him these two hundred years were defined by the project of the Enlightenment which imagined a world that was equally good for all of humanity and not for just some part of it. More than revolution, the Enlightenment drove this world onward until it seems to have exhausted itself by the end of the twentieth century; the Marxist Hobsbawm is inspired more by the Enlightenment than by one of its consequences, the millenarian dream of revolution. Deriving from the Enlightenment, the conjoined industrial and French revolutions, known as the Dual revolution in his work, generated all subsequent events. The industrial revolution assumed both capitalist and socialist forms, and the political revolution inaugurated by the French species spawned a series of bourgeois and socialist revolutions, attempts at revolution of both types, and revolutions against revolution, or counter-revolutions. They permeated not only the politics and the economy of the continent, but as much its social and cultural processes and the sciences and the arts. His magnificent *oeuvre* celebrates this universe bounded by the two revolutionary waves of the late eighteenth and the late twentieth centuries; but it is a celebration that broods on its dark side as much as on its stupendous achievements. His grand theme is the hope held out by the Enlightenment, the revolutions that reflected it, and the counter-revolutions that negated it. As this modern world drew to its close in the 1990s, a gloomy uncertainty hangs over the world, and his musings on the post-Cold War world reflects this unease.

ORIGINS

Hobsbawm is obviously not the first to have noted that a new world seemed to have sprung into existence from the late eighteenth century. The revolutions of the late eighteenth century have induced the greatest transformations in human history since what has been called the neolithic or agricultural revolutions so many millennia go, and we are still living those changes. Along with so many others, he appraised the significance of that half century as the profoundest since "the remote times when men invented agriculture and metallurgy, writing, the city and the state." The organizing principle of the first three volumes of the *Age* series is the dual revolution of the English Industrial and the French political revolutions; and it has been widely acclaimed for capturing the dynamic of Europe's revolutionary turbulence and creativity during the nineteenth century at least if not beyond.

But it is not clear from his work why these changes should have occurred or why the human species should have altered the course of its career so dramatically. He has devoted himself over six decades at least to the history of the modern world from the end of the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth. He has spaciously argued that the history of humanity from the paleolithic to the nuclear age is the province of the historian. He has frequently returned to the theme of the twelve millennia of human history and of the drama of modernity, but he has not chosen to explain the birth of the modern. He has been accused of presenting that combination of events as an irruption without antecedents: "The Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution dominate the drama of these fifty-nine years, but they appear blind, intrusive, unmotivated forces rather than logical historical movements."

However, like so many of his generation, and especially Marxists, Hobsbawm *had* hoped to explain these events as "logical historical movements" in the

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transition from feudalism to capitalism. He claimed that the "general crisis" of the seventeenth century eliminated the obstacles to capitalist development; henceforth there was no question of reversion to dispersed peasant production as had happened after the crisis of the fourteenth century. The removal of these obstacles, it appears, was the necessary condition. The sufficient condition was the revolutionizing of social structures and the creation of new production systems (the factory system), both of which occurred in Britain in the course of the eighteenth century and culminated in the industrial revolution. This reads like a statement of a general law with causes and effects; and despite the real erudition and stimulating insights, too many phenomena are said to have been necessary for something to occur and then they are discovered to have indeed occurred. Again, perhaps like a Marxist, but not necessarily so, he has sought a crisis to explain change, and certainly revolution. The French Revolution may certainly be traced to an immediate crisis, as also perhaps to a longer term one; but it is not so obvious in the case of the industrial revolution in England except in the banal form that change of any kind must imply a crisis. Hence a crisis in the middle of the seventeenth century to account for a revolution at the end of the eighteenth. A historical law, a crisis, and a revolution; a neat Marxist model, perhaps too neat for comfort.

He seemed to have felt the discomfort, for he did not return to the subject after the initial debate in the fifties. He set himself the task, not of discovering the origins of the modern world, but of uncovering the process of its self-creation. The modern world is revolutionary, and Revolution is its own explanation. Modernity was and is compelling; the entire world either flung itself into it or was sucked into it; and its revolutionary career is far from coming to an end, even in the postmodern world. The process is too profound and its range too universal for explanations in terms of national or even European histories. In this respect he was adhering to the self-understanding of the French Revolution of itself, and, in the abstract, of revolutionaries of themselves. In the purity of their pursuit of a new world uncontaminated by the old, they refused to derive their action from antecedents or to legitimize it from such sources. Their Revolution was its own justification and end. However this reasoning may apply to Robespierre, it did not to the English political agitators and innovators of the turn of the century to whom the transformations in their own country were legitimized as the restoration of well-established liberties. Nor did it apply to the American colonies where Jefferson defended himself against the charge of plagiarizing Locke in his Declaration of Independence by pointing to it as the commonsense of his time rather than a revolutionary act in itself. While Hobsbawm has not treated of the American Revolution, he has in effect endowed the Industrial Revolution with the attributes of the French Revolution, and fused them into a single series of volcanic eruptions that reorganized the world thereafter. A world was brought into being, the modern world, in the manner that God created the universe, an act for which nobody seeks out a cause.

WORLD HISTORY

The focus is European, but its ambition is planetary. This is conceivable only with the modern period of human history when the fate of all of humanity was integrated through the multiple processes that go by the parochial or partial names and concepts of industrialization, revolution, modernization, colonial conquest, and imperialism. The first book of the *Age* series is ostensibly limited to Europe and contains Europe in the subtitle; the rest have dispensed with that limitation altogether. Yet America is missing throughout, in all four volumes, and necessarily so in all his other histories. At best America is in the wings, always an extra, never the major player, even in the twentieth century. This is strange, even for the eighteenth century, when the American Revolution was as consequential as those occurring in Europe. American, French, British, and sundry European histories intermingled in Robert Palmer's and Jacques Godechot's 1950s atlanticist thesis of the Age of Democratic Revolutions, in which many historians have included many lesser known ones from the Low Countries, Switzerland, Poland, Haiti, and Latin America. The common sources and reciprocal influences have been worked and re-worked many times, but purely national or just European histories have long been seen as limiting and limited, even when Hobsbawm composed his first volume. Perhaps he felt it belonged too obviously to the Cold War that the democratic allies of the Second World War should be celebrated in this fashion; if so, the remedy would not be to bring together Britain and France, the European allies in that war. He has claimed that the American revolution was neither a social nor an ecumenical one like the French, for it did not transform class structures nor did it exert much influence outside. But these objections miss the point of the argument of the Age of Democratic Revolutions. somewhat. His exclusion of America seems parochially European.

Yet, he was far from dismissing the American Revolution. As early as 1959 he hailed it as the beginning of all good things: "The American and French Revolutions of the 18th century are probably the first mass political movements in the history of the world which expressed their ideology and aspirations in terms of secular rationalism and not of traditional religion." In 1961 he noted that Tom Paine's revolutionary career was due to his fortuitous expedition to America in 1776 with a recommendation from Benjamin Franklin. Even in *The Age of Revolution*, where he made the strongest case against the American revolution, he did admit its importance indirectly thus: "Victory over England was gained at the cost of financial bankruptcy, and thus the American Revolution can claim to be the direct cause of the French." This was not to admit the potency of the American Revolution so much as to notice the foolishness of the French state for overreaching itself through a transatlantic war. But he could go further in the same volume by asserting: "Proletarian consciousness was powerfully combined with, and reinforced by, what may best be called Jacobin consciousness, methods and moral attitudes with which the French (and also before it the American) Revolution had imbued the thinking and confident poor." This seemed to suggest the ecumenical force of the American Revolution. In 1980 he identified the beginnings of the militancy of such an unlikely species as European shoemakers from roughly the period of the American Revolution, "that the century beginning with the American revolution was the golden age of shoemaker radicalism." By 1982 he was prepared to concede that "... the ideology of the Enlightenment was one which had a strong appeal to working-class activists and militants from the American Revolution onwards." The age of "civility" began with the American Revolution and ended with the First World War. As his work progressed he acknowledged America ever more. In *The Age of Empire*, he defined the dual revolution as composed of the British Industrial Revolution and the "Franco-American political revolution." He went a step further to accept that during the centenary of the French Revolution "the educated citizens of the western world became conscious of the fact that this world, born between the Declaration of Independence, the construction of the world's first iron bridge and the storming of the Bastille, was now a century old." He was even prepared to pay the American the compliment of possibly embodying a social revolutionary tradition: "a left-wing tradition that reached back beyond Marx and Bakunin to 1789 and even 1776, revolutions hoped to achieve fundamental social change by means of sudden, violent, insurrectionary transfers of power." As he discussed the sources of non-proletarian support for socialist parties, he admitted the common radical inspiration of the American and French revolutions: "As the parties of the least privileged, it was natural that they should now be seen as standard-bearers of that fight against inequality and 'privilege' which had been central to political radicalism since the American and French revolutions..."After American hegemony had been firmly established in the post-Cold War world, he allowed himself to say, not only that America was a "revolutionary" power like France and Russia, but also that the Left is bonded by traditions deriving from the English, American, French, and Russian revolutions, and even that "communism was part of that tradition of modern civilization that goes back to the Enlightenment, to the American and French revolutions." What he may have tried to deny in the heady sixties, he admitted ever so reluctantly in the eighties, as the crisis of Soviet socialism became evident and thereafter when the triumph of America was final. But these were asides in the course of scattered essays and of three large volumes of what he imagined as world history; essentially America was ignored in the making of the modern bourgeois world, a strategy that has been shown to be inadequate even in the case of the colonies or semi-colonies and surely must be when it involves so dynamic a centre of capitalism in the nineteenth century and the leading one of the twentieth.

In his history of the twentieth century, *Age of Extremes*, America is again the missing presence. Three chapters have been devoted to the Soviet Union, namely, the Revolution, the mature Soviet Union, and the collapse, but not one to America. We are taken through the wars, the Depression, the Cold War from the beginning to the end, but without America. In the nineteenth century, the history seemed to have been primarily European, and on that basis, it purported to be a world history also. That could not hold in the twentieth when the Soviet Union and America took the lead after 1945 and decolonization shifted the balance further. Even within Europe, the imbalance is stark. National Socialism surely merited somewhat greater attention than an epigraph by Ian Kershaw at the head of chapter 4, revealingly titled "The Fall of Liberalism." He disdains America seemingly because he is European and a Marxist; he despises National Socialism because he is a communist and democrat; and he has composed a highly acclaimed history of the twentieth century with both of them hovering in the shadows.

Yet he has been congratulated for not being parochially European and ranging as far as Egypt, India, China, and Latin America. It is doubtful whether his comments in such short compass on these parts of the world are illuminating, and such a reception perhaps tells us more about European and American anxieties about being considered parochial in the postcolonial world. Certainly, his chapters on the rest of the world are the weakest in his *Age* series, especially the one that might have been closest to his heart, the gathering of the revolutionary storm clouds outside Europe before 1914, in China, India, Iran, the Ottoman Empire, Mexico and, above all, Russia. Astonishingly, not even Russia seems to have attracted more attention than say India or China. His observations on Russia before the Revolution of 1917 read like a layman's general knowledge about Russia, namely the classics of literature and heroic tales about the Russian revolutionary movement before its Marxist phase. That it was a European great power since the early eighteenth century, a colonial empire from the nineteenth, a state undertaking its own major capitalist reforms during the century, seems to have escaped notice. All these accounts of the world outside Europe read painfully like rapid summaries based on a quick reading of some limited literature. It is perhaps better to be Eurocentric and useful rather than global and inadequate.

Class

The major works are constructed around the three defining attributes of European civilization of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. These are class, nation, and empire. He has set them in that hierarchy of significance without saying so and without explaining why it should be so. The three together do define European identity substantially, but not wholly, since Christianity has not been included and he is little interested in that subject. To set them in a hierarchy may at best reflect the author's idiosyncrasy; but it derives more likely from his Marxist and socialist commitment in which class, the class struggle, and the class revolution provided the myth of action. The nation was secondary and an impediment, overpowering reality that it was; and empire was a putrefying excrescence, if also a regrettable reality. Class was far more congenial, for the emancipatory promise of the Left emerged from that relation; nation occluded it and empire corrupted.

