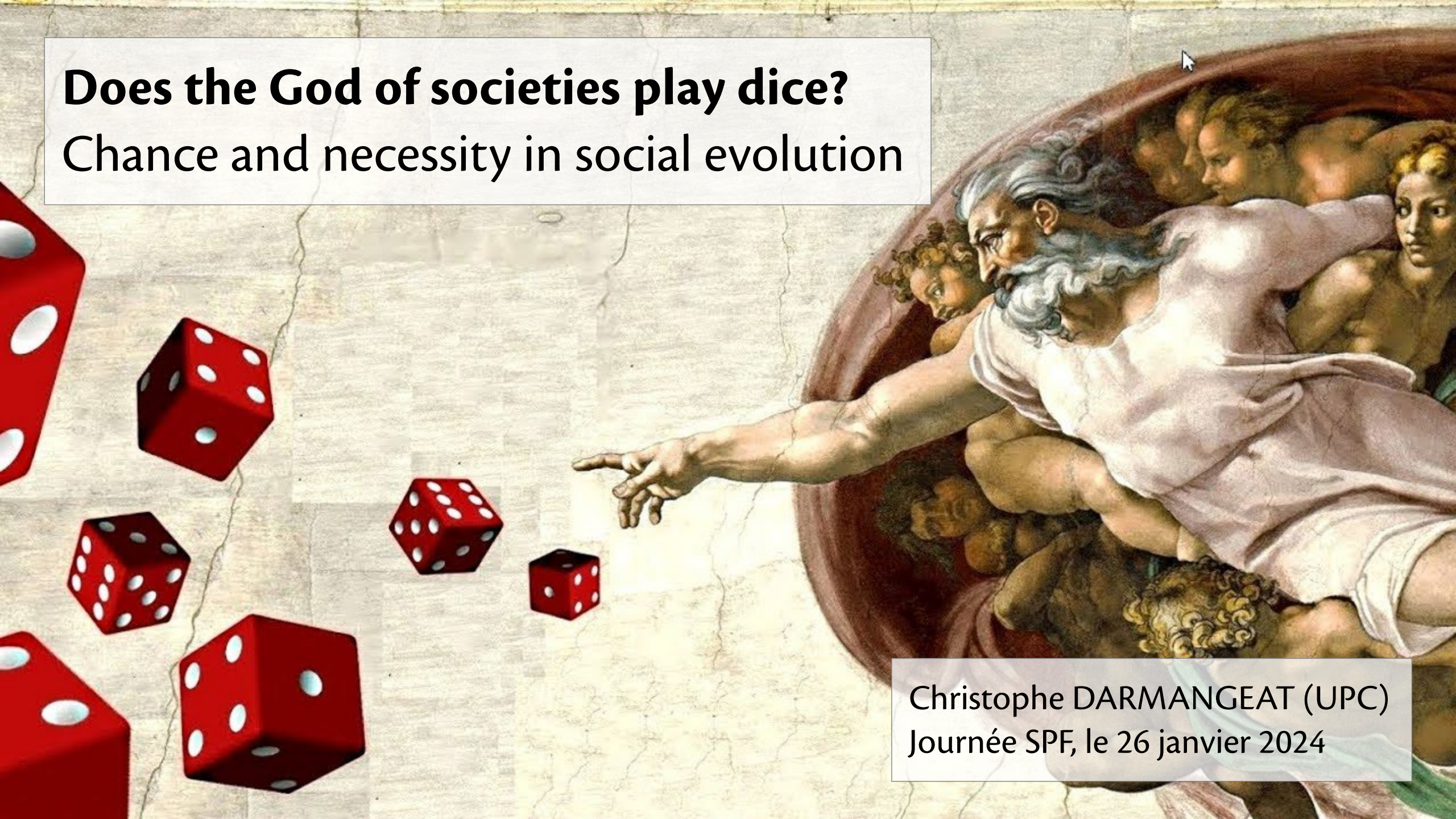


Does the God of societies play dice? Chance and necessity in social evolution



Christophe DARMANGEAT (UPC)
Journée SPF, le 26 janvier 2024

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1. Idealism *versus* materialism

1.1 What you expect is not always what you get

1.2 "An infinite group of parallelograms of forces"

1.3 A constrained imagination

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1.1 Centered points of view?

