Introduction

Ahi quanto a dir qual'era e cosa dura Questa selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte
Che nel pensier rinnuova la paura.

Dante

Every science is cognition of a process or movement. A natural process usually has clear-cut phases of development, and may be oscillatory or variative, though delimited by certain physically conditioned constants and natural laws. Most processes do not develop in isolation but interact with others, thus causing apparent irregularities. One such process concerns the existence of the species Homo Sapiens. The task of a theoretically minded historian is to find out the common laws and regularities, as well as the causes and the phases of the process in question. We should also try to find the causes of deviations, and the origin of the particular forms of existence of the Homo resulting from the general laws.

The process of the history of mankind can best be likened to the flow of a river. It has a source; at the beginning it is no more than a brook, then come broader reaches; stagnant backwaters and off-shoots, rapids and waterfalls may occur. The flow of the river cannot be completely accidental but it is conditioned by many factors. These are not only the general laws of gravitation and molecular physics but also the particular qualities of its banks which differ in their chemical composition and geological structure; the configuration of its bends, which is conditioned by the soil and the environment; one current overlaps with other currents, and they carry different organic and non-organic admixtures. Whether the metaphorical analogy between history and the flow of a river is sufficient to allow us to suppose that the river of history will finally fall into a historical sea, or the historical process will be brought to an end by the intervention of some still unknown forces is something which it is difficult to prognosticate.

Through all these phenomena one can discern the action of certain main laws or regularities. But the regularities of the historical process which are discernible at present and are dealt with in the present book may be regarded as regularities in the Humean sense, i.e. an event may cause another event without there being necessarily an original link between them.

During the twentieth century Historians have tended to downplay the idea of regular laws of historical development; their task, as they conceived it, was to examine particular factors of this development, or to pursue the implications of a theory like the one put forward by A. Toynbee whose idea, in brief, postulated a sequence of crises and declines in civilisations which were more or less autonomous and causally unconnected. Such an approach is unproductive and has recently gone out of favour.

Western historical science of the later twentieth century empirically elaborated a certain general periodisation of social structures. Pre-industrial (Primitive, or Pre-Urban, and then Early Urban), and Industrial, after which it is thought that a Post-Industrial society has to emerge. Such a classification, to be sure, accords with the facts, and in this respect is acceptable; but it has the important drawback of disregarding the principle of causation; however, since Aristotle, science has been perceived in terms of cognition of causes; and in spite of the growing complexity of modern epistemological constructions, this definition of science certainly remains correct.

From the point of view of causality, the theory of socio-economic formations outlined more than 100 years ago by Karl Marx and restated (and partly distorted) in 1938 by Stalin,[1] has certain advantages. According to this theory, productive forces, i.e. technology in combination with its producers as a social category, develop so long as the relations in production which exist in the society satisfy their requirements. When this condition is violated, the development of productive forces slows down, bringing about an upheaval and a change of the relations in production, and thus one social epoch is replaced by another. Marx distinguished the following 'modes of production': the Asiatic, the Antique, the Feudal and the Bourgeois (or the Capitalist), these being 'the progressive epochs of the social formation'. The later Marxists applied the term 'social formation' not to the entire history of the social development but to each of the epochs which were now termed 'socio-economic formations'. They identified five such 'formations', viz. one pre-class formation (Primitive), then three class, or antagonistic formations (Slaveholding, Feudal and Capitalist), and, in the future, a Communist formation, whose first stage is Socialism.

When Marx said 'capitalism', he of course meant a mode of production in which the bourgeois minority exploits the working majority (the proletariat); he regarded this mode of production as a stage in the history of mankind which, as we now can ascertain, was correct. Not limiting himself to the proposed periodisation, Marx explained it by resorting to Hegel's idea of motive contradictions. For the three antagonistic formations, this motive contradiction was that between the exploiting and the exploited classes. The weakness of the Marxist concept lies first and foremost in the fact that no convincing motive contradiction had been found either for the first, pre-class society, or for the last, supposedly Communist formation.[2]