His modern society of the nineteenth century was a class society, structured by the polar opposition of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, with the aristocracy, peasantry, and lower middle class as doomed encrustations on these poles. The sustained combat between the bourgeoisie and proletariat created the Europe we know today, of civil liberties, democracy, and welfare. Astonishingly, for one reputed to be a Marxist, his focus of attention is the bourgeoisie, not the proletariat. It could of course be said in extenuation that he has a distinguished forbear in Karl Marx.

It would perhaps not be an exaggeration or unfair to the historian to say that the three volumes of the *Age* series are a celebration of the conquering bourgeois. For there was an asymmetry in the class relation of bourgeoisie to proletariat: the bourgeoisie held the whip hand and it was infinitely more wide-ranging in its creativity and its destruction than the proletariat could hope to be or aspired to be. Both nation and empire were obsessively bourgeois preoccupations, limitedly proletarian, and marginally socialist. But within the nation, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, acting in tandem in their class opposition, produced the civilization of Europe with its civil liberties, democracy, and welfare. Even within this triad, the bourgeoisie played so dynamic and expansive a role, far greater than that of the proletariat, since they preceded the working class and dominated the world of politics, entrepreneurship, innovation, art, music, literature, and science. Without diluting either his socialist commitments or his loyalty to the working class, especially of Britain, Hobsbawm must, as a good historian, record the stellar achievements of the bourgeoisie even as he critically appraises them. He set out to capture both the class relation and the asymmetry within it, in the manner that the *Communist Manifesto* registered both the revolutionary function of the bourgeoisie and its engendering of its proletarian gravedigger.

This paradoxical preference for the bourgeoisie could perhaps be explained in part by the fact that he had after all assembled two hefty volumes of assorted articles on the proletariat exclusively. But the *Age* series was not meant to be read as a complement to the two volumes on labour; it was to stand on its own as comprehensive and in his view balanced accounts of Europe and the world during the nineteenth century with a fourth volume on the twentieth; also, his two volumes on labour deal almost exclusively with the British working class, not the European. The particular balance of the *Age* series appears deliberate and independent of other work.

The chapters on politics and society are dominated by the bourgeoisie with the working class enlarging their role as the century progresses, especially in the third volume, *The Age of Empire*. But the sections on the economy and on the arts are exclusively on the bourgeoisie; and if the working class has a walk on part in the accounts of mass entertainment culture, they must share a very crowded stage with bourgeois entrepreneurs, artists, actors, advertisers, salesmen, and impresarios, and only as audiences do they appear to play the leading role. Perhaps he was aware that his political and ideological commitments and his public image did not square with such loving attention to the bourgeoisie. He has opened his second volume with a profession of virtue thus: "The author of this book cannot conceal a certain distaste, perhaps a certain contempt, for the age with which it deals, though one mitigated by admiration for its titanic material achievements and by the effort to understand even what he does not like." But his distaste for the bourgeoisie or for the epoch is not as obvious as he might want us to believe. When he reached the third volume, there was no ambiguity: "Essentially the central axis round which I have tried to organize the history of the century is the triumph and transformation of capitalism in the historically specific forms of bourgeois society in its liberal version." Now he applied it to the whole century, not to just this one volume.

If the overwhelming presence of the bourgeoisie is as expected, what is not so expected is Hobsbawm's infinitely greater sensitivity to the experience of being bourgeois, to the interiority of the bourgeois, from his (and occasionally her) sexuality, family life, fantasies, and leisure, to his gargantuan appetite for life outside the family. The high points of Hobsbawm's vast *oeuvre* are always the chapters on bourgeois culture, art, science, philosophies, ideologies, and the professions. In *The Age of Revolution*, the chapters on the French Revolution that outlined the structures of bourgeois or modern politics and accounted for the career of a Napoleon and the one on the career open to talent are scintillating exercises in historical synthesis. In *The Age of Capital* and *The Age of Empire*, the chapters on the bourgeois world followed by the one on the arts mark similar peaks of achievement. Here we may enter the private world of the bourgeois, men and women, from their bedrooms to their dining rooms and parlours, to their holidays by the sea or in alpine snows, to their new found obsession with sport, each game of which was standardized with rules, teams, and competitions, culminating in the founding of the Olympic Games, their cultivation of art and the art market to such an extent that artists could now live as bourgeois individuals rather than as entertainers, and much else that we take as belonging to modern culture. The discussions of the various arts and the academic disciplines are detailed and masterly.

He devoted two large volumes of essays to the working class specifically, indeed of Britain alone. Despite their size, they do not compare with his adventurous explorations of the lives of the bourgeois. His proletariat lived a life marked by the slum, mass housing, and factory, from mid-century taking a day trip to a resort, and eventually in the twentieth squeezing in a foreign vacation, but apparently inhabiting a universe that is pitifully circumscribed. But Hobsbawm's account of proletarian life acquires a sparkle of its own when workers enter the political domain, through unions, politics, and ideology, especially Methodism or socialism. In a sense this is no longer the history of the working class or of the experience of being a worker and rather more a political history with a focus on the left of the political spectrum. On these subjects Hobsbawm is illuminating and authoritative in his usual sweeping fashion, on the nature of unionism until the 1840s, the growth from the 1850s, the new unionism from 1889 until 1914 when general unions to unite all the working class was seriously attempted, its socialist origin and its rightward turn by the War, the apogee of working class and socialist influence in the late forties, and the shifts thereafter. Similarly, his many discussions of the labour aristocracy and the nature of internal stratification within the working class point to the politics of a peculiar form of unionism within the British working class in which the labour aristocracy first secured the benefits of scarcity for themselves, and later, as mass proletarianization occurred toward the end of the century, they turned to the radical option of general unions and leading them.

His important analysis of the nature of reformism in the Labour Party reformulated the theses of class collaboration. He traced it to the extraordinary prosperity of Britain as both the pioneer industrial nation and as the centre of the largest colonial empire, to the labour movement and unionization having preceded the coming of socialism, to governments, even the Conservative, accepting unionism and conciliation from the 1860s, to the union bureaucracy becoming enmeshed in the State from as early as the 1890s, to the absence of the split between social democratic and communist wings of the movement unlike the rest of Europe after 1917, and finally and most importantly, to the sheer longevity of capitalism in which even the most militant worker and unionist was obliged to engage in a species of reformism to be relevant to the class. The leadership of the Labour Party may shift rightward, but militants sustained their pressure without a formal schism for the formation of a communist party. Nothing however could change the reality of having to negotiate everyday on the premise that capitalism was permanent.

His independent volumes on the working class focused on the class itself, but only on the British working class; the *Age* series pays scant attention to the proletariat, but its bourgeoisie is European, not merely British. His first volume, *The Age of Revolution*, is only marginally about workers since there were so few of them in any case and the single chapter on the subject is reserved for the labouring poor, of whom workers were a part. Workers may have been few in number, but their significance in this period is registered by Edward Thompson's masterpiece, *The Making of the English Working Class*. In *The Age of Capital* a small section on workers appears in chapter 6, a full chapter 12, and no more. The proletariat secures essentially one chapter out of seventeen in a volume on the period that saw Marx's most famous works, the *Communist Manifesto*, the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the first volume of *Capital*, and the *Civil Wars in France*. The *Poverty of Philosophy* and the Russian translation of *Capital*, the first into any language, should also be included. In the subsequent volume, *The Age of Empire*, this pattern is repeated, and the bourgeoisie is described (chapter 7) with the warmth, affection, and intimacy of knowledge and feeling that is usually reserved for personal friends and families or schools and regiments. But the proletariat suffers its usual fate. It gets one chapter to itself out of fourteen, with scattered references in the politics chapters, although this was the half century when the proletariat appeared in its most visible and potent form, mass socialist parties determined much of the politics of Europe, and the political influence of Marx began to be registered.

There is much about the working class, but not as much about the class relation, which is submerged somewhere. There is little about the relation of employer to worker, of the techniques of management, how employers and managers addressed their workers or vice versa, company welfare and philanthropy, the test of power through strikes and lockouts, and other aspects of their interactions. There is much about revolution, but not about class conflict: and it is worth remembering that not only is class conflict swallowed up in revolutionary movements, but that the chief medium of the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was everything short of revolution.

If there is not as much about class struggle as we might expect, there is an enormous amount on conflicts and stratification within the working class, the strains between militants and leaderships in unions, differences among unions, and reformism in the Labour Party. He composed a number of important articles on the thesis of the aristocracy of labour in Britain which revealed virtual class division within the working class itself; but it was motivated, paradoxically it might seem, by the compulsion to explain why the politics of Britain were not polarized to the point of revolution. But then, that was a famous Leninist thesis. Within the labour movement and especially the Labour Party, he discerned the extremes between a highly militant rank and file, shop stewards, and others, against a reformist leadership. This would have pleased a Subaltern historian of the late twentieth century.

His focus of attention and interest is polarity of any kind, not merely of class. He plunged into the controversy over whether the standard of living of the masses had improved or deteriorated in the course of the industrial revolution in Britain from the late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. Expectedly, he denied that it was improving although he was cautious as to how far the charge of deterioration could be sustained. In Europe, the nation challenged the multinational empire, in the world, the colony the metropolis, the advanced the backward, and so on until it culminates in the horrors of the twentieth century, of the most extreme ideological contestation, total wars, and the end of modernity. In every area of inquiry, he sought out the polar oppositions that generated the crises, structured them, and transformed them. The process was dialectical, as he said of the British labour movement: "But if the socialist consciousness of the British working class is potential rather than real; if indeed it is at every moment transformed into its opposite in the context of a reformist movement and imperialist institutions, we should nevertheless be wrong to underrate the bitter process of political education which has taught it utterly to reject capitalism, even though it may not quite know what such a rejection implies."

The last volume, *Age of Extremes*, is not even built around class, which seems to have become irrelevant in spite of the Russian Revolution, the triumph of Labour in Britain after World War II, and communist regimes in so many parts of the world. Both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat seem to have dug their respective graves after the First World War. This volume offers only states, parties, and ideologies in mortal combat, besides art, culture, and related subjects. The bourgeoisie, which he so celebrated in the nineteenth century, has disappeared as an autonomous agent. His fellow Marxist, Perry Anderson, was dismayed: "Omitting it, *Age of Extremes* offers a decapitated portrait of contemporary society." But none shed a tear for the working class, and Hobsbawm had already dried his eyes by the late 1950s and composed a sublime epitaph in 1979. The proletariat almost vanishes in this volume, and by the end of it, it has vanished into history. In February 1992 he managed to deliver an entire lecture on the crisis of ideologies without once using the word "worker."

NON-CLASS

The class relation of the bourgeoisie to the proletariat dominates the story, even if in lop-sided fashion; but the other classes have been dismissed not a little curtly. This is intriguing, for other classes did exist, and even Marxists have admitted to the fact. These are the aristocracy, the peasantry, and the lower middle class or *petite bourgeoisie*, and each played major roles in the history of these two centuries, although theory did not provide for them. However, Hobsbawm has devoted loving attention to the marginal species of bandits for which there exists almost no theory other than what Bakunin had offered; and he had little positive to say about Bakunin.

The aristocracy as a class has not been accorded the role that most other histories do. He has assimilated the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie since they derived their means of existence in much the same fashion, from capital and the state in various forms. Hence, the only distinguishing feature of the aristocracy was its lineage and flummery culminating in the monarchy. Further, the aristocracy increasingly consisted of ennobled bourgeois also, and Britain was as usual the leading practitioner of this form of diluting and neutralizing a possible source of opposition to modernization. However, from 1789 until at least 1918 across Europe they did play a decisive role constitutionally, politically, socially, and in certain professions like the military and diplomacy. In theory they did not belong to the bourgeois world and their historical function along with monarchies had been exhausted. But they did exist, all too visibly, and surely it must be explained why the "conquering bourgeois" was so addicted to aristocracy and monarchy even as these dinosaurs underwent their own process of *embourgeoisement*. Joseph Schumpeter, in an influential thesis, has argued the bourgeoisie's need for non-bourgeois sources of support, and explained the imperialism and "objectless" warfare of that epoch by the atavism of aristocracy; and Arno Mayer has provided it substantial empirical support. But Hobsbawm's histories have noticed them virtually only in the context of the aristocratizing bourgeois, not as a distinct caste that left their imprint on the Europe of these two centuries.