1.2 Teleology : give the deterministic dog a bad name and hang him

Conclusion: what freedom?

Three levels of issues

1. What happened? (What are the facts?)
2. What are the proximate causes of these facts?
3. What are the overall logics / principles / trends that can account for the general evolution of the system?

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Two paradigms in conceptions of history

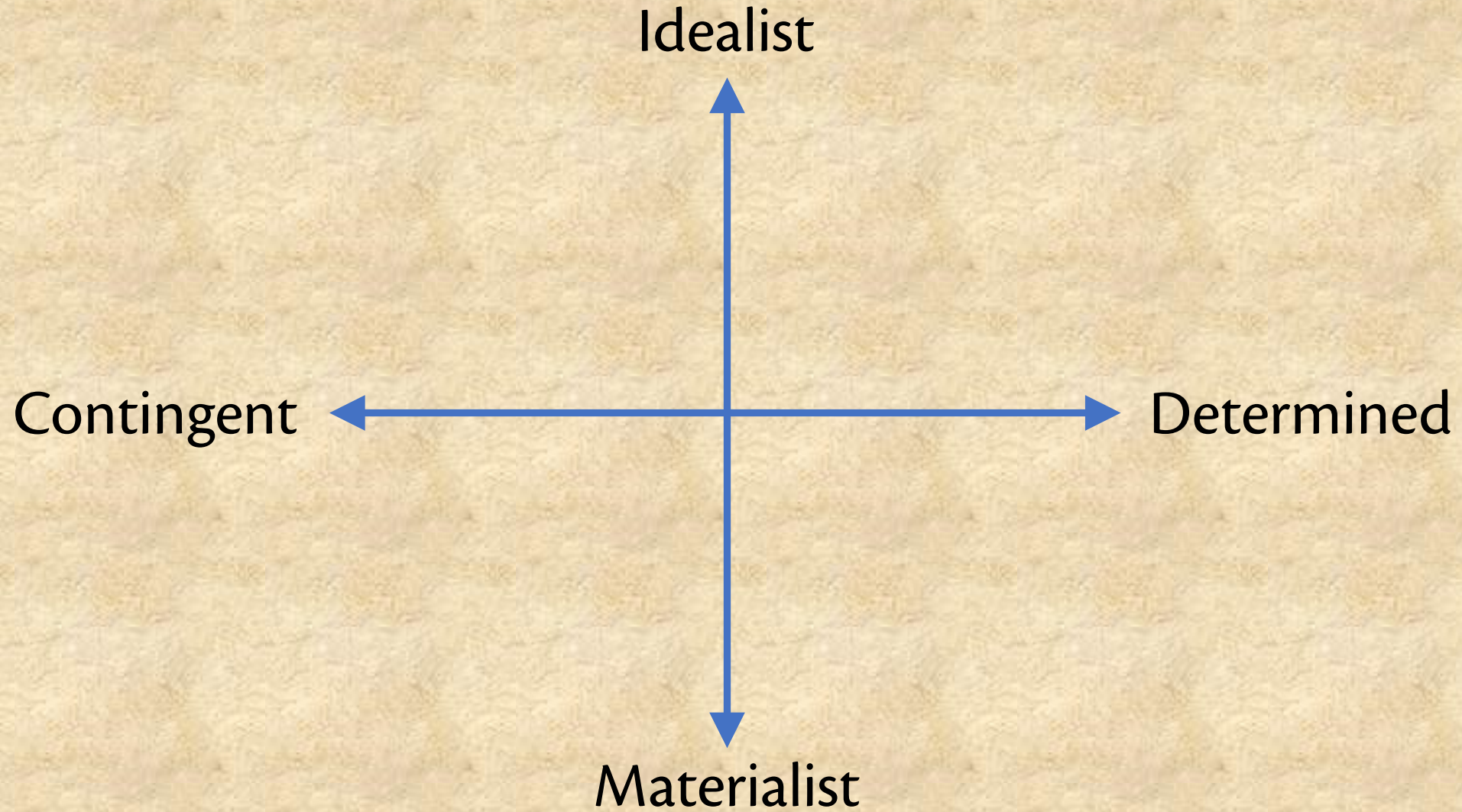
Two paradigms in conceptions of history

Idealist

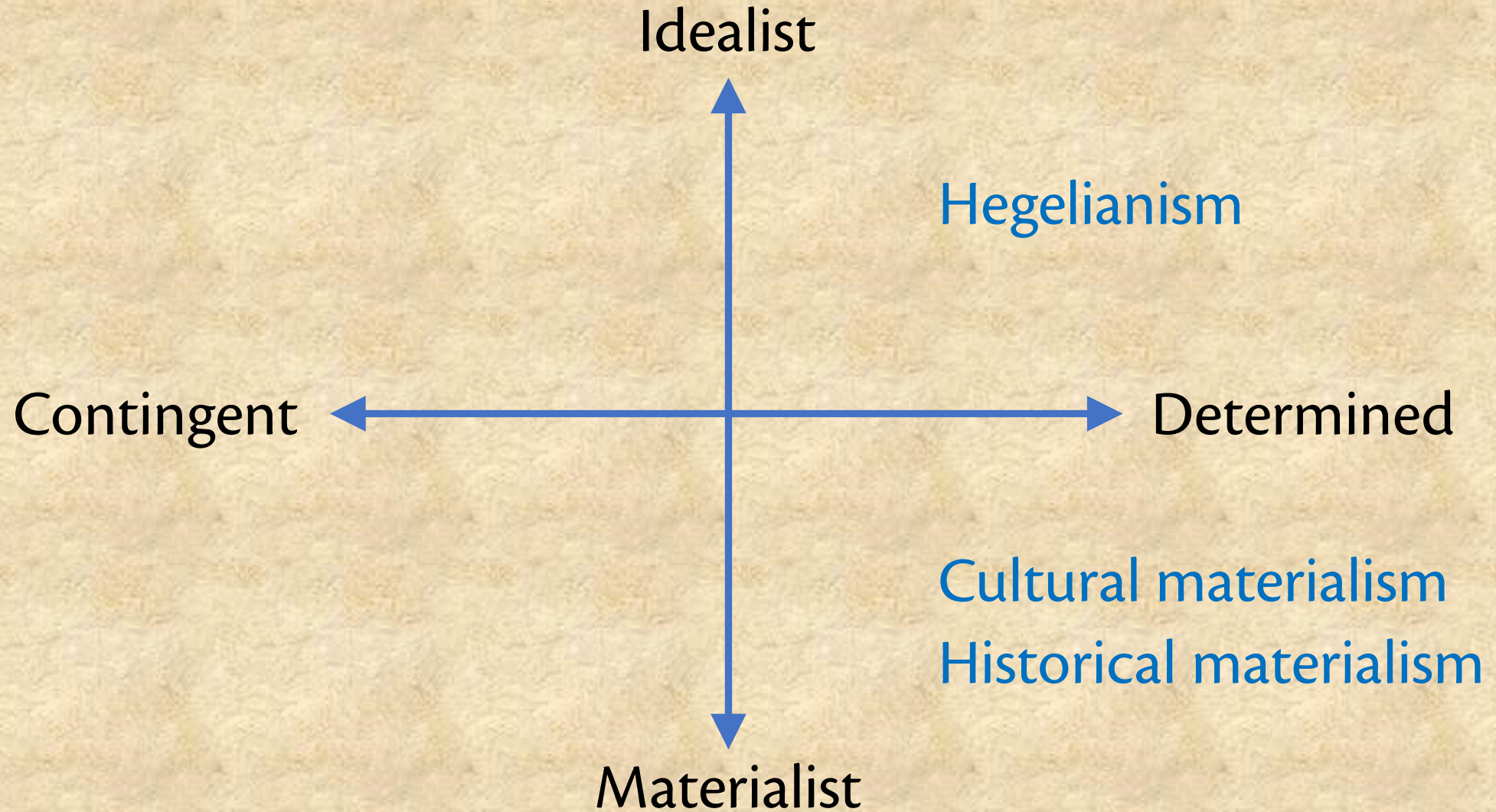