1. I am using the Russian edition of Marx's Collected Works which is more accessible to me: K. Marx, *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ekonomie*, in K. Marks and F. Engels, *Sochineniya*, 2nd edn, vol. 13, Moscow, 1959, pp. 7–8; cf. *Kratkiy kurs istorii VCP(b)* [by I. Stalin], Moscow, 1938, p. iv. The introduction into scholarly use of the notion 'Slaveholding formation' by Stalin (or his consultants) is mainly to be traced to V. V. Struve's works dating from the early 1930s.
2. Here I am referring to an inconsistency in the use of principles which a scholar has himself accepted as obligatory. If any movement is the result of a conflict of opposites, as taught by Marxism, then this is a natural law which has to be applied always, be it in physics, in cosmology, or whatever. However, in modern physical science movement is not regarded as a conflict of opposites. The attempts of Marxist philosophers to defend Hegel's concept of movement against the physicists must be regarded as futile. As we shall see below, also in history, the notion of movement as a conflict of opposites cannot be accepted.

Therefore, the Communist formation was conceived in terms of a completely harmonious future – an idea which goes back to Christian apocalyptic eschatology and does not tally with the materialistic explanation of the historical process.

At present, in the last decade of the twentieth century, it cannot be doubted that the Marxist theory of historical process, reflecting as it does the realities of the twentieth century, is completely out of date; not only because the hypothesis of a coming Communist phase is poorly founded, but also because of other errors, both theoretical and purely pragmatic. To Soviet historians of the antiquity, ever since the second discussion on the so-called Asiatic formation during the 1960s, it became obvious that the exploitation of slave labour in production was not the motivating factor of the ancient social 'formation'. Although doubtless there was a considerable number of slaves in Antiquity, and also in the early Middle Ages and later, it was only briefly in the history of the 'Antique' societies, especially in Rome during the Late Republic and Early Empire, that slave labour was a dominant factor in production. This secondary role of slave labour appears clearly in the works of L. B. Alaev, O. D. Berlev, E. S. Bogoslovsky, M. A. Dandamaev, V. P. Ilyushechkin, N. B. Jankowska, Yu. Yu. Perepelkin, A. A. Vigasin, K. K. Zelyin, and my own writings;[3] it also follows from a close study of the works by A. B. Egorov, G. S. Knabe, E. M. Shtaerman and many others.

But not only was the slaveholding 'formation' not slaveholding; the feudal one was not feudal. Marx introduced the term 'feudalism' for a certain stage of the historical process only because in the nineteenth century he could have had only very imprecise and vague notions of medieval society in Eastern Europe and in Asia. A feud (also called fee or fief) is a land-holding or a right of income which has been granted to a vassal by his suzerain on the condition of serving him in war and paying him a tribute. This was the system of organising the medieval ruling class characteristic of Western Europe before the epoch of the absolute monarchies, but the system, in this form, was not so usual for perhaps most of the other medieval societies outside the Western European political tradition. Therefore to call every medieval society 'feudal' means describing the whole world in terms of what happened in Europe. I do not think this term is worth preserving.

Unlike the feud, relations between labour and capital have been and are historically universal. However, while capital as such can exist in different historical 'formations', Capitalism as a system is, to be sure, a phenomenon which appeared only after Medieval society. But is it possible to use the term 'capitalism' to denote a society where not only the capitalists, but also the proletariat is in the minority, while the majority of the population is employed in the services sector? Such is

3. In the *History of the Ancient World* edited by I. S. Swencickaya, V. D. Neronova and myself (three Russian editions: 1980, 1982, 1989; an American edition of vol. I, Chicago University Press, 1992), the authors still maintained the concept of a slaveholding society, but mostly with certain reservations: thus, in the chapters written by myself, the exploited class of the ancient society is mostly characterised not as 'slaves' but as 'slave-type dependent persons', 'helots', etc.

the composition of the most developed modern societies. Western scholars call these societies Post-Industrial, and we must of course define them as Post-Capitalist.