Similarly his indifference to the peasantry as a class is intriguing. Not only was it a major presence in France, Spain and Italy, to all of which he devotes much attention, but it was a major political actor in its own right in Russia. The peasantry was indispensable to the Bolshevik Revolution; and, after a brief decade of dreams realized, it was liquidated by the Stalinist revolution of the 1930s. The Soviet Union, whose demise he regretted so deeply at the end of his last volume, was the product of this destruction, and the event was one of the great dramas of the twentieth century along with the Holocaust. Again, the intermediate classes, lumped together as the lower middle class, provided mass support to the various fascist movements which the working class did not. No theory proclaimed a future for these categories caught in the interstices of the great classes of bourgeois society, but they were collectively large and distinct, and their anxieties were well exploited by the fascists. Perhaps it is churlish to keep asking for so much from a historian who has given us so much; it is a tribute to his achievement that we always ask for more.

He may have ignored many classes that deserve better, but how do we account for his unexpected attention to bandits of all species? In two volumes he has considered the phenomena of social banditry, mafia, millenarianism, and city mobs, all of them in many ways interrelated or comparable. Of these, the rural bandit is of special interest in that Hobsbawm is so passionately engaged with him. The bandit was a member of his rural community, sharing their ideas and worldview and without framing an independent one of his own. He is distinguished by personal character, or more accurately, charisma. He refuses to submit to lord and state, abstracts himself from his community, forms a band of not more than about thirty outlaws, and harries his oppressors until he is killed, bought off, or justice is done. He never attacks the peasants themselves. He is usually a freebooter, an ex-soldier, a young man, or part of the rural surplus labour in times of crisis. But the sociological category is of lesser significance than his psychological attributes. He is essentially one of those "men who are unwilling to accept the meek and passive social role of the subject peasant; the stiffnecked and recalcitrant, the individual rebels. They are, in the classic familiar peasant phrase, the 'men who make themselves respected.' " His exploits make him a heroic symbol to his community, he could spearhead a movement of resistance, and most of all, his action could merge with a larger revolutionary movement. Ultimately, "Banditry is freedom." Hobsbawm has made numerous qualifications and distinctions, but this is a sort of eternal species until the coming of capitalism. Most unusually, he has described the phenomenon and sung its glories as Bakunin himself did, although, as a Marxist, he has been suitably disparaging about Bakunin.

But the bandit story does not end there. Astonishingly, he has driven the English farm labourer's rebellion of 1830, the Swing riots, into virtually the same fold as the banditry of southern and eastern Europe. English farm labourers were wage labour on farms, no longer peasants; but until the late eighteenth century they lived in a world of custom marked by patronage, obligation, mutualism, parish relief, and notions of fair wages and fair prices, and not yet of a market logic that determined employment, wages, and prices. This began to happen from the 1790s, was contained during the war years, and flared up thereafter. As agricultural labour was inexorably proletarianized, it rebelled. One wave of crisis occurred in 1816, the next in 1830, the subject of this work.

It took the form of issuing threatening letters from one "Captain Swing", attacking parsons and lower officialdom, arson of property, and most of all, destruction of threshing machines which had cut into employment.

Hereafter it merges with the story of the bandit. The rebels had little relation to the politics of the time, to Radicalism or the revolutionary wind carried across the Channel after the July Revolution; but they knew whom they hated and despised and what they wanted in concrete terms. Their targets were the machines that deprived them of work; parsons, justices of the peace, and overseers; and the property of the farmers. They were "pre-political" and were innocent of an independent ideology. They did not expect to overthrow the social order; and they even imagined that King and Parliament could be with them. After transportation to Australia, they settled down to new lives, indistinguishable from free settlers, leaving no legacy of Captain Swing and rebellion in the colony. Their type consisted of the young, unmarried, and pauperized, isolated like shepherds, generally independent, least amenable to discipline, often poachers and smugglers, ready for violence, and naturally rebellious. They were not organized for a concerted movement, and their leaders were seldom chosen by election or formal procedure. The leader emerged out of the mass for his charisma, by a "natural process of selection, based on his personal initiative or his standing in the community." Hobsbawm has not said it in so many words, but this was the English bandit, and the book was published in the same year as the one on banditry. It is not surprising that he finds the bandit a universal pre-modern type. Prevalent even in industrializing England, it was erased with the final triumph of the market, democracy, and bureaucracy in the 1830s.

NATION AND EMPIRE

Nation and empire distinguish Europe as much as class, and to the historian they might have seemed entitled to equal weight. But clearly not to Hobsbawm. Nation is distinctly secondary, and empire tertiary. He has consigned nationalism to an independent but rich volume without allowing it to interrupt the study of the conquering bourgeois in the three volumes of the *Age* series save through the obligatory chapter, as indeed for the working class. But its trajectory and fate runs parallel to class: it was created in the age of revolution, its attained its calamitous apogee in the twentieth century, and it exhausted itself by the end of it.

His arguments are not new but they are presented with characteristic verve and vivid illustration. With greater historical density, they are an amalgam of the work of Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Miroslav Hroch, Anthony D. Smith and others. They claim that nationalism is the ideology that asserts the congruence of a single contiguous territory and a single culture; that nationalism created the nation with the assistance of the state; that the nation did not create nationalism, instead it was the other way about; that it is a very modern artefact, the product of these processes, and dating from the eighteenth century as usual; that it did not and could not have existed for the centuries and millennia that every nationalist everywhere claims for his or her particular nationality; and that each nationalism and nation has erased innumerable potential nations and nationalisms.

The single culture itself has been variously defined by theorists, but broadly it consists of a common territory, history, economy, language, and culture once again, sometimes called psychology. Different theorists use variable combinations of these criteria; but when all else fails, language is used as a proxy. In case of multiple languages, a single territory with what can pass for a single history is deployed, as in the case of Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia and the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. India, as we know only too well, belongs to the latter category. Sometimes religion stands in for culture, as it has for Zionism and Israel. Every nationalism has to get its history wrong, and Hobsbawm, like every critical historian of nationalism, must cite Ernest Renan's aphorism of 1882 to that effect. Extravagant histories are written, which more often read like mythological tracts, of origins lost in the mists of time, of heroic periods of overcoming obstacles, of golden ages, of decline through moral turpitude, treachery, and alien corruption, of resurrection in modern times, and of a glorious destiny in the years to come.

The question that is close to his heart was the difficult relation between nationalism and socialism, especially in 1914. Socialism was famously hostile to nationalism on the ground that nationalism strove to unite classes instead of dividing the exploiter from the exploited, and that it divided the working class into national fragments instead of uniting them worldwide as socialists hoped to do. In Rosa Luxemburg's extreme vision, nationalism would dissolve with capitalism in a universal socialist world; many, but not all, nationalisms repaid the compliment by dismissing socialism as dangerously divisive of community and nation through their vaunted internationalism. Historians have overwhelmingly the thesis that socialist internationalism failed utterly when the choice for war had to be made in 1914. Socialists and workers voted for their respective nations over their class and movement and enthusiastically rushed into the holocaust.

But Hobsbawm has pointed to the complexities of this situation. Like so many other Marxists, he recognized that the national states were the real organizing bases of power, and workers and socialists had to work with them and conquer them before heading out to the promised universalism. Given the uneven development of capitalism, socialists had to function within those compact territories first. It allowed for the compatibility and co-existence of national and class identities. Workers and others faced multiple ideological pulls, nationalist, socialist, and confessional; and many found it possible to combine the three rather than look upon them as mutually exclusive as ideologues and historians have argued subsequently. Democratization before 1914 had been driven powerfully by workers and socialists; and the masses looked upon the state as theirs also rather than of the bourgeoisie alone. Such a state merited defence against alien assault, and governments were astonished by the patriotic frenzy of 1914. But these masses also did not expect their programmes of social reform to be abandoned because of the war, and workers were ready enough to go on strike during the war. National and social objectives seemed entirely compatible to them. In the polyglot empires and states of Central and Eastern Europe, so many socialist movements were the carriers of nationalist movements, as among the Finns, Poles, Georgians, Armenians, and Jews, both Bundist and Zionist. After the war, nationalism was written into so many socialist programmes, not only into Wilson's. Not merely was Pilsudski of Poland socialist, but Lenin absorbed the energies of national conflicts into his socialist revolution and eventually the Bolshevik state. During the Second World War, nationalism and socialism were locked in tight embrace in France, Yugoslavia and much of occupied Europe. Social and radical movements pursued their objectives both within the wars and outside of them, and they imparted a socially radical momentum to both the wars. Hence 1914 was not a socialist failure to the extent that it has been assumed.

This was an explanation for the nationalist passions of workers in 1914, for socialist participation in the War, and of the alliance between nationalists and communists in the thirties and forties against the common fascist foe. It expressed Hobsbawm's dream of a Popular Front that united the people in common struggles against greater evils like counter-revolution; and it blocked the Right's drive to convert people's causes into national causes. But, as the century wore on, and only socialism seemed to wane while both capitalism and nationalism retained their vigour, he accepted the reality of both for the foreseeable future and the need to work on those foundations against new common threats in the form of globalization.

This would be possible because nationalism came in varied forms, and the better part of it could be extracted. This was the citizen nationalism or universal nationalism bequeathed by the French and American Revolutions as opposed to the exclusive, parochial, and ethnic nationalisms that followed soon after. Citizen nationalism consisted in citizens bonding in the politics of the sovereign state of a single territory within which a single *political* culture was cultivated and which looked forward to a universal culture of humanity. Nationalism was revolutionary and ecumenical, and the national territory was merely the stepping-stone to humanity. It was inclusive, not exclusive; it represented a common interest against a particular interest like privilege; and it did not imply ethnicity, religion, or language as it did later. To ideologists in mid-century when bourgeois liberalism reigned supreme, the criterion for nationhood was the capacity to expand toward the horizon. This implied movements of national unification into larger states, be it German or Italian, but also those like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugolsavia, each of them nationally heterogeneous. Territory, not ethnicity of any kind, would provide the foundation for such national units, an ideal retained in Austro-Marxist theories of nationality at the turn of the century. Any people with any religion or language could live in a state ruled by another people; and while they might conflict for a variety of reasons, it would not be because different peoples could not live under one political authority. Polyglot empires like the Russian, Habsburg or Ottoman embraced large numbers of such varied peoples, Jews were emancipated in much of Europe during the nineteenth century, and the United States offered citizenship to an immense variety of peoples.

After mid-century another form of nationalism reared its head. It was exclusive, ethnic in various ways, separatist within an existing state, xenophobic, and determined to erect permanent barriers rather than dismantle them. From about the 1880s the extremes appeared, of claiming that any group could demand a state, territory, and nation for itself, that ethnicity and language could be the sole criteria, and nationalism itself became an ideology of the right. The politics of language appeared in every part of the world leading to various forms of "purification", "simplification", and standardization, in each case constructing a new language, not for communication, but for social engineering. Racism, although not the same as such nationalism, flourished in this milieu.

This is the kind of nationalism that has descended on the world in late twentieth century. The expansive citizen nationalism has lost its Èlan, and "nationalism, however inescapable, is simply no longer the historical force it was in the era between the French Revolution and the end of imperialist colonialism after World War II", but the new ones "seem to be reactions of weakness and fear, attempts to erect barricades to keep at bay the forces of the modern world", and akin to various fundamentalisms. It was not clear in which direction it was heading, but it seemed obvious that neither form of nationalism would be decisive in the new world after 1991. The nation had provided the power base from which to assert rights internationally, especially for labour; and that was eroding rapidly. The only hope, but not a prediction or even expectation, was the possibly residual function of a citizen nationalism as a shield from the scorching blast of globalization. It was a melancholic conclusion, since citizen nationalism at one time was revolutionary and ecumenical, not protectionist and restrictive.

He edited what might look like a companion volume to his work on nationalism, but it had been published in fact seven years earlier. *The Invention of Tradition*, a slim volume of outstanding essays, has enjoyed a vogue that is surprising. The contributions are all enlightening in every way, but the theme is not remotely novel. Historians have for long been busy uncovering myths of all kinds, national, local, religious, class, caste, tribal, and much else. This was the greatest claim of the professional historian and of what is disparagingly called positivist history from the eighteenth century. Hobsbawm's volume exposes yet again another set of myths and traditions, those generated or fabricated by nationalism.

