

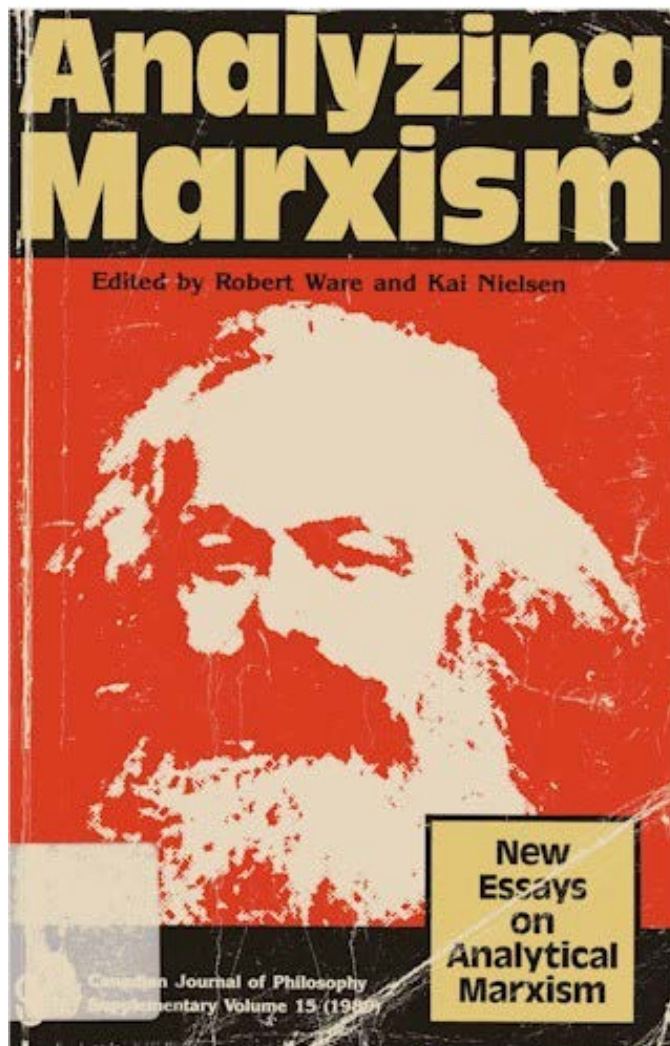
# Analyzing Marxism

## New Essays on Analytical Marxism

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# How Marxism Is Analyzed: An Introduction\*

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## I Analytical Marxisms and Their Methods

What has come to be called 'analytical Marxism' is to be celebrated when properly understood. It is a phenomenon that has engaged some of the best people in philosophy, political science, economics, sociology, and other disciplines. In the last fifteen years there has been a blossoming of analytic studies on Marx and on Marxism in the mainstreams of academic disciplines, with the first impetus coming from philosophers who had been working in the analytic tradition. During the previous sixty years of analytic philosophy virtually nothing was said about Marxism. It was not even considered worthy of philosophical attack. Bertrand Russell, who did write on Marxist topics, confined his considerations on Marx to popular texts. Karl Popper, who did take Marxism seriously philosophically, concentrated on criticisms which were in any case ignored by analytic philosophers. For some, this just reinforced the rejection of analy-

\* I am grateful to Kai Nielsen for helping me to clarify and correct several points in an earlier draft.

tic philosophy, a rejection that in Anglo-American circles was most persistent in the British journal *Radical Philosophy* and the American journal *Telos*, both of which looked to the thriving work of European Marxists.

Then in the early 70s, work began to appear in analytic philosophy using all the rigor and conceptual clarity that characterized that tradition and applying it to central topics in Marx's writings. Most notable in those very early days were G.A. Cohen's article on historical materialism (Cohen, 1970) and Allen Wood's article on Marx's moral theory (Wood, 1972). These were followed quickly by numerous articles and books on both of those subjects. In 1978 alone there were three important books with an analytic approach published on historical materialism: the books by Cohen, Shaw, and McMurtry. Around the same time, work in Marxist moral theory was flourishing, with important articles in collections by Arthur and Shaw (1978), Marshall Cohen, et al. (1980), and Nielsen and Patten (1981). All along, many of the established journals in analytic philosophy were publishing articles on various topics in Marxism. Numerous collections of articles were also being published, partly spurred on by the 1983 centenary of Marx's death. Now in 1989 there are already six volumes in the series that promotes a 'new paradigm,' *Studies in Marxism and Social Theory*, edited by G.A. Cohen, Jon Elster, and John Roemer. Publication in 'analytical Marxism' continues unabated.

This bustle of research and flurry of publication called 'analytical Marxism' must be properly understood, however. Analytical Marxism is certainly a phenomenon, but it is a mistake to think of it as anything like a movement or school. It is equally wrong to think of it as a theory or even a 'paradigm,' whatever is meant by that overworked term. The alternative names that have been suggested for this phenomenon themselves indicate the fragmentation of the work. Besides 'analytical Marxism' we have 'game theoretic Marxism,' 'neo-classical Marxism,' and 'rational choice Marxism,' depending on the author considered or the focus of attention. In this section I argue that there are different analytical Marxisms with differences of approach, method, and, to some extent, content.

The differences of approach can be seen clearly in the early self-descriptions of the leading contributors. G.A. Cohen was clear that

he was working within the constraint of 'those standards of clarity and rigour which distinguish twentieth-century analytical philosophy' (Cohen, 1978, ix) and it is Elster's assessment that Cohen did this admirably (Elster, 1985, xiv). In a similar vein, Richard Miller tries to show that 'Marx should be a classic for modern philosophy, including analytic philosophy' and correspondingly that 'the tradition of detailed, abstract and imaginative analysis in English-speaking philosophy has an enormous contribution to make to Marxist social theory' (Miller, 1984, 4 and 6; see also Miller, 1983).

Many of the contributors in this volume would agree with this aim of Marxist analysis. After all many of them have been strongly influenced by the dominant tradition in English-speaking philosophy known as 'analytic(al) philosophy,' and if nothing else they want to preserve the rigor and clarity of that tradition. Indeed, that is about all that remains that is distinctive of analytical philosophy, which began with the analysis of meaning, concepts, or language in Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, and Gilbert Ryle. It is a small irony that now when many in the tradition are writing about 'post-analytic philosophy' or going 'beyond analytic philosophy' many doing Marxist philosophy are happy to speak of analytical Marxism. It is a way to designate this phenomenon of doing Marxism using the high standards of clarity and argument that are the aim of English-speaking philosophers.

'Analysis' means something quite different to the social scientists, however. The social scientists emphasize tools and models. For example, in Roemer's introduction to *Analytical Marxism*, he claims that its practitioners use the 'contemporary tools of logic, mathematics, and model building' (Roemer, eds, 1986, 1). It is particularly the mathematics and model building that is important, in his view, for 'schematizing, simplifying, and modelling' (1; see also his introduction to Roemer, 1981). Or as the statement about the series, *Studies in Marxism and Social Theory*, claims, the books will use 'the tools of non-Marxist social science and philosophy.' This is the self-description of the social scientists. (It should be noted that almost all of the work in this series is by social scientists.)

Generally, philosophers do not use mathematics and model building, especially in studying Marxism. There are no special tools for philosophy at all. Perhaps there was a time when logic might have

been thought of as a tool. This is the sort of thing found in the writings of the logical positivists, but their appeal to tools of logic and linguistic analysis has long since been abandoned. For several decades, so-called analytical philosophers have emphasized 'the style of analytic philosophy, its conceptual resourcefulness, clarity and tolerance for detail' (Miller, 1984, 172). This is the self-description mentioned above of philosophers working in analytical Marxism.

If there is anything left to analytical philosophy, it is not a method, much less its tools, but a style emphasizing detail, clarity of interpretation, and rigor in argument. Originally in Russell and the early work of Wittgenstein there was a concern with the analysis of meaning (language or concepts) or matter. However, since the later work of Wittgenstein almost half a century ago which attacked his earlier 'analysis,' most have been persuaded that there are no atoms for philosophical analysis. This has been reinforced by W. V.O. Quine's attack on semantic analysis. Whatever the truth is in these matters, most philosophers who continue the tradition at all do not think there are linguistic or conceptual atoms to be analyzed. The history of philosophical analysis of this kind has run its course. Contemporary 'analytical' philosophy does, however, emphasize conceptual interpretation and exegesis. Emphasis on the details of implications and arguments is also distinctive, as is the case in much of the Marxist analytical philosophy.

It is difficult to find any contemporary method of analysis used in philosophy. At most there is a concern with details of meaning and of conceptual and logical implications. Whatever analysis is in the social sciences (they do not have histories of analytical movements), it is quite different from anything in philosophy past or present. For an economist like Roemer, analysis involves the application of mathematical models using the equilibrium method of neoclassical economics, about which he has no great confidence (Roemer, 1981, 10). What is more widespread amongst the social scientists is the interest in the analysis of social phenomena into individual action using some form of methodological individualism. In various ways this is found in the work of Elster, Przeworski, and Taylor. All of them have called for work in the microfoundations of individual rational choice using what has now come to be called



'rational choice theory.' (I return to this much discussed part of analytical Marxism in Section III.)

This does lead to a certain amount of agreement about content but more amongst the social scientists than the philosophers. For one thing, it is almost universal now amongst contemporary philosophers to be anti-foundationalist. It is widely thought to be misguided to think that there are any basic principles or foundations, a mistake deriving from Descartes. There are no foundations that can secure all other claims in a theory or that are preliminary to all other investigations. All theorizing must develop in coherence with the rest of our thinking. Second, many of the analytical Marxist philosophers have rejected or attacked various forms of methodological individualism, most notably Miller (1978), Cohen (1982), Ruben (1985), and Levine, et al. (1987). Unlike the social scientists, the philosophers, in general, are not enamoured of individualistic microfoundations. But it is also true that there are few things on which analytical philosophers agree, a characteristic generally true of analytical Marxist philosophers as well.

In many ways the analytical Marxism done by philosophers is not the analytical Marxism done by social scientists. (I suspect there are also differences to a lesser degree between disciplines in the social sciences themselves.) The differences between philosophers and social scientists are exhibited in the two important analytical Marxist texts on Marx's writings: the philosopher Allen Wood's *Karl Marx* (1981) and the political scientist Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx* (1985). The former is much more exegetical and conceptual while the latter emphasizes rational choice theory. It is understandable but no less amazing that Elster in his comprehensive *Making Sense of Marx* has virtually nothing to say about analytical Marxist philosophers other than Cohen and indeed does not even include most of the philosophical works mentioned above in his long bibliography. It is misleading to say in the series statement to that book and others that there is a new 'paradigm,' an overworked and ambiguous term, anyway. There is no one theory of analytical Marxism, not even one way of doing analytical Marxism. It is certainly not a movement, either theoretical or practical, with a core set of beliefs. Those who engage in analytical Marxism have all sorts of beliefs and approaches.

Still, analytical Marxism(s) is an important phenomenon. The mere existence of Marxism as an area of investigation, especially in philosophy, is important in itself. An enormous amount of work is being done in a significant area previously ignored. I think the articles collected in this volume show the value and high quality of work that can be produced. It is also important that despite the differences of approach indicated above there is important interdisciplinary work that brings diverse approaches in contact. (The interdisciplinary work is pursued in a very practical way in annual sessions in England attended by central figures in philosophy and the social sciences.) The work in this volume exemplifies this interdisciplinary contact. Although most of the contributors to this volume are philosophers, a significant portion of their work deals with the social scientists' analytical Marxism. There are also important contributions by social scientists. There is no school of analytical Marxism, but on the other hand the phenomenon has brought together diverse views and approaches more than any Marxist movement has.

Even in philosophy, analytical Marxism is a phenomenon rather than a school, or at most an approach with a distinctive style. Attention to rigor and detail is now pursued in practically every way, and virtually any form of theorizing and any position at all can be considered and assessed according to the standards of such theorizing. All theoretical methods are possible subjects for philosophical investigation with rigor and detail. These can include the methods and tools of social scientists, although as I have said these have not been the concern of analytical Marxist philosophers.

It is thus a misconception of analytical philosophy to say, as Paul Ricoeur is quoted as saying, that 'there is no method of discourse available between analytical philosophy and Marxism' (*The Guardian* [London: Tuesday, August 23, 1988]). The work that I have referred to above and the papers by analytical philosophers in this collection show that Marxism is as good a subject for analysis as any other. Some may think that there is an inconsistency between the concern for analysis and detail and the concern in Marxism for a synthesis of the whole, but it is clear that Marx is not included among those who have thought so. Marx often wrote about being analytical, even down to the 'minutiae.' (For example, see Marx, 1976, 90 in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, vol. I.) Whatever notion

of analysis there is in analytical philosophy, it is so broad that we can say with Mao Zedong that a dialectical approach 'means being analytical about everything' ('A Dialectical Approach to Inner-Party Unity,' *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung, Vol. 5*, 514). If there is an inconsistency between dialectical thinking and analytical thinking, I do not know anywhere that it has been shown. It is another question, which I discuss below, whether there are adverse tendencies in analytical approaches.

On the other hand, it must be recognized that few analytical Marxists give any importance to dialectics except as a very abstract way of talking about interrelations and change. This is one place where there is widespread agreement among analytical Marxist philosophers and social scientists. Many would include the dialectic, or at least most applications of it, among the 'increasingly discredited methods' alluded to in the series statement. There is at least a difference of attitude here between analytical Marxists and classical Marxists of various kinds. (For a sympathetic discussion of dialectics, see Wood's *Karl Marx*. Under one interpretation of dialectics, Elster also thinks it is an important Marxist contribution to preserve. See Elster, 1985, 37-48.) The neglect of dialectics will be enough for some to eschew analytical Marxism. Arguments that this neglect has led to serious mistakes are found in the papers by Sayers and by Mandel in this volume. I personally think that the questions of methodology are still too obscure on both sides to establish any inconsistency or logical faults of either method. I also think both approaches can be legitimate, although again it is important to know the tendencies of one's tools and methods.

## II What Is Left of Marxism After Analysis?

Some would say that there is little more than mere remains of Marxism after analysis. Some of the practitioners of analytical Marxism encourage this impression. Roemer is not sure that the work he supports should be called Marxist (Roemer, ed., 1986, 2). Elsewhere he says 'that the lines drawn between contemporary analytical Marxism and contemporary left-liberal political philosophy are fuzzy. This indicates there is a common core' (Roemer, ed., 1986, 200).

Elster's judgment is more severe and extreme. Among the things that he thinks Marx was wrong about and that should be rejected are 'scientific socialism, the labor theory of value, the theory of the falling rate of profit, the unity of theory and practice in revolutionary struggle, and the utopian vision of a transparent communist society unconstrained by scarcity' (Elster, 1986, 4; see also 188-94). The salient question (the question that Levine and Norman discuss in this volume) is what is living in Marxism according to analytical Marxism. If the answers are those of Roemer and Elster, it is not surprising that many would find analytical Marxism anti-Marxist. (See Schweickart [1988], Lebowitz [1988], and Burawoy [1989] among others.) However, this judgment is misplaced.

Such a general assessment is usually made with regard to the social scientists among whom there is more unity and agreement. As I remarked above, there is little if any common content in the writings of different analytical Marxist philosophers. Practically any claim made by one author is challenged by another. This becomes clear if one looks widely at the literature. Those who follow analytical approaches, especially in philosophy, take up virtually any claim as an object of investigation. Certainly all of the views above that Elster wants to reject have been defended by one philosopher or another using an analytical approach. So in the phenomenon of analyzing Marxism, most things remain and most are attacked. Some of this contentiousness and diversity of views can be seen in the essays in this volume, although not all of the contributors would identify themselves as analytical, or even as philosophers.

The prominence and comprehensiveness of Elster's *Making Sense of Marx* can mislead one into thinking that his views are those of a school but they aren't. There are deep differences even amongst those who meet annually and publish in the series of studies in Marxism and social theory. The debate between Cohen and Elster on functionalism and methodological individualism is perhaps best known. Taylor has also challenged Elster's individualism (*Inquiry* 1986, 3-10). Przeworski has challenged Roemer's account of class conflict (Przeworski, 1985, 223-38). The differences are much greater when you look more broadly at the literature available, including now the essays collected here.

There are still undeniably some positions that are widely, if not universally, held by Marxists using analytical approaches, especially Marxist social scientists. I have already mentioned the widespread rejection of dialectics. The labor theory of value is also commonly eschewed. And particularly amongst social scientists it is widely held that some form of rational choice theory based on methodological individualism should be applied. These positions are not universally held, but I think it should be recognized that their prevalence can have an effect on the direction of continuing research. I turn now to some issues in methodological individualism and rational choice theory, which have been the focus of so much attention in the literature. They are also topics of several articles in this volume.

Methodological individualism takes many forms (see Levine, et al., 1987 and Schmitt and Cunningham in this volume). On Elster's view, it is the reductionistic 'doctrine that all social phenomena . . . are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals' (Elster, 1985, 5). An ontological reason for advocating individualism is that the constituents of anything to be socially analyzed are apparently individuals. They are said to be the relevant units, the atoms, for any investigation (see Roemer, 1981, 7). A similar point is made by Elster when he says that by looking at individuals we 'reduce the time-span . . . between cause and effect' (1985, 5). Not only are individuals the atoms, but they are also seen as the only real units of social cause and effect. Thus, Elster says (Elster, ed., 1986, 3) that collectives or supra-individuals do not make rational choices, they do not decide, or presumably do anything else of interest to the social scientist. Maybe not, but no argument is given for this claim. Elster seems to be committed to saying that collectives, e.g. parliaments, cannot literally make decisions and that teams cannot win games, since only individuals do things. (I criticize this ontological stance in Ware, 1988). It is not even clear that social entities are constituted by individuals (Ruben, 1985), but even if they are, it is questionable that they are the only relevant units for theorizing.

Discussions on this topic too often seem to turn on a false dichotomy of there being only individuals or only societies with their structures. Surely it is plausible that many social institutions and other entities of different complexities should be part of the explanation. (This is sometimes suggested by Przeworski, especially in his joint

work with John Sprague. See Przeworski, 1985, 99-132. See also Taylor's work in Taylor, ed. [1988] and *Inquiry* [1986], Carling [1986], Lash and Urry [1984], and Hindess [1984] on this view.) There will undoubtedly also be other things, for example the climate, that will have explanatory impact on what happens in a society. Not everything that happens will be completely explained by the choices and actions of individuals. The point made by Levine, et al. (1987) is important. Even if societies can be ontologically reduced to individual atoms, it does not follow that explanation of social action can be reduced to explanation of individual action. Psychology is widely thought to be supervenient on physiology but not reducible to it. There is no one physiological description for each psychological description. That serves as a model for the relation between sociology and individual psychology (see Levine, et al., 1987 and Kincaid, 1986).

This leads to a methodological reason for individualism. Individualism in analytical Marxism began with a concern about crude functionalism in Marxism, the view that if something serves the ruling class then it consequently exists for that purpose. Explanations cannot be derived so simply. It may be that the mass media, for example, serve the bourgeoisie and that the existence of the mass media is accounted for by their function, but if so we need to know why or how. According to Elster, we need to know the mechanisms behind something happening. It was Cohen's argument that we do not always have to know the mechanisms or 'elaborations,' as he prefers although we may assume that there are some. It can be agreed that we can enrich our understanding by knowing the mechanisms, but it does not follow that they are only individuals or even in any way *micro*-mechanisms (*pace* Roemer, 1981, 7f and Elster, 1985, 5, but in accord with much of his explanatory practice). To know how something happens is not necessarily to know what happens with the atomic parts. That is true only if reduction is established, but it is implausible that social theory can be reduced to individual psychology. As we know from other sciences, enriching a science usually does not involve ontological reduction and often cannot be done by giving atomistic laws. But this debate both about the natural sciences and the social sciences is far from settled.

This call by the Marxist analytical social scientists for microfoundations is meant to establish the generality of rational choice explanations of social phenomena, of explanations that depend only on the rational behavior of individuals. Such rational choice explanations are frequently put in terms of self-interest and/or distribution. Even when put in the most general terms of preferences, it is not at all plausible that such rational choice explains everything. Of course self-interest (as well as other-regarding interest) of rational individuals will frequently be relevant, and in the case of some actions may be all there is. It is certainly plausible to consider how anyone might look after him- or herself. Popkin (1988) shows how incentives can be important without showing that rational self-interest is the only source of explanation. Little (this volume) also shows the importance of rationality in social explanation, along with many other factors. It is not plausible to make rational choice the whole of one's theory, however, as often seems to be the case.

Two challenges to the view that all individual behavior is the result of rational choice come immediately to mind. One might be called the Hobbesian challenge because of Hobbes' challenge: read thyself. This was his challenge to those who might doubt his view that people are always self-interested. When I read myself, however, I do not find the sort of thing that either Hobbes or the analytical social scientists claim is the whole of our nature. Nor do others appear wholly rational and self-interested. It was Hobbes who should have looked again. A second challenge to rational-choice theory might be called the paying-rider challenge. Rational-choice theory, with its constraints, has given us the clear and difficult problem of the free-rider. It is clear that it is often to my benefit to be a free-rider. But then the question immediately arises of why there have been so many people who have seemingly acted against their interests, why so many find it reasonable to dissent or even join a revolutionary movement. This raises questions about the explanatory adequacy of the theory itself. (See Ripstein, this volume.)

It has to be recognized that there are many factors other than rationality that explain human behavior. Elster mentions some of them: 'habit, tradition, custom. . . duty' (Elster, ed., 1986, 23). There are also non-rational, but nonetheless human, responses such as reacting out of depression or rising up in anger. Marx certainly

thought there is more than rationality when he talked about the courage and self-sacrifice that workers would need in class struggle. Several different factors may be involved in any one adequate explanation. Furthermore, it is not out of the question that there will also be non-intentional human behavior, for example responses of fear and nervous reaction, particularly in times of social struggle. Rational choice is surely not the only explanation of behavior. And if the point is that it is sometimes an explanatory factor, no one in their right mind would disagree. It is commonly held by rational-choice theorists that people 'by and large, behave rationally' (Elster, ed., 27), but it may be that it is closer to the truth to say that they behave rationally by and by. In any case, it is inappropriate to restrict explanations of behavior to rational choice.

As Elster admits, 'voting behaviour provides one of the strongest cases against the omnipotence of rational-choice explanation,' but he also suggests that rational-choice theory will be most useful in 'medium-sized decisions, when the alternatives differ somewhat but not greatly' and less useful in strategic and urgent decisions (Elster, ed., 1986, 14 and 20). It would seem that rational-choice theory will be less useful in the large-scale social events of the sort on which Marxism focuses. Those are also the events where strategy, urgency, and emotion are prominent. In explaining individual action, any Marxist account should look to rational choice, but many other factors as well. Of course, even then the explanatory role that there might be for collectives, institutions, and social structures should not be excluded.

### III Some Research Tendencies

Any theorizing, including Marxist theorizing, will have certain research tendencies which we would be well advised to consider. We may not be able to decide whether methodological individualism is right or to what extent we should use rational-choice explanations, but we should be more conscious of where our research programs are taking us. As I have suggested above, there is more than one research program in the phenomenon of analytical Marxism. Many 'analytical Marxists' do not accept either methodological individu-



alism or rational-choice theory, but for those who do there are tendencies to be considered. Concentrating on individuals at the expense of investigating institutions and collectives runs the risk of skewing our understanding of social phenomena. It is important to know how individuals behave, but it is also important to know about causes that can be understood only collectively if Levine, et al., are right about the irreducibility of some of our social theory.

One tendency I see of methodological individualism is an over-emphasis on the role of leaders and an under-emphasis on collective and structural factors. (I discuss this briefly at the end of Ware, 1988, but it needs much more investigation.) Elster maintains that 'leaders are always necessary. . . to coordinate collective action' (Elster, 1985, 366) and does not consider the effects of hierarchical structure, level of participation in the organization, enemy threats that encourage solidarity, and many other collective and structural matters. Much more should also be said about the way social conditions and organizations choose the leaders (cf. Mandel, 1986) and the way the rank and file affect the leaders (cf. Burawoy, 1989, 68). In my view, some of the bias towards individual leaders is found in Little's paper in this volume, but he also discusses the role of organizations.

Przeworski notes a bias of methodological individualism to 'the idea that society is a collection of undifferentiated and unrelated individuals' (Przeworski, 1985a, 393). The proletariat is thought to be composed of homogeneous rational individuals. In fact, proletarians have enormous differences, but like many other groups of people they can still unite around a common cause. There are also biases towards attributing general agreement and common feelings to all workers and away from organizational matters like the passing of motions and the establishing of goals. I also suspect a bias away from the formation and role of parties and from institutional power, which are pervasive and prominent in politics. Very little has been said about political parties and social power. These collective factors are the sorts of things that cannot be reduced, or at best with great difficulty, to individual behavior. Such biases give reason to investigate what Miller calls the 'middle level of theorizing' (Miller, 1984, 101. Another call for middle-level theorizing is found in Cunningham, 1987, 19-22. This again indicates the difference between

the Marxist philosophers and the social scientists, who emphasize microfoundations). Middle-level theorizing can reveal possibilities of explanation that we tend to overlook with an individualistic approach.

Rational-choice theory is another prevalent view of the analytical Marxist social scientists, and I have already indicated some ways in which it might be found to be biased. Besides the social factors that tend to be ignored, there are also many psychological factors such as habit, character, and emotion that are ignored. A consequence of such neglect is that it is difficult to explain the large-scale strategic and urgent events that are at the center of Marxist social theorizing. Ripstein (this volume) points also to the neglect by rational-choice theory of activity and self-identity.

An even more prevalent (but not universal) position among the analytical Marxists is the rejection of the labor theory of value. This is taken up in this volume explicitly by Mandel and implicitly by the criticisms of Roemer's theory of exploitation that it ignores disequilibria and social settings. Elsewhere, Schweickart (1988, 118) contends that 'if the project is to study development and disequilibrium, a labor-value orientation remains useful.' (Outside analytical Marxism, see Mandel and Freeman, eds., 1984 and Farjoun and Machover, 1983). The debate between Nadvi (1985 and 1986) and Roemer (1986) is also explicitly over the implications of rejecting the labor theory of value. The tendencies of rejecting the labor theory of value is an issue that I must leave to others.

Finally, I return to the question of methodology and its tendencies. In particular, I want to consider the analytical Marxist philosophers' concern with clarity of interpretation and rigor of argument. In this volume, Mandel and Sayers, more generally, criticize analytical Marxism for being undialectical. I cannot begin to take up that issue, but I can point out that very similar criticisms are made (of Roemer, anyway) by Dymski and Elliot without recourse to the dialectic. I do not want to discuss the neglect of the dialectic here. Nor is my concern with the use of tools and models of the social scientists, an issue implicitly discussed above. My concern is with the method, however diffuse, of the analytical Marxist philosophers. I have already indicated that there are virtues of considering details, but in the concentration on detail one can tend to neglect larger mat-

ters and matters of structure. This is a tendency that Schweickart attributes to 'an analytical bent.' As he says, there is a 'tendency to sidetrack discussion onto inconsequential details that do not in any way challenge capitalist hegemony' (Schweickart, 1988, 119).

There is indeed such a tendency, although the difficulty depends very much on whether we are focusing on theory or on practice. Details that are of no immediate consequence to our practice can be important or even simply relevant to developing our theory. Analysis looks for details where the theory does not give an answer. The theoretician, particularly of an analytical bent, sees lots of problems as an opportunity for sedulous investigation. This is exactly what Marx did in the British Museum. It is crucial to get the theory right, in detail. The theoretical problem is that the tendency of analysis may lead to the theory neglecting or not even being able to accommodate more comprehensive aspects or those parts left unanalyzed. G.A. Cohen has been criticized for not dealing with class struggle in his account of historical materialism. A similar criticism is made of Roemer's account of exploitation. Of course no one can discuss everything. Cohen and Roemer each contend that their theories can be integrated into a theory of class struggle, but those are contentions that will long be contested. Still, everyone agrees that the analyses have to cohere with the syntheses.