Note that when Marx defined (in the first volume of *Das Kapital*) the ratio of the surplus value (approximately *c.* 100%), it was only a rough estimate. Moreover, from the third volume of *Das Kapital* we learn that this 100% is by no means totally consumed by the capitalist; they include the cost of renovation of the equipment (machinery), advertisement, land rent, repayment of credits, etc. If, as was recommended by the fanatical leaders of workers' groups, the capitalists were dispossessed of the surplus value, the new masters would, first, still have to deal with the cost of production; and secondly, the limited percentage of the surplus value which was the private income of the not-so-numerous capitalists, if divided between the numerous workers, would increase their wages only a little, perhaps less than by 1 per cent; but actually it would be necessary to spend it on paying not the workers but the administration, which now would have to fulfil all the organisational operations needed for production. This is what occurred in the new society built by the Marxists, where not only all the surplus value but a considerable part of the necessary produced value is consumed in this way.

Let us pose a question regarding the modern so-called 'capitalist' society: can the surplus value created by the labour of the few workers who belong to the proletariat suffice to support not only the class of capitalists but the whole giant service sphere? The amount of value of a commodity depends on the amount of labour which is socially necessary for its production. But for production, not only socially necessary is the labour of the turner working the metal with his lathe, or the stoker putting coal into the furnace, but also the labour of the inventor which has resulted in making the lathe and the furnace, and the labour of the scientist who created the possibility for the latter's inventions through basic research; that is, not only blue-collar but also white-collar labour is needed. And if the amount of the value depends on working time, then we must also include in it the time spent on creating the very possibility for the worker to labour at his job, including the time spent on fundamental research.

The Marxist theory of 'formations' in the form it was given by Marx and Stalin has another serious drawback as well: it does not even consider the mechanism of change from one socio-economic 'formation' to the next. But the apparent discrepancy between the development of productive forces and the character of the relations in production does not automatically bring about a change of 'formations'. To the question about the mechanism of change the Marxists of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth answered, that such a mechanism is revolution, i.e. a violent upheaval: 'violence is the midwife of history'. This, however, from the point of view of world history, is incorrect. No violent upheaval divides Primitive society from Antiquity, nor Antiquity from the Middle Ages. As to Capitalism, this is a stage in world history which set in as the result of a revolution only in one country,

viz. in France. In England the bourgeois political revolution occurred in the seventeenth century, the industrial revolution, i.e. the change from one system of production to another, occurred in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth, but the real power passed to the bourgeois class only after the parliamentary reform of 1832, and even then not at once. In Russia, capitalism began taking root after the reforms of the 1860s; as for the bourgeoisie, this class might have come to power as a result of the revolution of February 1917 but did not. In Germany capitalism was the result of reforms, in America and Italy a result of war of liberation which cannot be termed a revolution in the strict sense of the word. And what about Egypt? Or Scandinavia? Or Thailand?

But whether or not we accept the doctrine of Marxism, the historical process in any case remains a natural process which has its own laws of development. History is a complicated unfolding of socio-economic factors in close connection both with technological and socio-psychological changes. If Marxism, one of the great doctrines of the nineteenth century, shows certain important limitations from the point of view of the twentieth century, this does not imply that we should immediately reject any Marxist statement and seek for all answers elsewhere, e.g. in Orthodox Christianity, although Christianity, of course, has its own theory of history, which, by the way, had a decided influence on Marxism, as well as the other social theories of the nineteenth century.

In our time, all concepts of historical development share, in principle, one important drawback: they are all based on the idea of progress, and of progress unlimited in time at that. This idea goes actually back to the Christian concept of the future as an immutable 'God's kingdom on Earth', which, in its turn, goes back to the historicism characteristic of Judaism, the ancestor of both Christianity and Islam.[4] Historicism was absent from Graeco-Roman philosophy, and from the philosophy of the Renaissance: we do not encounter it either in the works of Montaigne, or Spinoza or Descartes or Leibniz, and it exists only in embryo in the works of Francis Bacon.