Perhaps the explanation for its success lies elsewhere. This anthology should be set alongside Pierre Nora's extraordinary project of seven volumes of dozens of scintillating essays by some of the most distinguished historians of France. It is a study of how a national memory had been constructed around a number of sites or themes in the course of the past two centuries, and how that memory was now eroding. (Hobsbawm however distanced himself from Nora on the Rankean ground that it was a flight from "the *actual* past" and "more or less sophisticated reductions of history to mere forms of literary composition."). In comparable fashion, the *Subaltern Studies* group unpacked the claims of Indian nationalism to hegemony in the history of modern India and the serial jousts with the British Empire. Nora's assemblage is a beautiful requiem to the French nation state; Hobsbawm's much smaller effort is an ironic inquiry into the artificiality of the nation; and *Subaltern Studies* sharply punctures what they see as the bloated balloon of Indian nationalism.

Each of these arose from the same ground of the hollowing of the nation, but the spirit was different in each case. They appeared in the eighties when the nation was losing its lustre. International organizations cut into national sovereignty in different ways from the sixties. A swathe of economic activities were transnationalized from the seventies, that is, they had no basis in any specific national boundaries, unlike internationalization, which consisted in national firms expanding their enterprise beyond their national borders. In Europe, the nation was, or seemed to be, ending its spectacularly successful career with the halting progress of the European unification. Anti-colonial nationalisms had run their course, with decolonization climaxing in the exhilaration of American defeat in Vietnam. Nationalism in the former colonies now seemed parochial: the pressure to globalize from the eighties and carried out in the nineties in so much of the world, heightened the sense of the inadequacy of what had once been emancipating. The Soviet Union disintegrated, not on account of nationalism, but owing to failure in the Cold War. Nationalism was merely the beneficiary, not the agent, of the Soviet dissolution; and post-Soviet nationalisms are bereft of the creative energy of both the European nationalisms of the nineteenth century and of the anti-colonial ones of the twentieth, their stridency notwithstanding. Thereafter American hyperpower and globalization have further served to cool this passion. The great burst of critical studies on nation and nationalism that appeared from the seventies is a reflection of the deliquescence of the nation state and of nationalism the world over. The time was ripe for exposure by Hobsbawm, farewell by Nora, and dismissal by the *Subaltern Studies* group.

CATASTROPHE, ECSTASY AND GLOOM: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

As he reflected on the Enlightenment project, its triumphs in the nineteenth century and its disasters in the twentieth, Hobsbawm chronicled the progress of barbarism throughout the twentieth century, beginning with 1914 when the lamps went out over Europe. It is a depressing record with which few could disagree. Warfare became total as governments felt free to send millions of their own citizens into holocausts such as at Ypres and Verdun, as non-combatants became fair game as much as combatants, as national populations were mobilized behind their respective governments to demonize their opponents, as war led to breakdowns of the social and political order on a scale never known before in history, and eventually as approximately 187 million of the world's population were slaughtered between 1914 and 1991.

In his analysis of the horrors of the twentieth century, he isolated fascism for its sinister singularity. The Stalinist phase of Soviet socialism was not assimilated to barbarism as totalitarian theory so favoured; and the atrocities of colonial regimes were ignored, whatever their excesses in Africa, in India, and in South East Asia. Soviet socialism belonged to the tradition of the Enlightenment, and its genocidal ferocity was condoned on that ground. By the same logic, imperialist savagery was not worthy of note as it issued from liberal capitalism, again the self-conscious heir of the Enlightenment. Fascism on the other hand deliberately repudiated or claimed to repudiate the Enlightenment. In sum, the brutalities of communism and liberalism were deviations from their own norms and could be corrected, those of fascism were its own norm and had to be fought to extinction. In the story of the epic struggle between good and evil, the alliance of liberalism and communism seemed natural, as befitted the proper legatees of the Enlightenment; and the opponents appear as "the threat of an entire world built on the deliberate reversal of civilization." He spoke of fascism as an isolated phenomenon with little support outside its core areas, and that it had "dissolved like a clump of earth thrown into a river." He claimed that fascism "had never been, even in theory, a universal programme or political project." Ultimately, fascism was outside the pale.

But ideological hatred by itself does not make for theoretical clarity. The twentieth century inspired profound reflections on the nature of barbarism in the modern world. It has been variously posited as the antithesis of the Enlightenment, as generated by it, and as internal to it. While Adorno and Horkheimer agonized over the manner in which it had been spewed out by the Enlightenment itself, they have also suggested that it was internal to it, a demon to wrestle with perpetually. Hobsbawm has shed so much light on the darkest century of human history that he could not indulge any naÔve faith in the glories of the textbook version of the Enlightenment. But he appraised the twentieth century as a triumph over the barbarism that had negated the Enlightenment. As evil it had been vanquished; as a cancer it had been rooted out. But was it an evil or a cancer; was it external or did it grow out of all that the Enlightenment had bequeathed? In the exhilaration of the victory of 1945 he seemed to think of it as the ultimate triumph; but when he described the post Cold War condition in almost the same terms as the fascist, it seemed more like a cancer that could periodically recur. As a proper historian, he recorded that fascism grew on democratic soil. "The major difference between the fascist and non-fascist Right is that fascism existed by mobilizing masses from below. It belonged essentially to the era of democratic and popular politics which traditional reactionaries deplored and which champions of the 'organic state' tried to by-pass. Fascism gloried in the mobilization of masses... Fascists were the revolutionaries of counter-revolution...." He fought it as if it were external; but the historian in him was aware that it was internal to "civilization." Race could be as universal to a certain range of the fascist species as class to the communist or the citizen to the liberal; in each case challenges had to be extirpated. We have not seen the end of such cancers, or perhaps even internal demons, and the post-Cold War world has already thrown up ample evidence of such possibilities.

A Unifying Vision of Crisis?

Is there is a unifying vision to this enormous corpus? There need not be, and a person who has lived nearly a century might have been entitled to change his mind or be inconsistent. A shift of focus from a youthful, sometimes breezy Marxism and all the central concerns of Marxists then have been noted, from the transition debate, the standard of living question, the aristocracy of labour thesis, and labour history generally to the fate of the modern world, including some of the losers like the bandits. But such a shift of themes of interest need not betoken a change of method or vision. Insofar as a single vision may be identified, it is that of crisis, stretching from the general crisis of the seventeenth century and the crisis of the old type to the repetitive crises of capitalism down to the post-Cold War years.

Some of these crises are the obvious ones of the economy, war, and revolution; but even his celebration of the achievements of the conquering bourgeois are cast in the form of crises. It is not a history of progress, evolution, problem-solving, and growing stability. It is never a calm world, not even for five years. At the end of the three volumes of the *Age* series, he summed up his central insight thus: "Their [historians'] central preoccupation, and the one which runs through the present book, must be to understand and to show how the era of peace, of confident bourgeois civilization, growing wealth and western empires inevitably carried within itself the embryo of the era of war, revolution and crisis which put an end to it." Not merely Marx but Hegel also would have been pleased.

The restlessness of the capitalist pulsates through his work. His history is a record of extraordinary feats of bourgeois achievement combined with spectacular catastrophes of their own making. His modern world is in the grip of endemic crisis even as it notches up progress that would have been almost impossible to imagine from one generation to the next. Nothing is ever stable or final, capitalism lurches from crisis to crisis dragging the socialist world in its wake. There are losers and there are winners, but his focus is less on their undoubted privations and triumphs and more on the fact of continual change and crisis and the dizzying rapidity of it. Until the middle of the twentieth century these were more likely due to the creativity and contradictions inherent to capitalism; thereafter it shifts to being the dangers of unbridled developmentalism; and humanity faces a greater threat from the latter than from the former.

The story of Victorian prosperity is nothing if not one of crises, of a system always threatening to go out of control and nearly doing so in the crash of 1873. The boom of 1850-1857 was followed by a slump in 1857-1858, a revival and another slump in 1867-1868 culminating in the great crash of 1873. The boom was good for manufacturers but not for workers whose wages could not keep up with the inflation. It induced one more stage in the unification of the world, but divided it yet again into advanced and backward. The world was united into one market, but crises became instantly worldwide instead of being confined regionally and to specific markets. Life became more standardized across the board in the developed world, but it was polarized into standardized nationalisms that tore at each other with a bitterness that could not have been contemplated earlier. The mass hatreds and competitions generated by nations and nationalism could not be contained within the liberal bourgeois world created by the dual revolution. Absolutist regimes knew that bourgeoisie and capitalism brought progress and prosperity; but they tried in vain to have them without the political consequences. Contemporaries could not comprehend the paradox of the liberalizing and modernizing Emperor Alexander II being assassinated by the beneficiaries of his reforms.

Democracy is the most famous instance of loss of control. It is celebrated as progress, empowerment, and citizenship; but it energized the masses who tended not to be democratic, liberal, socialist or rational. Bourgeoisies and aristocracies could threaten each other with mass mobilizations and extensions of the franchise; neither wanted it but both resorted to it to outflank their opponents; in the event both faced the dreadful prospect from the eighteen sixties of mass political parties of the proletariat, peasantry, and lower middle class fired in different ways by nationalism, class anger, and resentment and frustration. Bismarck and Disraeli were successful performers on the conservative side displaying the manner in which the masses could be used against the liberals. Napoleon III, the political fixer to whom an unkind fate had granted merely the name without its genius, superseded both conservative and liberal through a plebiscitary dictatorship that revealed the ominous outlines of mass democracy. The mass mobilizations of democracy entailed new loyalties; and regimes desperately galloped ahead of the breaking ice by resorting to irrationalism, xenophobia, colonial conquests, new traditions like national anthems, national days, monuments, and vast official spectacles like coronations, whether in European capitals or even the colonial one of Delhi in 1911. The coming of progress to agriculture brought with it ever more dangers. As peasants were released from slavery, serfdom, and independent household production, they threatened insurrections that could join with revolutions, as eventually so many of them did in different parts of the world.

Did the bourgeois enjoy his or her triumph, unlimited prosperity, and freedom to be creative. Not quite. They took to new forms of leisure, be it sport, or trekking in the mountains, or trips to seaside resorts and spas. But why did Anglo-Saxon male urban professionals begin climbing Alpine slopes with such passion? The answer is vintage Hobsbawm: "perhaps the close company of tough and handsome native guides had something to do with it." The repression and hypocrisy of bourgeois sexuality has been much written about. But to Hobsbawm they seemed more tormented by their state of liberation than hypocritical about it. Roman Catholic men could philander freely as long as they maintained their families properly; but Protestant men sought to obey the moral law and agonized over their desire to violate it and their actual violations of it. Sex was concealed, not flaunted, with liberation; but secondary sexual characteristics were brandished in the form of luxurious facial hair growth among men and flouncy dresses that exaggerated the buttocks in women. The individual male had been liberated through citizenship, but the family that nurtured him and to which he retreated from the social Darwinism of the outside world was held in thrall. He was a dictator to his wife, children and servants as much as Krupp was to his factories and Wagner to his enthralled audiences. A world of equals had been created, yet hierarchies remained or were engendered. Why? It was agreed that it was not due to superior intellect, education, or morality, for that would not account for the wealth of the plutocrat, the subordination of women, or the misery of the proletariat. The answer was found in what was to become the scourge of the twentieth century: genetic selection and scientific racism. This baleful ideology was conceived in the womb of bourgeois liberalism to account for inequalities in a world of equals.

The world of art and literature was more than the unfolding of creative genius. His *The Age of Empire* launched into the subject with crisis, and as always, specifically of the bourgeoisie: "Perhaps nothing illustrates the identity crisis through which bourgeois society passed in this period better than the history of the arts from the 1870s to 1914. It was the era when both the creative arts and the public for them lost their bearings." He saw the crux of the problem in the divergence of the modern from the contemporary. Until about 1900, the modern in art and politics went hand in hand; thereafter they diverged. Thus the Arts and Crafts Movement, which found its incarnations across Europe up to Russia, turned to the pre-modern as a source of inspiration, but not for the purpose of restoration. Hence William Morris could be socialist, and art and politics could go together. But anxieties mounted as the bourgeoisie adopted the movement; at the same time mass socialism was becoming routine politics; and art and politics deviated. But the avant-garde, which flourished after 1900, failed to remake the world in its image when revolution swept the world in the second decade. The most important movement in the arts since the Renaissance was overtaken by the mass entertainment industry of high technology, which remade the world in its own image instead. All that was considered high art was swept up in the mass culture of mediocre, profit driven, and deliberately philistine taste. As he noted, the arts were indeed revolutionized, but not by those who wanted to do so.