A book like Elster's *Making Sense of Marx* points to many problems that have led some to despair. I personally find many of the problems he raises challenging, not in the least discouraging, and not nearly as damaging as Elster suggests. A successful theory should throw up many questions that call for an answer, particularly if the theory is as broad as Marx's was. A profusion of questions could even be considered a sign of a theory's success. Moreover, it would be absurd to think that Marxism should get the mechanisms and elaborations right in detail. Certainly no other theory of society has come close to that. We have seen above that Elster's rational-choice theory as an alternative to parts of Marxism has its own problems of detail, for example not being able to explain voting behavior! We could even challenge the very basis of rational-choice theory by considering some of the recent work claiming that there is no psychological state of belief at all. These days, practically every position has come under attack. It is to be expect-

ed that analytical Marxists, particularly the philosophers, have found all sorts of issues to challenge and investigate.

None of this should disturb the practical person or the theoretical person in practical moments. In practical times, theoretical problems will largely be avoided and difficult details will be a nuisance. Merely recognizing the limits of the human intellect in understanding society in detail is no reason to abandon all action or demands for change. At other times and for other people, theorizing will continue. If the flourishing of critical work in analytical philosophy in general is any indication, we can also expect a continuing wealth of work in analytical Marxist philosophy.

#### IV The Papers and Issues

Not all of the papers in this collection are work in analytical Marxism. Some of the authors would not consider themselves analytical Marxists, and although most of the authors are professional philosophers some of them would not like to be called analytical in any way. In one way or another, however, the papers are *on* analytical Marxism. The subjects discussed are diverse and by no means do the papers neatly fit into the four sections we have devised. There is an interesting variety of topics, viewpoints, and approaches, as one would expect from a broad group of philosophers and some social scientists.

We begin with four programmatic papers which in different ways assess work in analytical Marxism. Andrew Levine is most friendly to analytical Marxism. Recognizing that many classical positions have been abandoned under that rubric, he raises the question of how the continuity with the Marxian tradition can be maintained. After arguing that there are several ways in which Marxism cannot be defined, he settles on the centrality of having a Marxian agenda with a commitment to communism and regards the theoretical questions largely open to theoretical developments. Although Richard Norman thinks 'analytical Marxism' is a misnomer, he claims that normative political philosophy has much to contribute to Marxism. His central point is that Marxism is incomplete and must be incorporated into a wider tradition of values for it to be a living theory. He

discusses the importance of values to class, ideology, and historical materialism.

Sean Sayers and Ernest Mandel each give unfavorable assessments of analytical Marxism. Sayers' assessment is both general and critical. He criticizes analytical philosophers for dismembering, distorting, and falsifying Marxism. He focuses on some of the central literature in analytical Marxism on moral theory and accuses it of universally being anti-historical. The source of the problems, according to Sayers, is that analytical philosophers are hostile to dialectics. Mandel is far-ranging in his critical review of Elster's *Making Sense of Marx*, a book that is often taken to be the exemplar of analytical Marxism in all its aspects. Referring to a broad range of economic and political events of the twentieth century, Mandel argues that Elster's methodological individualism ignores social processes and institutions. According to Mandel, Elster fails to understand history because he rejects the materialist dialectic and consequently fails to be a revolutionary socialist.

In this book more than any other on analytical Marxism, methodology is a focus of investigation. Section II begins with Joseph McCarney's critique of Elster's understanding of dialectics, considered by Elster to be one of Marx's central contributions. For Elster, social contradictions are about non-universalizability, a matter of formal logic. McCarney indicates various ways in which Elster's characterization of non-universalizability is obscure and fails to apply to dynamic social change. An interesting suggestion at the end is that Elster may not actually be a methodological individualist and thus need not withhold contradictions from class struggle. Daniel Little, on the other hand, argues for a methodology that is characteristic of the analytical Marxist social scientists. His paper is an argument for microfoundations in order to ground explanations of popular politics. (This view, he says, is similar but not identical to methodological individualism.) He contrasts his position with a classical class conflict theory, which he indicts for assuming too direct a connection between class structure, material interests, and collective action. In his view Marxism is strengthened by the microfoundations of values, cultures, organizations, and leaders.

Both Frank Cunningham and Richard Schmitt take up direct investigations of methodological individualism. Cunningham claims

that everyone, including Marx, accepts both individualistic and holistic explanations and argues that the differences are largely over the appropriateness to practical needs. Recognizing this, he contends, displaces much of the debate between communitarians and individualists. Cunningham tries to show the plausibility of the communitarian appeal to tradition despite the widespread criticism that tradition locks communitarians into conservatism. He argues that democracy can be a strategy of critique for breaking out of constraints of tradition. Schmitt argues that the debate for and against methodological individualism has suffered from mutual misrepresentation but that in any case methodological individualism has been a bad defence of reason, its historical concern. He locates the fundamental problem in the unacknowledged premise of psychological individualism, the premise that only human individuals think. His critique of that premise is based on the social nature of language and reason, which is ignored because of patriarchal views about the essential separateness of persons.

Section III takes up issues of economics, including some methodological questions. John Roemer's economics has been especially influential in analytical Marxism, so it is not surprising that several contributors have focussed on his work, mostly critically. Roemer has used mathematical models from neo-classical economics, traditionally the enemy of Marxist economics, to establish a general theory of exploitation. The theory is based on unfair differentials of productive assets rather than for example the appropriation of unpaid labor in the productive process, as Marxists would normally have it. Roemer has gone to great lengths to show that his definition of 'exploitation' offers a better basis for Marxist theory than a definition depending on the labor theory of value and in terms of power or domination.

In his essay for this volume, Roemer proposes amendments to his earlier definition in the light of a variety of counter-examples from his critics. He appeals to some intuitions about unusual cases that challenge the generality of abstract definitions given both by him and by others. He ends with a couple of alternatives, neither of which will work in every case but both of which depend on the injustice of property relations and which combined are claimed to be satisfactory. Roemer acknowledges unclarity of intuitions when

people's preferences or utilities differ, but Drew Christie challenges the soundness of the theory *because* of its precise formalizations and the ambiguity of 'utility.' Christie tries to show that each plausible interpretation of 'utility' is inappropriate for Roemer's conditions on distribution. He also criticizes Roemer's conditions, which are said to be too precise to account for real world flexibility of goals and practice.

In various ways, several of the contributors criticize Roemer for ignoring social aspects in the theory of exploitation. David Schweickart takes up the surprising result of Roemer's formalization of exploitation that as Roemer puts it elsewhere: 'There is absolutely nothing special about labor power. . . in its magical property of producing more value than it embodies' (Roemer, ed., 1986, 100). Schweickart argues that there is something very special about labor power. It involves a social factor which is left out by the formalism and that is separate from determinate technical factors. In the purchase of labor power, as opposed to raw materials, there is the indeterminacy of how much labor the capitalist can appropriate from the workers. The indeterminacy is resolved in social conflict, the crucial factor neglected by Roemer.

Jeffrey Reiman amends his own earlier definition of 'exploitation' to include injustice, but he takes up his earlier critique of Roemer (and G.A. Cohen), contending that Marxian exploitation must involve social force (Reiman, 1987). Against Roemer's 'distributive' Marxism Reiman defends a 'social' Marxism according to which exploitation is an unjust social relation involving force in the productive process. He uses a variety of examples to compare the alternative theories of exploitation. The conception of justice in Reiman's theory of exploitation depends on the liberal ideal of individuals being equal sovereigns. This is also an ideal that Reiman thinks should be used as a measure to compare alternatives to capitalism.

Gary Dymksi and John Elliot criticize Roemer for failing to take into account important aspects of social relations and the interaction of alienation, domination, and exploitation. They contend that the assumptions of Roemer's property definition of 'exploitation' exclude the historical development of capitalist institutions and the resulting forms of social power. Roemer, they claim, gives some logical possibilities and raises many important questions. They try to

show, however, that Roemer ignores much that was important to Marx and much that is of contemporary moral importance.

Henry Laycock takes on Marx himself on the theory of surplus value, while not contesting the labor theory of value. He shows that there are metaphysical problems with the value of labor power that is hypothesized for the supposedly equal exchange of wages for labor power. The problem turns on the difference between means of production which merely transmit their value to the finished product and labor power which is used to create new value. There is value in the means of subsistence required for labor power, but that value appears to be consumed in individual consumption so that no value is transmitted to the labor power. The theory of surplus value is undermined, he contends, by there being no value of labor power. Consequently, the exchange between the capitalist and the worker needs to be reinterpreted.

In the last section we have some excellent examples of analytical work applied to Marxism. They each take up an important part of Marx's work and carefully investigate what Marx said and/or should have said on the particular matter. Debra Satz begins with her dissatisfaction of G.A. Cohen's technological interpretation of historical materialism which explains historical development in terms of the development of productive forces. Satz contends that this view is inadequate because it ignores the moral progress towards communism, which, she argues, must be explained by objective non-moral values. To Cohen's view of history she adds the intentional mechanism of classes coming to recognize their interest in those objective values, most notably freedom. Finally, it is the free activity of each that, she claims, is the end of history in communism and the transcendence of morality.

William Shaw discusses the explanation of the ruling ideas being the ideas of the ruling class, as Marx claimed. Shaw sketches an answer where Elster thinks there is no answer (because of Marx's misplaced teleology) to a question that Shaw says has been misformulated. Some of the answer in terms of control of the media and grants to institutes is familiar, but Shaw develops it in a subtle and complex way and elaborates diverse connections with some important categories of everyday life. He also argues that the explana-



tions can be accommodated by historical materialism without widespread appeal to ruling class intentions or conspiracies.

We return to some methodological questions in Arthur Ripstein's discussion of rational-choice theory and alienation. Although he does not accuse rational-choice theory of logical errors, he does try to show why Marx would criticize it for appealing to petty bourgeois models. Rational-choice theory, Ripstein contends, suffers from a focus on distribution through overgeneralizing in marginalist terms. Consequently, it ignores non-instrumental activity, especially where that activity is a means of self-expression. It thus neglects Marx's fundamental criticism of capitalism that it is alienating. On the other hand, it has some success in explaining the alienated activity which is a reality under capitalism that must be changed.

Finally, Philippe Van Parijs develops an aspect of Marxism in analyzing the notion of abundance. Although it is widely thought that Marx's conception of communism was one of abundance, virtually nothing has been said about this topic. Van Parijs argues that abundance is a capacity of an economy to satisfy needs and wants given material and human resources. He argues that it is compatible with scarcity and thus, importantly, with economic calculation. He distinguishes weaker and stronger conceptions of abundance and discusses their relevance to overcoming utopian ideas of communism. An interesting upshot of the discussion, in his view, is that a decent universal grant is a way of dealing with the limits of resources.

The papers cover a wide variety of topics, but by no means the full range of work in 'analytical Marxism.' It is important to emphasize that topics that have been the focus of much work in the literature to date receive virtually no attention here, for example feminism, class, and moral theory. These topics and others are very important both theoretically and politically, some more than others of course. Historical materialism has also received less attention here than it has in the past, although Kai Nielsen returns to the subject in his afterword. Nor does this collection indicate the wide application of Marxism from analytical perspectives. Far too much is being published now even to think of preparing an appropriately general bibliography of this active but rather inchoate area that I have called the 'phenomenon of analytical Marxism.' The phenomenon is much

broader and the Marxist topics being discussed just among philosophers are far more diverse than what we have here. This volume merely contains some good work in and on analytical Marxism that we hope will indicate the diversity, dynamism, and contentiousness of recent work on Marxism, especially by philosophers.

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# I ANALYTICAL MARXISM: REVIVAL OR BETRAYAL?

## What Is a Marxist Today?<sup>1</sup>

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### I Introduction

Much as what we now call 'the Marxism of the Second International' long ago passed from the scene, the Age of 'Western Marxism' has apparently come to an end.<sup>2</sup> Internal theoretical developments, changes in intellectual culture and, above all, political circumstances have joined together to hasten the demise of this episode in the history of radical theory. It would be instructive to trace the trajectory of Western Marxism, and to reflect on the political conditions for its decline. In both Western and Eastern Europe, Marxian politics has been in crisis at least since the watershed year of 1968, and in disarray for more than a decade. Western Marxism has always been joined programatically to currents within these political movements and has suffered grave, indeed fatal, damage in consequence. But it is not my intention to reflect on the vicissitudes of Western Marxism here. What follows will consider instead a style of theorizing

1 I am grateful to Daniel Hausman, Kai Nielsen, Debra Satz, Robert Ware and Erik Olin Wright for comments on an earlier draft.

2 I use the term 'Western Marxism' in the widely accepted sense made current by Merleau-Ponty and Anderson. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press

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that has effectively superceded Western Marxism, just as Western Marxism earlier replaced the Marxism of the Second International. This new kind of radical theory is widely designated approvingly by some, disparagingly by others 'analytical Marxism.'<sup>3</sup>

Analytical Marxism is not confined to anglophone Marxists. But its roots are in English-speaking intellectual culture and its content is conditioned by historical circumstances peculiar to Britain, North America and the Antipodes. It is therefore worth commenting briefly on the situation of Marxian theory from this vantage-point.

There have never been mass political movements identified with Marxism anywhere in the English-speaking world. Anglophone philosophers, social scientists and historians who have identified with Marxism have therefore been less directly involved in significant political events than has been commonplace for Marxists elsewhere. In addition, particularly in the United States, Marxian theory was, for many years, effectively repressed and successfully marginalized. Thus English-speaking Marxism, throughout its history, has existed in much more of a political vacuum than Western Marxism did in its countries of origin. To be sure, by the onset of the celebrated crisis of Marxism in Europe, pressures supporting the exclusion of Marxian theory from university culture had already largely sub-

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1973), 30-58, and Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB 1976). Roughly, the term denotes that current of theorizing that runs through the work of Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, the 'critical theorists' of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, et al.), existentialist Marxists (Sartre, Merleau-Ponty), structuralist Marxists (Althusser, Balibar), and so on. Politically, Western Marxism is oppositional with respect to the official Marxism of the Soviet Union and the Western European Communist parties though, in some cases, only implicitly. Philosophically, Western Marxism is shaped in varying ways by 'continental' philosophical currents neo-Hegelianism, above all and tends to focus programmatically on grand reconstructions of Marxian philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> There are, of course, other survivors of Western Marxism's demise strains of radical theory that draw on surviving remnants of Western Marxism, but also on 'deconstructionist' literary theory and other post-structuralist tendencies. However, these currents have had little impact on analytical Marxism and vice versa, and will therefore hardly impinge on the discussion that follows here.

sided. But this liberalization only reinforced the 'academic,' politically disengaged character of Marxian theory in the English-speaking world.

Anglophone Marxism has been peripheral to the principal Marxian theoretical currents of this century, but not altogether excluded. Great Britain has long had a flourishing tradition of Marxian historical writing, and there have been important Trotskyist and independent theorists in the United States and elsewhere. Every strain of Western Marxian theory has had proponents throughout the English-speaking world and many of the great Western Marxists have lived as refugees or emigrés in English-speaking countries. On balance, though, there has not been a continuing, Marxian intellectual tradition; and what did exist was largely extinguished in the period preceding the 1960s. Thus analytical Marxism, insofar as it is rooted in English-speaking culture, represents a new departure, if not quite a fresh start. It is, in the main, a consequence of the New Left movements of the 1960s and their continuations.

For want of an indigenous tradition, it was necessary, at first, for these movements to *import* Marxism from Western Europe. These importations have exhibited a remarkable tenacity. For nearly a decade, anglophone Althusserianism survived the demise of the Althusserian project in France; and critical theory, even now, flourishes among some philosophers, literary scholars and legal theorists. There are feminists and some Marxists, too who continue to look to France and Germany for intellectual sustenance. But intellectual life in Europe, particularly in France, has veered even more sharply to the right than has English-speaking culture in the Age of Reagan and Thatcher, diminishing the prestige of continental styles of theorizing among those on the left who remain *au courant*. At the same time, continental philosophy has become an eminently avoidable medium for radical theory. In consequence of an episode in intellectual and political history that I shall neither attempt to trace nor account for here, it has finally become possible to engage Marxian themes without recourse to European importations. In recent work, analytical philosophy, empirical social science and neo-classical economic analysis have been joined productively with traditional Marxian theoretical and political concerns. In consequence of the preeminent role of analytical philosophy in this new current, 'ana-

lytical Marxism' is indeed an apt designation for this strain of theoretical work.

When Western Marxism held sway, the question 'What Is a Marxist?' was less interesting than it has subsequently become. Western Marxisms were so grand in scope and diverse in style that one can only look in vain for a common core beyond the resemblances occasioned by their similar political orientations and historical circumstances. Until quite recently, it was therefore unproblematic to call theoretical work Marxist if it represented itself as such or was acknowledged by others to be so; and there was no reason to pursue the matter further.

Analytical Marxism has altered this situation significantly. Analytical Marxists seek to clarify theoretical claims to the point where opposing views directly confront one another and become susceptible to rational adjudication. They emphasize the elaboration of conceptual structures drawing distinctions where appropriate, collapsing distinctions where they have been inappropriately drawn, marshalling arguments in support of the positions they defend and, so far as possible, formulating questions with a view to resolving them. Of course, philosophers throughout history including most Western Marxists have done likewise. But like analytical philosophers generally, analytical Marxists emphasize these values to the virtual exclusion of other traditional objectives including the enunciation of programmatic schemes of an all-encompassing sort and the evocation of views that elude precise representation. In consequence, as analytical Marxism has emerged as a distinct current, sweeping philosophical pronouncements have given way in some Marxist circles to modest but tractable theorizing, positions have been carefully elaborated, assessed, revised and, in some cases, abandoned; and the question 'What is a Marxist?' has therefore taken on a specificity and timeliness that it previously lacked.

Needless to say, no thinker, Marx included, could be expected to have gotten everything right. Thus it could have been predicted with assurance that in moving from grand theory to the reconstruction and assessment of particular positions, Marx's actual views would be found wanting. Throughout the past decade, it has become increasingly clear that this inevitable outcome of the analytical project is in fact coming to pass. Most analytical Marxists aimed,

at first, to *defend* Marx's express views or some close approximation. It is now clear that this objective cannot succeed.<sup>4</sup> But if most of what Marx maintained cannot be sustained, what, if anything, is left of Marxism? It is possible that not enough is left to justify continuing to talk of Marxism at all. If so, we might conclude that there is, as it were, nothing for Marxists to be; and therefore that, except by dint of confusion or self-deception, one cannot be a Marxist today. Then the term, if it should continue to be used, would be at most a political designation, replete with symbolic meanings and rhetorical force, but void of substantive content. My aim here is to show that this conclusion is avoidable. But it is far more nearly the case than is commonly supposed.

In the end, of course, it hardly matters whether a body of theory is or is not Marxist. Unless it is supposed that Marx, like an oracle, somehow had privileged access to Truth, fidelity to his views is in itself no particular virtue. This is a truism, but a truism that merits elaboration as analytical investigations of Marxian positions proceed. In the present conjuncture, I think that it is worth registering what is going on from the perspective our question affords; even if, in the end, the question itself is of only passing historical interest. What matters, finally, is what is true; not what is Marxist. But it is well at this moment in the history of radical social theory to reflect on the relation between what we now believe to be true and what Marxism is.<sup>5</sup>

4 See, for example, Jon Elster's encyclopedic *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985). Some Western Marxists ought to have drawn similar conclusions. Thus, it was plainly untenable for Althusserians to defend the *scientificity* of Marx's theoretical practice, while insisting, at the same time, on *orthodoxy*. Sciences change; orthodoxies do not. No science has ever been nor could ever be fixed infallibly by a Master Thinker. Nor, more generally, could any body of doctrine be expected to provide an infallible purchase on Truth.

5 Here and in what follows, I assume, as did Marx, that there is indeed a truth to be discovered, and that the truth conditions for theoretical claims are supplied by a mind-independent reality, not by thought or language. Many Western Marxists and their 'post-Marxian' successors effectively deny this assumption, making 'truth' dependent on particular points of view (the point

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## II Is There a Distinctive Marxian Methodology?

In the view of Lukács, Sartre, Althusser and many other Western Marxists, Marxism is distinguished by its method.<sup>6</sup> However, 'method' admits of a variety of understandings that must first be clarified before the Western Marxian consensus can be assessed. Arguably, even the claims I shall advance here on behalf of the 'Marxian agenda' could be construed as yet another brief for a distinctive Marxian method. But this understanding risks obscuring what distinguishes Western from analytical Marxism. I therefore suggest that we not allow the term to stand in for whatever might actually distinguish Marxism from rival views, but instead understand 'method' in just one of its possible senses to refer, to strategies for concept formation, theory construction, the 'logic' of justification and discovery, and related issues that contemporary philosophers of science conventionally designate 'methodology.' So understood, most analytical Marxists implicitly reject the view that Marxism is distinguished by its method, and so shall I. It is a mistake to look to Marx's method for a *definition* of Marxism.

To my knowledge, claims to the contrary have never been challenged directly by analytical Marxists. As happens in 'paradigm shifts,' the old notion has lapsed without benefit of explicit refutation. This neglect is unfortunate. But, if analytical Marxists are on track, there is no need in the present context to address the Western Marxian consensus with the care the issue deserves. 'The ques-

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of view of the proletariat, for example) or on 'discursive structures' without subjects. I would hazard that positions of this sort are of very dubious intelligibility. In any case, it is worth noting that what strikes most analytical Marxists as obvious is actually denied by some non-analytic survivors of Western Marxism's decline, and that, in this respect, analytical Marxists, unlike their contemporary rivals, are faithful to the core idea underlying the materialism Marxists have always vociferously professed.

<sup>6</sup> See Georg Lukács, 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press 1971); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: New Left Books 1976); Louis Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination,' in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books 1971).



tion of method,' as Sartre calls it, is a diversion from the task at hand. I shall therefore follow the lead of other analytical Marxists and not attempt a direct confrontation with the standard view. Still, the idea that Marxism is distinguished by its method is too influential to ignore without at least gesturing in the direction of a response.

Nothing can be concluded, even provisionally, about the purported distinctiveness of Marx's method until Marxian explanatory objectives are clarified. In characterizing 'method' as I have, I have assumed, following Marx himself, that Marxian explanations, like scientific explanations generally, aim to discover the causal determinations that govern a specifiable range of phenomena. Then the claim would be that Marxists have contrived, or in any case deployed, a distinctive way of executing this task: of forming concepts, constructing theories, corroborating hypotheses and so on. If different aims are supposed, Marxism's purported innovations in method would have to be considered in light of these objectives. Some Western Marxists do appear to endorse aims distinct from those of modern science. But the alternatives they propose are, I submit, fatally obscure. I shall therefore relegate discussion of this possibility to a brief comment, and assume without further justification that Marxists aim to provide causal explanations in the familiar sense.<sup>7</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the role obscurantism has played in making claims for Marxism's methodological distinctiveness attractive. Consider, for instance, the idea that Marxian theory, in contrast to rival views, is *dialectical*. It is notoriously unclear what this widely repeated claim means. Evocative but imprecise metaphors, borrowed from Hegel and the tradition of German romanticism, can sometimes allay bewilderment. But these meta-

<sup>7</sup> There is another indisputably legitimate explanatory objective social scientists might maintain: the *interpretation* of cultural forms in the manner of anthropologists and (some) cultural historians. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of interpretation, a topic that has vexed social theorists and philosophers of social science for more than a century. It must suffice to declare without argument what seems clear enough on its face: that interpretation is *complementary* to the explanatory practice of modern science, not opposed to it.

phors have yet to withstand careful scrutiny. The additional assurance that Marx somehow set the dialectic 'on its feet' hardly helps; neither do the other characterizations that commentators have proffered. Aficionados can, of course, identify dialectical explanations and produce them. Arguably, Marx himself did precisely that. Moreover, it does seem that the skillful use of dialectical metaphors can serve worthwhile heuristic purposes. But it is one thing to be adept with a suggestive idiom and something else again to deploy a distinctive methodology. Dialectics, it seems, is only a question of idiom.

To support this dismissive assessment, it would be necessary to analyse purported deployments of dialectical reasoning an arduous task that is bound, in any case, to be inconclusive. For now, I will just assert that dialectical accounts either restate what could perfectly well be expressed in unexceptionable ways; or else that they are unintelligible and not, in any plausible sense, explanatory. This bare assertion will not dissuade would-be dialecticians. But I think it is fair to cast the burden of proof on them. If there were in fact a distinctive and explanatorily useful dialectical method, it ought by now after the best efforts of so many for so long to have become apparent. That it has not is, I think, a good (if not conclusive) reason for holding that, in the end, there is no dialectical method at all. What there is, at best, is a way of organizing and directing thinking at a pre-theoretical level that is incapable ultimately of providing insights that cannot be discovered and expressed in accord with the norms of modern scientific culture.

The same could be said *mutatis mutandis* for 'structuralist' Marxism. Structuralist methodology is either perfectly standard, despite its self-representations; or else wildly implausible, as would be conceded nowadays by many of its erstwhile practitioners. To defend this claim too would require an arduous analysis of purported structuralist explanations: those of Althusser and his co-thinkers and their continuators throughout the world, particularly in Britain and the United States in the 1970s that is, in the gestation period of analytical Marxism.<sup>8</sup> In lieu of the requisite investigation, it is worth

<sup>8</sup> Cf. my 'Althusser's Marxism,' *Economy and Society* 10, 3 (1981) 243-83.

noting that when pressed to elucidate methodological positions, structuralists, like traditional dialecticians, advert to vague and unhelpful metaphors of dubious cogency.

Western Marxists' claims for the methodological distinctiveness of Marxism are generally advanced as sweeping philosophical programs, at some remove from actual explanatory practice. But the Western Marxian view has resonated down. For this reason, among others,<sup>9</sup> versions of the idea that Marxism is distinguished by its method have also been advanced by practicing social scientists and philosophers of science. Their claims are almost always overstated and misleading, but not without merit. There are indeed methodological positions characteristic of Marxian social scientific practice that contrast with methodologies current in some non-Marxian social science; and these are, to some degree, represented by the shibboleths commonly bandied about. We are told, for example, that Marxism is holistic while 'bourgeois theories' are individualistic; that Marxism is historical while its rivals are ahistorical; or that unlike alternative 'paradigms,' Marxism is anti-empiricist and anti-positivist. It would require a complex and protracted argument to show that that there is less to these characterizations than is commonly supposed.<sup>10</sup> But even were these or other methodological positions as

9 Another reason is the wish of many who identify with Marxism to distinguish themselves and their theoretical work from mainstream social science, and a complementary desire on the part of mainstream practitioners to differentiate themselves from Marxists. These motives will be discussed below.

10 See A. Levine, Elliott Sober and Erik Olin Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism,' *New Left Review* 162 for a portion of that argument, focusing on the dispute between methodological holists and methodological individualists. Ostensibly, holists believe that societies are somehow more than the sum of their individual parts, while individualists regard societies just as collections of individuals. But the holist view, formulated plausibly, devolves into the claim that relational properties (or individuals) are explanatory. No reasonable individualist could deny this claim. Similarly, the individualist claim, properly understood, is just that 'social facts' work through individual agents a position no reasonable holist could deny. Of course, it is possible to imagine holist or individualist programs that genuinely are incompatible. Holists might assert the explanatory relevance of emergent, supra-individual properties; or individualists might deny the explanatory relevance of relational properties.

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opposed as their proponents maintain, Marxism would be distinguished, at most, by the particular configuration of methodological postures it embraces. There would still be no methodology unique to Marxian social science. This consideration should suffice to show that Marxism cannot be defined by its method.