Materialist

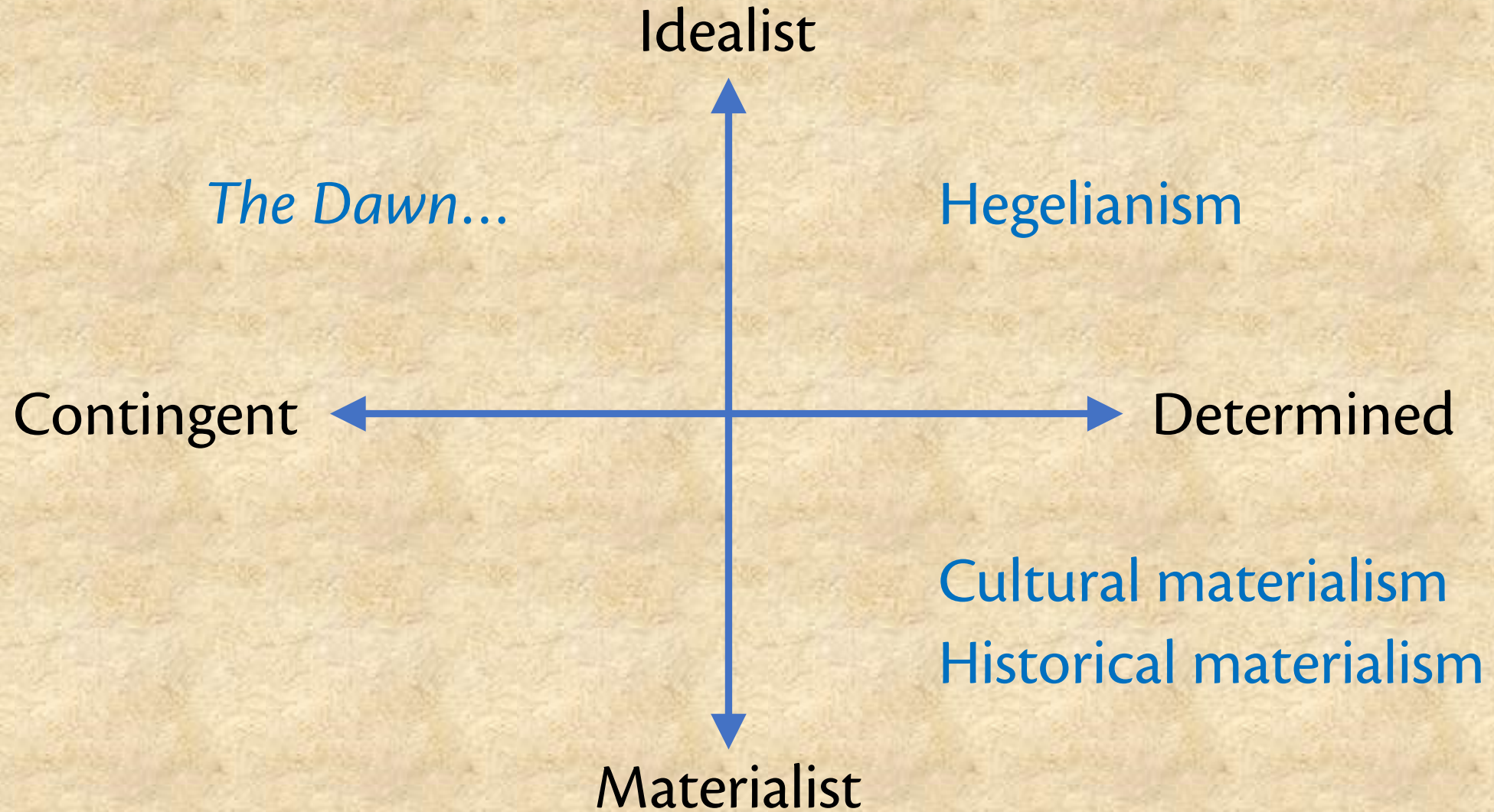
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“the concept of ~~social or cultural evolution~~ *choice* on the part of societies offers at best a tempting, but suspiciously convenient method of presenting facts”