Even a subject like trade union history is presented in the manner of stock market fluctuations. There are "jumps", jerky movements upward in membership and activity, and sudden collapses. Compare these with the accounts of trade unions by Sidney and Beatrice Webb or Henry Pelling. Their histories of impeccable scholarship reveal a steady growth with periodic retreats, expansion into new regions and sectors, attachment to political ideologies like socialism or political parties like Labour, but staid and regular withal. They do not impart that sense of crisis and extremes as Hobsbawm does.

The twentieth century was in the grip of endemic crisis; and with the modern mutating into the post-modern, he discerned "the general breakdown of civilization as we know it over large parts of the world in and since the 1980s," just as the fascist poison of the 1930s had boded "the threat of an entire world built on the deliberate reversal of civilization." But it seemed to be worse than the horrors of all that preceded it, for the world seemed to have become rudderless, without direction, with decision-makers not knowing what to do with a world that has escaped their control. The atrocities perpetrated between 1914 and 1991 could be ascribed to decisions by a Hitler, a Stalin, a Mao, or their equivalents, but that somehow did not seem appropriate after 1991. The world seemed plunged into Hobbesian anarchy and Durkheimian anomie; for "we no longer know what 'the done thing' is, there is only 'one's own thing'." It pessimistically mimicked Fukuyama's optimism, for capitalism was now bereft of an internal contradiction that could either contain its excesses or ensure its dissolution.

The end was heralded in so many different ways from the eighties. Working class consciousness seemed to have been extinguished although the working class and the social democratic parties of Western Europe continued to flourish into the eighties at least. The great social revolutions of our times are no longer linked to socialist ideals but of the kind that the Iranian revolution represented. The big city was no longer the arena of proletarian and socialist mass politics but of a ghettoized form of protest action, of violence reminiscent of the early nineteenth century but without the structure that sustained those forms of radicalism. A new form of identity politics seemed to have replaced the socialist politics of emancipation which spoke for everyone rather than a group or groups, and this includes the new nationalisms as of Scotland or Wales.

He sounded more like an aristocrat surveying the debris of the French Revolution and the coming of modernity when norms were self-legislated, not given by tradition; he could equally have been a *grand bourgeois* appalled at the socialist revolution of 1917 and the end of order and property, and of civilization as he knew it until then. Hobsbawm had lived the modern world of the two centuries since 1789 that he has analysed so eloquently; he now sensed that world was dissolving into a postmodern one which he could not comprehend and therefore could not discern any comprehension among those who led or theorized that transformation. It is an ironic comment on the fate of one who had lived on the radical edge of modernity for nearly a century. He himself had expertly described the revolutionary logic of continual change and radicalization as it began with the

French Revolution, with the world which had been superseded in 1991 and its aftermath. The outline of the future was not clear and postmodernists did not seem to make any sense. In this lay the barbarism of our times. To him it was the end of the modern world of which he was such an accomplished historian, just as so many others were enthusiastically welcoming it as the renewal of all that the Enlightenment had once seemed to promise.

MARXISM

In what sense was Hobsbawm a Marxist as a historian? He was a Marxist, a communist, and a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain which died before he did; and Marx accompanies him on all his expeditions like "a shadow or faithful wife", as Pushkin might say. But he has told us little about the method to his Marxist history. Marxist admirers have complained that in spite of several well-received books and a high profile as a Marxist historian, he had been incorrigibly reticent on his method and theory. He has occasionally enlightened us, but regrettably, these theoretical exercises do not compare with his histories for depth, clarity, or sophistication. He has preferred the passing comment to the extended treatise. In effect, his empirical work of so many books is his theoretical statement on what is Marxist history. Nobody could have asked for a more exhaustive account, but it is not rendered in the form of a series of theoretical propositions, and still less of capsules to be effortlessly swallowed or of aphorisms for instant quotation. His method must be extracted from this enormous corpus, and it would reveal inconsistencies, contradictions, shifts of positions, and most of all, convergence between Marxists and non-Marxists, all which makes it impossible to identify a single Marxist method. It should also come as no surprise if at least some of his theoretical pronouncements seem to be at variance with his historical exposition.

His works have been described as Marxist and reviewers have generously distributed backhanded compliments with the odd disparagement. Commenting on *Primitive Rebels*, Karl Helleiner observed that in spite of being a "scholar of left-wing leanings", Hobsbawm had given these archaic social movements "a much more sympathetic hearing" than the "Fathers of Communism" had cared to do, while Fritz Redlich approved of the work but warned readers "it is clear that this book is written from the standpoint of socialists." Julian Pitt-Rivers accused him of evolutionary Marxism, while FranÁois Billacois warmly welcomed *Bandits* but mentioned only in passing that Hobsbawm was a Marxist without suggesting any influence on his method. Govinda Pillai, as a communist writing in a communist party journal, was enthusiastic about this contribution to Marxist history; but unusually, he congratulated Hobsbawm "that in spite of the ideological conviction of the author, he does not attempt to fit in facts to preconceived theories." David Epstein was exceptional in complimenting him on his *Bandits* attesting to the "renewed vitality of Marxism", on his being "a committed Marxist, yet alive to the subtlety and vitality of people who live in an archaic world", and especially of possessing the magic of the bandit! Mark Solomon likewise claimed that Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels* "advanced a creative Marxist framework for reinterpreting (or interpreting) Robin Hood-style banditry, peasant revolutionary groups, 'primitive' social agitation, pre-industrial urban mobs and early secret labor movements." Jackie Assayag identified Hobsbawm's distinction between the pre-political bandit and the political revolutionary that followed as an instance of Marxist, indeed Leninist, teleology of stages, which is perhaps Pitt-Rivers's meaning of evolutionary Marxism. None of them, save Assayag, explained what was Marxist about them, presumably because social history and these subjects of inquiry are assumed to make them Marxist.

Ashworth warns us that with *The Age of Capital* "Hobsbawm is to the Marxist interpretation of history [what] Macaulay is to the Whig. His book should be read for new insights and constant stimulus. But, no more than Macaulay's, should his version be swallowed whole." John F. C. Harrison reassures us that he was Marxist in the tradition of Marx himself rather than of Marxists, and that he had worn his Marxism "very lightly indeed," while Max Fletcher informs us that this outstanding work exhibits the analytical quality of *Das Kapital* rather than the propagandistic froth of the *Communist Manifesto*. Lawrence Murray concluded a positive assessment with appropriate condescension: "...those who have disdained Marxist history as narrowly 'economically determinist' will be acquainted with the wider possibilities of an unorthodox approach." Stephen Salsbury complained that "Hobsbawm is a confirmed Marxist and this strongly colours his book. While many of his most significant judgements remain free of Marxist bias, the author spends a disproportionate amount of time discussing Marx's view on each particular historical event or trend...Despite this bias, the professional historian will enjoy reading Hobsbawm's work and it will serve as an excellent introduction for the literate reader who knows little or nothing about mid-century world history." Edward Shorter also found the book "so intellectually appealing" in spite of being a "standard Marxist analysis." Karl de Schweinitz has discharged the unusual function of defending Marx from Hobsbawm's charge that he had welcomed the colonial conquest of India; but besides applauding the work of this "distinguished Marxist historian", he had nothing to say on method. Alford applauded his immense erudition while dismissing his Marxism as "loose" and "old-fashioned." Alain Silvera declared, "Although at no point does he ever spell out the theoretical assumptions of his interpretation, the whole architecture of his edifice is firmly rooted in classical Marxism handled with grace and elegance and with a lively attention to the curious but telling detail." William Langer paid him the supreme compliment of comparing him to Jacob Burckhardt, but went on to note that "Hobsbawm is a confirmed Marxist, so it is easy for him to elaborate on economic developments and their consequences. I hasten to add, however, that he is not painfully Marxist." Some were merely perverse: "It is not difficult to see why the attempt to make sense of history on this scale appears to be less difficult for Professor Hobsbawm than many other historians, for the strong hypothesis of Marxist orthodoxy that sustains his exposition throughout, while Marx himself emerges as the solitary hero in an unheroic era." He concluded that this was an example of "how not to write history." Hobsbawm has had to suffer the embarrassing compliment of having his *The Age of Capital* greeted as a handbook for social and political activism rather than one of scholarship: "For workers, teachers, students, union organizers, female liberationists, and youth group militants, Hobsbawm's book under review, coinciding as it does with an admirable new translation of 'Capital', is an event to be celebrated." Perhaps predictably, it was from the *Economic and Political Weekly*. In short, he may have been a Marxist, but he knew how to read and write. But nobody has quite explained in what sense his historical work may be considered Marxist?

On the other hand, a significant number of important reviewers have ignored his Marxism altogether. Many of the readers of his two books on primitive rebels and social banditry don't seem to have noticed it. Pat O'Malley is an avowed Marxist, a sociologist and legal theorist, but he discussed Hobsbawm's account of social banditry in considerable detail several times without touching upon the question of his Marxism or its supposed method. Nor did Anton Blok, who likewise devoted considerable attention to Hobsbawm's social banditry. The Marxist Genovese, in a substantial appraisal of Hobsbawm's Marxist method, was not able to identify anything more than sympathy for bandits: "Hobsbawm's judicious treatment of the strength and weakness of the people with whose struggles for justice he passionately identifies appears in especially moving form in his studies of social bandits." Henri Dubief commended Hobsbawm for taking care "not to revive defunct freudo-marxist interpretations," while others have referred to them only *en passant* or not at all when fruitfully employing his insights.

Of the *Age* series, Geoffrey Bruun found his *The Age of Revolution* lacked "a comprehensive unity and integration"; and if he thought the Marxism distorting, he did not mention it at all. Theodore Hamerow again found it uneven and brilliant, while John F. C. Harrison was just as enthusiastic, even if he regretted the short shrift given to religion; but neither mentioned Marx. A. Goodwin seems to have been disoriented by the fact that one who professed to be a Marxist could compose a work of such exceptional quality. "Dr. E. J. Hobsbawm has made this selective thesis [that of the dual revolution] his own and has exploited it with astonishing virtuosity. The work is challenging, learned, brilliant in its analytical power, wide-ranging in its exposition of literary, aesthetic and scientific achievements and packed with novel insight." Perhaps Hobsbawm was not being so selective after all. S. D. Berkowitz hailed his social history in *The Age of Capital* but regretted his inadequate handling of the economic history. "It lacks a coherent and detailed theoretical framework for the changes it describes, but it makes up for this in its scope and depth of presentation of the *consequences* of the extension and consolidation of modern industrial capitalism." J. P. T. Bury enjoyed the immense erudition and readability of the work, but complained, without comment on method, that the largest number of index references was to Marx. This might have been the proper occasion to comment on Marxism, but it did not appear on the radar. Eugen Weber warmly welcomed his *The Age of Empire* without once referring to Marx or Marxism, while John Saville did not merely bypass Marxism altogether but threw in Nietzsche for good measure: "For those who work their way attentively through this newest volume, one result might be a reaching out for some of the works of Nietzsche as part of a more general recognition of the role and place of the artistic imagination in the delineation of social and political change." Others mention his Marxism cursorily or not at all.

If Hobsbawm has not told us what is Marxist history, he has told us what is it not but passes for it, and this is known as vulgar Marxism.

> "the Marxist influence among historians has been identified with a few relatively simple, if powerful, ideas, which have, in one way or another, been associated with Marx and the movements inspired by his thought, but which are not necessarily Marxist at all, or which, in the form that has been most influential, has not necessarily been representative of the

mature thought of Marx. We shall call this type of influence 'vulgar-Marxist', and the major problem of analysis is to separate the vulgar-Marxist from the Marxist component in historical analysis."

This is what most people distinguish as Marxist history, and he listed its sins: 1) the economic interpretation of history, 2) base and superstructure, 2) class struggle and class interest, 4) historical laws and inevitability, 5) specific subjects, like capitalist development, 6) specific areas of interest to Marxists, like the study of the oppressed, 7) observations about historians who claim to be searching for the truth. But it might be worth our while first to distinguish questions of method from those of interpretation, to the extent that they may be separated at all.