Up to the eighteenth century all European thinkers regarded Classical Antiquity as the highest point of historical development. The idea of mankind improving everlastingly can be traced to the authors of the eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie* – to Diderot and D'Alembert;[5] but the concept of certain consecutive stages of an endless progress, in which the next stage after ours, a stage not yet reached by mankind, is to be the absolutely most perfect, was first formulated by Marquis de

4. See *Istoriya drevnego mira*, ed. I. M. Diakonoff, I. S. Swencickaya and V. D. Neronova, 3rd edn, vol. III, Moscow, 1989, p. 152 (the chapter was written using data supplied by S. S. Averintsev). Unfortunately, I had no opportunity to get acquainted with the work of Fr. Fukuyama.
5. We are (rightly) accustomed to regard the authors of the *Encyclopédie* as anti-clerical; but, perhaps it is worth while to remember that both Diderot and D'Alembert were pupils of Jansenists, i.e. of Catholics who were in opposition to the Pope's authority, and who stressed the importance of free will as against a general hopeless predestination. It is hardly possible to doubt the influence of Christian values upon the authors of the *Encyclopédie*.

Condorcet, who was active in the French Revolution. We find it in his posthumous work *Esquisse d'un tableau historique de progrès de l'esprit humain*, written in 1793, published 1795 (Condorcet died in prison).

From Condorcet the thread can be traced, first of all, to Saint-Simon, who regarded history as a sequence of positive and negative epochs, the positive factor gradually increasing. From Saint-Simon it can be traced to Marx. Another source of the idea of progress is the philosophy of Hegel, which influenced Marx most directly; in his younger years Marx was actually a Hegelian. As for Hegel himself, he began as a Lutheran theologian and the author of the book on the '*Spirit of Christianity*'. He was always a believer, although his philosophy, which developed only gradually, seemed to have lost its more obvious theological influences. Hegel had an enormous influence not only on Marx,[6] but indeed on all philosophical thought of the nineteenth century. Such influential philosophers of the first half and the middle of the nineteenth century as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer (for whom progress was, at least at the time, 'not accidental but necessary'), and John Stuart Mill, were all proponents of the idea of progress. The possibility of unlimited progress was something self-evident to men and women of the second half of the nineteenth century and the whole of the twentieth century, and this in spite of the law of conservation of energy formulated as early as the 1840s by Mayer, Joule and Helmholtz.

In the mentality of man the notion of progress is connected to basic social impulses, and it is necessary for cognition and reproduction. But we should not use this notion – from the field of social motivation – to evaluate the natural process as a whole, where unlimited progress, an eternal progress (which, of course, involves expense of energy) is a case of perpetual motion and contradicts the basic natural laws of conservation.

From the energy conservation law it follows, that accretions on one side are paid for by losses on another, i.e. each form of progress is simultaneously a form of regress: there is no progress without loss, and the more one progresses, the more one loses.

Historical changes can be observed most clearly in the realm of technology. Its development partly depends on how far the products of the environment and the society can at any point be exploited by man, and partly on the continuing development of the cognitive functions of the brain conditioned by its physiology. The

6. As is well known, Marxism has 'three roots and three sources', these being classical German philosophy (read: Hegel), English political economy (read: Adam Smith), and French Utopian socialism (read: Saint-Simon; Fourier did not play any major role). In our exposition we have not dwelt on Adam Smith. He also distinguished three stages in the development of natural economy: that of agriculture, that of manufactories, and that of international commerce. But (in Book IV of *The Wealth of Nations*) he pointed out only that the first stage was the most 'natural', and did not prophesy the advent of future social harmony. Therefore, for the correct appreciation of Marxist theory of history and its origins, only Saint-Simonism and Hegelianism are important.

possibilities of cognition are so far not threatened by extinction; cognition is not going to discontinue in the expected future, and for the time being it can be regarded as unlimited, although actually it is not; any unlimitedness is impossible as a matter of principle.

But when public figures and historians discuss progress, they are usually thinking not so much of the progress of thought and technology but of a progress of the human society as a whole, of the conditions of its existence, of the accessibility of material goods, etc. Here again an unlimited or even an uninterruptedly linear progress is hardly possible.

Therein lies hope for mankind, because unrestricted technological progress has already brought humanity to the brink of ecological hell, which neither Marx nor the other thinkers of the last century and a half had envisaged.

Marxist theory considers technology not *per se* but as a part of the productive forces which are thought of as manifestations of the human (personal) and material (technological) factors which realise the interaction between man and nature in the process of social production. But the development of personal relations in the process of production can (I should say 'must') be viewed not only in the realm of immediate productive activities, but also in the realm of social consciousness and the motivation of productive (and other social) acts, i.e. social psychology.