Claude Lévi-Strauss (revised and corrected)
Race and History, 1952



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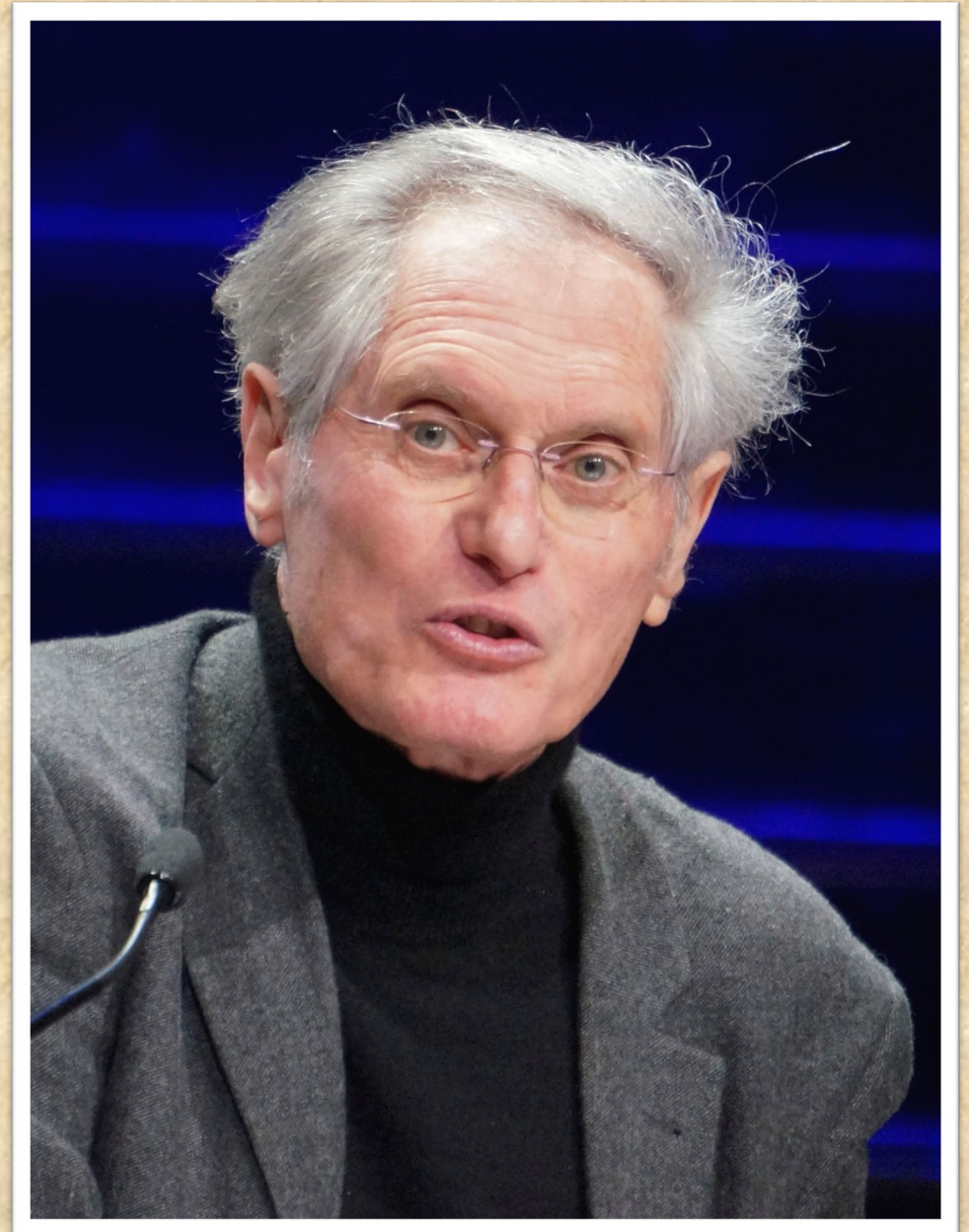
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“Paradoxically, it is with the aim of maintaining, providing for or re-establishing rigorous parity between individuals and groups that New Guinea societies introduce, in the form of wealth that partially replaces people, the instruments that are at the root of the beginnings of inequality. It is the desire for equality among women that men exchange that opens the door to social systems that are less egalitarian, if not downright unequal.”

Pierre Lemonnier, “En marge des femmes : la société contre le désir des hommes”, *Archéopages*, 2008.