As noted, the possibility remains that, despite his own representations, Marx's was not, strictly, a scientific methodology at all, and that, whatever Marx may have believed, Marxian explanatory objectives differ from those of modern science. Thus it is sometimes held that Marxian theory is 'critical'; that it is inextricably tied to practice (or 'praxis'); or that it somehow yields understandings that are directly 'emancipatory.' Perhaps so. There surely are ways of explaining that are non- or extra-scientific, and it may be that Marx's express declarations of scientificity mask an unwitting adherence to some such program. Here I can only suggest that the idea of a critical, directly emancipatory or otherwise 'practical' theory and a fortiori of less developed extra-scientific explanatory agendas has yet to be satisfactorily defended;<sup>11</sup> and, more in point, that its relevance to the current of theorizing that makes the question 'What is a Marxist today?' timely and problematic remains to be shown.<sup>12</sup>

### III Substantive Commitments

If Marxism is not distinguished by its method, perhaps it is distinguished by its substantive, theoretical commitments, its claims about the world. Needless to say, Marxists have always disagreed over precisely what Marx's views were; and analytical Marxists are no

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But these positions are plainly untenable. In short, either the dispute is only apparent or else one or another of the disputants is saddled with an unsustainable case.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas & the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981).

<sup>12</sup> But see n. 26.

exception. Marxology is important to the analytical program. But, for most analytical Marxists, there is nothing sacrosanct about Marx's own positions. Marxian theory is not necessarily Marx's theory.

Consider, for example, John Roemer's reconstruction and generalization of Marx's concept of exploitation.<sup>13</sup> In Roemer's account, what Marx actually said about exploitation, taken at its word, is wrong; the conceptual apparatus Marx deployed—the labor theory of value, the theory of surplus value, and much else too—cannot be sustained in the way Marx supposed. But Marx's formulations do articulate a sound theoretical intuition: that exploitation arises in consequence of differential control over productive assets, and that different forms of exploitation result from distinct kinds of real ownership. In this respect, there *is* a specifically Marxian concept of exploitation, connected historically and conceptually to Marx's own account, and distinct from rival views.<sup>14</sup> Whatever we make, finally, of Roemer's account, his work shows how this core idea is susceptible to reconstruction in a way that advances understanding not only of capitalist exploitation, but also of exploitation in pre- and post-capitalist societies, including existing socialisms. The general theory of exploitation Roemer constructs is not literally Marx's. But it is defensible and it is Marxian.

Were it likely that a number of important positions in social, economic and political theory could be developed analogously, there would then be a set of claims about the world that, faithful or not to Marx's actual views, is properly designated Marxian. In those circumstances, to be a Marxist would be to adhere to these claims; or, since Marxian theory in this sense is still undeveloped, to adhere tentatively and prospectively. But there is reason to be sceptical of

13 John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982), and *Free to Lose: An Introduction to Marxist Economic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988)

14 Roemer's account is also directed against views held by declared Marxists who advance the idea that exploitation is a consequence of differential authority relations at the point of production. See, for example, Jeffrey Reiman, 'Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16, 1 (1987) 3-41.

this approach to our question. Haunting Marxism is the spectre of Joseph Schumpeter: suggesting that Marxian positions, if they are not demonstrably false, have already supplanted opposing views or, in any case, face no insurmountable obstacles in the way of incorporation into the mainstream.<sup>15</sup> Schumpeter did not establish this assessment decisively: among other things, he was insufficiently attentive to the potentialities of Marxian, as opposed to Marx's, positions. But his general thesis seems more plausible in light of recent investigations than it did when he first advanced it.

Some indication that Schumpeter was right is provided, ironically, by the case already adduced to illustrate the difference between Marxian and Marx's theory: Roemer's general theory of exploitation. In considering the moral philosophical implications of the concept he derived from Marx, Roemer has moved revealingly onto the terrain of such writers as John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and even Robert Nozick, to a point where he has raised significant doubts about the normative importance of exploitation itself.<sup>16</sup> This turn towards liberal and even libertarian social philosophy is unexceptionable: there is hardly any other and certainly no better way to think about distributive justice. But it is indicative of a general problem in reconstructing Marxian theory. Even if there are a number of views that can be deemed Marxian, and even if their contribution to on-going discussions is acknowledged, it is still far from clear that there is enough that is genuinely and distinctively Marxian to hold that *Marxism* exists as a systematic collection of substantive claims.

15 Cf. *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row 1983).

16 See *Free to Lose*; 'Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, 1 (1985) 30-65; 'Equality of Talent,' *Economics and Philosophy* 1, 2 (1985) 151-87; 'Equality of Resources Implies Equality of Welfare,' *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 101 (1986) 751-84; and *Value, Exploitation and Class* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers 1986).

#### IV Political Identifications

It would seem that many analytical Marxists owe as much, if not more, to Weber, Mill, and a host of contemporaries, as to Marx,<sup>17</sup> and that an identification with *Marxism* today is therefore a political identification only, without theoretical content. If this were all there were to being a Marxist, it would still be something. In a political culture that permits the Leader of the Free World to cast 'Marxists' alongside 'terrorists' in the minions of the Evil Empire, common decency, if nothing else, militates in favor of taking this identification on if only in a spirit of solidarity and resistance. And in the face of capitalism today, there is a powerful and continuing appeal in a tradition dedicated to the construction of a social order committed to equality, self-realization, and the end of the host of oppressions that afflict humankind.

Needless to say, the significance of Marxism as a political identification will vary according to circumstances, and can only be assessed from the stand-point of particular histories and situations. For many who live under existing socialist regimes and also for Western and Third World progressives with an unhappy relation to official Communism, the Marxian tradition may seem, at best, a tragically false path leading away from the democratic and humane values Marxists profess. Most analytical Marxists, however, share the experience of the last great wave of student rebellion and the parochial vantage-point of the English-speaking world. Of course analytical Marxists participate in the liberalism of the prevailing intellectual culture. But from the perspective most analytical Marxists share, *liberalism* is tainted by liberal *anti-Communism*; and it was liberal anti-Communists who made war on Vietnam while superintending an increasingly irrational and devastating capitalism at home; and it is liberals now in league with professed 'conservatives' who continue to promote imperialist predations and regressive social policies. This is why, for these individuals at this

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Michael Walzer, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' *New York Review of Books* (Nov. 21, 1985).

time, Marxism does not suggest Stalinist terror or even state bureaucratic socialism, but resistance to oppression and opposition to the palpable horrors perpetrated by anti-Communist regimes and their 'organic intellectuals.' Thus, in matters of political identification if not theoretical commitment, analytical Marxists eschew liberalism, and instead acknowledge any and all affinities with the tradition Marx began. Marxism, in these circumstances, is emblematic of a certain radicalism, and instrumental for defining a place as dissidents in the dominant political culture.

Moreover, it is fortunate that there are theorists for whom this identification still comes easily. For Marx's political vision, aiming at the 'supersession' of capitalist civilization in all its aspects and at the construction of communism, is becoming indispensable for saving what remains of socialist politics from dissolution into an ever-narrowing and rightward moving mainstream consensus, on the one hand; or from degeneration into the bankruptcy of Social Democracy or official Communism (to the extent it still exists), on the other. In this respect, Marx can still be taken at his word. 'The categorical imperative to over-throw all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being' is as timely now as it was in 1843, when Marx first uttered these words. If official Communist practice and the vicissitudes of history have made this point of view difficult for many progressives to adopt, this unhappy situation must be added to the already substantial list of what there is in our world to deplore. The rest of us can only be grateful that at least this misfortune is not also our own.

But if to be a Marxist today is only to express a political identification, then the Marxian project would be effectively finished. In place of Marx's determination to *understand* the world in order to change it (in accord with its underlying 'laws of motion'), Marxism would have become a simple expression of dissidence, replete with historical resonances, but ultimately void of content. It does seem that developments within the analytical Marxist current support this assessment. But it is not a conclusion to which we must accede.



## V Class Analysis

At the very least, we could forsake the goal of reconstructing a highly integrated body of substantive claims, and view Marxism instead as a framework for generating explanations, a loosely structured collection of concepts and positions. Then we could look to actual Marxian explanatory practice to characterize what Marxism is. Self-declared Marxian explanations are distinguished by the preeminence they accord class structure and class conflict. Perhaps we should therefore retreat to the view that a Marxist is an adherent of the idea that class is the fundamental explanatory category in social science.

Understood in the usual way, as a claim about what explains particular phenomena, this view is almost certainly false. Often, the best available explanations do not accord primacy to class; and there is no reason to think that, as science progresses, the concepts class analysts deploy will figure more prominently than they now do. But the usual understanding misconstrues the Marxian claim for the explanatory primacy of class. What drives Marxian social science is the idea that power at the level of social structure accounts for social order and change, and that real (as opposed to merely juridical) ownership of productive resources, the basis for class divisions in the Marxian view, is the fundamental source of this power. Explicit class identifications or overt class conflicts need not have more explanatory force in particular instances than other considerations. But where class is not directly explanatory, class analysis should eventually explain why. The claim, in short, is that, at an appropriate level of generality, class relations render social life intelligible.

It is, therefore, no embarrassment to Marxian class analysis if many social phenomena are best explained without reference to class at all. This conclusion may seem paradoxical and at odds with received Marxian understanding. But it is not nearly so heterodox as may appear. No thoughtful Marxist could claim that only class is explanatory or that class accounts for all the explananda of social science. If nothing else, some explananda are too fine-grained to be explained by reference to class. Thus class struggle may in some sense account for the Protestant Reformation. But it would be farfetched to suppose that class could explain, say, liturgical differences among Protestant sects or the dress of Protestant ministers. This con-

sideration hardly impugns the viability of class analysis as an explanatory program. But it does imply caution in extolling its explanatory pretensions. In the main, class analysis is coarse-grained. Except where 'class consciousness' runs high, the explanatory relevance of class will be confined to phenomena of a very general sort. Class analysis is bound to be irrelevant for many of the phenomena social scientists seek to explain. No partisan of class analysis could plausibly hold otherwise.

The Marxian claim for class analysis is a claim about fundamental social theory; not about particular social scientific explanations. The idea, again, is that class power structures social life. This claim is plausible on its face, but hardly unexceptionable. An important strain of social theory, from Durkheim through Parsons, invests integrative mechanisms like values or norms with the preeminence Marxists accord to conflict and struggle. However, to impugn class analysis, it is not necessary to diverge so radically from the core idea underlying Marxian explanatory practice. It is enough to maintain that other sources of power—military force, perhaps, or culture or sexuality—enjoy equal or greater explanatory preeminence. Some 'post-Marxian' radical theorists advance precisely this view.<sup>18</sup> To defend an explanatory practice that privileges class categories, Marxists must confront this post-Marxian challenge as well as the radically alternative orientation of Durkheim and his successors.

These issues cannot be settled a priori. The choice of a theoretical framework for explaining social life is a question only the progress of science can finally resolve. But it is misleading simply to cast Marxian social theory as one among many still plausible theoretical orientations. There are theoretical resources within the Marxian tradition that provide foundational support for class analysis, and that clarify the issues the facts of the matter must eventually resolve.

<sup>18</sup> The *eminence grise* behind this departure in post-Marxian theory is Michel Foucault. A clear example of the genre is provided in the work of Anthony Giddens. See, for example, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (London: Macmillan 1982). For a rejoinder to Giddens, see Erik Olin Wright, 'Giddens's Critique of Marxism,' *New Left Review* 138 (March-April 1983). Similar ideas inform many strains of contemporary feminist theory.

Marx's theory of history, historical materialism, motivates class analysis, at the same time that it explains its evident limitations.

This is why I think it unwise and unnecessary, at this point, to identify Marxism with class analysis. I would venture that the prospects for class analysis are good; and that many traditional Marxian explanatory strategies will eventually be vindicated. But so long as the contest between Marxian social science and alternative views is left at the level of ungrounded speculation, the facts of the matter are unlikely to establish any conclusions definitively. Like its rivals, Marxian explanatory practice is in need of more support than the facts alone can provide. In a word, class analysis needs historical materialism. If historical materialism should prove untenable, would-be Marxists could still endorse (ungrounded) class analysis as a last resort. Doing so, however, would render their explanatory strategies liable to immediate rejection by theorists who endorse different paradigms or to revision by those who accept the explanatory centrality of power but deny, as the facts sometimes seem to require, the preeminence of class. Marxian explanations may finally be vulnerable to these or other confutations. But the apparent viability of Marx's theory of history, the foundational support for class analysis in the Marxian scheme, renders this conclusion unlikely.

## VI Historical Materialism

For Marx, the inner workings of 'the capitalist mode of production,' his principal explanandum, are only intelligible historically as part of a process of development and transformation. Historical materialism is a theory of this process. I propose that we call adherents of historical materialism *strict Marxists*. By no means are all professed Marxists strict Marxists. But a commitment to strict Marxism to the core ideas of Marx's theory of history does provide one sure way to be a Marxist today.

Strict Marxists stand opposed to the dominant atheoreticism of contemporary historiography and social science. In the mainstream view, past events (supposing they can be individuated unproblematically) are in principle susceptible to causal explanation, but

history itself cannot be explained except, trivially, by the conjunction of particular causal accounts. The contrary idea, that history actually is intelligible, was advanced by Christian, Moslem, and eventually secular philosophers whose explanatory objectives were at some remove from those of practicing historians or scientists in other domains. Instead of looking for pertinent causal determinations in history, these philosophers sought to interpret the past by unveiling its meaning. Since meanings (in the sense they intended) are only conceivable from particular vantage-points, to talk of *the meaning of history*, as they proposed, is to suppose that there is a definitive perspective, an end (or *telos*) in light of which everything retrospectively becomes meaningful. Thus, before Marx, theories of history were teleological: they maintained that history's structure and direction is explained by its end. Hegel's was the last great teleological philosophy of history and the inspiration for Marx's own attempt to make sense of historical change. Marx's signal achievement was to have retained Hegel's sense of history's intelligibility without advancing teleological explanations, and without purporting to identify 'meanings' in history.<sup>19</sup> For Marx, history is as meaningless as nature is. But history's structure and direction is discernible nevertheless.

The reconstruction, defense and revision of historical materialism has been central to the analytical Marxian project.<sup>20</sup> This is not the place to rejoin discussion of this issue, except to register tentative support for the core insights Marx sought to develop, and to suggest how, if Marx's theory or some close approximation can be sustained, there would indeed be a theoretical grounding for class

<sup>19</sup> See my *The End of the State* (London: Verso 1987) 87-9.

<sup>20</sup> See, among many others, G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*; Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981), part 2; William Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1978); John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978); Richard W. Miller, *Analyzing Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984), ch. 5 & 6; Daniel Little, *The Scientific Marx* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986), ch. 2; and my *Arguing for Socialism*, ch. 5, and *The End of the State*, ch. 5.

analysis and, as noted, a substantive characterization, consonant with traditional Marxian views, of what a Marxist is.

Historical materialism conceives the structure and direction of history as a consequence of correspondences and `contradictions' (failures of correspondence) between forces and relations of production. In the historical materialist view, there is a tendency for forces of production to develop continuously and for relations of production to change discontinuously to accommodate ever increasing levels of development of the forces. Since for the range of human history historical materialism purports to account for, social classes are the bearers of social relations, classes are the agents of historical change. In this sense, class struggle explains why production relations are as they are (and not otherwise); and, more to the point, given Marx's concern with `the laws of motion' of capitalist societies, why capitalism (rather than some other set of production relations) exists. Similarly, class relations explain capitalism's (possible) futures.

This historical materialism implies a key explanatory role for class structure and class struggle wherever the limits of possibility for maintaining or transforming social structures are implicated. But there will be many issues of interest to social scientists and historians where these limits hardly matter. Fine-grained *explananda* comprise a very large category of examples. Some coarse-grained *explananda* that traditional Marxists consider `superstructural' may comprise another. Thus historical materialism does not imply that class is always more salient than other factors. If anything, it suggests agnosticism with respect to the explanatory pertinence of class relations except insofar as particular *explananda* involve the social structural limits historical materialism addresses. Historical materialism is a theory of historical trends, and an account of the conditions under which economic structures of different sorts become (materially) possible. Its subject is the structure and direction of history or, at least, the trajectory of society's `economic base.'<sup>21</sup> When

<sup>21</sup> Historical materialism, as a theory of the trajectory of underlying economic structures, is a *general* theory of history; that is, it is an account of history's structure and direction. Strict Marxism consists in commitment to this gener-

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these limits are not directly engaged, historical materialists, like mainstream atheoreticists, need only hold that the explanatory importance of class relations will vary with the phenomena under investigation.

In the end, historical materialism may prove empirically untenable. Even supposing that its account of history is derivable from general and unexceptionable claims about human nature and the human condition, as Cohen has argued,<sup>22</sup> it may nevertheless have little explanatory pertinence to actual history if only because the endogenous processes it invests with the task of moving history along may always be swamped by countervailing 'forces.' In short, the atheoreticists may be right: history may have no theory of explanatory interest. Or some rival theory of history based perhaps on the distribution of military force or on racial, ethnic or gender divisions may supplant Marx's in whole or in part. Then the role historical materialism ascribes to forces and relations of production and to class struggle would not be sustainable. I think that good, though inconclusive, reasons can be adduced in support of the strict Marxian view.<sup>23</sup> But, for now, this question remains open. It is, I think, among the most pressing theoretical issues in social science today though, for most practicing social scientists and historians, it is hardly a question at all.

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al theory. This question should not be confused with the question of the extent to which historical materialism is also a theory of *general history*. Historical materialism is, of course, commonly thought to be a theory of general history, an account of superstructural forms and cultural phenomena. But see G.A. Cohen, 'Restricted and Inclusive Historical Materialism,' in E. Ullmann-Margalit, ed., *The Prism of Science* (Dordrecht 1986) 57-83.

<sup>22</sup> G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *The End of the State* ch. 5.

## VII The Marxian Agenda

The jury is, of course, still out on strict Marxism, and is likely to remain out for some time. All that can be said with assurance now is that, as in so many other domains, developments within the analytical Marxian current have put historical materialism in question, and that it may finally be necessary to conclude that this foundational theory cannot be sustained. I fully expect that this conclusion can be avoided. But if we must conclude that strict Marxism a substantive, foundational theory motivating a genre of explanatory practices is an untenable basis for maintaining continuity with the Marxian tradition, traditional Marxian concerns in politics and social science would still combine to produce a certain *agenda*. I would propose that, whatever we conclude about strict Marxism, fidelity to this agenda suffices to make 'Marxist' a properly descriptive term.

All grand social theories of nineteenth century origin were concerned essentially with the phenomenon Marx conceived as the emergence of capitalism: the rise of a new form of civilization, first in Europe and North America and eventually throughout the world. But, unlike other theorists, Marx joined this concern with an account of history's trajectory and of capitalism's future. This trajectory is what historical materialism aims to track. Whether or not it does so successfully, the vision it suggests of history's (possible) destination so long as its cogency, desirability and possible realization remain credible can endure, and inspire a political project. This project is a core component of traditional Marxism, and the principal motivation for Marx's own theoretical work. Marx's reflections on the past and present are inextricably fused with a commitment to a communist future, and to the working class and its allies as the agents of this epochal transformation.

These commitments establish the Marxian agenda. What Marxists want to know is what is pertinent to the transformation of society from capitalism to communism. This objective determines the questions Marxists ask and the research they undertake. Scholasticism (in the sense of theory for theory's sake) is a constant temptation for social theorists and philosophers, as is antiquarianism for historians and what C. Wright Mills called 'abstracted empiricism' for social scientists. Marxists are not immune from these temptations. But

regardless of the subject in contention, Marxian politics a continuing project for revolutionizing the social order provides a constant countervailing force. Marxists aim not just at understanding the world, but also above all at transforming it to accord with this understanding.

This characterization is admittedly stipulative. Many declared Marxists, especially Marxists in power, do not in fact promote communism as an ideal, and there have been utopian socialists and anarchists undeclared Marxists, as it were whose political commitments are pro-communist in the requisite sense. However, the historical and conceptual connection between traditional Marxian politics and communism is sufficiently strong to warrant calling a program that orients research towards the realization of a communist future a *Marxian* agenda. This historical link could eventually become sufficiently mitigated to justify abandoning the designation. But the conceptual affinity between traditional Marxism and communism would nevertheless remain.

However, for the time being, class analysis whether or not it can be grounded satisfactorily remains a viable option in social scientific research. It is therefore fair in the late 1980s to insist upon the Marxian agenda retaining a Marxian flavor, an explanatory practice continuous with traditional Marxian motifs. To be a Marxist today is to be pro-communist and, at the same time, a proponent of class analysis. It is the fusion of this fundamental Marxian political commitment with a theoretical practice still joined to traditional Marxian concepts and questions that constitutes the Marxian agenda in its contemporary form.

I would venture that, for the foreseeable future, the situation will remain essentially the same. But if it is right to privilege the commitment to communism even over traditional Marxian explanatory practices, then a Marxian agenda with only very tenuous links to class analysis as traditionally conceived is at least a theoretical possibility. By way of conclusion, I shall speculate briefly on this possibility. First, however, it will be helpful to consider the nature of the normative commitment that helps constitute the Marxian agenda, and to reflect on what it may suggest about what Marxism is.



## VIII Is There a Distinctive Marxian Normative Theory?

Whether or not there are enough sustainable and distinctively Marxian claims about the world to constitute an 'ism,' it might still be the case that, as promoters of the Marxian agenda, Marxists share distinctive normative commitments. This suggestion is susceptible to at least two interpretations, of which one is stronger and more speculative than the other. The weaker interpretation underwrites the Marxian agenda. The stronger, more speculative interpretation raises the possibility of other perspectives on what Marxism is. However, for the present, there is reason to be confident only in the weaker interpretation.

Indeed, the more speculative claim runs counter to the increasingly evident inclination of some prominent analytical Marxists to employ liberal and even libertarian ideas in support of traditional Marxian political positions,<sup>24</sup> and otherwise remains an unexamined option within the broader analytical current. The idea would be that there is implicitly a critique of capitalism and arguments for socialism and communism historically and conceptually continuous with traditional Marxian positions, but substantively distinct from, though perhaps compatible with, the moral philosophical foundations of mainstream liberalism. Thus it might be argued that there are distinctively Marxian ideas, say, of equality<sup>25</sup> or freedom or of even more fundamental notions that comprise a distinctive moral philosophy, implicitly but essentially critical of capitalism and sup-

24 See, for example, G.A. Cohen, 'Self-Ownership, World Ownership and Equality,' part 1 in Frank S. Lucash, *Justice and Equality: Here and Now* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986), and part 2 in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 3, 2 (Spring 1986) 77-96; and John Roemer, *Free to Lose*.

25 Ironically, some of Roemer's own strictures against the account of equality provided by Ronald Dworkin suggest precisely this possibility. See esp. 'Equality of Talent' and 'Equality of Resources Implies Equality of Welfare.' Liberalism, in Dworkin's version, insists on holding individuals responsible for their choices. Thus liberal egalitarians should not seek to correct for the distributional consequences of choices that are freely made. Roemer, however, calls this conclusion into question suggesting a far more radical conception of what it is to treat people as equals.

portive of its historical rival. Support for this view would require examination of the principal normative standards operative in contemporary political discourse and in Marxian political practice; an enormous undertaking that I shall not even attempt to broach here.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps research in this area will eventually provide a purchase on Marxism that would respond to the question 'What is a Marxist Today?' more satisfactorily than the proposal I have endorsed. But this is not the place to predict the outcome of new departures in Marxian theorizing. For now, in anticipation of future developments, this suggestion must remain a speculation only.

The less controversial sense in which the Marxian agenda supplies a determinate content to Marxian theory follows directly from its commitment to communism as an ideal. Historical materialism, even weakened in the ways I have suggested, supports belief in the cogency and feasibility of communism.<sup>27</sup> Its desirability requires additional argument that Marxists have seldom ventured to provide. But declared Marxists have always supported communism, at least officially; and, in the absence of sound arguments to the contrary, the appeal of the vision they promote is reason enough to endorse their stance, even should historical materialism eventually prove indefensible. This goal virtually establishes the Marxian agenda in its contemporary form. It insures that the investigations it prompts will bear at least a family resemblance. Of course, within the family, disagreements may be as sharp as any that are joined with those who fall beyond the pale; and, at the limit, Marxian concerns can motivate inquiries that shade off into research that is not, in any recognizable sense, Marxist at all. Nevertheless, a commitment to communism as a possible and desirable future does constrain the content of Marxian theory.

It is not possible to say, with any degree of specificity, what one must believe in consequence of the Marxian agenda. It is possible,

<sup>26</sup> See my *Arguing for Socialism: Theoretical Considerations*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso 1988) for support of the idea that, at a level of abstraction not too remote from actual political discourse, there exists a consensus on many normative standards.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. my *The End of the State* (London: Verso 1987).

however, to say what Marxists cannot believe. No Marxist in the sense now in question could deny that, in *some* sense and to *some* extent, history is shaped and moved by class struggles. None could deny the pertinence of social revolutions for understanding societies and their futures. None could suppose that 'life' somehow arises out of 'consciousness.' These claims — others could be added to the list — are deliberately vague. More precise specifications would undermine universal assent. But despite the vagueness necessary for characterizing a consensus view, they do prescribe identifiable limits beyond which Marxists cannot pass. These limits hardly comprise a *theory*. The consensus is too indeterminate, too deeply contested. Nevertheless, there *is* sufficient agreement to orient inquiry in a certain fashion — to direct theory to accord with and, if successful, to advance the political commitment that motivates it. Theory and politics combine to produce a view of the world that motivates the questions Marxists ask, the investigations they undertake, and the privileged explanatory role Marxists traditionally accord to issues of class. This world-view is inimical to investigators with different agendas; and the difference would remain even if, as Schumpeter thought, Marxists' answers will eventually be abandoned or merged into the mainstream.

Could this difference survive the passing of the 'ism' that has articulated it historically? Could it survive the demise of class analysis? Insofar as there is reason for optimism about historical materialism's prospects and for class analysis generally, I would again suggest that this question is premature and, very likely, avoidable. But, in case this assessment is only wishful thinking, it is well to reflect on this possibility even now. I want to suggest that the Marxian agenda can indeed survive the demise of Marxism in any of its historically pertinent senses. Whether there are circumstances in which this situation would arise, however, depends on how we assess Marxism's political history and, more importantly, on what we can say of its likely future.

Marx was loathe to predict the future. But in accord with received views of scientific practice, he did seek, as we know, to discern the 'laws of motion' that govern class societies. Laws of motion are dispositions for systems to behave in certain ways. They predict the behavior of these systems *ceteris paribus* in the absence of coun-

tervailing 'forces' that prevail over them. Marx knew that even approximate satisfaction of the *ceteris paribus* clause could not be expected in the cases that interested him. There are bound to be countervailing forces, and no systematic way to account for their effects. At most, then, science can discover tendencies and reflect on their relative weights. But to identify tendencies affecting social systems is not to predict their future course. In Marx's view, prophecy is impossible and therefore foolish to attempt.

In reflecting on the future of the Marxian agenda, there is yet an additional reason for hesitation. Insofar as a political commitment is essential to this program, its future will depend on the trajectory of political movements that seek to implement Marxian ideals. But developments in politics are inextricably tied to conditions of time and place, and depend substantially on extra-political circumstances. We can therefore suppose that whatever can be said about identifiable tendencies pales in comparison to other factors that elude systematic consideration. Nevertheless, at this moment in the history of left politics, at least some futures do seem blocked. I would therefore venture, cautiously in the face of the considerations just adduced, that this observation does afford some basis for predicting the future of the Marxian agenda.

In the past decade or so, Marxian politics has passed through a watershed. As I have remarked, there have never been significant political movements identified expressly with the Marxian tradition in the English-speaking world. Allowing for differences in history and circumstance and the inertia of political styles, this situation is now becoming generalized. It therefore seems unlikely that there will ever again come a time when masses of people marching, as it were, under the banner of Marxism will offer a realistic promise of revolutionary change and reconstruction.