Therefore I shall try to identify the compatibility of each system of relations in production not with the complex category of productive forces, but, first, with the level of technology, and, secondly, with the state of the socio-psychological processes. The social activities of man depend on their socio-psychological evaluation. But this means that any passage from one type of economic organisation to another must be accompanied by a change in social values, even if the change does not involve the principles of social relations but is limited to ethnic or religious (ideological) changes, or even to differences inside the strata of society. What has been an anti-value must become a value, and what was a value must become an anti-value. Such a change cannot all at once involve the masses: in order to start them moving, emotional and strong-willed leaders are needed (this is the phenomenon called 'passionarity' by L. N. Bumilev).[7]

The mental realisation of the fact that the existing system of relations in production (or of the character of the state, or of the character of ideology) limits the possibilities for the development of productive forces does not immediately lead to a change of this system, whether forcible or gradual. Actually only the development of a new technology of the industrial society is impossible without a corresponding drastic restructuring of the relations in production; but also here the passage to a

7. In his book, *Etnogenez i biosfera zemli* (Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere), L. V. Gumilev suggests another explanation, which I think is wrong. Although one may agree with his definition of 'ethnic unit' as a phenomenon, the importance which the author ascribes to ethnicity in the creation of what he calls 'passionary situations', is very much overestimated.

new system is not always a social revolution, and is not always synchronised with a technological revolution. This is all the more true of the earlier systems of relations in production. The appearance of a metal ploughshare and a steel axe actually led to a change in the organisation of production, and even to the territorial spread of civilisations. But the same primitive ploughs were used without substantial improvements from the end of the fourth millennium BC (in Sumer) until the nineteenth century AD (for instance, in Russia). The change of the metal used for the ploughshare (steel instead of bronze or copper) did not imply any direct radical change in the state of the society. Also mining did not change radically from the beginning of the Age of Metal to the beginning of the capitalist epoch. In handicrafts, certain innovations (as, e.g. the invention of the vertical weaving-loom, the diamond drill, etc. etc.) are not directly connected in temporal terms with systemic changes in society. An important influence on the development of society was ascribed to the introduction of steel implements, which allowed to widen considerably the territory of tilled land. Of great historical importance was the progress in shipping. However, neither of these technological innovations can be synchronised with the changes in the socio-economic structure of the society of mankind as a whole; the results of these inventions were felt only very gradually.

There exists only one technological field where progress has a direct influence on the change of relations in production. This is progress in the production of arms.[8] Where there are no high quality arms, no class society can exist (and not even its forerunner, the stage defined by modern anthropologists as chiefdom society[9]). A warrior who is in possession of the kind of arms which can be produced at the stage of the Chalcolithic or the Bronze Age cannot organise mass exploitation of slaves of the classical type: for each slave with a copper or bronze implement an overseer would be needed. But one can exploit whole groups of classical-type slaves when the warrior has a steel sword, a steel coat of armour, a proper helmet and a shield. If in due time one had to abandon the exploitation of classical-type slaves, the reason would not be any kind of revolution in the productive forces (i.e. in technology), but the low productivity of slave labour. A warrior on horseback, with his horse covered with armour, and armoured himself, and, later, based in a new architectural invention, a fortified castle, could provide for the exploitation of peasants, who in the preceding epoch themselves made up the main mass of warriors. What brought about the end of the Middle Ages was not so much the great geographical discoveries (although certainly they played an important role), as the cannon which brought the role of the medieval knight to an end and made the industrial enterprise more important than the agricultural one, not to speak of the handicrafts. The nuclear bomb shall (if the human race survives) provide for the world-wide institution of post-capitalist society. This

8. This had already been noted by F. Engels in the apparatus to *Anti-Duehring*, not published in his lifetime. 9. On chiefdoms, see below.

shall, of course, itself be full of contradictions, and can by no means be regarded as a guaranteed future.

I should like to stress that changes in military technology do not of themselves cause a change in the relations in production (social relations). It is caused only by changes in technology in combination with a change in value orientation. And contrariwise, a change in value orientation will not produce a change in social relations, unless combined with an actual or imminent revolution in the technology of the production of arms.