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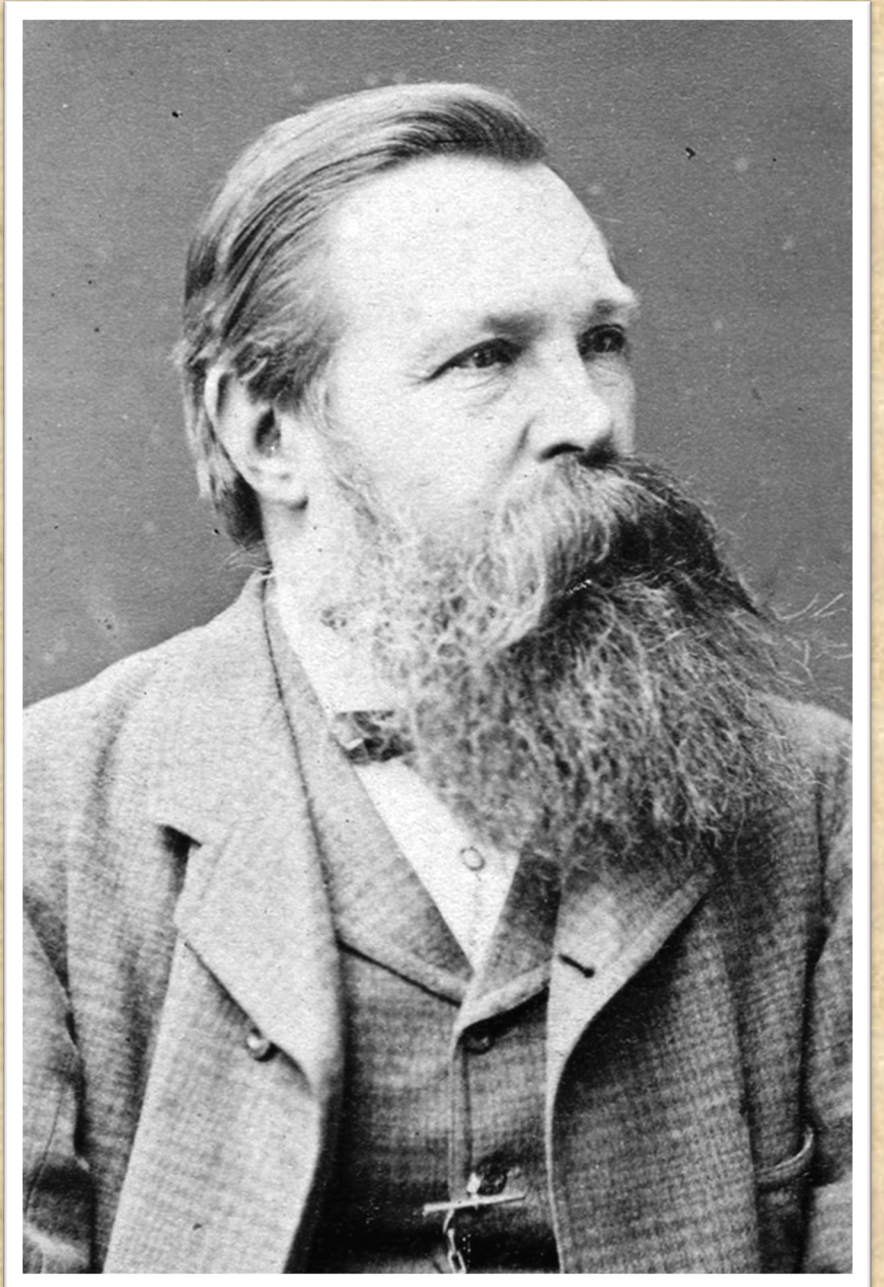
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“history forms itself in such a way that the ultimate result springs always from the conflicts of many individual wills (...) there are thus innumerable forces which cross each other, an infinite group of parallelograms of forces, from which is derived one resultant – the historical event – which in its turn again can be considered as the product of an active power, as a whole unconsciously and involuntarily, because that which each individual wishes is prevented by every other, and that which results from it is a thing which no one has wished. (...)