This is not to say that the vision of communism Marx articulated will finally pass from the scene. What is passing is the representation of that vision under the banner of Marxism. In different ways in the First, Second and Third Worlds, that banner always the object of derogation from defenders of the capitalist order has brought disrepute upon itself and exhausted its creative potential. I believe that its passing is lamentable. There is much to be gained from continuing a tradition that has attracted the loyalties of so many mili-

tants, elicited so many sacrifices, and achieved so much for so long. But if the Marxian tradition in politics or, rather, its external forms and self-representations has become an encumbrance, then so be it. It is only a political style that will have passed. What matters is the commitment that style expressed. That commitment can survive and eventually prevail even as Marxian forms pass into desuetude.

However, for the Marxian agenda to have a future, it is crucial that political movements inspired by Marxian ideals survive, with or without the outward accoutrements of traditional Marxism. Theorists by themselves can hardly sustain a class centered culture, and a dedication to understanding the world with a view to transforming it towards communism. But a more intimate connection between theory and practice is not always to the good, either. The adoption of Marxism as a ruling ideology in the existing socialist countries has wreaked havoc with the Marxian agenda there, and even the kind of *engagement* that flourished until recently in oppositional circles in Europe and the Third World, attractive as it may seem for academic anglophone Marxists, can be stultifying too particularly when so many fundamental claims must be reassessed. To date, analytical Marxists have enjoyed the benefits and suffered the costs of isolation from mass political movements. But Marxian movements in Europe and the Third World, and even in the existing socialist countries, made an indirect and attenuated connection possible. With Marxian political styles now in decline, this sustenance will diminish. Thus we can expect freer but less connected theorizing within the framework set by the Marxian agenda. We can expect Marxist social science and philosophy to become even more academic than it already is. To be sure, there is much to fault in this situation, but it bears repeating that it is not an altogether bad thing. Marxian positions *do* need to be rethought. And this exigency does demand more rigor and distance from immediately political concerns and from the demands of party and movement politics than has been the case traditionally. Without revolutionary politics, Marxism will become, at best, the theoretical orientation of an atavistic sect. But this fate can be avoided. If a genuinely Marxian politics can be revived in no matter what guise, the Marxian agenda can flourish with implications for theory that cannot now be foreseen.

## IX Marxism Tomorrow

Should strict Marxism prove defensible, it will provide a basis for reconstructing many traditional Marxian claims, and for continuing theoretical work in accord with the Marxian agenda. But if strict Marxism is untenable, the prospects for Marxism are less clear. Then, in theory as in politics, the Marxian agenda, if it survives, will be continued in ways increasingly remote from the forms and styles historically associated with Marxism.

What is clear is that recent work on Marxian themes has a role to play in either eventuality, and that many of the current preoccupations of analytical Marxists can be understood in light of the uncertainties that cloud Marxism's future. Some achievements of the analytical current are irreversible: above all, its (implicit) deflation of grand theorizing and programmatic declarations, and its turn towards the rational adjudication of competing hypotheses. It is already plain that the Marxism of the future will barely resemble the Marxism of the past.

Schumpeter's spectre may therefore have its day, but there is no need for partisans of the Marxian agenda to despair. What Marxists have to say, if sustainable, *should* be appropriated by the mainstream theoretical culture. Intellectual resources important to the Marxian agenda should be taken on board, regardless of their origin. And, sentimentality notwithstanding, what is untenable should be set aside.

Some analytical Marxists have gone to extremes in assimilating theoretical tools of non- or anti-Marxian origin. Methodological individualism, joined with rational choice models of individual behavior, has become emblematic of an important strain of Marxian social science.<sup>28</sup> Neo-classical economics, long the bugbear of Marxian political economists, has won the day in analytical reconstructions of Marxian economic ideas.<sup>29</sup> And, as I have noted, some

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* and Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985). A critical survey is provided in Alan Carling, 'Rational Choice Marxism,' *New Left Review* 160 (Nov.-Dec. 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. John Roemer, *Analytical Foundations of Marxian Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981).

Marxian philosophers have come to take entitlement theories of justice and related libertarian notions more seriously than is commonplace among mainstream liberals.<sup>30</sup> There plainly is merit to these and other unlikely departures in Marxian theory. But to hostile observers, it must seem disingenuous in the extreme to flaunt the intellectual apparatus of Karl Popper, Paul Samuelson and John Locke while donning a Marxian label. Even sympathetic observers cannot fail to note the irony of the zeal with which some Marxists today have moved onto what was once universally acknowledged to be the terrain of Marxism's enemies.

However, the irony of these departures from traditional Marxian practice attests to the continuing appeal of the Marxian agenda, and explains, in part, why so many analytical Marxists insist on maintaining an expressly Marxian identification. Throughout Marxism's history, 'revisionism' has gone hand in hand with apostasy. With some notable exceptions, those who have questioned received Marxian ideas have ended by going over to the other side. To be sure, this historical memory is not a compelling reason for remaining self-consciously Marxist. But a Marxian identification, in the present conjuncture, is a way of expressing a continuing endorsement of the radicalism of the Marxian tradition and a rejection of the political trajectories of so many former Marxists. Maintaining a Marxian identification, even while deploying some of the tools of Marxism's traditional enemies, provides a ballast for investigators struggling to find ways of continuing the Marxian agenda by more satisfactory means than the Marxian tradition has so far provided.

There is a sense in which most evolutionary biologists today are Darwinians not because they believe very much of what Darwin believed or even because their views bear a strong conceptual affinity to his, but because they carry on the project Darwin initiated. In the same way, social scientists and philosophers can be Marxists. In each case, the designation indicates a choice among theoretical agendas. In the Marxian case, that choice depends more directly on external circumstances than is commonplace for other scientific en-

<sup>30</sup> See n. 24.

deavors. However, external circumstances are likely to cooperate in sustaining the Marxian agenda. There is reason to be confident that, despite the eclipse of socialist politics in the advanced capitalist countries today, the palpable evils of capitalism will again generate organized, mass opposition to the existing order. There is reason, therefore, to think that communism will remain an appealing ideal. If, in addition, strict Marxism and perhaps other Marxian views can be sustained, the analytical turn need not end in a radical departure from traditional Marxian positions. However, predictions about the 'Marxism' of the future are speculative and, ultimately, of little consequence. What is sure is that would-be Marxists can no longer remain in the 'dogmatic slumber' that has afflicted Marxian theory for so long. How much of what we now recognize as Marxism will survive the critical scrutiny to come remains to be seen. But it is likely that the Marxian agenda can survive and urgent that it does.

If, in consequence, the continuators of the project Marx began move onto the terrain of 'bourgeois theory,' then so be it. Nostalgia must give way to intellectual honesty and the need for sound theory. The orthodox will protest. But proponents of the Marxian agenda can withstand this challenge and even benefit from it. There will be resistance too from those who fear political dissolution through incorporation into the mainstream. This fear is not unfounded. The less marginalized Marxian theory is, the more cooptable its proponents become. But the Marxian agenda itself is irretrievably at odds with rival orientations. All science and philosophy aim at making sense of the world. Marxian science and philosophy aim, too, at the revolutionary transformation of the world towards communism. Wherever this objective survives, opposition survives. In this sense, cooptation cannot be the outcome of the Marxian project, whatever the fate of some of its practitioners. So long as the Marxian agenda survives, there will be theorists committed to communism and to the overthrow of capitalism. In this sense, to be a Marxist today and tomorrow, too is just what it has always been.



## What is Living and What is Dead in Marxism?

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I

I make no apology for what is by now a hackneyed title. It derives, of course, from Croce's book on Hegel, and I choose it because I want to suggest that the question 'What is living and what is dead in Marxism?' is the right question to ask. The analytical approach is appropriate if it means distinguishing and discriminating between different aspects of Marxism, and refusing to reject or embrace it en bloc as a monolithic creed. However, this does not mean that Marxism can be chopped up into a number of disconnected theses, with a view to producing an inventory of those which are true and those which are false. Marxism claims to be a systematic theory, whose various elements hang together in an organised way. Some would say that this creates an unbridgeable gulf between Marxist and analytical philosophies. Nevertheless, though Marxism's claim to be systematic should be taken seriously, there are different readings of the theory and of how its components are connected, and different versions will see different elements as central. This is where the careful discrimination of meanings and interpretations is needed. It is not simply a question of deciding whether each of the various elements, in isolation, is true or false, more a matter of deciding

where the emphasis should lie if Marxism is to continue to illuminate our understanding of the social world. It is in this sense that we can talk about Marxism or any other theory as 'living' not just as containing true assertions, but as being capable of playing a vital and creative role in human thought and action. In what version, then, if any, is Marxism a living philosophy?

I want to put forward two closely connected suggestions.

1. Marxism is dead insofar as it purports to be a complete and self-sufficient philosophy, or even a complete social theory, and living insofar as it recognises itself to be part of a wider tradition of thought, without which it is incomplete.
2. What Marxism needs to draw from that wider tradition is, above all, a set of values, and these values must be central to any Marxism that is to be a living theory.

There is indeed a version of Marxism which sets itself up as an all-embracing philosophy. It takes the form of a conjunction of philosophical materialism and historical materialism, in which the former is taken to be a comprehensive ontological theory and the latter is seen as the application of the former to the social world. Philosophical materialism is supposed to provide the premises from which the social theory is derived. Now I do not want to deny that both philosophical materialism and historical materialism may be acceptable theories, in some version. What is not acceptable is this particular combination of them as two interlocking halves of a supposedly comprehensive world view. The fact is that there is no special connection between them. The case for historical materialism may, perhaps, start from the premise that human beings are endowed by their biological nature with certain inescapable physical needs, for food and clothing and shelter, and must work on the external world to satisfy those needs; but this is not something which any sane version of philosophical idealism or dualism would deny. I suspect that Marx himself linked historical materialism with a wider philosophical materialism mainly because he was reacting against Hegel's own particular combination of philosophical idealism and historical idealism, according to which, on its most natural interpretation, 'mind' or 'spirit' is both the ultimate reality and the driving force of history. The fact remains, however, that subsequent Marxists who aspire to be orthodox have supposed that they must find some

plausible connection between the two materialisms. The most tempting way to do this is to adopt a severely reductive version of each: ideas are seen as epiphenomena, as peripheral offshoots, in the one case, of material entities and, in the other, of 'material life' or 'material activity.' What is especially damaging in this version of Marxism and this brings me to my second point is that ethical ideas, values, are seen in this way. It cannot for long be plausibly maintained that *all* ideas are purely epiphenomenal in relation to material activity, for how could that activity even be possible unless human beings formulated purposes and intentions, invented techniques and tools, and carried into effect in the material world ideas which they had first formed in the imagination? Hence values are fixed on as the more plausible candidate to exemplify the claim that ideas are secondary phenomena. Values are seen as essentially ideological, as reflections of class positions and class interests. They have neither independent efficacy nor independent validity, and this conception of values is typically stated as a form of ethical relativism, a class relativism.

I consider that the impact of this version of Marxism has been disastrous. It does violence to the fundamental impulse behind Marxism. The initial appeal of Marxism resides in the fact that it seems to offer a critique of existing society and to embody the desire for a better society, that critique and that desire being thought of precisely as *not* just reflections of class interests, but as rationally grounded. People are attracted to Marxism because they believe that the judgements that capitalism is built on exploitation and oppression, that it crushes and restricts people's lives and prevents them fulfilling their human potential, and that it can and should give way to a socialist society which would embody greater freedom and equality, are not of the same order as the ideological rationalisations invoked to legitimate the status quo and to protect the interests of the privileged. Marxism appears to offer a perspective within which to develop those judgments and render them more rigorous. It is then a tragedy that the dominant version of Marxism can lead its adherents to deny all this.

I maintain, then, that a living Marxism would have to be one in which values are central. There has in recent years been a very thorough and wide-ranging debate about the relation between

Marxism and ethics.<sup>1</sup> Marx has been variously interpreted as a utilitarian and a Kantian, as a proponent of the idea of 'justice' and that of 'self-realisation,' as a naturalist and a humanist, a social relativist and an amoralist. If there is one thing which the debate can be taken to have established, it is that there is no one clear and consistent position on ethics to be found in Marx, either explicit or implicit. There are of course many fertile hints and suggestions, and much of Marx's writing has ethical implications hence the interpretations which abound. But to the question 'What did Marx really think about ethics?' there can be no answer, since Marx himself did not know what he really thought about it and never worked out a consistent position. My own claim is rather different: that whatever Marx himself may have thought, Marxist social theory becomes properly intelligible only when it is seen as imbued with certain specific concrete values. Sometimes these are explicit in Marx's writing, sometimes they are implicit. Their philosophical basis is not fully worked out, they are not always consistently espoused, and sometimes they are actually disavowed. Nevertheless, they constitute the background against which Marxist social theory needs to be set. These values are by no means unique to Marxism. First and foremost they are socialist values, but these in turn are located within a wider tradition, the tradition of humanistic values and the ideal of the fully human life. It is a tradition which begins with Aristotle's account of the good life as one in which human beings use to the full their distinctively human capacities. In Aristotle, this is an elitist ideal: the fully human life can be realised only in intellectual activity and in the performance of civic duties which are confined to a male and slave-owning citizen class exempt from the need to engage in manual labour. Within a socialist perspective, the ideal

1 See, for instance, *Marxism and Morality*, Supplementary Volume VII of the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Kai Nielsen and Steven C. Patten, eds. (Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing 1981). This includes a comprehensive bibliography by Kai Nielsen. Another important collection is *Marx, Justice and History, a 'Philosophy and Public Affairs' Reader*, Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980). A valuable survey is Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985).

of the fully human life takes on an egalitarian slant, and in some of Marx's writing such an ideal is explicitly formulated. Since, for Marx, the fully human life is realised not just in intellectual activity but in all forms of productive work, it is potentially accessible to all. Hence arises Marx's hostility to conditions which 'mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine,' and his commitment to the making of 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.'<sup>2</sup> Marx's own explicit remarks about the concept of equality are equivocal; he sometimes suggests that it is a characteristically bourgeois notion, and sometimes also that it is essentially incoherent. I repeat therefore that I am not offering here an account of 'what Marx really thought' about values, but I do want to suggest that the underlying inspiration of Marxism is broadly egalitarian.

I have said that Marx himself did not have a fully worked out ethical theory. A major task for a living Marxism would therefore be to develop such a theory. To do so it would need to draw on the wider socialist tradition, much of which is more self-consciously egalitarian than Marx (examples are the early French socialists building on the work of Rousseau, and British socialist writers such as William Morris and R.H. Tawney). It would also need to draw on the yet wider philosophical tradition of humanistic ethics (and this includes engaging with contemporary political philosophy such as that of Rawls, in a way which has already been usefully done by some writers).<sup>3</sup> Marxism is dead if it cuts itself off from the resources of those wider traditions.

I should add that in talking about Marxism's need for ethical values, I am not necessarily talking about 'morality' in the narrow sense, that is, a mode of evaluation which is preoccupied with the guilt and innocence of individuals. When Marx expresses scepticism about morality as such, and appears to regard it as essentially ideo-

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, Chapter XXV, Section 4; and Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Section II

<sup>3</sup> See, again, the collection edited by Nielsen and Patten, especially the essay by Reiman; and much of Nielsen's own work listed in the bibliography there and incorporated in his *Equality and Liberty* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld 1985).

logical, he may at least sometimes be referring primarily to morality in this restricted sense. Thus he says in the Preface to the First German Edition of *Capital*, Vol.1:

I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose*. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.

Such a standpoint, however, need not preclude the making of rational value judgments about the relations characteristic of a particular society and the quality of the human lives which they make possible. Indeed, the above passage actually implies that value judgments *are* appropriate when applied to the capitalist and the landlord as personifications of economic categories rather than as individuals. Whether Marx is right to eschew morality in the strict sense and to deny individual moral responsibility is a matter for further debate.<sup>4</sup> I simply want to indicate that even if he is right, the fact remains that values in a wider sense are essential to a living Marxism.

I also want to make it clear that I am not advocating a version of Marxism which is simply the obverse of positivistic Marxism. For a Marxism devoid of values I do not wish to substitute a merely ethical Marxism. I do not agree with Popper when he says:

It is [the] moral radicalism of Marx which explains his influence; and that is a hopeful fact in itself. This moral radicalism is still alive. It is our task to keep it alive, to prevent it from going the way which his political radicalism will have to go. "Scientific" Marxism is dead. Its feeling of social responsibility and its love for freedom must survive.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On this, see especially Tony Skillen's essay in Nielsen and Patten.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* Vol.2, 4th ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1962) 211

That is too exiguous an allowance. Jon Elster, in his account of what is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Marx, tends in the same direction. He consigns to the mortuary not only 'scientific socialism' but also 'the theory of productive forces and relations of production perhaps the most important part of historical materialism.'<sup>6</sup> Though he allows that there is some life left in the theory of class and the theory of ideology, it does seem to me that a Marxism without the lynchpin of its social theory can hardly be regarded as recognisably Marxist. The position which I want to advocate is not that we need to preserve Marxist values in contrast to Marxist social theory, but that we need to see how values underpin the social theory. I shall now consider in more detail the nature of that underpinning, and in particular the relation of values to the concept of 'class,' the concept of 'ideology,' and the theory of historical materialism.

## II Class

'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' A frequent and natural response to that broad assertion is that history can be the history of many things and can be viewed from many different perspectives, often remote from that of Marxism. History can be looked at as the history of the rise and fall of civilizations or of nations, or as the history of high culture, or as the history of court politics; or as Popper more fancifully puts it, 'according to our interests, we could, for instance, write about the history of art; or of language; or of feeding habits; or of typhus fever.'<sup>7</sup> Popper's argument is that historical 'facts' are potentially infinite, that selection is therefore necessary, and that how we select depends on our point of view. The conventional standpoint from which history is written, as the history of the exercise of political power, is accord-

<sup>6</sup> Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986) 193

<sup>7</sup> Popper, 270

ing to Popper merely one possible standpoint among others; none of them, neither the conventional point of view, nor the Marxist, nor any other, can be identified with the history of mankind as such.

Although these innumerable points of view may be possible, the Marxist judgment would be that to focus primarily on, say, the history of the exercise of political power, or the history of artistic achievement, would be to ignore the most *important* thing: the way in which high culture and the politics of rulers rest on the unacknowledged labour of the mass of mankind, engaged in that material production without which no other human achievement would be possible. This necessary labour is secured at the cost of the squandering and crushing of countless individual human lives for the sake of the well-being of the few. Opponents of Marxism could hardly deny the dependence of other activities on material production and therefore on the existence of a labouring class. The disagreement is about the importance of this for our way of looking at history, and the Marxist insistence on seeing history as the history of class struggle is inescapably an ethical judgment about the importance of class and the importance of the lives of those who have been the victims of class subordination. (The alternative view, that such a judgment is a pure causal judgment, is one to which I shall return later.)

Not only is the judgment of the importance of class relations in history inescapably ethical, but so also is the concept of class itself. Clearly not just any division between different groups in a society counts as a division between classes. The division must, for a start, be a division between groups with respect to their material wellbeing, but, more than that, the concept of class necessarily invokes a certain kind of explanation for the differences in material wellbeing. The contrast between, for instance, the lucky and the unlucky is not a distinction between classes. Differences in material well-being are class differences if they are a consequence of the power-relations between the respective groups. Classes, then, are by definition characterised by relations of inequality in power and wealth, by relations of oppression and exploitation.

Such a position has been contested, not least from within the Marxist tradition, and with some plausibility. One can, it is said, accept the Marxist theory of class, and indeed the theory of history



generally, without drawing the practical conclusions which are drawn by the political Marxist. Could not a member of the dominant class, for instance, say quite consistently 'Yes, indeed, history is the history of class struggles, the current phase of those struggles has put my class in power, and I intend to make sure that it stays that way for as long as possible'? Invoking the distinction between facts and values, it would seem possible to accept the factual analysis of class relations, whilst rejecting the evaluation of those relations as unjust and rejecting the ideal of a classless society.

I agree that one can consistently reject such an evaluation of class relations; what one cannot consistently do, however, is to reject it without further explanation. Class relations, I repeat, are by definition relations of oppression and exploitation. One might take the view that they are nevertheless inevitable and that there is therefore no point in criticising them or trying to change them. One might reject the fundamental premise of moral equality, and take the view that some people's lives simply are more important than others and that it is appropriate that lesser mortals should be sacrificed for those who are, in some specified respect, their superiors. A variety of value judgments about class is therefore possible. What cannot be done, however, is to treat the concept as simply neutral. The Marxist concept of class is a critical concept and its critical connotations can be rejected only if specific grounds are given for doing so from some alternative ethical perspective.

I want to make two further points about the ethical significance of the concept of 'class.' First, if the concept is to carry critical weight, it cannot be the case that the whole of people's experience of social relations is confined to class relations of oppression and exploitation. This is because the positive values against which we identify the deficiencies of class relations must themselves be grounded in experience. Though Marxism does not have an adequately worked out moral epistemology, any Marxist perspective would undoubtedly, and rightly, rule out the conception of values as abstract Platonic ideas or as objects of intellectual intuition. Values, though they are not just the relativised products of class interests, are nevertheless based in social experience. If class relations are criticised from the standpoint of egalitarian values, those egalitarian values must themselves be the expression of people's non-oppressive, non-

exploitative relations of cooperation and solidarity. In part the relevant experience will be of relations of solidarity within the working class, such as the young Marx himself found during his brief residence in Paris:

When communist artisans form associations, teaching and propaganda are their first aims. But their association itself creates a new need the need for society and what appeared to be a means has become an end. The most striking results of this practical development are to be seen when French socialist workers meet together. Smoking, eating and drinking are no longer simply means of bringing people together. Society, association, entertainment which also has society as its aim, is sufficient for them; the brotherhood of man is no empty phrase but a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their toil-worn bodies.<sup>8</sup>

That, however, cannot be the whole story; it would be absurd to suppose that working-class life was always like that, still more that it is always so today, and it would be equally foolish to suppose that the experience of solidarity is confined to members of the working class. There are authentic relations of cooperation and community not only within classes but across class divides. Indeed, I should want to argue that classes are not classes unless they are divisions within a wider community which is at least in some respects a cooperative community. The minimal thesis here is an a priori one: exploitation itself presupposes a rudimentary level of cooperation, if only the coerced and unwilling assent of slaves to the orders of their masters. So much, at any rate, is necessary to distinguish relations between classes from relations between adjacent but self-contained communities, or to distinguish the exploitation of human beings from the manipulation of inanimate objects. The more substantial and more important thesis is an empirical one: that as a matter of fact there is in modern capitalist societies a large measure of common life and willing cooperation which transcends class divisions.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 'Needs, Production, and the Division of Labour' (in *Early Writings*, T. Bottomore, ed. [London: Watts 1963]), 176. Cf. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1975), 313.

In the strictly economic sphere Marx himself recognises this, when he talks of the contradiction between the increasing role of cooperation in modern productive forces and the relations of production based on private property. Analogous contradictions, I should say, are to be found in the spheres of cultural and political life, where the reality of authentic community comes into conflict with the lines of class division which cut across it. (Note, for instance, the recalcitrant fact of nationalist sentiment, which a narrow Marxism can never satisfactorily explain.) The case for equality has its rational foundation in those contradictions in the existence of cooperation and the fact that the requirements of freely cooperative relations are violated and betrayed by exploitative class relations.

The experience of class, then, cannot be the whole of anyone's social experience, and a Marxism which focuses exclusively on class cannot be a comprehensive social theory. The value of equality is rooted in people's experience of authentic social cooperation. My second, related point is that there are forms of inequality other than that of class inequality. In this respect, too, Marxism cannot provide a comprehensive account of social experience. Most obviously, there are racial and sexual inequalities. There has been a long-running debate about the relation between Marxism and feminism. Whatever the outcome of that debate, whether we conclude that Marxism can be extended to provide an account of sexual inequalities or whether we conclude that it is inadequate to do so, it is clear that traditional Marxism is in itself incomplete, and that it needs to be located within a broader tradition of egalitarian politics.

### III Ideology

The second element in Marxist social theory which I want to look at is the concept of 'ideology,' and again I want to argue that if the Marxist theory of ideology is taken to provide an account of *all* human thought and consciousness, it is inadequate. The distinctive Marxist concept of ideology refers to ideas which are a reflection of the standpoint and the interests of a particular class. I know that this reading of Marx is disputed, and that many would want to attribute to him a different version of the concept. The matter is a dif-

difficult one, and I can only state baldly that the concept of ideology as a reflection of class interests seems to me to be the dominant one in Marx, and the most useful version of the concept. It identifies a highly important social phenomenon, and if we did not call that phenomenon 'ideology' we should have to invent another term with which to refer to it. The usefulness of this concept, however, depends precisely on contrasting ideological with non-ideological thought. Not all ideas can be ideological in this sense.

Some Marxists have supposed that they can be and are. They have denied that there can be any objective truth independent of the standpoints of particular classes; all ideas reflect the perspective of a specific class, and the only question which can be raised concerning their truth or falsity is whether they are true for this or that class. This position of extreme relativism and irrationalism, however, falls foul of the paradox of relativism. If all beliefs can have only relative truth, then the assertion of relativism itself can be only relatively true. Therefore the denial of relativism must also have a relative truth.

Relativism as a general theory of truth is so obviously paradoxical that it is unlikely to be maintained for long. Marxist class relativists tend to fall back on a partial relativism, and the most popular variant is one which employs a distinction between science and ideology. Scientific thought (including the Marxist science of society) is allowed to be capable of objective truth; all else is ideology, and can only express the standpoint of a particular class. What is immediately puzzling is how science, and science alone, can escape the influence of class interests. No doubt answers are available, but they would have to make some fairly sweeping claims for the efficacy of scientific method. What more particularly concerns me here, however, is what is consigned to the other side of the divide. Characteristically, this includes values. Value judgments are often regarded by Marxists as the paradigm of ideology, and this generates the ethical relativism which I have been so concerned to criticise.

I want to suggest, then, that the concept of ideology, like the concept of class, is essentially a critical concept, and that it gets its critical force from the contrast with non-ideological thinking, including non-ideological thinking about values. As with the theory of class and indeed with the central thrust of Marxist social theory, what the theory of ideology offers is primarily a *pathology* of social life,

an account of what goes wrong, of the systematic distortions and deformations of human life as a result of the exigencies of material production and its institutional structures. In talking of 'distortions,' I do not mean to suggest that they are mere incidental deviations. They are at the heart of people's lives, but they are never the whole of people's lives, and the contradiction between the experience of human fulfillment and the social forces which frustrate and crush that fulfillment is a contradiction which has been lived throughout history, in different ways by different classes. Marxism, at its best, provides an understanding of that contradiction. The often-made comparison between Marx and Freud is appropriate and illuminating. Freudian psychoanalytic theory cannot furnish a comprehensive psychology, and if pressed into service in that role it makes for an impoverished view of human life. Freud, as has often been said, offers us no developed account of the healthy personality. What he does is explain the obstacles to psychic health, the inner conflicts, the evasions and repressions which block human fulfillment and which do so not just as an unfortunate accident but because of deep-rooted features of the human condition. Just as Freud is concerned with the psychopathology of human life, so Marx is concerned with its socio-pathology. And as Freud's concept of the unconscious explains the power of the irrational in the individual personality, so Marx's concept of ideology explains the power of the irrational at the social level.

