and struggle, full of impediments and catastrophes. In this world of blind necessity and chance, order is only the by-product of chaos.

There is, however, a second incomparably more important aspect in nature for Marx. After nature brought forth man, it now has the cardinal function of permanently serving human society and history as handmaid and nurse. In Hegel's terms, it acted as a mediated (aufgehobener) factor in the historical evolution of the human race. Nature is no longer blind and cruel, senseless and dead. With the genesis and ascent of mankind nature itself takes on another brighter coloring as it is now a precondition and a promise of all the harmony and liberty, the power and insight of a fulfilled humanity.

Nature in the initial sense surrounds history and society as a kind of all-encompassing frame of reference serving it as an ultimate substructure. Consequently social history is - in Marx's view - not entirely complete and sufficient in itself. Not only vertically (i.e. considered at a given single moment without regard to the time dimension) is society dependent upon nature. Even horizontally (i.e. seen in terms of the flow of time), history is limited by nature insofar as at both of its ends it passes into oblivion: At the dawn of the planet, in the age of paleolithic man, history fades out into prehuman nature; at the dusk of the globe it will perish in cosmic catastrophes and universal destruction. The eternal and infinite world of nature is, however, for Marx only the background from which human history and society emerges in clear outline. Nature then becomes a subordinated and integrated element of the overall socio-historical structure.

II

However optimistic and "godly" Marx was in observing the history of man, he was just as pessimistic and godless in dealing with nature as such. In contrast to Aristotle, Leibniz, Hegel, and all the other optimistic idealists his conception of nature and hence of the universe as a whole does not constitute a structured totality culminating in a Godhead (similar to the Aristotelian "energeia", to Leibniz's "central monad", or to Hegel's "Absolute Mind"). For Marx nature is "without gods". Yet, Marx's atheism is by no means absolute and total. It definitely includes the introduction of a "God" in history. By a "God" in this context we do not mean an anthropomorphic being analogous to the god of the primitive phase of Jewish or Christian religion. Marx had as little use for such a deity as Hegel, Leibniz, or even Aristotle. Yet for Marx, as for Hegel, the structure of history is anything but purely naturalistic, materialistic, and open. Rather it is spiritualistic, dialectical, and transcendent. Marx's history has a spatially conceived unity, like a completed circle or rather like a spiral suggesting the unique and all-pervading progress of human society. In Marx's organic and universalistic view history de-