Friedrich Engels, letter to J. Bloch, 1890



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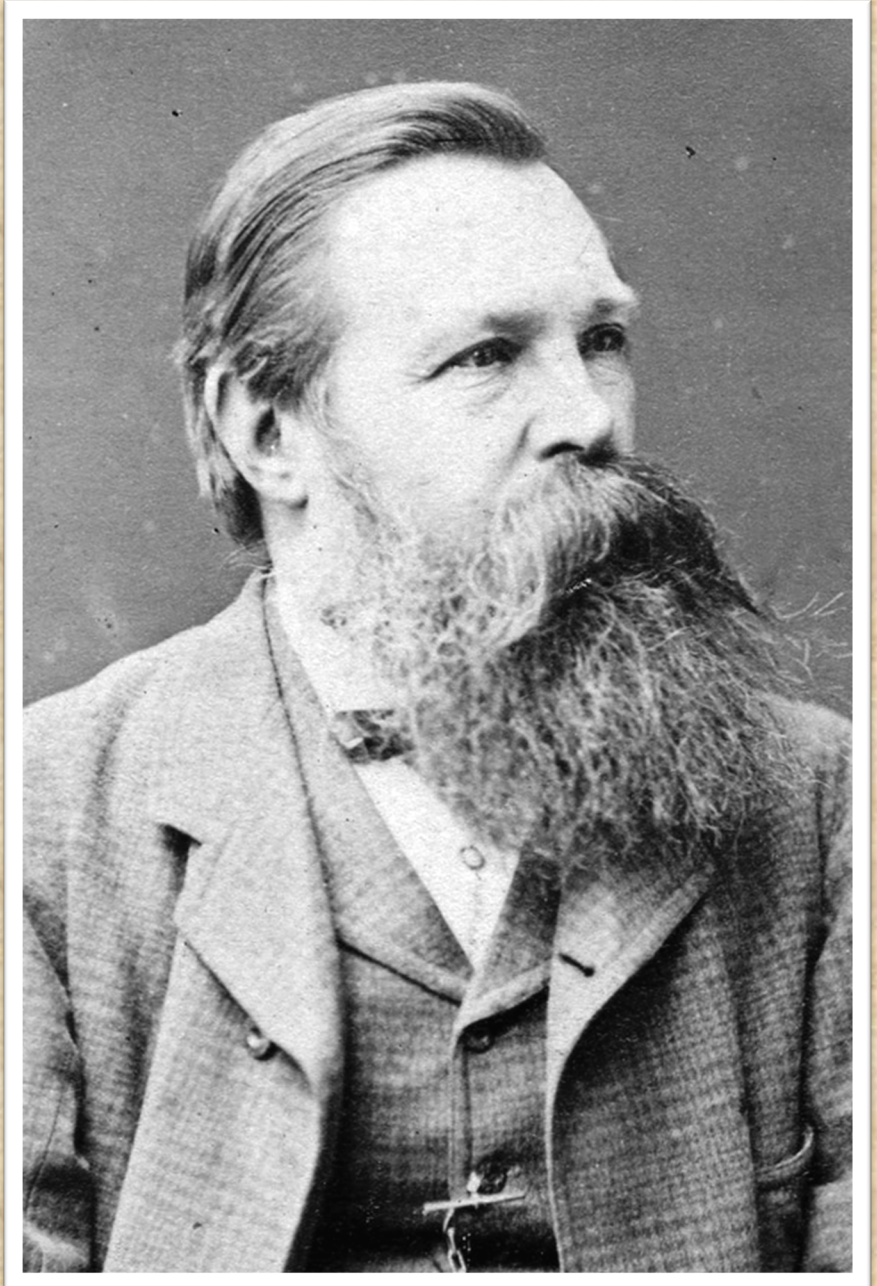
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“If Richard the Lionheart and Philip Augustus had introduced free trade instead of becoming involved in the Crusades, we should have been spared 500 years of misery and folly”

Friedrich Engels, letter to F. Mehring, 1893



Free thinking?

Two examples:

1. The 'refusal' and 'invention' of wealth
2. Gender relations

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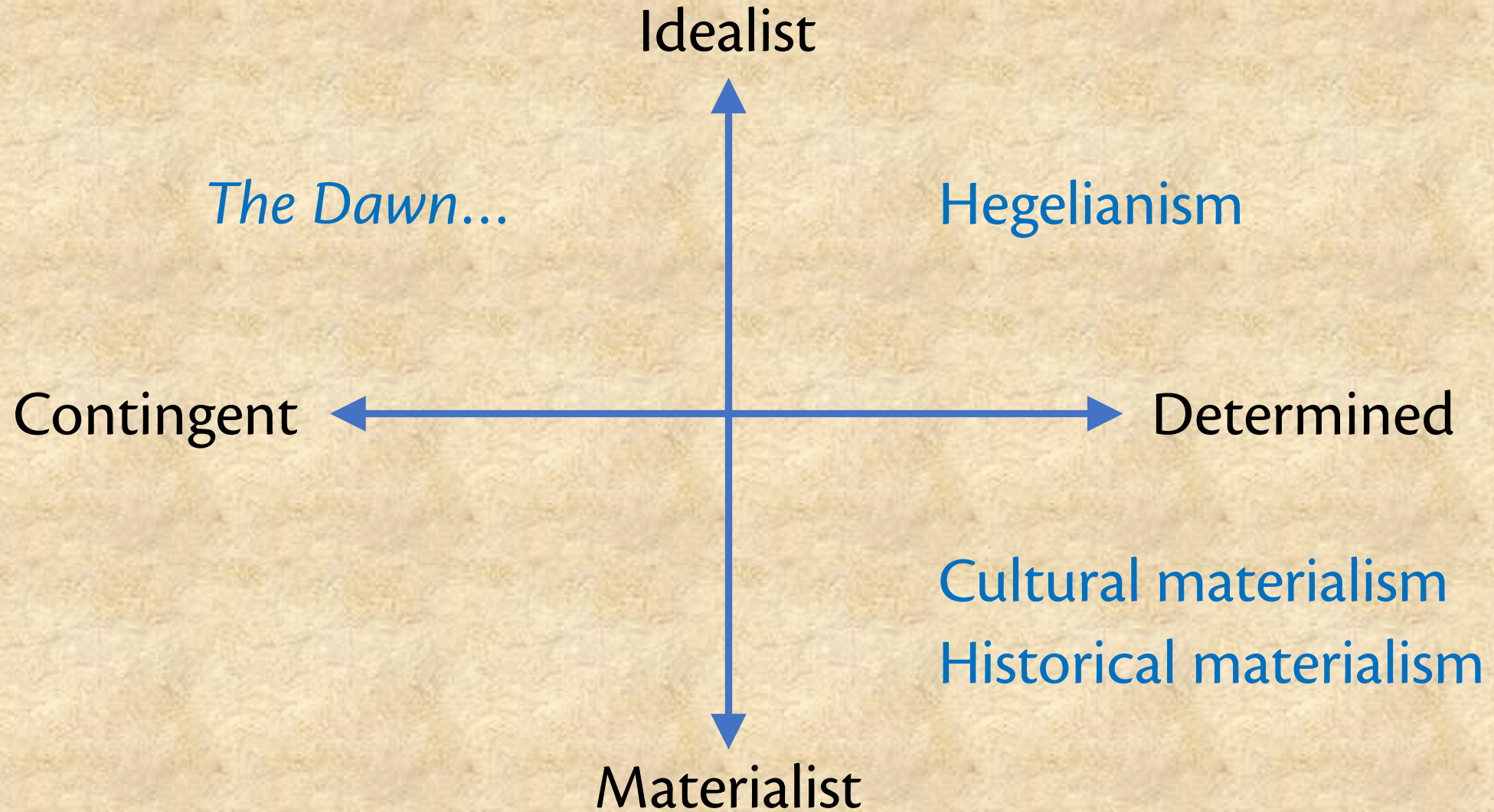
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“*We could* have been living under radically different conceptions of what human society is actually about. It means that mass enslavement, genocide, prison camps, even patriarchy or regimes of wage labour never had to happen.”

D. Graeber & D. Wengrow,
The Dawn of Everything, p. 524



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Teleology :

“to organize history in a way which does [...] imply that current arrangements were somehow inevitable.”

D. Graeber & D. Wengrow,
The Dawn of Everything, p. 449



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“But the only ‘laws’ are those we make up ourselves.”

D. Graeber & D. Wengrow,
The Dawn of Everything, p. 5



“Social science has been largely a study of the ways in which human beings are not free: the way that our actions and understandings might be said to be determined by forces outside our control. Any account which appears to show human beings collectively shaping their own destiny, or even expressing freedom for its own sake, will likely be written off as illusory, awaiting ‘real’ scientific explanation.”

D. Graeber & D. Wengrow,
The Dawn of Everything, p. 498



Tanks for your attention!