To use the concept of ideology in this way is to imply that there can be rational thinking about values, about the good life and the good society. The dichotomy of science and ideology is not exhaustive. A rational ethics will employ informal, non-specialised argument and debate which is not 'scientific' in the narrow sense but need not on that account be just an ideological rationalisation of class interests. My claim in this paper is that Marxism needs to be linked to that rational debate about the good life, and can itself contribute to it. The irony is that Marxist misuse of the concept of 'ideology' tends to undermine that contribution.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The tension manifests itself also as a desire on the part of Marxists to have it both ways. Thus Engels maintains that 'morality has always been class moral-

*(footnote continued on next page)*

I want to emphasise again that in describing ideological thought as an irrational distortion, I do not mean that it is merely peripheral. Historically, ideological thinking about values has always been socially dominant. 'The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.'<sup>10</sup> That, of course, is part of what makes it the ruling class. These ruling ideas are diffused mainly at the level of a vague and unsystematic popular consciousness, the 'common sense' of the age, but they are present also in the work of serious thinkers. Thus the dominant form of ancient Greek thought legitimates slavery and focuses on distinctively aristocratic values and a contempt for manual labour. The dominant ideas of feudal society present social hierarchies as 'natural,' as components of a cosmic hierarchy. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political thinkers are especially preoccupied with the defence of private property rights and the values and assumptions of possessive individualism. However, though these modes of thought are socially dominant, they are never all-embracing. There are always currents of oppositional thought running alongside them, in a continuing and developing tradition. To take just the first example, that of ancient Greek thought: Aristotle, in his ideological endorsement of slavery, finds it necessary to argue against those who 'think that it is contrary to nature for there to be masters ruling over slaves; they argue that slave and free are determined purely by convention, whereas by nature there is no difference between the two.'<sup>11</sup> Euripides, in his tragedies, speaks

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

ity; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, ever since the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented its indignation against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed.' He immediately goes on to assert, however, that 'there has on the whole been progress in morality,' progress towards 'a really human morality' (*Anti-Dühring* Part I, ch. 9). This will not do. Progress can be identified as such only by reference to values which are *not* just those of a particular class or a particular epoch. For a different view, however, see Sean Sayers' contribution to this volume.

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* Part 1, in *Collected Works* Vol.5 (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1976) 59

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1.3 (trans. J.L. Creed and A.E. Wardman)

up for women, peasants and slaves. Radical sophists such as Antiphon criticise the conventional divisions between noble and base, Greek and barbarian, 'since we are all by nature born the same in every way.'<sup>12</sup> Later, the Stoics put forward the idea of a universal world citizenship. These oppositional thinkers cannot be represented merely as giving expression to another ideology, that of the oppressed class. They are for the most part members of the dominant class, but they have questioned the received wisdom of their class. Nor are they isolated individuals; they are part of a continuing tradition, pressing against the barriers of ideology.

It should go without saying that there is no sharp contrast between ideological and non-ideological thinkers. There is no privileged group of intellectuals who can completely rise above their epoch and escape the influence of class interests. I have mentioned the example of Aristotle, the last person to be categorised as a mere ideologist, but a philosopher whose thought often shocks us by its crudely uncritical acceptance of the assumptions of his class and sex. Another classic example is Hume; his reasons for thinking that justice must be almost exclusively a matter of the protection of private property are transparently inadequate, yet these ideological strands in his theory of justice are interwoven with wonderfully acute discussions of the relations between nature and artifice, particular cases and general rules, private and public interests. With such thinkers it is no easy task to say where ideological distortions begin and end, and the attempt to determine this is part and parcel of the rational assessment of their thought. It is not, then, a matter of putting ideas into boxes neatly marked 'ideological' and 'non-ideological,' but of using the concept of ideology as a critical tool in our engagement with ideas.

<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1962) 148

## IV Historical Materialism

What is true of the concepts of 'class' and 'ideology' is true also of historical materialism as a whole: it depends for its significance on the centrality of values in Marxism. Consider the controversy around Engels' assertion that material production is 'the *ultimately* determining element in history.'<sup>13</sup> What can 'ultimate' mean here? In historical and social processes there is no Aristotelian first cause, no unmoved mover. Changes in material production themselves have their causes, and these include political, religious, scientific and intellectual causes. As Engels, in various letters such as the one from which I have quoted, was anxious to stress in distancing himself from the vulgarisations of historical materialism, all the different elements of social life interact. They cannot be divided into those which have causal efficacy and those which do not. Everything has its consequences, everything is both cause and effect, and no one thing is more of a cause than any other. In that case, however, it would seem that we can give no sense to the idea of an 'ultimately determining element.' Social life must be a seamless web of interacting and interpenetrating elements. Engels cannot have it both ways.

I want to suggest that in dealing with this difficulty we can make use of the work of those philosophers who have linked the concept of causality with that of human agency.<sup>14</sup> Collingwood, in particular, argued that the use of the concept of 'cause' in science is an anthropomorphic extension of the term.<sup>15</sup> According to Collingwood, the original sense of 'cause' (which he labels 'Sense I') is that in which causing someone to act in a certain way means providing them with a motive for so acting. In Sense II the concept is extended into the practical sciences and x is said to be the cause of y if we can pro-

<sup>13</sup> Engels, letter to Joseph Bloch, September 21-22, 1890. The emphasis is Engels'.

<sup>14</sup> Engels himself made such a link elsewhere, but failed to draw on it in the present context. See *Dialectics of Nature*, note on 'Causality' in the section headed 'Dialectical Logic and the Theory of Knowledge,' in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* Vol.25 (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1987) 510.

<sup>15</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1940) Part IIIc



duce or prevent y by acting on x; for instance, the 'cause of cancer' is that factor which we can manipulate in order to prevent cancer. In Sense III the concept is further extended into the theoretical sciences, and is the ultimately incoherent notion of one event (anthropomorphically) necessitating another event.

It is Collingwood's Sense II, I suggest, that can throw some light on Engels' notion of an 'ultimately determining element' or 'final cause.' An 'ultimately determining element' must be the most important determinant *of something*; it cannot just be the ultimately determining element 'in history.' The best sense we can make of this, I suggest, is that we are looking for the ultimate determinant *of that which we want to change*. How then do we select, from all the interconnecting elements, one of them as 'ultimate'? It is that element on which we can act in order most effectively to change what we want to change. Compare Collingwood's example.<sup>16</sup> If I want to know the cause of my car's failure to climb a steep hill, 'I shall not consider my problem solved by a passer-by who tells me that the top of a hill is farther away from the earth's centre than its bottom, and that consequently more power is needed to take a car uphill than to take her along the level.' Though this is one of the set of conditions which explain the event, it is not *the cause*.'

But suppose an AA man comes along, opens the bonnet, holds up a loose high-tension lead, and says: "Look here, sir, you're running on three cylinders." My problem is now solved. I know the cause of the stoppage . . . . It has been correctly identified as the thing that I can put right, after which the car will go properly.

Analogously, why would we not say that the ultimately determining element of social life is, for instance, our biological constitution, the set of biological needs which we have to work to satisfy? If they were different, the whole of our life and of human history would be quite different. Nevertheless, we do not pick out this factor as 'the cause' of how we live and how we might live, since it is not something that can be modified by human agency.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 302-3

I suggest therefore that the Marxist claim about 'the ultimately determining element in history' is best understood somewhat as follows. If you want to work for a classless society, a world in which all human beings are free and equal, you have to change not just the overt and conscious ways in which people treat one another, but the institutionalised structures of power. In order to change these, you have above all to change the structures of economic power, the relations of ownership and control of the means of material production, and you have to do so in ways which will increase or at least maintain the productive capacity of the society, for any attempt at social and political change which jeopardised the socially organised capacities for material production would be doomed to failure. It is in that sense that economic factors are the most important. From a strictly neutral value-free point of view, no one aspect of society is more important a cause than any other. 'Importance' here must again be an evaluative term. The 'ultimately determining element' is that area of social life in which human agency is most effectively able to determine the prospects for the quality of people's lives.

To put it that way may seem to suggest that Marxist theory is solely concerned with offering a prognosis for the future. But it is of course a theory of history, and the same perspective can illuminate the past as well as the future. We can look back at the history of human societies and chart the way in which aspirations for a better life have been thwarted by power structures, and above all by the structures of economic power. The standpoint of agency can be retrospective as well as prospective. The connections between the different aspects of social existence are real, objective connections, they are to be established by an examination of the historical facts, and it is because they can be objectively established that they provide a guide to future possibilities. In linking them to values, I am not introducing another version of relativism. I am not suggesting that different theories of society are simply reflections of different sets of values, and that judgments as to their truth or falsity are determined by one's evaluative standpoint. The evaluative perspective is not a criterion of truth, but a criterion of relevance. It determines the questions which we pose, and the facts which we select as central to our understanding of society.

It should be noticed that this view of historical materialism sits uneasily with the interpretation of it as a narrow technological determinism. By that I mean the thesis that the 'productive forces' which are supposed to determine the character of the relations of production, and thence of the political and ideological superstructure, are to be identified with tools and techniques. If we combine this with my emphasis on the standpoint of agency, it seems we should have to say that in order to create a more just and humanly fulfilling society we have to devise new tools and techniques. This is presumably not something that can be done by broad social and political movements inspired by a vision of a better society, but only by scientists and inventors. And since their concern will be with purely technical challenges and tasks rather than with the wider social ramifications, the kind of society we get will, for better or worse, be the unintended by-product of technical inventions.

It does not then follow that technological determinism is false. It may in fact be the case that social change can be brought about only as a secondary consequence of technological innovation. There are, however, independent reasons for thinking otherwise, and for doubting the truth of technological determinism. What gives plausibility to the thesis of 'the primacy of productive forces' is the commonsense recognition that struggles for a better society are unlikely to succeed if they would involve a decrease in economic productivity, and are in fact more likely to succeed if they will actually increase society's productivity. At this commonsense level, however, the 'productive forces' whose primacy is being asserted would have to mean not just technology, but 'productive capacities' in a broad sense. These can be developed and increased not just by technological innovation but in all sorts of ways, including changes in work relations, in the patterns of organisation and control within the workplace (which Cohen classifies as 'material relations of production' in contrast to 'social relations of production').<sup>17</sup> But since a particu-

<sup>17</sup> G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978) 111-14. Cohen says that work relations are not part of the productive forces, but he nevertheless allows that '*knowledge of ways of organizing labour is a productive force, part of managerial labour power*' (113, my italics).

lar pattern of material relations of production is likely to be inseparable from a particular structure of relations at the level of the society as a whole, the contrast between 'productive forces' in this broad sense and 'relations of production' may at least in some cases be simply a distinction between different aspects of the same phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> Consider the claim that economic productivity would be increased if workers themselves owned and controlled the means of production, since their sense of working for themselves rather than for 'the bosses' would be a much greater incentive to efficiency, hard work, innovation and creativity. If this is true such a change would be a change in the productive forces in the broad sense that it would be an increase in productive capacities, but it would also of course be at the same time a change in the relations of production (both 'material' and 'social'). In such a context the assertion of the *primacy* of productive forces would amount to the assertion that such a change is possible only *because* it increases productivity. This would not be technological determinism, and it would be an interpretation of historical materialism more consistent with the approach which I am proposing.

## V Marxism and Analytical Philosophy

I have argued for the centrality of values in a living Marxism, and have suggested that the concept of 'class' itself has evaluative connotations; that the concept of 'ideology' presupposes the possibility of non-ideological values; and that when historical materialism identifies the most important determining factors in history it does so from an evaluative standpoint. I have suggested that the values in question are not exclusively Marxist, that though they are sometimes invoked by Marx himself they are also treated inconsistently by him, and that he does not have a properly worked out ethical theory. I am committed to the view that there are values which are not just the expression of class interests, which transcend particular classes

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Anthony Skillen, *Ruling Illusions* (Hassocks: Harvester 1977) 38-9.

and particular socio-economic systems, which can therefore serve as objective criteria for judging a particular society, and which can be rationally defended. Whether that means that they are 'timeless,' 'eternal,' 'universal' values or whether they are still in some sense historically specific, I do not know. I am not sure what these terms mean, and one of the principal services which analytical philosophy could render to Marxism would be to help sort out such questions. I want in conclusion, then, to offer some brief remarks about the relation between Marxism and analytical philosophy.

I suspect that the term 'analytical Marxism' is something of a misnomer. Some excellent work has gone under that name, but the positive qualities which it shares with analytical philosophy are simply the qualities of all good philosophy: clarity, precision, and rigorous argument. Analytical philosophy more narrowly defined must surely be at odds with any version of Marxism, for the creed of analytical philosophy in its militant heyday was that grand theory about human life, about history and society, can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion, that it should be replaced by detailed piecemeal analysis of terms or concepts, and that philosophical problems will evaporate once the conceptual muddles have been cleared away. Contrast that intellectual stance with the approach adopted by Cohen in his book *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (deservedly regarded as a classic of 'analytical Marxism'). Cohen does not just define the central terms of Marxist social theory and clarify the theses put forward by that theory; he also defends it in substance, and does so by appealing to broad factual generalisations about the human condition, in a way which would have been anathema to the purists of analytical philosophy.

Meanwhile, however, analytical philosophy itself has moved on. If we use the term to refer to the mainstream of English-language philosophy, it is now very different from what it was thirty or forty years ago. One of the most important developments has been the revival of normative ethical and political philosophy, concerned not just with the form of evaluative discourse but with its content and prepared to draw practical conclusions about contemporary social life. This is sometimes called 'applied philosophy,' but would be better described as a philosophy which is no longer artificially abstracted from the practical problems and dilemmas of human existence.

The standards of rigour characteristic of the best in analytical philosophy should continue to be applied to Marxist social theory, but what is even more needed is the convergence of normative political philosophy and Marxist social theory. The two should come together on terms which assign to normative political philosophy the task of providing the wider perspective. Much good work of the required kind has already been done. We need a comprehensive theory plotting the connections between such concepts as 'freedom,' 'self-realization,' 'needs,' 'work,' 'democracy,' 'community,' 'cooperation,' 'justice' and 'equality' and thereby providing a systematic account of what a good society would be like. It is within that setting that Marxism can best flourish as a living theory.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In thinking about these matters I am grateful for the stimulus of arguments over many years with Sean Sayers. See his contribution to this volume, and his article 'Marxism and Actually Existing Socialism' in *Socialism and Morality*, David McLellan and Sean Sayers, eds. (London: Macmillan forthcoming 1989).

## Analytical Marxism and Morality

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I

Marxism has probably been the most influential philosophy of this century. Until recently, however, it was either ignored or dismissed without serious consideration by the great majority of English-speaking philosophers. If the situation is now changing, that is thanks in good measure to the development of analytical Marxism.

The project of analytical Marxism is to clarify, criticize and develop the theory of Marxism using the methods and techniques of analytical philosophy.

Unfortunately, analytical philosophers have been noticeably reluctant to spell out in clear terms what these methods are. Reference is usually made to the standards of clarity and rigour which are supposed to characterize this style of philosophy.

But such claims are little more than the advertising copy for this approach.

Clarity and rigour are the virtues of *good* philosophy, of *good* thought in all fields. Analytical philosophy has no special monopoly on them. Indeed, there is plenty of obscure and cloudy work done in the analytical tradition, as a look through the standard journals will soon confirm.

If it is difficult to define the analytical approach in terms of its method, it is no easier to make significant generalizations about its content. Although analytical philosophy arises out of the empiricist tradition and remains predominantly empiricist in character, analytical philosophers have responded to this tradition in a variety of

ways. In view of all these problems, it is tempting to give up the attempt to define analytical philosophy as a distinctive school of thought, and think of it rather as the shared style of a particular 'philosophical community.'<sup>1</sup> But there is more to it than that. For there *are* shared assumptions and tenets in the analytical approach. This becomes apparent when it is applied to a philosophy like Marxism, which not only does not share them, but which actively questions them. The result then is not clarity and rigour, but rather systematic misunderstanding and misinterpretation. That is what I shall argue.

## II Moral Values in Marxism

To do so, I shall concentrate on the question of the role of moral values in Marxism. This has long been a controversial topic, and has been a major subject of debate among analytical Marxists.<sup>2</sup> For Marxism, it is often said, involves an ambivalent paradoxical or even contradictory attitude to moral issues.

Thus, on the one hand, Marxism claims to offer a scientific account of society. Its primary aim is to understand the social world and to analyse the laws governing it, rather than to judge it in moral terms or to put forward an ideal conception of how it ought to be. Indeed, according to Marx, moral outlooks and ideals must themselves be viewed as social and historical phenomena, as ideologies, as the products and reflections of specific social conditions. Marxism thus rejects the appeal to moral principles, both in its account of capitalism and in its idea of socialism.

1 See, for example, R.W. Miller, *Analyzing Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984), Introduction.

2 Useful brief summaries of the history of these controversies are contained in S. Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1985), and in L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 3 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978). N. Geras, 'The Controversy About Marx and Justice,' *New Left Review* 150 (1985), 47-85, surveys the recent analytical debate.



On the other hand, it is clear that Marx does not confine himself to describing and explaining capitalist society and predicting its future course: he condemns it and advocates socialism. His work is full of moral judgments, both implicit and explicit, and so too is that of subsequent Marxists. It is sometimes argued that Marxism is a 'value-free' or 'ethically neutral' sort of social theory;<sup>3</sup> but that view is untenable, and it is rejected by great majority of writers on Marxism, analytical or otherwise. For Marxism is not only a social theory; it is also, and essentially, a form of *socialism*: it is a political outlook, in which practical and moral commitments play a fundamental role.

In this way, Marxism claims to be *both* a social theory *and* a political outlook, *both* a scientific account of history *and* a form of socialism. Moreover, it seeks to encompass these two aspects within the unity of a single outlook, not as independent and unrelated elements, but as equally essential parts of an integral whole. Its social theory, so far from conflicting with its moral and political values, provides the basis upon which these are thought through in concrete, practical and realistic terms. In short, Marxism claims to be a scientific form of socialism.

These claims, however, appear confused and paradoxical to the great majority of analytical philosophers. For these philosophers attempt to interpret them within a framework of rigid and exclusive dichotomies which simply exclude them from view. Marx's social theory and his moral values are portrayed as entirely distinct and logically independent aspects of his thought. Thus Marxism is dismembered into separate and unrelated aspects and, in the process, distorted and falsified.

On the one hand, the social theory is portrayed as a value free sociology which, when applied to morality, results in pure relativ-

<sup>3</sup> This view is usually associated with the name of R. Hilferding. Recently, a version of it has been defended by A. Collier, 'Scientific Socialism and the Question of Socialist Values,' in J. Mepham and D.H. Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (Brighton: The Harvester Press 1981) 3-41, and K. Nielsen, 'Coming to Grips with Marxist Anti-Moralism,' *Philosophical Forum* 19, 1 (1987) 1-22.

ism. Marx's social theory is reduced to a form of 'anti-moralism' or moral scepticism, which has the effect of rejecting all values as mere 'ideological illusions.'<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Marx's socialism is interpreted as an ethical outlook which, whatever Marx may have said to the contrary, condemns capitalism on the basis of a set of absolute moral principles of justice, self-realization, or whatever, quite distinct and separate from any social theory.

### III Analytical Marxism and Justice

These assumptions run right through the huge flood of recent analytical work in this area. Much of the debate has focused on the pros and cons of various moral principles, and particularly on the question of whether Marx criticizes capitalism as unjust. Writers like Wood and Lukes argue that he does not. According to Wood, 'although capitalist exploitation alienates, dehumanizes and degrades wage labourers,' and is condemned by Marx in these terms, 'there is nothing about it which is wrongful or unjust.'<sup>5</sup>

It is clear enough how Wood arrives at this view. He accepts the framework of assumptions I have just been describing. This imposes an either/or choice between pure relativism and moral absolutism. Quite rightly, Wood stresses that Marx regards justice and right as ideological notions and gives a social and historical account of them. These notions cannot, therefore, constitute absolute standards which have a universal or trans-historical validity. For Wood, however, this means that they are *purely* relative, entirely internal to the conditions which produce them, and thus incapable of providing a basis for criticism of these conditions. 'For Marx,' writes Wood, 'the justice or injustice of an economic transaction or institution depends on its relationship to the prevailing mode of production. A transaction is just if it harmonizes with the productive mode, unjust if it contradicts the productive mode.'<sup>6</sup>

4 S. Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, 3

5 A.W. Wood, *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981), 43

6 A.W. Wood, 'Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami,' in M. Cohen,

*(footnote continued on next page)*

On this account, the established order is 'just' and 'right' by definition. The standards of justice and right which prevail under capitalism are purely relative and internal to the capitalist system. They can be used to criticize only specific deviations from the norms of capitalist morality, like fraud and theft; but they cannot provide a basis by which the prevailing order itself can be assessed or criticized, nor can they be used to criticize other sorts of society. For that we need non-relative standards, standards which transcend the established order. According to Wood and Lukes, Marx finds these in the concepts of self-realization and emancipation. I shall return to this claim in due course; but such standards, they argue, cannot be found in the idea of justice.

In support of this account, Wood stresses that Marx himself explicitly and repeatedly repudiates the view that his theory relies on an appeal to principles of justice. Indeed, Marx is scathing about forms of socialism, like Proudhon's, which do so. Moreover, he goes to considerable lengths to insist that the wages contract, at the basis of capitalism, is 'just,' in the sense that it involves the exchange of equivalents: the worker is paid in full for the use of his labour power.<sup>7</sup>

The matter is not so easily settled, however, as writers like Cohen and Geras show. In opposition to Wood, they maintain that Marx does criticize capitalism for its injustice; and they have no difficulty in citing passages which seem to demonstrate this. For Marx does often appear to condemn capitalism in moral terms. For example, capitalist wealth, Marx writes, is based on 'the theft of alien labour time';<sup>8</sup> and in numerous other places he attacks capitalism for involving 'robbery,' 'usurpation,' 'embezzlement,' 'plunder,' 'booty,' etc.<sup>9</sup>

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

T. Nagel and T. Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980) 107

<sup>7</sup> This case is well made in A.W. Wood, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice,' in M. Cohen et al., eds., *Marx, Justice, and History*, 3-41.

<sup>8</sup> K. Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1973) 705

<sup>9</sup> Z.I. Husami, 'Marx on Distributive Justice,' in M. Cohen et al., eds., *Marx, Justice, and History*, 42-79

Language such as this cannot be reconciled with the purely relativist account suggested by Wood; nor can it be discounted as loose and rhetorical. Marx, it appears, is prepared to condemn capitalism for its injustice, even if he does not regard it as his main purpose to do so. Evidently he does believe that there is a sense in which capitalism involves injustice. Moreover, it seems clear enough that most socialists regard capitalism as unjust and evil, and that conceptions of justice and right play an important part in the socialist outlook, even if Marxism has often had problems in dealing with these facts.<sup>10</sup>

For Cohen and Geras this is all that is required in order to prove that Marxism involves 'independent and transcendent standards of justice' in terms of which he judges and condemns capitalism. Indeed, according to these writers, Marxism is based on the principle that no one has the moral right to the private ownership of the means of existence, and this is asserted as 'in effect a notion of natural right.'<sup>11</sup>

As an account of Marx's ideas this is quite absurd. Not only does Marx quite explicitly reject such views; but, more importantly, the central thrust of Marx's whole method the historical and materialist approach is in the clearest contradiction to them. Cohen and Geras are, of course, aware of this, but they brush it aside with an arrogant disregard for such evidence which is, unfortunately, all too characteristic of the analytical approach: 'Marx did think capitalism was unjust,' writes Geras, 'but he did not think he thought so.'<sup>12</sup>

Of course, it is quite possible that Marx contradicts himself, as Geras goes to some lengths to insist. Neither Geras nor Cohen, how-

10 Greatly over-optimistic ideas about how rapidly the state will 'wither away' under socialism have, I believe, been largely responsible for the disregard of issues of legality and rights by many Marxists. See S. Sayers, 'Marxism and Actually Existing Socialism,' in D. McLellan and S. Sayers, eds., *Socialism and Morality* (London: Macmillan 1989).

11 N. Geras, 'The Controversy About Marx and Justice,' 58, 77; cf. G.A. Cohen, 'Freedom, Justice and Capitalism,' *New Left Review* 126 (1981), 13.

12 N. Geras, 'The Controversy About Marx and Justice,' 70; cf. G.A. Cohen, 'Freedom, Justice and Capitalism,' 12.

ever, gives good reasons to think he does so in this case, and in this particularly massive and glaring way. The far more likely hypothesis is that it is the views of Geras and Cohen which are mistaken.

The reasoning which leads them to their conclusion is set out particularly clearly by Cohen as follows.

Since . . . Marx did not think that by capitalist criteria the capitalist steals, and since he did think he steals, he must have meant that he steals in some appropriately non-relativist sense. And since to steal is, in general, wrongly to take what rightly belongs to another, to steal is to commit an injustice, and a system which is "based on theft" is based on injustice.<sup>13</sup>

The premises here are not the problem. It is true that Marx uses the language of justice, equality and even rights in order to criticize capitalism. Certainly, that cannot be accounted for in the purely relative terms for which Wood argues. However, it simply does not follow that Marx must therefore be appealing to non-relative universal and trans-historical standards.

For here Cohen is presupposing that the only alternatives are either out and out relativism or absolutism. If standards of justice are historical and relative, then they are purely internal to the system which produces them and can be applied only within it. In order to assess whole social systems, absolute standards are needed. As we have already seen, exactly the same assumptions underlie Wood's arguments. It is just these assumptions that must be rejected, however, if Marx's approach is to be understood, for they simply exclude it from view.

#### IV The Marxist Approach

The Marxist approach is quite different. Marxism is primarily a form of social theory. It looks upon morality as a social and historical phenomenon, as a form of ideology. It sees different moralities as the products of different social and historical circumstances, and tries

<sup>13</sup> G.A. Cohen, Review of *Karl Marx* by A.W. Wood, *Mind* 92, 367 (July 1983), 443

to understand them in these terms. As we have just seen, this approach is standardly taken by analytical writers to be a form of moral relativism and scepticism. It is portrayed as a form of 'anti-moralism' which implies, in Lukes' words, that 'morality is a form of ideology, and thus social in origin, illusory in content, and serving class interests.'<sup>14</sup>

This is a fundamental misunderstanding. The main purpose of Marxism is to analyse and understand the social significance of moral ideas, not simply to criticize and dismiss them. Marx thus portrays different moral outlooks as the products and reflections of specific historical conditions, and as the expressions of the needs, desires, interests and aspirations of the members of specific social groups and classes. Although it does indeed comprehend morality as a form of ideology, that is not to say that it regards it as pure illusion. For it is a mistake to think of ideology as mere illusion and 'false consciousness.'<sup>15</sup>

This is particularly evident in the account of 'Socialist and Communist Literature' given in the *Communist Manifesto*, Chapter 3. The whole range of critical reactions to capitalism is there described and related to the class interests that they voice and reflect. There is no suggestion that these responses are thereby revealed as purely erroneous and illusory. Indeed, Marx and Engels apply the same method of analysis to their own views. They portray communism in exactly similar terms, as the conscious and theoretical expression of the developing working class movement.

The theoretical conclusions of the communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> S. Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, 3

<sup>15</sup> For further elaboration see S. Sayers, *Reality and Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1985), Ch.6; see also J. McCarney, *The Real World of Ideology* (Brighton: The Harvester Press 1980).

<sup>16</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 6 (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1975- ), 498

In short, Marxism does not involve a moral approach to history; but rather a historical approach to morality. It cannot and does not appeal to universal moral principles or values; for the essential insight of Marxism is that morality is a social and historical phenomenon. As Engels says,

we . . . reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as the eternal, ultimate and forever immutable ethical law. . . We maintain on the contrary that all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of society obtaining at the time.<sup>17</sup>

Such ideas are clearly incompatible with the sort of moral outlook which most analytical writers try to impose upon Marx. According to these writers, if Marxist ideas are historical products, then they are purely relative, and can only reflect and endorse existing conditions. In so far as Marx criticizes the established order and advocates its transcendence, therefore, he must be appealing to moral principles which themselves transcend it.