To begin with, Hobsbawm has disdained slogans, formulae, clichÈs, and sundry forms of signalling for others to recognize members of the tribe. However, until the early sixties, when perhaps he still retained some of the heady enthusiasm of his youth, he did permit himself the occasional war cry. In 1952, in his account of Methodism and its supposed dampening effect on working class radicalism, he employed a purely Leninist slogan and referred to the man himself. It defined a revolutionary crisis as consisting of the ruling groups incapable of acting and the subalterns refusing to endure privation any longer. This aphorism was beloved of Soviet historians, or rather was imposed on them, but what Lenin said any political strategist might have also said. It is not specifically Leninist, or for that matter Marxist in any sense, Lenin's implacable declarations to the contrary notwithstanding. In his essay on the labour aristocracy, he identified a period of history, from the 1890s to 1914, as imperialist. This did not denote the conquest of colonial empire; it was what had become Marxist usage for a phase of high concentration of capital, of cartelization, of banks gaining control of industries and creating thereby "finance capital", all these in addition to of course imperialist rivalries. With Marxists, he repeatedly identified it as an era of "monopoly capitalism." He even spoke of the "industrial reserve army of unemployed and underemployed." In one essay alone he spoke as if he were addressing the faithful at a Party school, about the mode of production, how the potential for one exists in another, how they tend to be mixed; and he raised such non-questions as to whether forces of production had outgrown relations of production in Europe alone, and whether something in the superstructure blocked such trends in other non-European worlds. However, he generally steered clear of such theological disputation, and nothing that he wrote as history reflects these arid propositions. None of his accounts seek to lead us directly or surreptitiously to the final crisis of capitalism; none of them seek to expose the sinister manipulation of the bourgeoisie to deflect history from its appointed course toward the millennium; and he does not find scapegoats for the failures of the numerous revolutions that he has analysed.

Did he engage in the vulgar Marxism that he himself denounced? The core of it consists of the two first features that he has listed, economic determinism and the question of base and superstructure, which are interrelated. The first claims that the events and even actions in history are determined by an economic, or material, interest; and the second that the "base" or the manner in which human beings create the material conditions of their existence must determine all else which may not be material, namely, the "superstructure" of politics and culture in their widest meanings.

Economic determinism, the economic foundations to life, and materialism, are interrelated concepts with varying stress on the "economic factor" in explanation. Hobsbawm has asserted that the "materialist approach to history" is the best, and he has handed out the formula "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness", which would have made Plekhanov ecstatic.

But he was ambivalent about materialism as the monopoly of the Marxists. He has gone out of his way to point out that the materialist contribution came from many sources, the Marxist being a relatively late stimulus. The historical discipline began modernizing from the 1890s when narrative and a narrowly political history of individual events was overtaken by one that sought regularities, made larger generalizations, freely borrowed from other disciplines, and related the events of history to the different phenomena of society. This was marked by the convergence between history and the social sciences, when history came to be regarded as a possible social science, which allowed it to discern both uniqueness and general patterns in human action. The convergence "included followers of both Marx and Comte as well as people like Lamprecht, who were politically and ideologically far from rebellion. It included the followers of Max Weber and Durkheim." This was a revolt against "orthodoxy" which, he has asserted, "wasn't ideological" even if it was directed against a " 'materialist conception of history'." He felt that Marx's analytical rigour yielded predictive force; he then graciously admitted Alexis de Tocqueville and Jacob Burckhardt also into the company of the elect.

History seems to have been carried on an irresistible surge of progress, "irrespective of the ideology of its practitioners." He seems to be suggesting, without using the word, that a non-ideological professionalism carried all before it. He summarily included Marxists among so many others as the "Braudelian – Marxist – Weberian modernizers." He then catalogued the sundry pressures that made it so "materialist": it began with the economists and sociologists, followed by the geographers in France, and even lawyers. The stirring question of the relation of religion to capitalism was broached, after Marx himself, by Max Weber, whom Hobsbawm called a sociologist although he represented all disciplines within himself, and by Ernst Troeltsch, the theologian. Later, the French *Annales* historians drove the process forward with messianic enthusiasm, and only from the 1950s did the Marxists begin to play a noticeable role. However much materialism was significant to Marxist history, he took some trouble to point out that Marxists and non-Marxists drew on common sources of inspiration, and that Marxists were laggards in the writing of history.

As for the related question of base and superstructure, fellow Marxists have accused him of ambivalence: what other British Marxists emphatically repudiated, Hobsbawm seems to have perversely adhered to. This charge arises chiefly from his theoretical discussion on the "hierarchy of social phenomena", implying thereby the base and superstructure, and with it, the problem of determining which of the levels determine the other levels. It would be possible to detect this tendency in some of his early work. In his study of the labour aristocracy he has at points claimed a direct correlation between the politics of the labour aristocracy and their economic condition. Early in *The Age of Revolution* he explained the French Revolution with a straightforward and favourite Marxist formula of the productive forces outgrowing the relations of production: "the conflict between the official framework and the vested interests of the old rÈgime and the rising new social forces was more acute in France than elsewhere." Beyond an occasional excess of this kind, it would not be possible to identify a base and superstructure in Hobsbawm's works. In his accounts of the birth, career, catastrophe, and recovery of the bourgeois universe, all the "levels" function simultaneously and in relation to each other, such that primacy may not be accorded to any one of them, be it the economic "base" or the cultural "superstructure." This cannot be discerned even in the sequence of chapters. For example, in *The Age of Revolution*, the chapter, "The Career Open to Talent", precedes the one on "The Labouring Poor"; between the two chapters on ideology, that on "Religion" is placed before the one on the "Secular"; and even "Science" follows "The Arts." But some may be reassured to find that in *The Age of Capital* "Science" takes precedence over "Religion" and "The Arts", although disconcertingly, "City, Industry, the Working Class" comes a poor third after "The Land" and "Men Moving." Other works offer little with which to distinguish a base from a superstructure. As for the claim that he pursues a "bottom up" approach because he studies the bottom of the social pyramid, this is egregious. Yet so fine a historian as Michelle Perrot could accuse him of being Marxist (and it is an accusation) for granting priority to social and economic history; this could be doubly repudiated, first since social and economic history does not identify the Marxist, and second since Hobsbawm's *Age* series cannot be so described.

But it seems necessary to rescue Hobsbawm from his Marxist followers. One of them, James Cronin, has himself quoted Hobsbawm on the futility of the base-superstructure obsession. Cronin then attempted to protect his flank by approvingly citing Leszek Kolakowski, that speaking of the "relative autonomy" of levels "deprives Marxism of its specificity, and makes historical materialism a banal commonplace." Both the Marxist Hobsbawm and the astringent critic of Marxism, Kolakowski, seem to be in agreement on the matter of base and superstructure according to Hobsbawm's admiring Marxist commentator, Cronin. Having completed the scholarly ritual of citing both sides to an argument, he presented Hobsbawm's resort to this discredited model, discounted by Hobsbawm himself: "Indeed, the structure and argument of *The Age of Capital* itself embodies an essential element of Hobsbawm's historical problematic: to delineate precisely the mode of interaction between economics on the one hand, and politics, culture and sensibility on the other, between base and superstructure." He has then pointed out how Hobsbawm set out to "solve the problem" by detailed empirical accounts of the shifting relation between different "levels" of existence, like the economic, political, cultural and so on. But it is not clear what problem Hobsbawm has solved since he had not started out with one. Marxists (not Hobsbawm) first tied themselves in knots through a reductionist base-superstructure model, and then claimed that Hobsbawm expertly dealt with it by sophisticated empirical research free of reductionism.

In like fashion, Genovese has patted him on the back for not confining himself to working class history, for not reducing the state "to a mere vehicle of class repression", for hesitating "to call the bourgeoisie a 'ruling class' " in *The Age of Capital*, for not setting much store by the withering away of the state, and most gratuitously, for objectivity that is not neo-Kantian: "Ironically, Hobsbawm's work, which rejects Max Weber's neo-Kantian 'ethical neutrality in the social sciences' and all such attempts to achieve an impossible objectivity, ends by advancing as close as humanly possible to that qualified objectivity without which the writing of history must turn into ideological swindling." He is assumed to be a good Marxist because he is not a bad one. But the one does not follow from the other; it may also imply that he is not Marxist after all, especially when these claims about objectivity are set alongside Hobsbawm's own view about non-ideological professionalism in method.

Next, Hobsbawm has been repeatedly complimented for composing total histories; and Marxists have claimed that this is an example of Marxist method. His *Age* series are indeed fine examples of total history, of everything from the agricultural and industrial "base" to the cultural "superstructure" of the arts and sciences. As total histories, they seek to relate any one sphere or "level" of society to every other, so that nothing is considered in isolation, everything is interrelated, like life itself. However its relation to Marxism specifically is not clear.

Marxists are by no means the first, or for that matter the last, or even the principal exponents of such comprehensive histories of mankind. Modern historical writing from its inception in the middle of the eighteenth century had established that aspiration; and it was regularly attempted throughout the nineteenth century. Guizot called such a totality "civilization", which was to be distinguished from the events of history. It was a globalism that de Tocqueville eagerly imbibed: "The history of civilization...wants and should want to embrace everything at the same time. Man must be examined in all aspects of his social existence." Michelet was unequivocal about his totalizing ambition, and Macaulay opened his *History* with the programme "to relate the history of the people as well as the history of the government", although he did not succeed in doing so. This was carried to great heights in the twentieth century by especially the French historians Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, and most of all Fernand Braudel and their followers. In the post-World War II years, "theoretically driven history of whole societies changing over time" was the product of the confluence of British Marxists, the French *Annales* group, and sociologists like Charles Tilly. Within British history, and without the elaborate grandstanding of the French historians, Hobsbawm's contemporary, Asa Briggs, for one, engaged in just such history that presented the lived experience as reasonably as was practicable and avoided the disciplinary compartment.

This is not a Marxist method; at best some Marxists, indeed remarkably few, have attempted it. What is loosely called Marxist history in this British context is social history, or the history of entire societies from high politics to daily life; its most productive years were after the War and until the 1970s; and the Marxists were the most creative in this genre, the counterpart of the non-Marxist *Annales* historians in France. But it seems to be called Marxist in Britain, not merely because the chief practitioners were communists, but because Marxism seems to have been the route of escape into totality from the disciplinary segregation of university departments.

Hobsbawm has claimed, and Marxists have asserted, that the Marxist method understands history as a history of change. This embraces a number of claims, none of them specifically Marxist, but believed to be so or claimed to be so by Marxists. These are at least the following: 1) change is continuous in history, and all structures must change into something else; 2) by that logic, the present is not final, and must itself be superseded; 3) any structure contains within itself tendencies which work toward its stability as much as its disruption; and, apparently the most difficult to ingest, 4) that we do not know in which direction the change is taking us, although we know how it has happened in history. In his final years he defined it as follows: "Above all, a Marxist interpretation suggests that, in having understood that a particular historical stage is not permanent, human society is a successful structure because it is capable of change, and thus the present is not its point of arrival."

These seem to be banal given the two centuries of dizzying changes, which all recognize to have been the greatest the human species has known since agriculture ten millennia ago. However, there are a number of targets to this polemic. The first is the desire for stability after the disorientation induced by the perpetual change of modernity, an experience that is already two centuries old. This was a conservative dream in the nineteenth century, and both liberals and conservatives believed in it or looked to it during mid-Victorian prosperity. It infected the Western world during the extraordinary boom and prosperity in the post war years until 1973, which Hobsbawm himself has celebrated as "The Golden Age" and "The Golden Years" in his *Age of Extremes*; and change has been sufficiently disturbing for even Hobsbawm to deplore it in almost conservative fashion after the end of the Cold War. It penetrated even the Soviet Union during those years of post-War reconstruction and revival when Khrushchev made bold to prophesy a date for the dawn of Communism. And in the post Cold War years, a flurry of writing has looked forward to the "end of history", free of ideological contestation. But these are ideologies for the modern and postmodern world to coerce them into stability; they did and do affect historical accounts; but they are not historical interpretations which cannot but demonstrate change. If nothing else, such histories must explain their ideal present through changes in the past.

The second, and by far the most significant target, is nationalist historiography. In every country, or rather nation, it posits an unchanging essence which endures all the travails of history to blossom into the final flower of the nation. Nationalist histories have been by far the most influential of historical writing over the two centuries, and they have not lost their hold on either the lay or the academic public, not the least since states ceaselessly demand them in order to mobilize, manipulate, and direct the mind of the citizen.