Basing ourselves on these issues, we can distinguish eight Phases of the historical process, each of them characterised by its own system of social values (an ideology), and its typical level of military development. One Phase is divided from the next without a distinctive threshold, certainly not by a revolutionary upheaval, but by a transitional period of different duration, which continues until all the necessary symptoms diagnostic of the next Phase are developed. This period between the Phases we shall call Phase transition. While the progress in the production of arms expresses itself promptly in military events, which are the traditional and always spectacular contents of narrative history, socio-psychological changes underlie everyday life and are expressed in religion, lexical changes and works of art. In each chapter we have cited the most important artists and thinkers whose work provided for the necessary socio-psychological changes for the Phase in question; but to give a detailed account of their work or render the dramatic movement of their ideas through time fall outside the task and scope of our brief outline of the historical process.

Human creativity, in both fields, technology and ideas, is aimed to avoid 'discomforts', specific to each Phase but emerging always on the same natural basis. The effort of creativity, productive forces in the broadest sense, is made in quest of stability, of procuring the possibility of peaceful reproduction; but, being creative, they shall, at a certain point, inevitably discredit this stability. Then we can observe, on one hand, new technological inventions applied in the military field, and on the other, a change in current social values. The Phase transition has thus begun.

The unity of the laws of the historical process is made apparent also because they can be identified in Europe as well as on the other extremity of Eurasia: in the nearly isolated island chain of Japan which experienced neither the Crusades, nor the Turk or Mongol invasion; and also, e.g. in South America, and so on. These examples allow us to check the periodisation of the historical process as suggested below with a sufficient measure of strictness.

1 First Phase (Primitive)

For the earliest periods in the history of *Homo sapiens* only a technological periodisation is possible: the Palaeolithic period, the Mesolithic period (chiefly attested in the western part of the Eurasian continent), the Neolithic period. The actual life of the Late Palaeolithic man might have been observed in the instance of the aboriginal population of Australia; however, the very imperfect observations date mainly from the time when the societies of the Aboriginals had already been radically disrupted by the mass immigration to Australia from Europe from the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the most interesting pieces of evidence comes from a nearly illiterate Englishman, who was sentenced to transportation to Australia, fled from the colony and lived among the Aboriginals for decades, spending the end of his life in one of the towns of Eastern Australia. He told his story to a chance journalist. Scientific research, however, began only at the very end of the nineteenth century. It might seem that the Palaeolithic state of the Australian Aboriginals, at an epoch when Europe and America had reached the high level of capitalist development, might attest not only to social but even to biological backwardness. This is not the case. The epoch of the class development of mankind occupies no more than 1 or 2 per cent of the existence duration of the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*.[1] Thus a technological lag of only 2 per cent – let us say a

1. The problem of the development of modern man (genus *Homo*, species *sapiens*, subspecies *sapiens*) from certain preceding forms is still being discussed. If the hallmark of 'wise man' is the ability to create at least primitive tools, and to use fire for his own benefit, then already the so-called *Sinanthropus* of China must be regarded as belonging to the genus *Homo sapiens*; however, at present it is assumed that the *Sinanthropus* belonged to the same species (perhaps even to the same subspecies) as the Pithecanthropus in Indonesia, the Olduvia Man in Africa and the Heidelberg Man in Europe, who at present are usually subsumed under the denomination of *Homo erectus*, or *Homo sapiens erectus*, also called *Archanthropus*. The time of the latter's existence was the Middle Pleistocene (about 500,000–200,000 years ago); but at that period another hominid also existed (or still did exist), namely the *Australopithecus*; a late subspecies of the latter was also able to produce very primitive artefacts. Some scientists are of the opinion that the *Archanthropus* is the direct ancestor (through mutation) of modern Man, while others think that modern man is a mutant of the *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis* (the Palaeoanthropus). But the Neanderthal man is attested only from the period of the last (fourth) Glaciation, while the earliest Palaeolithic artefacts (Chellean and Acheulian) are by many students ascribed to the *Archanthropus*. If so, the *Archanthropus* should be regarded as the ancestor both of the Neanderthal and the Modern man. Then the intermediary type discovered in Palestine (Carmel, Qafzeh) should be regarded as hybrid. The problem is still debated.