The underlying assumption here is that society is a monolithic and homogeneous structure, which exerts only a single, uniform, *1984*-like influence on its members. But things are not like that. On the contrary, society is full of tension and conflict. The existing social order contains not only forces which support and sustain it, but also forces which oppose and negate it. The established order is itself contradictory. Negative aspects and critical tendencies arise *within* it. For this reason, there is no need to look for a 'transcendent' basis for critical and negative ideas, an absolute moral standard outside existing conditions. 'If theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc., comes into contradiction with existing relations, this can only occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production.'<sup>18</sup>

However, this account does not yet answer the problems raised by relativism. Indeed, it may even seem to exacerbate them. For it appears to suggest that there are a number of different and conflicting

<sup>17</sup> F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, 87

<sup>18</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 45

but equally valid, equally possible alternative outlooks, each embodying the point of view of a specific class. Socialism would then simply be one among these, with no more claim to truth than any of the others. In other words, the approach I have been describing seems to imply a simple relativism, which has the effect of undermining any claim that can be made for the validity or truth of the socialist outlook.

This would, indeed, be the case if these conflicting forces and outlooks merely differed and clashed without further result. However, these conflicts and contradictions are at the root of historical development. Because of them, the present order is in a process of flux and change. It is not stable and ultimate; and it is ultimately destined to perish and be superseded by a new and different form of society.

Moreover, this process of historical change does not consist of a purely arbitrary succession of social forms, each merely different from and incommensurable with the others. This is how it is standardly regarded in the analytical literature; but it is not like this, according to Marxism. Rather, it takes the form of a *development through stages* and involves *progress*. These notions are crucial to the Marxist account of history. An understanding of them is essential if we are to grasp the Marxist response to relativism.

Historical development, according to Marxism, is divided into a number of distinct stages, or modes of production. Feudal society is followed by capitalism, which in turn gives way to socialism. Each stage arises on the basis of the previous stage, as a higher and more developed historical form. Every stage is therefore a necessary part of the process. Each initially constitutes a progressive development, justified for its time and relative to the conditions which it supersedes. By the same token, however, no stage is stable or ultimate. Each stage constitutes a merely transitory form, destined ultimately to perish and be replaced by a higher and more developed one.

Moreover, each particular stage is characterized by conflicts and contradictions. It undergoes change and development. In the process, the conditions for the emergence of the next stage gradually take shape within it. To the extent to which this occurs, present conditions cease to be progressive and become, instead, a fetter



and a hindrance to the process of development. In this way, as Engels explains,

each stage is necessary, and therefore justified for the time and conditions to which it owes its origins. But in the face of new, higher conditions, which gradually develop in its own womb, it loses its validity and justification. It must give way to a higher stage, which will also in its turn decay and perish.<sup>19</sup>

The Hegelian origin of these ideas is evident.<sup>20</sup> Of course, there are profound differences between the Hegelian and Marxist accounts of history. However, a progressive outlook is common to them both. Its specifically moral implications are well summed up by Bradley. 'Morality,' he writes, 'is relative, but is none the less real.'

All morality is and must be "relative," because the essence of realization is evolution through stages, and hence existence in some one stage is not final. . . On the other hand, all morality is "absolute" because in every stage the essence of man *is* realized, however imperfectly: and yet again the distinction of right in itself against relative morality is not banished, because, from the point of view of a higher stage, we can see that lower stages failed to realize the truth completely enough. . . Yet. . .the morality of every stage is justified for that stage; and the demand for a code of right in itself, apart from any stage, is seen to be the asking for an impossibility.<sup>21</sup>

## V The Marxist Assessment of Capitalism

This is the context in which Marx develops his assessment of capitalism. Contrary to the picture presented by the analytical account, he does not attempt to judge capitalism in an absolute fashion,

19 F. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House 1958), 362

20 See S. Sayers, 'The Actual and the Rational,' in D. Lamb, ed., *Hegel and Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Croom Helm 1987), 143-60.

21 F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1927), 190, 192

according to universal principles. Rather, his account is thoroughly historical and relative, and all the more realistic and useful as a result.

Relative to the feudal society which preceded it, capitalism has been a progressive indeed, a revolutionary social development. It has resulted not only in gigantic economic development; it has also led ultimately to moral and political advances in equality and liberty, not only for the bourgeoisie but also for working people.

To be sure, these developments have occurred in an intensely contradictory and destructive fashion. They have involved an enormous toll of misery and degradation. During the course of the growth of capitalism in Europe, innumerable people were uprooted, their communities and means of livelihood destroyed. They were driven off the land and herded into industrial towns and into the miserable and slave-like conditions of factory employment (and unemployment).

However, as Marx insists, there are also other aspects to these developments. For in the process working people have been liberated from their bondage to the land and to the feudal lord, they are removed from rural isolation, brought together in factories and cities. Their horizons are widened, their social relations and consciousness are extended; and, ultimately, they emerge onto the political stage as the modern industrial working class. According to Engels,

that the situation of the workers has on the whole become materially worse since the introduction of capitalist production on a large scale is doubted only by the bourgeois. But should we therefore look back longingly . . . to rural small-scale industry which produced only servile souls? Only the proletariat created by modern large-scale industry, liberated from inherited fetters including those which chained it to the land, and herded together in the big cities, is in a position to accomplish the great social transformation which will put an end to all class exploitation and all class rule.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> F. Engels, *The Housing Question*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, 564. The view that capitalism initially resulted in a decline in living standards has been recently the subject of an extensive debate among historians: see E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1968), Ch. 5-7.

In this way, as Marx and Engels show, the capitalist system, quite unintentionally and unconsciously, creates both the material conditions for its own supersession, and also the agents who will bring this about its own `grave-diggers.'<sup>23</sup>

In short, relative to feudal society, capitalism must be judged progressive; but as the possibility of, and conditions for, a higher form of society emerge, it increasingly becomes a fetter to progress. From the standpoint of this higher form it can be judged to be irrational and immoral. Although these views are characteristic of Marx, the inspiration for them is, once again, clearly Hegelian. Progress, writes Hegel, `appears as an advance from the imperfect to the more perfect. But the former must not only be taken in abstraction as the merely imperfect, but as that which contains at the same time its own opposite, the so-called perfect, as germ, as urge within it.'<sup>24</sup>

## VI The Idea of Socialism

Marx's account of the `higher form' of socialism arises out of the account of capitalism just described. For Marx regards socialism, just as he does capitalism, in historical and relative terms. He does not attempt to spell out an absolute and timeless ideal of how a future society ought to be, on the basis of universal principles. Rather, he portrays socialism as the outcome of forces and tendencies at work in present, capitalist society, and he envisages its character on that basis. `Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.'<sup>25</sup>

Marx's own work is almost entirely focused on the attempt to analyse and understand the capitalist society of his day. His reluc-

<sup>23</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, 496

<sup>24</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1953), 71

<sup>25</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 49

tance to try to predict the shape of the future in detail is well known. His only extended discussion of the character of socialist society occurs in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written just after the experience of the Paris Commune. In that work, one of Marx's main concerns is to emphasize that his conception of socialism, unlike that of the Gotha Programme, is not a mere moral ideal. It is not based upon moral principles of 'fairness,' 'equality' or 'freedom.'

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.<sup>26</sup>

Marx thus looks upon socialism as a real form of society, as the concrete historical stage beyond capitalism; hence as a contradictory and imperfect form, which will undergo its own process of change, and in which the conditions will develop only gradually for the passage towards a still higher phase of 'full communism.'<sup>27</sup>

In brief outline, these are the terms in which Marx assesses capitalism and conceives of socialism. His approach, as I have stressed, is historical rather than moral. Socialism is not portrayed simply as an ideal, but rather as the predicted outcome of real and present historical forces. At the same time, however, this account relies heavily on the notion of progress; and in doing so, it is often argued, a disguised moral element is introduced. In talking of the development of socialism as 'progress' and in conceiving of it as a 'higher' stage, it is said, value judgments are being smuggled in. Even if Marx's historical analysis and predictions are correct, it does not necessarily follow that socialism is a desirable or preferable form of society. For these are value judgments which cannot be deduced from any purely factual historical theory. Marx's approach is thus accused of confusing factual and evaluative judgments, and of committing the 'naturalistic fallacy.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, 23

<sup>27</sup> These ideas are more fully explained in S. Sayers, 'Marxism and Actually Existing Socialism.'

<sup>28</sup> This argument goes back to the debates at the beginning of the Century: see

*(footnote continued on next page)*

To this charge Marxism pleads guilty. It does involve a kind of naturalism; for it is a form of historicism. It regards morality as a social and historical phenomenon, and seeks to base its moral and political outlook on this understanding. It thus questions the idea that the political and moral values of socialism are mere subjective preferences, independent of social and historical theory. It rejects the view that naturalism is a fallacy, and the rigid fact/value dichotomy upon which this view is based.

For it is wrong to think of Marxism as a purely theoretical and contemplative outlook. It is not a purely explanatory and predictive science on the model of physics or chemistry. Marxism is also a form of socialism practical ends are integral to it. In this respect, a more illuminating comparison is with medicine. For medicine, too, is a practical science and, like Marxism, has a practical end: the promotion of health. Moreover, the end of health is not a purely subjective preference on the part of doctors. It is not an arbitrary value in medicine. On the contrary, it is something objective: it arises out the very nature of the object which the doctor treats; it is inscribed in the living organism, in the body itself, as *its* end. Similarly, if Marx is correct in his analysis of capitalism, socialism is not simply the subjective preference of socialists; it is the objective tendency and proximate end of the historical process itself.

Thus Marx rejects the view that he is putting forward ideals or expressing subjective values, either his own or those of the working class; and it is for this reason that he insists that working people `have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.'<sup>29</sup> This is also what Hegel is saying in more abstract and general terms when he writes,

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

S. Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, Ch. 2, and L. Kolakowski, *Man Currents of Marxism*, Vol. 2. The most influential presentation of it at present remains K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1966), Vol. 2, Ch. 22.

<sup>29</sup> K. Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 335

dialectic is not an activity of subjective thinking applied to some matter externally, but is rather the matter's own soul putting forth its branches and fruit organically. This development of the Idea is the proper activity of its rationality, and thinking, as something subjective merely looks on at it without for its part adding to it any ingredient of its own.<sup>30</sup>

## VII Marxism and Justice

These are familiar themes in the work of Marx and Hegel. They are well described by a number of writers: most notably by Lukács, and more recently Kolakowski. Even Popper seldom the most sympathetic or sensitive writer on Hegel and Marx is aware of their importance in Marx's work, and captures their general drift.<sup>31</sup>

Analytical philosophy, on the other hand, has long been characterized not only by its hostility towards such Hegelian ideas, but also by its ignorance of them. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is hardly any discussion of these themes critical or otherwise in the whole vast analytical debate about Marxism and morality. Instead, writers on all sides of this debate try to force Marx's ideas into the alien and anti-historical categories of analytical thought categories which impose an either/or choice between fact and value, between absolutism and relativism, and which simply exclude from view the ideas I have just been describing.

When Marx judges capitalism to be unjust as he does do he does not invoke absolute standards of justice. For he does not regard capitalism as absolutely unjust or immoral. Marx's approach, I have been arguing, is a historical one. In relation to the feudal

30 G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1952), 34-5

31 G. Lukács, 'Tactics and Ethics,' in *Political Writings 1919-1929* (London: New Left Books 1972); L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*; K.R. Popper, *The Open Society*, Vol. 2, Ch. 22. Indeed, Popper raises important difficulties for this whole approach, to which there are no clearcut answers, either in Marx's work or elsewhere. I make this point explicitly, lest I be accused of ignoring it. However, an exploration of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper.

world, bourgeois society appears to constitute progress in justice and right. Which is to say that by the standards of bourgeois society, the feudal order, with its ranks and privileges, seems unjust, and capitalism seems a higher form. However, these standards and the society which produces them, themselves come to seem limited and unjust, as the conditions for a new and still higher form of society socialism emerge, and as the morality associated with it becomes clearer.

Thus Marx does criticize private ownership, but not in terms of absolute moral standards. On the contrary, he makes the historical and relative basis of his judgment quite explicit. Thus he writes, 'from the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as the private ownership of one man by another.'

Strangely, Geras cites this passage to show that Marx believes in absolute criteria of justice. However, it is mainly the continuation that interests Geras, for Marx goes on:

Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its beneficiaries, and, like *bond patres familias*, they must hand it down in an improved condition.<sup>32</sup>

According to Geras, Marx is here condemning private property as unjust, on the principle that 'there is no moral right to the private ownership and control of productive resources.'<sup>33</sup> Although Marx's language in these sentences is quite uncharacteristically moralistic, there is no basis for such an interpretation in the passage taken as a whole. For its theme is clearly the opposite of this. Marx is arguing that claims of ownership, although they may appear to be matters of eternal natural right, are in fact the the product of social relations, they are 'created . . . in the first place . . . [by] relations of production.'

32 K. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1971), 776

33 N. Geras, 'The Argument About Marx and Justice,' 77; cf. also Husami, 'Marx on Distributive Justice,' 50.

Thus Marx's critique of capitalism does not appeal to absolute standards; but nor is it simply trapped within the capitalist order and tied to its standards in purely relativist fashion. It judges capitalism, as Marx says, 'from the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation.' However, such an account is simply excluded by the either/or scheme which Wood, Cohen and other analytical Marxists impose upon Marx. Wood is quite explicit about it. He dismisses the historical approach as follows.

Someone might think that capitalism could be condemned as unjust by applying to it standards of justice or right which would be appropriate to some postcapitalist mode of production. No doubt capitalism could be condemned in this way, but since any such standards would not be rationally applicable to capitalism at all, any such condemnations would be mistaken, confused and without foundation. The temptation to apply postcapitalist juridical standards (however they may be understood) to capitalist production can only derive . . . from the vision of postcapitalist society as a kind of eternal juridical structure against which the present state of affairs is to be measured and found wanting.<sup>34</sup>

The assumptions at work in this passage are characteristic of the analytical approach. Perhaps there would be something to be said for them if capitalism and socialism were entirely distinct and unrelated social systems. But they are not: socialism *develops out of* capitalism. Postcapitalist society is not, as Wood suggests, entirely external and alien to capitalism, but rather internally and essentially related to it.

As Marx shows, the conditions which make socialism possible, and the agents who bring it about, develop *within* capitalism, as *its* product. These forces, and the new social order which they presage, form the material basis for the socialist critique of capitalism. For once the forces which contradict the capitalist system and which will bring about its supersession begin to make themselves felt within it, and once the shape of the new society which will *in fact* supersede capitalism begins to become apparent, then a point of view becomes available from which present day conditions may be criti-

34 A.W. Wood, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice,' 29



cized. 'If we did not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all attempts to explode it would be quixotic.'<sup>35</sup>

The analytical perspective adopted by Wood, Cohen and the others, simply excludes these ideas. It is profoundly hostile to Hegelian and dialectical forms of thought.<sup>36</sup> Different modes of production are portrayed as entirely separate and self-contained systems, merely distinct from and unrelated to each other. Capitalism and socialism are separated from each other by a metaphysical wall. Such views are not merely unhistorical, they are positively *anti*-historical.

### VIII Human Needs and Human Nature

By contrast, Marxism, as I have tried to show, involves a historical approach to morality which avoids either an appeal to absolute values on the one side, or a collapse into pure relativism on the other. So far, I have focused particularly on the notion of justice in order to make this point. However, this approach is quite general, I will now argue, and applies to other forms of morality as well. This is disputed by a number of analytical writers, including Lukes and Wood. Although ideas of justice and right are inescapably historical and relative, they argue, the same is not true of naturalistic kinds of values.

Thus Lukes maintains that Marxism draws a sharp distinction between what he calls 'two kinds of morality.' On the one hand, there is the 'morality of *Recht*,' which appeals to principles of justice and right. According to Lukes, this is rejected by Marxism as ideological and relative. On the other hand, there is the 'morality of emancipation' which underlies Marxism. This involves naturalistic values

<sup>35</sup> K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 159

<sup>36</sup> See S. Sayers, 'Marxism and the Dialectical Method: A Critique of G.A. Cohen,' *Radical Philosophy* 36 (Spring 1984) 4-13.

of 'welfare and happiness'; it looks forward to 'the overcoming of alienation and the realization of the human essence or human nature'; and it envisages the creation of 'harmonious social relations.'<sup>37</sup> Marxism, argues Lukes, rejects only the former: 'it is the morality of *Recht* that it condemns as ideological and anachronistic, and the morality of emancipation that it adopts as its own.'<sup>38</sup>

Wood makes a similar point by distinguishing 'moral' values, like justice and equality, from what he regards as 'non-moral' goods, like welfare and self-realization. Only the former, he maintains, are regarded by Marx as historical and ideological; whereas 'capitalism can be condemned without any ideological mystification or illusion by showing how it starves, enslaves and alienates people, that is, how it frustrates human self-actualization, prosperity and other non-moral goods.'<sup>39</sup>

Marx does, indeed, use terms such as these to criticize capitalism: they are a familiar feature of his work. Moreover, such naturalistic values are no doubt more congenial to the materialist and realist approach of Marxism than notions like justice and right. That is not to say, however, that Marxism adopts an entirely different attitude to these two sorts of moral outlooks, or that naturalistic values are in some way non-ideological and non-relative, as Lukes and Wood maintain. For such values are based upon standards of human need and human nature; and these are social and historical phenomena.

That, at least, is Marx's view. In producing to satisfy our needs we also create new needs. In exercising our powers and capacities, we develop new powers and capacities and, in the process, human nature develops. 'By . . . acting on the external world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes his own nature.'<sup>40</sup> These ideas recur throughout the entire span of Marx's work. The theme, however, is a Hegelian one, as Marx acknowledges: 'Hegel conceives

<sup>37</sup> S. Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, 10

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>39</sup> A.W. Wood, *Karl Marx*, 128

<sup>40</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House 1958), 177

the self-creation of man as a process. . . he. . . grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man true, because real man as the result of his *own labour*.'<sup>41</sup>

Human nature cannot provide an absolute and trans-historical moral yardstick. When conditions are criticized for being 'inhuman' or 'degrading,' it is an inescapably historical and relative judgment that is made. Current standards of what is human and worthy of mankind, or inhuman and degrading, are in part at least a product of current conditions. They are based on needs, aspirations, forms of relationship, etc., which have themselves been created and developed by capitalism and modern industry. There is no question, therefore, of holding capitalism up against an absolute and ideal conception of what is 'human' and finding it wanting.

Indeed, Marx's judgment of capitalism and industry is not a one-sided and purely negative one. Even in his early work, he recognizes that they have a *contradictory* human impact. 'Industry. . . is the *open* book of the essential powers of man,' he writes, and it 'has prepared the conditions for human emancipation, however much its immediate effect [is] to complete the process of dehumanization.'<sup>42</sup>

To all this, philosophers like Lukes and Wood will no doubt respond by insisting that they are not denying the social and historical character of needs, abilities and other aspects of human nature. For the essential point they are making is the naturalistic one, that human nature *as currently developed* can provide an objective a real and existing basis for values, which ideas of justice and right lack. Wood even suggests that naturalistic considerations can provide a self-evident and uncontroversial basis for Marx's criticisms. Marx, he writes, 'is evidently persuaded that the obvious nonmoral value of the goods to which he appeals is sufficient. . .to convince any

41 K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* in *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1975), 386

42 Ibid., 355. Some of the problems and confusion caused by the language of 'dehumanization' are evident here. For despite what Marx appears to say at the end of this quote, it is quite clear that he does not mean to suggest that the impact of industry is entirely negative. Marx's idea of socialism would be an impossible utopia were it so.

reasonable person to favour the overthrow of a social order which unnecessarily frustrates them and its replacement by one which realizes them.'<sup>43</sup>

There are, of course, obvious and indisputable cases of need, like starvation, where a person's very biological survival is threatened.<sup>44</sup> It is important to be reminded that such cases are still a familiar spectacle in the capitalist world; and that serious material deprivation is widespread, even in its most advanced parts. Nevertheless, it is clear that Marxism goes far beyond this in its criticism of capitalism. Lukes and Wood are well aware of this. They focus mainly on values like self-realization, emancipation and community. However, the claim that these are genuine human needs is by no means self-evident.

Although it is clear that new desires and wants emerge as society develops, the view that these constitute *needs* is rejected by many philosophers, and particularly by the opponents of Marxism, often on the basis of their social and historical variability.<sup>45</sup> Some deny the very notion of needs beyond the survival minimum, and insist that such wants are nothing but subjective, individual preferences, without any further moral significance. Others see these wants as socially created 'false' needs unnecessary desires, artificially induced by the pressures of consumer society. This outlook leads to criticism of industrial society; but in a romantic way which harks back to earlier and simpler conditions.

Marx's position differs from both of these. He, too, portrays such desires as socially created, but he does not regard them as artificial and false simply in virtue of that. On the contrary, he regards the historical transformation of human nature in positive terms. He sees it as a progressive process, as a growth and a development of human powers and needs, and of human nature generally.

<sup>43</sup> A.W. Wood, *Karl Marx*, 127

<sup>44</sup> Even then, however, what constitutes 'subsistence needs' is by no means an unproblematic or self-evident matter.

<sup>45</sup> See D. Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1987).

Again these ideas have Hegelian origins, even if a recognition of their critical and revolutionary implications is distinctively Marxist. For Hegel, too, regards the growth of Human nature as progressive, and he criticizes the romantic idea that it involves only a proliferation of false needs and unwanted powers. 'To be confined to mere physical needs as such and their direct satisfaction would simply be the condition in which the mental is plunged in the natural, and so would be one of savagery and unfreedom.'<sup>46</sup>

This is not to deny that 'false' needs and desires are also engendered in modern society. However, it is to reject the attempt to confine the sphere of 'true' needs to the survival minimum, and it is to insist that the distinction between 'true' and 'false' needs must always be conceived in a historical and relative fashion.

Only when the growth of human nature is conceived in these terms does it provide a progressive basis for the critique of capitalism, and point forward towards a future socialist society. Only then does the emergence of the needs mentioned by Wood and Lukes for emancipation, self-realization and community point towards a 'higher stage' of historical development, in which these needs are recognized as needs, and in which the meeting of them becomes a basic priority of social life.

Such views raise large and important issues about human needs and human nature, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore them further here. For my present purpose is only to show that the criticism of capitalism in terms of its impoverishing and inhuman effects is no less problematic for the analytical outlook than the criticism of it for its injustice. An appeal to human needs and human nature is no better able to provide a trans-historical and nonrelative criterion for Marxist morality, than are principles of justice and right. Standards of human nature and needs, just like those of justice and right, are inescapably historical, relative and, in that sense, ideological. That does not mean that these standards must

<sup>46</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 128. See also S. Sayers, 'The Need to Work,' in R.E. Pahl, ed., *On Work* (Oxford: Blackwell 1988) 722-41; and 'Work, Leisure and Human Needs,' in T. Winniffrith and C.J. Barrett, eds., *The Philosophy of Leisure* (London: Macmillan 1989) 34-53.

be dismissed and rejected; but it does mean that judgments based upon them must be historical and relative ones.

In emphasizing the historical and relative character of morality, I am not seeking to undermine or reject it as illusory; nor am I suggesting that Marxism does so. On the contrary, Marxism, I have been arguing, involves not only a social theory, but also a practical an evaluative, a moral and political stance. So far from regarding these as incompatible aspects, Marxism seeks to ground its values and its criticisms on its social theory, and thus to give them a sound objective and scientific rather than purely utopian and moralistic basis. For the great achievement of the Marxist and Hegelian outlooks is to show that it is possible to recognize the historical and relative character of moral values, without descending into mere relativism and scepticism.

My purpose has been to explain these ideas, and to show how the analytical approach simply excludes them from view. Certainly, these ideas are not without their problems; but I have not dwelt upon these here. For in order to recognize these problems and explore them, it is first of all necessary to acknowledge and understand the ideas that give rise to them; and for that we must move beyond the framework offered by analytical Marxism.

## How To Make No Sense of Marx

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### I Introduction

Professor Jon Elster advances the proposal that Marx and Marxists really stand for 'methodological individualism,' as opposed to 'methodological collectivism.' He defines 'methodological individualism' in the following terms:

Social science explanations are seen as three-tiered. First, there is a causal explanation of mental states, such as desires and beliefs. . . Next, there is intentional explanation of individual action in terms of the underlying beliefs and desires. . . Finally, there is causal explanation of aggregated phenomena in terms of the individual actions that go into them. The last form is the specifically Marxist contribution to the methodology of the social sciences.<sup>1</sup>

And more succinctly:

. . .the doctrine that all social phenomena their structure and their change are in principle explicable in ways that only [!] involve individuals their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions.

The least one can say is that the reduction of all social phenomena to purely individual actions and beliefs sounds a bit paradoxical in

<sup>1</sup>*Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 4

the description of a doctrine well-known for its dictum: the history of all epochs is the history of class struggles.

It is true that a paradox should not be rejected out of hand. Like all hypothetical statements, a paradox should be checked against the facts. Unfortunately for Elster, his paradoxical assumption cannot stand that test; i.e., it does not correspond to Marx's thought as distilled from an objective overall study of his writings, and is unable to explain the real march of history.

## II The Overwhelming Pressure of Social Conditions

This is not to say that the problem of correlating individual and social groups' actions, and therefore also individual and social groups' interests, goals and beliefs is not a very real one. I have dealt extensively with one aspect of that question elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> But the very way in which the problem is formulated implies that what must be correlated are two *different* sets of phenomena, even though they often appear to be combined. Psychology and sociology are not identical sciences, not even asymptotically. They handle different empirical data. They deal with different materials of human life, experience and development. This is what Elster implicitly denies; that is where he is fundamentally wrong.

He blocks himself from a correct approach to the problem by letting himself go astray on a formulation of his own concoction:

Methodological collectivism assumes that there are supra-individual entities that are prior to individuals in the explanatory order. Explanation (then) proceeds from the laws either of self-regulation or development of these larger entities, while individual actions are derived from the aggregate pattern. (6)

That specific societies (either modes of production or social formations) have a development determined by laws of their own, no Marxist will deny. I accept the accusation wholeheartedly. I even

<sup>2</sup> See my article 'The Role of the Individual in History: The Case of World War Two,' *New Left Review* 157 (May/June 1986) 61-77.



consider it one of the main superiorities of the Marxist method that it has been able to formulate these laws for different societies and even for history as a whole. But that does not imply that individual actions 'derive' from the aggregate pattern. Only a fool would derive Einstein's discovery of the law of relativity or Hitler's pathological hatred of Jews from the class relations between wage-labour and capital. What is at stake is whether specific social conditions and institutions weigh decisively on shaping *certain concrete forms* of individual actions more so than individual desires, passions, beliefs, goals, etc.

The way in which Hitler became chancellor of the Reich or in which he could unleash the Second World War cannot be explained essentially, primarily, or in any important way through the secrets of his individual psychology, nor can Einstein's genius explain why and how the USA dropped the atom bomb at the end of World War II. That is what the debate between 'methodological individualism' and 'methodological collectivism' (whatever the value of these formulas, which is very dubious as far as I am concerned) is all about. In both instances as well as in all others relevant to the history of class societies the weight of social forces, of classes, main class fractions, governments led by such fractions, was much more decisive than that of any individual or any unstructured aggregate of individuals.

Nor is it a question of 'priority' in the explanatory order, either from a chronological point of view or from the way analysis begins. It is a question whether an individual's actions and beliefs are not bent, changed, transformed through social pressures over which he has no control, and of which he often is not consciously aware.