The third is immensely influential currents in historiography, best represented by the *Annales*, which suggests stable structures of the *longue durÈe*, so stable that Braudel has invoked the metaphor of the prison to imagine them. These do not deny change, but they are recorded as those violent convulsions, or the conjunctures, taking place within the tight coils of the long term structures. But such histories have been limited to the European Middle Ages, and they do recognize the uncontrollable nature of the transformations since then, which is why the pre-modern ones are imagined as so stable. They set off the pre-modern type of change from the modern one, and the pre-modern crisis from the modern crisis. Despite the limits within which the *Annales* have functioned, they have been targeted, obliquely, by Cronin and directly by Genovese, although not by Hobsbawm himself, whose admiration for them is unreserved, and who sees their work as the counterpart of his own.

Hobsbawm could be accused of the error of essentialism in one respect. He has discerned the primitive rebel and the bandit as an eternal pre-modern type that vanishes with modern politics and administration. Unlike the nationalist story it does not cross the great divide of modernity; but unlike the *longue durÈe*, it does not posit a stable total structure of society. But since only one type in such pre-modern society remains unchanging, it could imply that all of society was in some sense unchanging, since a structure must change if one element changes. If the Marxist is the historian of change, Hobsbawm has been found wanting in this one respect at least; but since he investigates the bandit ensnared in the transition to modern politics, he has escaped without censure.

But the Marxist is not the only historian of change. Hobsbawm (and his followers) could have pointed out that this was the proudest claim of what has come to be disparaged as historicism, or the method of the German school of history, that the truth of social phenomena lies in their ceaselessly changing history, not in any permanent laws. But their polemical target was the Enlightenment rationalism of the eighteenth century and neo-Kantianism thereafter, which have been accused of proposing eternal values; the Marxists focused on the social conservatism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their yearning for stability. The concerns of the historicists run parallel with those of the Marxists, but they were on opposite sides of the barricades. If Hobsbawm was pursuing an idea of revolution, Meinecke imagined, at least in 1936, that historicism was "one of the greatest intellectual revolutions that has ever taken place in Western thought." But Hobsbawm has repeatedly drawn attention to the convergence of different ideologies and methods in the professionalization of historical writing since the late nineteenth century; and he has cited Ernst Troeltsch, the theologian and a leading historicist scholar, as one of the most significant contributors to that process. Hobsbawm may be hinting at this aspect of convergence.

However Hobsbawm is preoccupied with much more than the banality of recording change: he is concerned with change through the dialectic as the singularly creative Marxist method. This looks upon any system as carrying within itself the seeds of its disruption, hence whatever is stable must also be unstable. This is an argument against conservative sociologies, especially structural-functionalism so much in vogue in his day, and all the celebratory histories, once again of the nationalist and historicist variety, that recounted the entire past as the preparation for the ideal present. This is perhaps not so Marxist as Hegelian; and it demands the identification and succession of "ages" or "epochs", which in Marxist terms become "modes of production." It is also worth noting that most Marxists have resorted to both the dialectical contradiction of the type that Hobsbawm has upheld, and the stability that he has deplored. Soviet Marxists are the prime exemplars. They have represented the Russian Revolution as the product of the contradictions of capitalism in Russia and the Soviet system as the *permanent* resolution of those contradictions, hence of an eternal stability that Hobsbawm deprecated. But Soviet Marxists have been discarded as vulgar Marxists by almost universal agreement, and certainly by Hobsbawm himself.

Hobsbawm has made another important methodological claim for Marxism. It is that the past cannot be studied in its own terms since it is only from the present that the past appears as the past. This was a polemic against historicism, which warned against anachronism, demanded that the past be studied exclusively in its own terms, that the only reality is historical, and that the present is mere abstraction. But historicism has always faced the charge, not merely from Marxists, that there is danger of antiquarianism in a rigid application of this procedure. Further, independent of the ideological and methodological concerns of the historicists, many historians have had recourse to what is known, ironically enough, as the "regressive" or even the "retrogressive" method. It consisted in the *technique* of starting from the present or what is better known and working backward to times that are less well-known but which may be better understood in this manner. It was employed most fruitfully in many works of classic importance.

The next on the list of methodological claims to Marxism is the theory of combined and uneven development, and Justin Rosenberg has credited Hobsbawm with having applied it creatively to his history. It contains two propositions on the global spread of capitalism, first, that it was uneven, and second, that in one region it combined different processes which had been separate in another region. It was uneven in the sense that a capitalist form must first evolve in a non- or pre-capitalist one, typically, a factory in a village or in a town with craft workshops around it. This does not require Marxist insights to be self-evident, for all industrialization, or for that matter any innovation of any kind, cannot but proceed in this fashion. All development, by its nature, must be uneven. The second proposition, on combined development, is weightier. This rests on the insight that the wheel need not be reinvented each time, that an innovator would borrow outright a successful model from any part of the world, hence that the latecomer would telescope processes which had been distinct in an earlier phase. Within the Marxist tradition, Trotsky is the principal theorist of this process, which appeared to him to unlock the secrets of the Russian Revolution.

However, Trotsky himself was drawing upon a commonplace of Russian theoretical debate on the "advantage of backwardness." This thesis noted that later developers merged processes which had been separate for earlier ones, hence the latecomers enjoyed the advantage of a delayed start by not having to go undergo the experiences of pioneers. Petr Chaadaev, traditionalist and conservative, noticed this possibility in 1837 when he pointed out that Russia was akin to a blank sheet, bereft of history: she could both avoid the mistakes of her predecessors and escape the incubus of history by carrying out radical changes through an act of pure will. Alexander Herzen, liberal and aristocratic, suggested that the peasant commune had preserved the people from "Mongol barbarism and civilizing Tsarism, from the landlords with a veneer of Europe and from German bureaucracy", preparing them for socialism. Nikolai Chernyshevskii, the proto-Narodnik, elaborated the insight by pointing to the "acceleration" (*uskorenie*) of historical processes, which dispenses with the routine of replication; and the Narodniks relayed the idea further with V. P. Vorontsov arguing that latecomers could collapse stages of development instead of having to repeat them. Trotsky resumed this train of thought as "combined development." It fertilized his idea of a "permanent revolution", that is, the distinct stages of revolution in Europe would be fused into an uninterrupted or "permanent" process in Russia; and it resurfaced through Lenin's notion of the "weakest link" in the chain of imperialism. Both of them privileged the backwardness of Russia in the making of revolution. These insights into combined development reappeared in an entirely non-Marxist context after World War II in Alexander Gerschenkron's theory of late industrializers effecting "substitutions" of processes that had occurred earlier elsewhere. Thus Marxists and non-Marxists have drawn on a common stock of ideas of pre-Marxist provenance; but, like the class interpretation of the French Revolution, Marxists have imagined these ideas as uniquely their own.

How Marxist are his interpretations of modern history? Again, the results are not as expected, for there is a distinct shift of gear from the late fifties. He began with labour history driven by the Marxist problematic of the working class as the source of emancipation in industrial society. With this inspiration he composed his articles on British unionism, working class culture, the burning issue of consciousness and spontaneity, the internal stratification of the working class or the labour aristocracy thesis, and perhaps most of all, the question of the standard of living during the industrial revolution. He capped these with that other magnificent obsession of Marxists of the epoch, the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The proletariat seems to have induced ennui: he then went slumming in the pre-modern world of bandits before conquering the peaks of the *grand bourgeois* from where he surveyed the universe of modernity. Workers remained a residual if productive area of concern. He did not compose a major book on them, whereas he devoted three full books to bandits (including the English species) and five major ones (including the one on nationalism) to the modern world. He clearly did not expect much more from workers after their absorption into consumer culture by the fifties.

The thesis of the dual revolution, or of the industrial and French revolutions being combined as a single capitalist revolution, has been accorded the distinction of being Marxist. However, Hobsbawm has made no such claim and his own account of the historiography of the French Revolution confutes this thesis. Hobsbawm refuted two claims on the French Revolution made by the revisionists from the 1950s. The first was by Alfred Cobban, that the Revolution was not bourgeois since the bourgeoisie neither made the Revolution not benefited from it, and that the Revolution hindered rather than stimulated the industrial development of France. The second was by FranÁois Furet, that the Revolution registered continuity rather than a decisive break with the past of French history. Hobsbawm has gone to some lengths to show how the class and revolutionary interpretation of the French Revolution was not a specifically Marxist thesis although it had come to be identified as such in the course of the twentieth century.

The class interpretation, that of a bourgeoisie overthrowing an aristocracy, was elaborated by the Restoration Liberals, especially by FranÁois Guizot, Augustin Thierry, Victor Cousin, and F. A. Mignet, later by the Republicans, and then appropriated by the Left as their own. Guizot was acutely aware of "the struggle of classes; a struggle which constitutes the very fact of modern history, and of which it is full. Modern Europe, indeed, is born of this struggle between the different classes of society." Not surprisingly, Marx was his most celebrated adept. Hobsbawm endorses the findings of modern research, that the bourgeoisie did not make the Revolution and that it was of doubtful benefit to them directly; but the idea of a bourgeois revolution was liberal, not Marxist. Even FranÁois Furet the revisionist has pointed out the Jacobin origins of the concept of the bourgeois revolution.

Similarly, Hobsbawm traced the second aspect of the interpretation, of the Revolution as rupture rather than as continuity, to these same Restoration Liberals: they both recorded and endorsed the fact of the rupture and of its permanence, deplore the violence and democratic excesses of the Revolution as they may. Alexis de Tocqueville, the aristocratic liberal, had argued in 1856 that revolutionary continuity lay in the centralization of the state from the *ancien rÈgime* into the nineteenth century, but that revolutionary discontinuity consisted in the destruction of "everything in the old order that stemmed from aristocratic and feudal institutions." Hobsbawm enjoyed pointing out that de Tocqueville, always presented as the fountainhead of the continuity thesis, was unequivocal about the finality of the break with the past socially.

As for the Revolution and industrialization, it is an oft-recited paradox that France lagged behind in industrialization despite her Revolution, and that Britain, Germany, and the United States streamed ahead without such dramatic propulsion. However, these same liberal scholars yearned for industrialization, admired England as the model, and regarded France, Holland, and Britain as having carried out the political, social, and economic transformations that go by the general expression bourgeois revolution. Historians may rightly note the modest results of the French Revolution for the economic development of France, but these Restoration Liberals saw a dual revolution taking place in their lifetimes in that western corner of Europe and spoke glowingly of the future that it portended.

Hobsbawm has recorded how Marx admitted to having derived so much of his understanding of class relations and class struggle from these liberals; but nobody for that reason could accuse the very bourgeois Guizot of being Marxist in anticipation of Marx. Hobsbawm has adhered to what has come to be understood as the Marxist interpretation while accepting the results of empirical investigations; but he has shown how the Liberals had propounded this interpretation before Marx himself seized upon it. With polemical delight and academic exasperation, Hobsbawm was reminding the revisionist liberals of the latter half of the twentieth century that they were repudiating their forbears of the first half of the nineteenth century.

It could of course be said that Hobsbawm was being self-consciously Marxist by endorsing an interpretation that is today considered Marxist against revisionists anxious to knock it down, even if this Marxist account owes its origins to a liberal historiography of the first half of the nineteenth century. But there could be two objections to this claim. The first is that this is less Marxist scholarship and historiography and more the taking of a factional position within French academic politics and the historical profession, and waving the flag for communists in general. The second, and academically more consequential, is that his argument suggests the convergence of ideological positions, of what is loosely called Marxist and non-Marxist history, which has been a major theme in Hobsbawm's reflections on the development of historical research since the late nineteenth century.