Take the basic problem of human life: sheer physical survival. Without food, shelter, and a few other basic necessities, no human individual can survive. Contrary to other animal species, humankind cannot get such necessities through purely individual nor through purely instinctive endeavours. It can only get them through human *social labour*, i.e. in conjunction with other individuals, on the basis of common, conscious goals. The desire to get food is universal for all human individuals. But the concrete way in which this desire can be fulfilled is less dependent upon the individual peculiarities of each person, his psychological 'uniqueness' (which is very real),

than on the social conditions in which he is embedded: relations of production and of communication, levels of development of productive forces, etc.

In a slave society, a slave can only get food by submitting to his master's will. In a feudal society, the average serf can produce his own food, provided he respects a certain number of rules imposed on him by the lords: e.g., that he works for nothing during three days a week on a *demesne* or monastery. In contemporary bourgeois society, if he is not a subsistence farmer (these farmers do not represent more than one to two percent of the active population in imperialist countries), the average producer can only get food in exchange for money, and he cannot get enough money to buy the basic necessities of life without selling his labour power. All these are compelling social circumstances, largely independent of the individual's will, and not of his own choice or creation.

So it simply is not true that all social phenomena are explicable in ways that, in the final analysis, only involve individuals. Their explanation must also involve social forces and institutions which have a logic of their own, separate and apart from that of any individuals who compose them irrespective of whether that logic operates a priori or a posteriori to that of personal motivations.

Human beings are characterized by a great many *conflicting* drives, passions, interests, goals, motives, etc. Which one of them (or which precise combination of them) will ultimately determine given forms of *social* actions or behaviour (as opposed to 'purely' personal ones, like having your corns cut) will largely depend upon the pressure of prevailing social circumstances, mediated through the clashes between social groups (again: classes, major fractions of social classes, etc.) and their relative force. When these circumstances change, behaviour changes, without necessarily any change in the individual's 'total personality.'

After World War II, surviving SS-men and -women generally remained as authority-directed, 'law-abiding,' servilely obeying commands transmitted through hierarchical authority i.e., totally myopic ideologically and morally as they had been in 1930, 1935, 1940 or 1942-44. At the same time, they deeply loved their children, put flowers on their parents' graves and tenderly caressed their pets, exactly as they had done when they were busy killing millions of

people. Yesterday they committed horrible crimes; today they don't. Essentially, they hadn't changed as individuals; the social environment had. One hundred thousand individual SS, taken separately, are not a criminal association. One hundred thousand SS organized, commanded and spurred on by Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich and their main henchmen, with their actions tolerated by the state and the ruling class under given specific circumstances and for given specific social reasons, are indeed an association of criminals. The potential to become criminals must be present inside these individuals, but that potential is only realized under given social conditions.

Elster is right on one important point. There is no such thing and certainly not in Marx's doctrine as 'capital' or 'history' endowed with a logic of its own, separate and apart from the sum-total of human beings which are concerned with them. Indeed, one of the basic discoveries of Marx is precisely that 'capital' is, in the final analysis, not a bunch of things (not even a mass of money) but a specific relation between individual human beings. But these are precisely, always, *individuals living under specific social conditions, i.e., concrete social individuals*. Individuals 'in general,' divorced from the social conditions in which they are embedded, are as unreal, abstract and metaphysical (mythical, pure products of imagination) as 'history' is in general and in the abstract.

There is a striking example offered by Elster of the difference between 'methodological individualism' and 'methodological collectivism' as a way to explain social reality: it is the answer to the problem of wage labour under capitalism seen as forced labour (211-16). After a lengthy, abstract and confused argumentation, Elster arrives at the conclusion that one can only state that:

A worker is exploited if he would be better off were he to withdraw with his per capita [!] share of the means of production.<sup>3</sup>

A worker is coerced to sell his labour power, if he would be better off were he to withdraw with his own means of production.

<sup>3</sup> This is a near-farcical throwback to a Rothschild anecdote of the nineteenth century, in which the old rascal is supposed to have silenced a critic by offering him 1/30 millionth of his fortune, as that was supposed to be redistributed among all the inhabitants of France by equal shares.

A worker is forced to sell his labour power if he would be unacceptably worse off were he to withdraw with his own means of production. (216)

This argumentation, which seems and only seems to do so quite superficially to make sense for the individual worker, becomes blatant nonsense when applied to the mass of the wage and salary workers as a whole. *Could* 25 million wage and salary earners in Britain, France, Italy, West Germany (not to speak of 110 million of them in the USA) 'withdraw' with their 'per capita' share of the means of production, their income being what it is and the cost of machinery or the price of land being what it is? *Could* they conserve 'their own means of production,' the weight of concentrated banking and industrial capital being what it is in the economy? *Could* they en masse survive crises, unemployment, sickness, and old age, the income and hazards of petty shopkeepers, farmers, industrialists, handi-craftsmen being what they are in real society? Doesn't the absurd Roemer-Elster hypothesis lose its obvious unreality only if and when one simultaneously assumes a radical change of *all* concomitant property and power relations in society (i.e., an overthrow of capitalism)?

*Individual* workers can opt out and do indeed opt out of the proletarian condition. They not only become shopkeepers and handi-craftsmen; they also become hippies or *clochards*; or they try to live as subsistence farmers, or on wild berries in the woods. But as statistics show over more than a century, this is a small (and declining) minority. A growing majority (more than 90% of the active population in several countries) ends up selling its labour-power to the owners of capital or to the state. Why? Because they like to or prefer to? No. *Because they globally, in their majority, have no choice.* There just aren't enough wild berries around for 50 million proletarian families to live on in the USA.

One could try to retort that prevailing social conditions for simplicity's sake, we shall reduce them to prevailing social relations of production and communication could only prevail because they conform to 'prior' individual motives and choices. Commodity production becomes generalized because it corresponds to the individuals' preferences for 'property' and 'freedom' based upon property. But this is again historically untrue.

Generalized commodity production and market (money) economy were *imposed* through institutional changes and specific economic processes (like enclosures) upon tens of millions of human beings on all continents, against their clearly expressed wishes and their furious successive revolts. Furthermore, the theory confuses cause and consequence. In the long run, part of the 'mentalities' (mental structures) conducive to a more or less smooth, continuous reproduction of a given set of relations of production will indeed become interiorized in the majority of the toilers (never permanently and never for all of them). But this is a posteriori and not a priori, nor even simultaneous to the emergence of these relations of production.

One has merely to study the interminable diatribes of bourgeois economists, politicians, 'moralists,' preachers, 'discoverers,' ethnologues, etc., from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, against the 'lazy' Flemings, the 'lazy' English, the 'lazy' Irish, the 'lazy' French, the 'lazy' (unbelievable but true!) Germans, the 'lazy' Italians, the 'lazy' Spanish, the 'lazy' Hungarians, the 'lazy' Poles, the 'lazy' Negroes, the 'lazy' Mexicans, the 'lazy' Indians, the 'lazy' Hindus and so on ad nauseam, to understand this time-lag. The universal workethos does not precede the birth of the capitalist industry. It is its most characteristic illegitimate offspring in the field of mentalities.

### III Individual Priorities and Social Priorities

Another clear example of the misguided nature of Elster's assumption that social phenomena are but 'aggregates' of individual actions inspired by individual desires and passions, is offered by that most negative of all social phenomena: war. The instinct of self-preservation is the most basic human drive, prevalent even in the basic drive to get food and shelter. Yet in spite of this instinct, human beings periodically engage in wars in which millions upon millions have been killed throughout the ages. Why this folly? Because individual 'beliefs' and 'desires' more essential than the wish to conserve life have suddenly sprung up again and again among them?

While not denying that there exist fanatics who are indeed willing to sacrifice their lives for a given cause, I think it stands to reason that the overwhelming majority of soldiers who have composed

and still compose the armies of yesterday and of today cannot readily be classified into that category. They are (with great and generally growing reluctance) submitting to the risk of dying under compelling social circumstances: because military discipline is imposed upon them; because the alternative is being shot immediately (which seems a greater immediate risk); because they do not see any way out, given the fact that an individual revolt against the war is largely meaningless; because ideologies which present wars as 'good' or 'lesser evils' still influence the minds of some of the people; etc. Indeed, when these conditions change as they sometimes do collective revolts against war do occur, even in large armies.

Again, one could object: aren't wars possible only as a result of the individual's 'aggressive drives' and 'death wish,' which, after all, according to Freud and other psychologists, precisely coexist with the instinct of self-preservation and the 'pleasure' principle (*Lustgefühl*)? This is a sophist's argument. If the origins of wars can be reduced to the individual's 'death wish,' why aren't wars permanent, since this 'death wish,' together with the 'aggressive drive,' is supposed to be permanently omnipresent? Why are there historical periods and, indeed, historical social organizations (frameworks, relations of production) that are much more peaceful than others? If this is in fact the case and it is hard to deny it in the light of historical evidence is that not a clear example of a social phenomenon (war) not resulting from a simple aggregate of 'individual drives, passions, desires, beliefs, goals,' but resulting from these 'drives' mediated through social institutions and social forces, their correlation of forces, their conflicts and clashes, etc.?

Elster's reductionism likewise leads him into a blind alley when, in different parts of his book<sup>4</sup> he raises the problem of the 'motiva-

<sup>4</sup> I cannot take up here all the criticisms of Marx's economic theory dispersed throughout Jon Elster's book. Let me mention in passing that the criticism of the solution of the so-called 'transformation problem' advanced by the neo-Richardians, which Elster considers definitive, has in turn been submitted to harsh criticism by 'orthodox' Marxists (see Mandel and A. Freedman, eds., *Ricardo, Marx, Sraffa* [London: Verso 1985]), to which any reply by neo-Ricardians is still lacking.

tions' for the class struggle on behalf of the capitalists and of the workers. Regarding the capitalists he states

. . . we must indeed expect something to give if each capitalist acts on an assumption that only *his* workers should save or accept lower wages which as a matter of logic cannot be true for all. In Marx's phrase, "each individual reciprocally blocks the assertion of the others' interests," because they act on mutually incompatible assumptions about one another. (26)

Now, where Elster sees a *logical* contradiction (antinomy), we have to examine a concrete *contradictory historical process*. Because he approaches the problem from the standpoint of the individual capitalist's 'assumptions' (as if it were a pure and simple thought process, or psychological process), he does not see the pressure of social circumstances which force the capitalist *to act in a contradictory way*, independently of his 'assumptions.'

Under the pressure of these circumstances above all, price competition on the market the individual capitalist is forced to regard wages of his workers in the first place as *costs to be cut*, regardless of his supplementary 'thoughts,' 'assumptions' and 'motivations' in relation to 'aggregate demand,' public sanitation, survival of the fittest, or the best way to save his own and his workers' immortal souls. (These are all very real, but cannot, *at that stage*, determine his attitude towards his workers' wages, except in the marginal case when they make him indifferent to going bankrupt; i.e., they are not representative of capitalist entrepreneurs *as capitalist entrepreneurs*.) And as, under these conditions of near-free competition and still slow technological innovation, he will indeed be able to hold his share of the market only if he cuts costs, there is nothing 'logically contradictory' at the micro-economic level in such an attitude among all entrepreneurs.

But are these attitudes self-contradictory on a macro-economic level? Of course they are. And these contradictions express themselves concretely through economic crises of overproduction, obstacles to technological innovation resulting from low wages, a search for more and more distant markets (with increased transportation and circulation costs) when markets nearby still remain undeveloped, the need to face workers' strikes and revolts which are

increasingly costly, the personal hazards for the capitalists of epidemics resulting from widespread misery in workers' quarters in large cities, etc.

So the capitalists begin to diversify their attitude towards wages, not because they bow before 'logic,' but because they bow before changing social priorities born of changed social pressures.<sup>5</sup> (It should be noted in passing that small capitalists, in deadly fear of losing their market shares and their shirts, will 'give in' to that pressure with much greater hesitation than do big ones. Indeed, a more 'flexible' and 'progressive' attitude towards workers' wages becomes an additional motor for the concentration and centralization of capital!) So the big capitalists will periodically especially in periods of prosperity look not only upon the wages of other capitalists' workers as potential purchasing power for their own goods, but also consider their own workers' wages as such. Henry Ford was the embodiment of that 'turn.' Keynesianism became the creed in the field of bourgeois economics which expressed this new pressure.

But that 'solution' of Elster's 'antinomy' is always temporary and limited. At the very time he was composing his book, the international bourgeoisie made a turn in the opposite direction on a worldwide scale. In the midst of recurrent recessions and a 'long depressive wave,' with US industrial production capacity only utilized at an average of 70% (and for civilian purposes, i.e., leaving out parasitical military production, probably less than 60%), capital is busy cutting the wages of its workers in all advanced countries and even more so in most underdeveloped ones. Has it suddenly gone mad? Has it forgotten Elster's 'logical antinomy' and 'contradictory assumptions'? Or is it just bowing to the overwhelming social priority of increasing the rate of profit?

So what appears as an unsolvable logical antinomy dissolves, in the light of concrete historical analysis, into successive patterns of capitalist entrepreneurial behaviour, perfectly explainable by the

<sup>5</sup> Organizationally, this passage from the micro-economic to the macro-economic 'motivation' is expressed among other phenomena by the setting up of employer's associations, which by no means consistently acted in favour of increasing wages.



changing social pressures (economic conditions and the ups and downs of the class struggle). The end result is a *conflicting trend* of real, absolute, and relative wages, sometimes up and sometimes down; (not always up and not always down) and in different ways for specific categories of workers and in specific social formations.

Elster attributes to Marx the absurd idea that wages hover around the physiological minimum under capitalism, and then goes on to debunk that idea, among other things, with the concept that individual workers have different individual needs (11-12). One of Marx's main scientific innovations was, however, precisely his resolute rejection of the Ricardo-Malthus-Lassalle 'iron law of wages' (or 'wage-fund' theory). For Marx, the only 'fund' existing was the totality of newly created value (added value, net national product, national income), the precise division of which between capital and labour was a matter of concrete struggle, indeed *the* first and foremost object of the current class struggle. That is why Marx substituted for the demographical wage theory (which sees wages hovering around the physiological minimum), an accumulation-of-capital-wage-theory which (by taking into account not only conjunctural, but secular, movements of *supply and demand* of labour power) distinguishes two components of wages: the physiological minimum and the moral-historical component. This last is dependent on the vicissitudes of the class struggle, and is related to, but not mechanically determined by, the medium and long-term fluctuations of the industrial reserve army of labour.

But instead of taking into account that particular theoretical innovation of Marx which makes the labour theory of value much more coherent and 'realistic' than it is for Adam Smith and Ricardo, Elster tries to press his point even more:

Marx generally took the workers' consumption bundle rather than the monetary wage as given, although he occasionally recognized that this was deeply misleading as a characterization of the capitalist mode of production. This enabled him to speak of *the* value of labour power, a phrase that would be devoid of meaning if the workers could spend a given wage on many different bundles that, even if they do add up to the same price, need [?] not add up to the same value (since prices in general are not proportional to values). On the other hand, this procedure also prevented him from securing a firm foundation for the labour theory of value in the Ricardian interpretation. (137)

Everything is wrong here. In the first place, for Marx, labour is not a *numéraire*, a simple measuring stick for the different 'factors of production.' It is the substance, the essence of value. For him, value is nothing but a fragment of the total abstract labour potential available in a given society at a given time ('abstract' meaning an abstraction made of the concrete use-values that labour produces, i.e., of a distinction between different trades and occupations). It is, therefore, different from wages, which are just the values (better: market prices oscillating around values) of one particular commodity: the commodity labour power. The disconnection of value from wages in a much more systematic and total way than Ricardo's theory was what Marx considered one of his main theoretical achievements (not a step backward).

In the second place, wages are not, for Marx, direct expressions of the value of labour power in the same way that market prices are not direct expressions of prices of production; the law of supply and demand does intervene in their determination. Independently of fluctuations in the *value* of labour power, wages can go up when there is full employment and rapid economic growth (rapid accumulation of capital). They can go down when there is massive unemployment and economic stagnation (low level of accumulation of capital). This occurs independently of any changes in the bundle of consumer goods bought by money wages.

Third, like all value, the value of labour power is a social, and not an individual, phenomenon. It is determined by the average productivity of labour in the consumer goods industries (length of labour-time put into the production of these goods), independently of the way in which each working class family divides up its income between different wage goods and services. This could only be challenged if luxury goods would seriously influence the workers' standard of living. But such an assumption is both logically and historically inconsistent. When luxury goods no longer are consumed only marginally by workers but become widespread in workers' families, they stop being luxury goods and become wage goods. And then the struggle unfolds to have the money wages include the capacity to purchase what were formerly luxury goods in addition to previous wage goods. When and if this struggle is success-

ful, the value of the new wage good widely consumed by workers' families is included in the value of labour power.

It is, therefore, a moot point whether one calculates all these aggregates in labour time, in gold equivalents or in paper money, provided one uses the same measuring rod consistently for particular wage goods and for the aggregate value (or production prices or market prices) of the commodity labour power. Small discrepancies between these aggregates will cancel each other out in the long run (i.e. presumably during a given business cycle), over which they are established as social averages.

Fourth, and this is the key question: all these processes are social processes not only in the sense of social averages but in the sense that they result from struggles between living social forces, leading to a new 'social contract,' i.e., newly recognized average wage(s) for the society in different branches of industry (or even on a national scale), or a new quantity of 'socially necessary labour,' necessary to reproduce the commodity labour power. Today, in many countries, this occurs in a conscious or semi-conscious way through industry-wide or nation-wide collective bargaining (tomorrow it will start occurring internationally too).

The value (costs of reproduction) of labour power *does not change* if one worker (or even one hundred thousand workers, except in a very small country) radically changes the product mix of his consumption packet, becomes a food faddist or a vegetarian, a smoker or a non-smoker, a tee-totaller or an alcoholic. *It does change* when, as a result of a successful struggle by the labour movement, the workers succeed in incorporating, for example, paid holidays or free health services or motorcars, in the annual average wage. *It changes again* now in the opposite direction when the employers (with or without the help of the state) succeed in imposing increased individual payment for health services or pensions or education upon the working class or, through a lowering of real wages, eliminate the possibility of worker's families buying certain customary goods and services with their direct money wages.

So, Marx does not assume and does not need to assume that every individual worker's family consumes the same bundle of wage goods and services, either to 'defend the assumption of a given value of labour power' or to 'prove' his particular version of the labour theory of value.

#### IV Mechanical or Parametric Determinism

One of the most important aspects of Elster's book is its harsh rejection of the dialectic (34-48), presented nearly exclusively as 'Hegelian metaphysics,' i.e., as logical antinomies. Elster refuses to consider Marx's version of the materialist dialectic as grasping real contradictions (i.e. the contradictory character of the movement of nature, of history and of the cognition process itself, the subject/object relation). But this rejection of the materialist dialectic has a boomerang effect upon Elster himself. He rejects dialectics, but he is caught by dialectics like a fly in a spider's web. Independently of his will, his thought becomes increasingly incapacitated in trying to grasp real historical processes, precisely because those processes appear at first sight 'logically inconsistent.' The alternative answer that his particular 'logic' is at fault, because it is mechanical and formalistic, instead of being dialectical does not seem to occur to him.

When he deals with the problem of the so-called primitive (original) accumulation of capital, he follows Max Weber, severely taking Marx to task for presumably not seeing the difficulty of understanding the 'reinvestment motive' at the dawn of bourgeois society (39).<sup>6</sup> But the problem is not finding a 'motive' for money-capital, owners to reinvest profits. Merchants and money-changers (bankers) have been doing that for thousands of years in the most different of civilizations. Innumerable treatises have been written on the way to divide and reinvest profits, from the Talmud to learned contributions by Roman senators, Chinese sages and Muslim philosophers.

Indeed, Marx was quite right when he pointed out that it is the very nature of money-capital to be constantly bent upon money accretion. To throw money into circulation instead of simple commodities (M-C-M' instead of C1-M-C2) literally does not make sense if money thereby does not grow in value. And it cannot grow in

<sup>6</sup> Elster also doesn't understand Marx's view that capital can very well be initially accumulated in the circulation process through appropriation of part of the surplus product produced under non-capitalist relations of production before it is systematically produced in the capitalist production process itself.

value without at least partial reinvestment of profits (i.e. accumulation of capital).

The real problem concerned social and political relations between the owners of money-capital and the different pre-capitalist ruling classes. Owners of money-capital perforce lived in constant fear of confiscation in one way or another by these ruling classes if they ostensibly accumulated too much capital, or became visibly too rich; hence their natural reaction of hiding part of their wealth or of transforming it into landed estates; hence also their refusal to reinvest part of their profits; and hence, both as a result of real confiscations and of the reactions to the threat of confiscation, the generally *discontinuous and therefore limited* nature of reinvestment of capital accumulation.

Only when the relationship of socio-political forces changed, when real and durable guarantees against expropriation were achieved, did discontinuous reinvestment (accumulation of capital) become *continuous* and could the capitalist mode of production definitively emerge. In the fifteenth century, banker Jacques Coeur could still be expropriated by an ungrateful King Louis XI, whose wars for the unification of France he had financed. In the sixteenth century, Emperor Charles V of Spain, Austria and the Low Countries, not to mention the Americas, could no longer expropriate the Antwerp and German bankers who financed his wars. Relations of social and political forces had changed, not the 'motives' of money-capital owners.

Likewise, Elster cannot explain satisfactorily the historical chain of events leading first to the emergence of ruling classes and later to the production of surplus value by the modern proletariat (i.e., the constant reproduction of capital and of a capitalist class).

An increase in the productivity of labour only leads to the *possibility* of a surplus emerging and to the *possibility* of exploitation, Elster argues on p. 169. Whether that possibility is realized or not depends upon the producers' 'readiness' (willingness) to work more; they could always work less.

But that is not the real chain of events in the emergence of class society. Increased productivity of labour eventually led to a *real surplus* (e.g. granaries), which then became appropriated by foreign conquerors (Greece, pre-Columbian American civilizations, tropical Africa) or interior rulers (Egypt, China, Rome, etc.). When

Elster argues that the producers could 'refuse' to work more in order to produce the surplus, he forgets that they were *forced* to do so by their rulers. That is precisely what class *rule* is all about, in the final analysis. The only alternatives were to revolt or to run away. That they often did. Class rule plus surplus production could be consolidated only inasmuch as these reactions became only minor, marginal and periodic ones.

In addition, Elster repeats one of the most worn-out arguments against the theory of surplus-value by raising the following question:

Obviously and tautologically, profits are possible only because workers do not consume the whole net product . . . this however does not prove that the workers have a mysterious capacity to create *ex nihilo*. To summarize, man's ability to tap the environment makes possible a surplus over and above any given consumption level. Whether this surplus should be used for more workers' consumption, for capitalist consumption or for investment, is a further question that bears no relation [!] to the issue of "the ultimate source of profits." (141)

If a serf works three days a week on his own *manse* and three days a week on the lord's *demesne*, the 'ultimate origin of the lord's income' is quite clear: unpaid labour by the serfs.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, when a worker *adds value* to that of machinery and raw material by applying his muscles, nerves and brains to them during a work day, the fact that he reproduces the equivalent of his wages (or the value of his labour power) in, say, four hours a day while actually working eight hours, means that he gives his employer half of his work week for nothing, exactly as the serf discussed above did. There you have 'the ultimate source of profits' (better: of rents, interests and profit, i.e. the whole bourgeois class's income). In the case of a slave or a serf, the process is crystal clear. The fact that in the case of a wage-earning industrial worker it is obscured by all kinds of successively intertwined money transactions and market relations

<sup>7</sup> The idea that the lords 'exchange' these unpaid labour services for the protection they offer the serfs from potential robbers is of course a joke. It has nothing to do with exchange in the economic sense of the word and is quite similar to the arguments used by gangsters organizing a so-called protection racket as Elster himself correctly points out.

makes its discovery more difficult. But it doesn't make the process less real. It was Marx's greatest contribution to economic science (and to history!) to explain that process through his theory of surplus-value, which in the final analysis is nothing but the monetary expression of the surplus-product of society.

In order to deny the substance of that theory, one would either have to deny that the workers do add value to that of machinery and raw material, or that the value they add is divided between capital and labour (i.e. assume that all value they add is appropriated by themselves; but in that case, why would the capitalists be interested in hiring them?). This has never been successfully demonstrated. So Marx's theory of surplus-value is alive and kicking today, just as it was 130 years ago when it was first formulated.

The fact that the surplus product (surplus value) produced by the working class *could* be used for different purposes is totally irrelevant to the two key questions: Who actually produces it? And who actually appropriates it? Nobody will argue seriously that the serfs don't produce the lord's income just because the lord uses part of it to build a chapel or a road. The view that it is produced *ex nihilo* is a perfect example of a red herring; the implied conclusion that because of that red herring there is no proof of an 'ultimate source of profits' is a near-perfect non sequitur.

Dialectical determinism as opposed to mechanical, or formal-logical determinism, is also parametric determinism; it permits the adherent of historical materialism to understand the real place of human action in the way the historical process unfolds and the way the outcome of social crises is decided. Men and women indeed make their own history. The outcome of their actions is not mechanically predetermined. Most, if not all, historical crises have *several possible outcomes*, not innumerable fortuitous or arbitrary ones; that is why we use the expression 'parametric *determinism*,' indicating several possibilities within a given set of parameters.

Socialism is never seen as 'inevitable' by Marx. A deep historical crisis of a given society can end either in the victory of the revolutionary class or in a common decline of all social classes (e.g., a relapse into barbarism). That is what happened in antiquity. That is what could happen again today. If not, the *conscious struggle for so-*

*cialism* would be largely useless, a waste of time, or only a hazardous effort to 'speed up' a process which would unfold anyway.

Marxism rejects such a fatalistic view of history, a view to which Elster and the Kautskyan Second International are much nearer. Marxism also *has a true perception of the ambivalence of social/political inaction and action*. It is likewise not blind regarding *the moral implications of inaction*, which always imply toleration of the given and seemingly 'irreversible' course of events. It pleads the case of resistance, attempts to reverse the seemingly unavoidable, as long as the material/social parameters of that possible resistance are perceived. Neither Hitler nor Stalin was an inevitable product of historical developments. Nor were their victories inevitable. They came as the end result of chains of actions and reactions, in which the absence of action by certain social forces played key roles.

The historical responsibility of German social democracy's inaction between summer 1932 and spring 1933 in Hitler's seizing and consolidating power besides the key responsibility of the German ruling class and the subsidiary responsibility of Stalin's criminal political course is overwhelming, and generally recognized by all serious historians. But no less great (although much less acknowledged by historians) is another responsibility, so strongly stressed by Rosa Luxemburg: that of leaving the victorious Russian revolution deliberately isolated and torn by war between December 1917 and autumn 1918. The Russian *Thermidor*, Stalin's dictatorship (i.e., the political counter-revolution after the victorious social revolution in Russia), is a thousand times more the product of German social-democracy's counter-revolution in 1918-1919 (i.e., of Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann), than it was of Lenin, not to say of Marx.

## V A Diachronic Conception of Human Progress

In the same way that a rejection of the materialist dialectic impedes an understanding of the mediating role of social forces between individuals and the social environment they are embedded in (and of the mediating role of the class struggle between relations of production and productive forces), it also prevents a correct per-



ception of Marx's approach to human (historical) progress. This is not seen by Marx as simply linear, but always as self-contradictory. Each successive step towards humanity's mastery over nature is accompanied by a successive form of subordination of human beings to seemingly blind fate. It is also seen not as synchronic, but rather as diachronic. What appears as progressive in the short run could be retrogressive in the long run; the reverse is also possible. Everything is always a matter of a concrete analysis of a concrete process, not of metaphysical or logical generalities and abstractions.

When Elster recalls Marx's stress on the progressive consequences of the British *raj* in India (111-12), he actually implies that Marx thereby *justified* the establishment as well as *all* the consequences of that rule! But why did the same Marx enthusiastically support the *sepoy's* uprising *against* that same rule? Elster might as well have pointed out that Marx and Engels likewise stressed the progressive character and consequences of slavery *compared with certain preceding conditions*, but simultaneously were full of admiration and support for the slaves' uprisings against slavery, beginning with those led by Spartacus. Is such an attitude contradictory and illogical? Not if one accepts the dialectical (i.e. diachronical) character of human progress.