Hobsbawm's interpretation of the twentieth century however has made him suspect in the eyes of many Marxists. They have frowned on his cavalier treatment of the sacred subjects of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet experience. Kevin Murphy, speaking as a Marxist historian of Russia to the few of the community that remain, has upbraided Hobsbawm for 1) endorsing the "continuity thesis", that the Revolution, the Civil War, the New Economic Policy, and the Five Year Plans, collectivization, and purges could be analysed as a single bloc of events, hence that Stalin was anticipated by Lenin, or even in *What is to be Done?*; 2) engaging in counterfactuals like what would have happened had the revolutions of 1917 and all that followed not occurred; 3) asserting that the Bolsheviks seized power with an unrealistic programme of socialist revolution; 4) refusing to realize or remaining unaware that the civil war was so extreme because of the American, British, and French roles in it; 5) explaining Stalinism by socialism in one country rather the devastation of the civil war. In short, Hobsbawm's account was impoverished, rigid ideology substituting for researched history, dismissing socialism in Russia as doomed for its isolation in a backward country.

Kevin Murphy's critique is persuasive, for Hobsbawm was far too summary. He did not grapple with the nature of popular support that the Bolsheviks enjoyed, and he collapsed too many distinctions, being perhaps a trifle lukewarm over the important one between the twenties and the thirties in the Soviet Union. Worst of all, he traced the Stalinist dictatorship to Leninist party organization. Murphy did not say so, but Hobsbawm raised these counterfactuals only with respect to the Russian Revolution and not to the dual revolution of the eighteenth century: he was happy to consider a world without the Russian Revolution but not one without its French precursor. He deplored the futility of such counterfactual speculation with respect to the French Revolution and went to great lengths to demonstrate that the liberals of the post-revolutionary generation, from Guizot to de Tocqueville, had considered it so decisive a break with the past that they did not have any wish to turn the clock back. In an astonishingly primitive and painfully clichÈ-ridden series of speculations and counterfactuals, he likened the Russian Revolution to natural phenomena like earthquakes or floods, and recommended that "We must stop thinking of the Russian Revolution in terms of the Bolsheviks' or anyone else's aims and intentions, their long-term strategy, and other Marxists' critiques of their practice." It was something he would not impute even to the First World War or the Holocaust. Hitler embodied pure ideology, the Russian Revolution mere instinct, surely a bewildering appraisal from a Marxist. As a European socialist, even if communist, Hobsbawm ultimately joined with Kautsky in shutting off Lenin and Soviet socialism from Europe, despise Kautsky as he may. Perhaps he wished it had never happened, for then the European Left would have been free of this Slavic albatross. That might also explain why his reading on Russia seems so limited.

His further discussion of the Soviet epoch and of post-War Europe has been quite as distressing to Marxists. He opened his *Age of Extremes* with a disorienting *leitmotif*: "It is one of the ironies of this strange century that the most lasting results of the October revolution, whose object was the global overthrow of capitalism, was to save its antagonist, both in war and in peace – that is to say, by providing it with the incentive, fear, to reform itself after the Second World War, and, by establishing the popularity of economic planning, furnishing it with some of the procedures for its reform." The Soviet Union first defeated the fascist threat and rescued Western liberalism from that dystopia. The Soviet challenge then impelled Western governments toward welfare, full employment, and the golden age of prosperity between 1945 and 1973. The Left finally realized its principal objectives. The UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 owes so much to the labour movements. During those palmy days, the civil rights of the French revolutionary programme were consolidated, democracy was extended to the entire adult population, and welfare reached everybody. In his final judgement communism saved capitalism instead of mankind, and it consumed itself in the course of that redemptive mission. This then is the tragedy of the Soviet collapse: the external compulsion on capitalism to reform itself had been dissolved, the internal or the socialisms of labour movements seemed to count for little, and the loss of the dream of the alternative to capitalism no longer matters. Hobsbawm's despair is matched by Rosenberg's counter-despair: "It is almost as if Hobsbawm had forgotten that the real ground of socialist politics never was the existence of the Soviet Union but rather the existence of capitalism."

Russians may feel rueful. In various versions of nationalist Russian history, Russia saved, protected, or rescued Europe from the Mongols in the thirteenth century, from Napoleon in the nineteenth century, and from Hitler in the twentieth. They must now learn from a distinguished Western historian, celebrated by liberals and Marxists alike, that liberal capitalism survived thanks to Russians trudging in their millions into the gulag. Hobsbawm does not seem to rejoice at the possible liberation of Russians from their communist incarceration; he merely records their emerging from the nether world to be driven into the postcommunist blizzard; but he regrets that Western capitalism may once again descend into chaos without the counterbalancing power of even a senescent gulag.

But a final Marxist vision and method may be considered, the obvious and most powerful one of the crisis-ridden condition of humanity and certainly of the modern world which engenders its own gravediggers. It has already been suggested that this might have been his central vision. But was the centrality of crisis in his accounts the product of a Marxist orientation? Not necessarily. It was the stock-in-trade of the *Annales* historians who were not Marxists but who were much admired by Hobsbawm. They engaged primarily in the history of the Middle Ages, not of industrial capitalism; they delineated the structures and described the crises which occurred within them with almost law-like regularity. They owed much to the work of Wilhelm Abel, who viewed history through the prism of crisis after the experience of the Great Depression from 1929. These were Hobsbawm's formative years also, the years of slump, unemployment, revolution and counter-revolution, Marxism, Fascism, the Popular Front, and the Spanish Civil War, before World War II engulfed all else. Marxist theory was merely one of the sources for regarding history as driven by crisis.

Unlike the *Manifesto*, he did not express any belief in a coming proletarian revolution: in this respect he remained firmly social democratic and left liberal. As he admitted early in the twenty-first century, "Socialist theory was a critique of capitalist reality rather than a real project for the construction of a different society. And make no mistake about it, this also applied to Marxists." His ultimate faith remained the optimistic philosophies of the rational Enlightenment, which gave him hope even when the socialist states had failed in such squalid fashion. Speaking of the nature of political commitment, he reflected: "I think that communism was part of that tradition of modern civilization that goes back to the Enlightenment, to the American and French revolutions. I cannot regret it."

In a world gripped by never-ending crises, who was the gravedigger? It was supposedly the proletariat in Hobsbawm's tetralogy of class polarities; but a closer examination suggests that even this did not hold. The crises of capitalism were those induced by capitalist excess, the cyclical crises from the short seasonal one to the long Kondratieff. The other crises were of counter-revolution culminating in the horror and supposed extirpation of fascism and all that this implied. In his final volume on the twentieth century, it had ceased to be a class or even class; it had become unabated developmentalism followed by the uncertainty and "barbarism" of postmodernism. The proletarian gravedigger of the *Communist Manifesto* seems to have risen but once, in 1917, and the result, according to Hobsbawm, was to inject concrete into the sinking foundations of capitalism, not to drain them. The spectre that had been haunting Europe since 1848 was transmogrified into a stern conscience keeper to capitalism. Capitalism's gravediggers were capitalist, be it predatory speculator or genocidal fascist: when the hour of reckoning seemed to approach, it reached out to the totalitarian incarnation of its ascribed proletarian gravedigger. Capitalism was ultimately merely two-faced, both creative and destructive in itself, in every fibre of its being.

Destructive possibilities flourished in many forms. Capitalism harboured internal contradiction, the inspiration that Marx furnished to the generations down to the 1960s. Hobsbawm's tetralogy on the nineteenth century and the first half of the *Age of Extremes* relied on this Marxian insight. On the other hand, the success of capitalism could lead to the destruction of the institutions that sustained it, as Schumpeter noted; and unregulated markets, like a forest fire, could consume all in its path, as Karl Polanyi warned. They silently informed his reflections on the end of the twentieth century when Marx seemed less and less of a guide to the condition of capitalism. Finally, modernity could induce catastrophe in the biosphere, the culmination of the insights of conservatives and romantics of every colour who deplored modernity's tendency to ruin the work of God, of Nature, of Tradition, of all that has been given to us, and to destroy in general. The socialist option was foreclosed; capitalism had learnt to cope with contradiction but was spinning out of control; and another, greater menace loomed. The approaching "general crisis" was not specific to either liberal or socialist ideology.

Marxists (and non-Marxists) may be discomfited by his evenhanded reassurance to both sides that "Marxism has so transformed the mainstream of history that it is today often impossible to tell whether a particular work has been written by a Marxist or a non-Marxist, unless the author advertises his or her ideological position. This is not a cause for regret." Clearly, he placed himself in the mainstream, at least by 1984 when this was published. Hobsbawm was not isolated in feeling the warmth of convergence. Victor Kiernan, another distinguished Marxist historian of that generation, confessed that "Marxism may have grown more reasonable, but less readily recognizable," and that it may be difficult to say who is not a Marxist, "so widely has the influence of Marx's more general ideas spread." Perry Anderson expressed the same insight in negative fashion as he observed in 1976 that Marxist history, though considerable, had not contributed significantly to Marxist theory. In effect, there is no Marxist history, only individuals, among them historians, who may be Marxist; but if people wanted to classify him a Marxist historian, Hobsbawm would not reject the label, perhaps *pour encourager les autres.*

CONCLUSION

The contribution that Hobsbawm and his Marxist colleagues made to invigorate historical research has been justly celebrated; but he (and they) could flourish and be imagined only in an ideologically plural environment. Marxism never did have a ghost of a chance of gaining political power in Britain, and the communist party has always been a marginal curiosity to British politics. But Marxist intellectuals, and especially historians among them, have been of the mainstream, not of the margin. They have been immensely influential in British culture however impotent in British politics. With variations, this applies to the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, especially Germany, Italy, or France. He claimed that the strength of Marxism lay in its capacity for critique; if so, the more advanced and entrenched capitalism in Europe, the more fertile the field of academic Marxist action. After all, Marx had subtitled his masterwork *A Critique of Political Economy*. Once again, he owes (and so do we owe) a high debt of gratitude to capitalism and bourgeois society for having spawned gravediggers like himself. But as Marxism invested the citadels of political power in Russia and East Europe, it became sterile and marginal to the cultural and academic life of the Soviet Union and its dependencies. It was the antithesis of the British and western world. Marxism could prosper only as critique. An enthroned Marxism was a contradiction of terms like the bourgeois monarchy; yet both bloomed at opposite ends of the European continent, each a presumed caricature of the authentic species, but each surviving as such long enough to represent authenticity. The Soviet Union bestowed on Hobsbawm the ultimate honour of never having his works translated, although, as he pointed out, he was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and an editor of the English edition of the Collected Works of Marx and Engels. However, Hobsbawm unerringly placed his finger on the button: "Much of my life, probably most of my conscious life, was devoted to a hope which has been plainly disappointed, and to a cause which has plainly failed: communism initiated by the October Revolution. But there is nothing which can sharpen the historian's mind like defeat." Dr Samuel Johnson would have concurred as he murmured at a public execution, "Hanging wonderfully concentrates the mind."

But Hobsbawm would have rebounded, and for him as for Scarlet O'Hara there was always a tomorrow. He was above all a free spirit like his bandits and he celebrated freedom and creativity. The rationality of the Enlightenment seemed to him to provide the space for it, the only space that humanity has so far been able to create, collectively and institutionally, for the exercise of such freedom. Marx appeared to have understood its contours and its possibilities best, but Marxists and communists did not always do so. His heart beat in unison with the utopianism of revolutionaries and their movements, not with parties, organizations and their odious bureaucracies, even if they called themselves revolutionaries. All his histories evoked that freedom and creativity at their most inspiring. This is what brings the conquering bourgeois of high finance, industrial entrepreneurship, and technological innovation on to the same page as the visionary artist, musician, and novelist, the inquisitive scientist and academic, the utopian revolutionary and the social bandit, the political shoemaker, tramping artisan, and the metropolitan mob before bureaucratic rationality flattened it. These are the people that crowd his histories like characters in an epic Russian novel, not the politicians, soldiers, and bureaucrats, be it of state or trade union, unless like a Napoleon or Bismarck they display the creative spark and daring imagination of the artist and scientist. These are not the histories of so much else that the bourgeois made, the great institutions of state, parliaments and bureaucracies, judiciaries and armed forces, academic centres and trade unions. These are stories of how each of them, individuals and institutions, drove themselves to extremes, to the limits, and over the edge. Creativity threatens to consume itself, as Marx warned of the uncontrollably creative capitalism, and the history of the modern world furnishes more than enough evidence of it in Hobsbawm's pages.

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*Revised version of lecture delivered at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, on 22 November 2012, and abridged from NMML Occasional Paper, History and Society New Series, No. 16, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2013. The complete version is available on the NMML website at www.nehrumemorial.org with full references. I am most grateful to Mehrdad Samadzadeh of Toronto University for considerable help with sources.