Indeed, if one is not misled by sentimentality, one will readily admit that even from the point of view of the individual slave, it is preferable to be a slave than to be killed outright as a prisoner of war (or even eaten up, which was often the case in the transition period between clan communism and slave society). One will likewise admit that serfdom was a better fate for the producer than slavery. The positive consequences for society as a whole of free Greek citizens being able to devote much of their time to political and social affairs, because slaves produced their livelihood, are obvious to all non-sentimental observers.

But that does not in the least imply that slaves and serfs should have resigned themselves to their 'progressive' fate. On the contrary: by revolting against slavery and serfdom, they in turn advanced human progress in a double sense. They forced the rulers to look for more sophisticated forms of exploitation, including technological progress (which came about partly as a result of a scarcity of manpower, i.e., a scarcity of slaves). They also established a conscious

(ideological and political) tradition of uncompromising struggle against *all* forms of oppression and exploitation, without which the drive of the modern proletariat for a classless society would be incomparably more difficult.

Lack of understanding of this dialectical and diachronic view of human progress in Marx leads Elster to attribute to Marx a 'teleological and instrumental' concept of progress which is said to have made him impervious to the inhuman consequences of capitalist machinery and the factory system. Elster goes so far as occasionally to attribute to Marx a justification of capitalism, analogous to the 'classic justification for Stalinism' (117). And he ends that passage of his book with a scorching indictment:

The main objection, therefore, to speculative theories of history resting on the notion of "reculer pour mieux sauter" is practical, not theoretical. Their intellectual shortcomings, though serious when measured by intellectual standards, are of little import compared to the political disasters they can inspire.<sup>8</sup> We should retain the respect for the individual that is at the core of Marx's theory of communism, but not the philosophy of history that allows one to regard pre-communist individuals as so many sheep for the slaughter. (117-18)

If one makes only a superficial perusal of Marx's and Engels' writings on the catastrophic social consequences of capitalist industrialization, one can only call that inference a crass misrepresentation, if not an open contradiction of Marx's thought. (It is true also that in other parts of this book, Elster contradicts himself on this subject.) The source of this misrepresentation is not dishonesty on the part of Elster, but ideological prejudice and pseudo-logical dogmatism (i.e. the incapacity to see the actual, real coherence of seemingly contradictory statements).

More than any other contemporary author, Marx was *simultaneously* aware of the tremendous revolutionary and emancipatory *potential* of modern machinery above all, its potential to reduce rad-

<sup>8</sup> And what about the political disasters 'inspired' by pragmatic moralists à la Max Weber, supporting colonial adventures and imperialist wars, or by 'nonutopian' *Realpoliticians* of the Kissinger-Nixon type, ordering the bombing and defoliation of Cambodia?

ically the length of the labour day and of the no less tremendous catastrophes its subsumption under the rule and interests of capital meant both for nature and humankind:

Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth the soil and the worker.<sup>9</sup>

And in his answer to the Russian magazine *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* Marx wrote in November 1877:

In the Afterword to the second German edition of *Kapital* . . . I speak of a "great Russian scholar" . . . [who] has dealt with the question whether, as her liberal economists maintain, Russia must begin by destroying the village commune in order to pass to the capitalist regime, or whether, on the contrary, she can *without experiencing the tortures of this regime* appropriate all its fruits by developing the historical conditions specifically her own.<sup>10</sup>

A burning moral indignation against the evils of capitalism inspired Marx and Engels throughout their adult lives, as Maximilien Rubel correctly stresses and Elster strangely doesn't mention. That indignation expressed itself in innumerable passages of their work, of which I shall quote only a few. In Marx's introduction to 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law,' he wrote:

The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being. . . .<sup>11</sup>

These words of 1843 find an echo in 1860-67, some twenty-five years later, when Marx writes successively in two letters:

Inasmuch as we have both consciously, each in his own way, out of the purest of motives and with an utter disregard for private interests, been flourishing

<sup>9</sup>*Capital* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976) Vol. 1, 638

<sup>10</sup> Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1975) 292

<sup>11</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International 1975) Vol. 3, 182

the banner for "*la classe la plus laborieuse et la plus misérable*" high above the heads of the philistines for years now, I should regard it as a contemptible offense against history, were we to fall out over trifles, all of them attributable to misunderstandings.<sup>12</sup>

Well, why didn't I answer you? Because I was constantly hovering at the edge of the grave. Hence I had to make use of *every* moment when I was able to work to complete my book to which I have sacrificed health, happiness, and family. I trust that I need not add anything to this explanation. I laugh at the so-called "practical" men with their wisdom. *If one chose to be an ox, one could of course turn one's back on the suffering of mankind and look after one's own skin.*<sup>13</sup>

And most strikingly in Chapter XXIII of volume I of *Capital*:

. . . within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker; that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate [*entfremden*] from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital. (799)

And the man who wrote this flaming indictment of capitalism, based on tremendous moral indignation, is accused of regarding precommunist individuals including capitalist workers! as 'so many sheep for the slaughter'! How can Elster be so blinded by his rejection of the dialectic as not to notice what a deep injustice he commits against Marx by attributing to him absurd short-sighted mechanistic notions of 'progress' and 'realpolitik' (as industrialization necessarily prepares society for communism, industrialization

<sup>12</sup> Marx to Ferdinand Freiligrath, 23 February 1860. In Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, 173

is unilaterally good, regardless of the price humankind and the workers pay for it)?

In the eyes of Marx what is always decisive is the need to develop self-confidence, the abandonment of servility and resignation, the spirit of rebellion and contestation, the freely developed cohesion and unity of all the oppressed and exploited, precisely because, in the long run, all circumstances in which human beings are oppressed have to be overthrown, and that can only be done *by the oppressed themselves*. That is the 'categorical imperative' which guided Marx's politics all his life, and which often appears 'ultraleft' to Elster.

But the contradiction is Elster's, not Marx's! For the alternative is arrogant, paternalistic elitism, in which 'scientists' (or 'scientific politicians') take it upon themselves to determine in a sovereign way, including against those involved, what is 'possible' and what is 'impossible.' The parallel with the Jesuits and the Stalinists is obvious, once that imperative and its necessary concomitant imperative the '*emancipation of the toilers can only be the work of the toilers themselves*' is even partially and momentarily abandoned. It is my contention that, to his great honour, Marx never abandoned these two imperatives in his political action throughout his life. Nor should anybody claiming to be socialist.

## VI Revolution and Counter-Revolution

Elster has written a great deal about revolution; some of his comments do not make much sense, and practically all of them are dead wrong. All these confused considerations culminate in two passages. The first is:

Communism is desirable only when that system would be (or become) optimal for developing the productive forces. Call this the objective condition for communism. Communism is possible only when the development of capitalism creates a motivation for people to abolish it. Call this the subjective condition for communism. Clearly, Marx needs a theory that insures the simultaneous presence of these two conditions.  
(293)

This is logically inconsistent and historically indefensible. The real logic should be reversed: communism is possible only when the de-

velopment of capitalism creates a motivation for people to abolish it (subjective conditions) and when the *material possibility* for abolishing private property, commodity production and monetary rewards as the main 'incentive for work' (i.e. class society and the state) has been created. Why the possibility of communism should be linked to 'optimal conditions' for the development of the productive forces is a mystery, even more so when the 'optimum' is practically reduced to 'unbound technical progress' or even to the maximum of production (290-1).

This is clearly a *petitio principii*. It is capitalism, not communism, which implies 'production for production's sake.' Why should the realization of all men's and women's personalities unavoidably be linked to an ever greater accumulation of (less and less useful) material objects? Why could the 'motive' for abolishing capitalism not be, for example, the need to save mankind from nuclear destruction; from the destruction of the natural environment; or simply from the health-destroying stress for all that is produced by the competitive rat-race, once all fundamental human needs could be satisfied in spite of the abolition of private property? Why should their relative validity depend exclusively upon what system could produce more?<sup>14</sup>

14 Quoting the novelist Wassily Grossman, Elster asks another rhetorical question: what harm would anyone do to people if he would open a private snack-bar 'under socialism'? Obviously none whatsoever! (517)

But carried away by his preference for 'market socialism,' he forgets to pose the relevant question: if by pandering to minority demand for luxury consumer goods (including imported ones) you undermine planned self-management, let market laws rule the distribution of productive forces among various branches of output according to wildly fluctuating 'effective demand,' unequally divided among households, and thereby *force* millions of producers to work 42 hours a week (instead of 35 or even 30 hours, as they would prefer), then in addition force hundreds of thousands of producers periodically out of work altogether, don't you then do great harm to a great number of people? I believe you do. Does Elster believe the same?

I believe that a society of associated producers, who themselves determine what they produce, how they produce it, where they work, and how long they work, by democratic decision-making processes, is a more just society

*(footnote continued on next page)*

Later we get an even stranger approach to the problem of 'communist revolution':

Many of the works in which Marx raises problems of revolutionary tactics and strategy mainly had a practical purpose. They were written during, or in the hope of, a revolution and must be understood as means to furthering that goal. This introduces two distinct biases, which I shall refer to as the *bias of compromise* and the *bias of exhortation*. They should be distinguished from the omnipresent *bias of wishful thinking* in Marx's work. The last distorted his thinking, whereas the former distorted the way in which he expressed it. (438)

Again, the approach is wrong: it misses one of the central theses of historical materialism. When a given society (with a given mode of production) is in structural crisis (i.e., it has entered its period of decline), when a given set of relations of production has become a fetter on the further development of productive forces, there occurs a rebellion of these productive forces against the social order, which takes above all the form of a rebellion of the *human* productive forces. In other words: pre-revolutionary and revolutionary crises occur, inevitably, independently of a foreseen 'ideal' outcome, or whatever outcome politicians, scientists, philosophers, moralists, or preachers think likely, independently of whether one believes that only bad changes can come out of them.

More generally: the movement of revolt of the exploited and oppressed against exploitation and oppression is an unavoidable concomitant of exploitation and oppression, as old as class society itself. It has occurred in all times and all civilizations, although, of course, not in an uninterrupted, but only in a periodic, way. When that movement coincides with a deep social crisis, it takes pre-revolutionary or revolutionary forms. Revolutions break out when, as Lenin said, those from above can no longer govern normally, and

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

than the one in which 'market forces' decide these things behind the backs of the majority of the producers. Doesn't Elster think the same?

I have already answered his argument that a society of plenty as conceived by Marx is a complete utopia (526) in my article 'In Defence of Socialist Planning' (*New Left Review* 159 [September-October 1986]).

those from below no longer accept being governed by those from above.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century (since the Russian revolution of 1905), such revolutionary crises have occurred again and again, in many countries, on all continents. On the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, *The Economist* predicted in a famous editorial that with the antics (and foreseeable collapse) of the Chinese cultural revolution, the cycle of revolutions which had started in 1917, if not in 1789, would be over (the Anglo-Saxon gentlemen conveniently forgot to mention the revolutions in England in the seventeenth century and the American revolution of 1776). I confidently answered that their prediction would be faulted by history, because the structural crisis of bourgeois society was too deep. Moreover, the economic crisis, which I announced, broke out soon afterwards.

Hardly had the ink dried on *The Economist's* pages, when the Old Mole did indeed reappear and with quite a red fury in May 1968 in France and in the Italian Hot Autumn of 1969. Then there were the South Vietnamese revolution, the Portuguese revolution, the Iranian revolution, the Nicaraguan revolution and the beginning of the Polish revolution (not in a capitalist country, but anti-bureaucratic political revolution is part and parcel of world revolution today). There cannot be the slightest doubt that we should add, as did the German poet Lenau in the middle of the nineteenth century, to a similar list: 'und so weiter' (and so on)!

As the history of our century has proven since the beginning of the debate between 'reformists' (or gradualists) and 'revolutionists' inside the socialist movement since the inception of Bernsteinian revisionism the real issue is not whether revolutions are 'advisable' or 'bad' ('the embodiment of "evil" and moral sin' as the German SPD chief Friedrich Ebert thought). The real issue is whether they inevitably occur again and again, because the contradictions of bourgeois society economic, social, political, military, cultural, even moral ones periodically sharpen. Bernstein, who was much more intelligent and consistent than his latter-day followers, understood and expressed this extremely well. *His gradualist proposals hinged upon the probability of a gradual softening of all inner contradictions of bourgeois society on a long-term basis: no more wars; no more*



*sharp economic crises; no more massive unemployment; no more poverty; no more imperialism; no more dictatorships; no more attacks against democratic freedoms; no more massive eruptions of spontaneous extraparliamentary mass struggles.*

If you draw up a balance-sheet for the twentieth century, you can easily see who was right and who was wrong, Bernstein or Rosa Luxemburg. 1914, 1917, 1918, 1929, 1933, 1936 (Spain), 1939, 1944-48, 1956, 1965 (Indonesia), 1968, 1973 (Chile), 1976 (Argentina), 1973-199? (second slump) all speak for themselves. The gradualist thought these catastrophes could be avoided. They have occurred nevertheless. Other catastrophes will occur again and again in the future.

Faced with the real movement of emancipation of the real masses of the toilers; faced with these regularly recurring revolutionary crises, it is the sceptics and gradualists of the Elster type and not the Marxists who appear to be utopians. They, and not we, have recourse at one and the same time to wishful thinking, to impotent exhortations and to the pernicious bias of compromise.<sup>15</sup>

I say 'pernicious bias of compromise' because when you try to prevent the workers from taking power (i.e., from pushing the revolutionary crisis to its victory), you divide, demoralize and thereby weaken the working class, and you cause defeats (be it only partial ones, as in Germany/Austria 1919 and in Portugal 1975). You thereby inevitably shift the relationship of forces in favour of the capitalist class. *You thus open up a cycle of counter-revolution*, of which you yourself can very well end by becoming the main victim, as in Germany. You literally work *pour le roi de Prusse*.

<sup>15</sup> Elster is right to point out the 'risks' of revolutionary victories under materially unfavourable conditions. But what about the dilemma implied in the concomitant risk of counter-revolutionary victories? Trotsky pointed out these dangers as early as 1905-6 and offered a real answer with his theory of permanent revolution: the gradual international spread of revolution, as conditions ripen for it in country after country, both as a result of successive crises in bourgeois society and of the gradual maturing of adequate revolutionary leadership, capable of winning the majority of the toilers for the conquest of power by the proletariat.

Marx preferred to try to help the workers to achieve victory in the revolutionary processes he witnessed in his time. I believe that that remains the duty of socialists today more than ever, everywhere in the world where such processes actually occur. Even if one mistakenly believes that more bad than good comes out of a revolution, to further and to strengthen self-organization and democratic self-activity of the toilers and the oppressed certainly will increase good and reduce bad results. And the victory of counter-revolution is certainly the greater evil. We have never heard or read a convincing counter-argument to this dialectical approach to revolutions in the twentieth century as real (and unavoidable) processes. That's why I remain a *revolutionary* socialist, in addition to being a socialist (that is, in addition to always being on the side of the emancipatory struggle of all the exploited and all the oppressed). That is Marx's message, both the scientific and the moral-political one. That is what is more than ever alive from his heritage.

Marx-bashing is many an academician's favorite occupation today, as the wind of the *Zeitgeist* blows. The bourgeoisie gives priority to bashing the labour movement and real wages. Both activities nicely complement each other, confirming for the nth time that the ruling ideology of each society is indeed the ideology of the ruling class. Elster is not to be classified among the ignorant and dishonest Marx-bashers; but he has become a Marx-basher nevertheless. He can only prove that 'there is probably not a single tenet of classical Marxism' (xiv) which should not be 'insistently criticized,' by distorting Marx's thought, by presenting it as fundamentally incoherent, inconsistent and unrealistic (and therefore unable to explain and to change social/historical reality). He thereby is forced deeper and deeper into the incoherence, inconsistency and unrealism of his own thought.

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## II METHODOLOGY AND MICROFOUNDATIONS

## Elster, Marx and Methodology\*

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This paper is concerned with the treatment by Jon Elster of methodological aspects of Marx's work, and, in particular, with his assessment of Marx's distinctive contribution to methodology. The relevant material is to be found in a variety of writings with the most complete and systematic presentation in *Making Sense of Marx*.<sup>1</sup> The issues to be discussed here comprise, of course, only a single dimension of Elster's view of Marx. It is, however, a strategic one whose influence is felt throughout the whole. Moreover, it is the dimension which is closest to the intellectual interests of Elster himself. Prominent among those interests has been the question of the relevance of methods of formal reasoning, particularly of modal logic and of game theory, to the study of society. Hence, the present emphasis should take one near the heart of Elster's Marx, and offer a perspective on his thought in general.

Elster's verdict on the chief topic of this paper is stated in *Making Sense of Marx* as follows:

The general idea that unintended consequences arise when agents entertain beliefs about each other that exemplify the fallacy of composition is an extremely

\* I am grateful to Roy Edgley and Trevor Pateman for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> J. Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985)

powerful one. In my opinion, it is Marx's central contribution to the methodology of social science . . . . (48)

Some explanation of the background is needed to appreciate the force of this judgment. A little earlier it had been made clear that the 'central contribution' also incorporates all that is of value in Marx's theory of social contradictions, and, hence, in his dialectical method. For that theory to be viable it is essential, in Elster's view, that the contradictions be construed as 'real contradictions' which are 'firmly tied to the logical concept.' The tie is secured once the contradictions are seen as obtaining 'when several individuals simultaneously entertain beliefs about each other which are such that, although any one of them may well be true, it is logically impossible that they all be.' The social scientific interest of these cases lies in the fact that 'If the individuals having these mutually invalidating beliefs about each other all act as if they were true, their actions will come to grief through the mechanism of unintended consequences.' The result is what Elster, borrowing from Sartre, calls 'counterfinality,' a situation which 'in condensed jargon' may be described as 'the embodiment of the fallacy of composition' (44). Marx's methodological achievement has to do with the social phenomenon of counterfinality. It appears, however, that the key which must be grasped in order to unlock this complex of ideas is the fallacy of composition. Unfortunately, it proves, as we shall see, to be a key which gives way in the hand instead of turning the lock.

I

No extended discussion of the fallacy is offered in *Making Sense of Marx*. Where it might have been expected, the reader is directed to other writings by Elster and primarily to *Logic and Society*, his most sustained attempt to commend logical techniques to social scientists.<sup>2</sup> There, as elsewhere, he interprets the fallacy in a somewhat non-

2 J. Elster, *Logic and Society: Contradictions and Possible Worlds* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons 1978)

standard way, in terms of modal logic, the logic of 'possibilities, impossibilities and necessities.' It is presented informally as the inference that 'what is possible for any single individual must be possible for them all simultaneously.' For this to be a fallacy, Elster notes, it must be possible to exhibit cases where the antecedent ('For any  $x$  it is possible that  $x$  is  $F$ ') is true and the consequent ('It is possible that all  $x$  are  $F$ ') is false. To say that the consequent is false is to say that 'all  $x$  are  $F$ ' is impossible. This will be so, Elster suggests, where the attribution of the property  $F$  to all members of a class is contradictory. For that to be the case, he concludes, the property must be in some sense '*non-universalizable*,' for reasons 'that may roughly be classified into logical, conceptual and causal.'<sup>3</sup> The concept of non-universalizable properties is, it now appears, the crux of the matter. In *Logic and Society* Elster's interest, as one might expect, is in the cases 'where the relevant property is non-universalizable for purely logical reasons,' and nothing is lost if one turns to these cases without delay (103).

There are a couple of cases which merit particular attention here. This is so in part because they have, as Elster remarks, 'obvious implications for action,' and, indeed, suitably redescribed, serve to illustrate counterfinality. More significantly, they have to be understood with a qualification which later turns out to apply, in Elster's view, to all the counterfinality examples. This linked pair of cases runs as follows:

From the fact that anyone may put all their money in the bank and draw interest on it, it is sometimes concluded that everyone might do so simultaneously. From the fact that anyone may retire his deposit from the bank when he wants to, it is tempting (but fallacious and disastrous) to conclude that everyone might do so simultaneously. (103)

These are not, in their existing form, in the least convincing as instances of the logically non-universalizable, as Elster soon acknow-

<sup>3</sup>*Logic and Society*, 99. The formulas for antecedent and consequent used here are from J. Elster, 'Some Conceptual Problems in Political Theory,' in B. Barry, ed., *Power and Political Theory* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons 1976), 267-8.

ledges: 'The reader may have observed that . . . some clause such as "being the only one to . . ." must be implicitly presupposed if these are to come out as *logical* rather than causal fallacies' (105). The role of this presupposition is not so intuitively obvious as one might wish, and Elster offers no help in deciphering it. Nevertheless, it can hardly represent what the circumstances require. Indeed, it seems to exemplify a familiar kind of overkill where an addition put in to make the argument watertight succeeds in subverting it utterly. For its effect is surely to yield a contradiction in the consequent of any inference whatever of the appropriate type. This will be so even in the case of the 'simple predicates' such as 'having red hair or six toes' which Elster had wished to differentiate from what is 'non-universalizable for purely logical reasons.' Such simple predicates, he remarks, 'must be ascribable to everyone simultaneously if they can be ascribed to anyone' (100). They cannot, however, be ascribed to everyone simultaneously with each individual being the only one to have them. It is no more the case that everyone can simultaneously be the only one to have red hair than that everyone can simultaneously be the only one to withdraw their deposit from the bank. The addition serves throughout the domain of its use to obliterate the distinction between universalizable and non-universalizable properties. What is then left is an error of reasoning which arises not, as one had been led to expect, from failure to grasp the logic of a particular class of predicates but rather from failure to grasp the elementary logic of the constant terms 'every' and 'only.'

This is still not an adequate description of the situation. It is not simply that not everyone simultaneously can be the only one to have red hair. We can, and should, be more parsimonious than this. The obvious truth is that no more than one person at a time can be the only one to have red hair. From the fact that any individual may be alone in withdrawing his/her deposit, it would be fallacious, and indeed absurd, to conclude that this is simultaneously possible for any plurality of investors. This inference is logically just as defective as is Elster's original version, though, since the 'every' has now dropped out, it can hardly claim to illustrate a fallacy of composition. Neither does the error involved seem significant enough to be recognised as a distinctive fallacy on its own account.

It may be useful to pursue the discussion by considering the same pair of examples under the aspect of counterfinality. For Elster's argument undergoes at that point another curious and debilitating shift. As counterfinalities, the situations reappear in the following form: 'When everyone simultaneously want to deposit their money or to withdraw the deposit, no one will achieve what they wanted (interest and their money, respectively)' (110). Like the rest of the counterfinality examples, these are subject to the now familiar qualification that 'the assumption giving rise to the contradiction will always be of the form "being the only one (the first one, the best one, etc.) to do  $x$ ."' The second shift consists in the fact that the qualification is itself immediately qualified in a manner which is more significant than the genial assurance with which it is done would indicate: 'This, of course, is shorthand for "being among the few (or the first, the best, etc.) to do  $x$ "' (106). The extra qualification is noteworthy for marking the disappearance of the 'only' from the argument. Yet the way this development is marked seems, once more, needlessly vague. For contradictions will now arise in circumstances that may be more precisely defined and are also, it may be supposed, more commonplace than is conveyed by talk of 'being among the few, etc.' It is impossible for everyone simultaneously to be among the few to do  $x$ , and also impossible for the many to be simultaneously among the few to do  $x$ . Indeed, it is impossible for all the members of any group to do  $x$  at the same time, where the doers of  $x$  number at least one fewer than the original group. The impossibility at the root of all this is the impossibility of classes of different size having identical membership. Thus, with the elimination of 'only' as well as 'every,' what remains is the logic of the quantification of 'some.' Offences against this logic are unlikely to constitute a fallacy, if by that is implied a seductive form of error with a reasonably complex structure. All that seems in principle to be involved in them is an inability to operate the basic notions of cardinal numbering.

The process sketched here is from one point of view simply the working out of Elster's modal interpretation. This leads him to look for impossibility and, hence, contradiction in the consequents of inferences. The result is that attention becomes directed towards the feature of non-universalizability as the basis of the contradictions.



Thus, the modal turn serves of itself to devalue the fallacy somewhat as a fallacy, a defective form of reasoning. The logical gap between antecedent and consequent becomes less significant than the logical error of predication within the consequent. The attempt to universalize the logically non-universalizable is, however, an important kind of error on its own account, regardless of whether it comes about through plausible, but faulty, reasoning from cases in which the ascription of the property is legitimate. Indeed, given the logical catastrophe of the outcome, critical attention to this strictly inconsequential background has the air of complaining of the deck-chair arrangements on the *Titanic*. It is the failure to specify fully the nature of the catastrophe itself that is most disturbing here. The argument has, it appears, come to depend on the distinctive character of the non-universalizable properties. Hence, it is disappointing that Elster makes no attempt to give an account of such properties, relying instead on the catch-all formula 'being the only to . . .' to carry the business through. But in so far as this works at all it does so quite independently of the distinction between what is logically universalizable and what is not. The formula is then itself diluted in the way described above, so that the ancient and respectable fallacy of composition ends up as little more than a failure to grasp what is involved in counting. It has undergone a process of what might be termed, adapting a phrase from Elster himself, 'being improved to death' (*Logic and Society*, 78).

In defence of his procedure it may be suggested at this point that its chief motivation is the commendable wish to deal in ideas that will prove substantial and fruitful when applied to the social world. That world seldom lives up to the stark demands of 'every,' 'none' and 'only,' and so these terms come to be dissolved in the calibrations of 'some.' If justice is to be done to the concern with empirical relevance, however, one will have to deal directly with the social phenomenon of counterfinality. The discussion has shown that it is not at all enlightening to be told that the phenomenon embodies the fallacy of composition. But it may after all prove to be intelligible in other ways and, hence, still serve to give substance to Elster's view of Marx as a methodologist.

## II

It may be well to start by presenting the idea more formally. By the term 'counterfinality' in *Logic and Society* Elster understands 'the unintended consequences that arise when each individual in a group acts upon an assumption about his relations to others that, when generalised, yields the contradiction in the consequent of the fallacy of composition, the antecedent of that fallacy being true' (106; emphasis in original removed). Thus defined, counterfinality is said to be 'a species of real contradictions,' obtaining at the social rather than individual level. Individual rationality is guaranteed by the requirement that 'the antecedent of the inference be true,' while the collective irrationality 'arises only from the incompatibility of the belief systems.' The discussion that follows is concerned to place some restrictions on the notion of unintended consequences. What they chiefly amount to is that the consequences should arise instead of, not in addition to, the intended ones, and for the actors themselves, not just for other people. Moreover, it is assumed throughout that, as *Making Sense of Marx* puts it, 'there is a distinction to be made between the unintended consequences that are beneficial for the agents bringing them about, and those that are harmful or detrimental to their interest' (23-4). It is the latter alone that yield counterfinality.

These are abstract claims, and progress in the discussion may be made easier if one turns to Elster's illustrations. Since the basic points to be made apply to all of them, they may as well be presented in connection with the first one on the list. It has the advantage that the circumstances are simple and familiar, and do not call for the constant qualifications needed in more complex cases. Yet, in keeping with Elster's well-founded dislike of imaginary examples, it may be treated as a real life situation. That is to say, it is not wholly determined by stipulations and one may allow a sense of what happens in practice to inform the discussion. The example is this: 'In a lecture hall where everyone gets to their feet in order to get a better view of the speaker, no one is able to do so.'<sup>4</sup> Even

<sup>4</sup>*Logic and Society* 110. It should be noted that, as *Making Sense* makes clear (24), it is, strictly speaking, required for counterfinality that the actors become worse

(footnote continued on next page)

here, it should be noted, qualifications have to be made in order to keep in touch with empirical realities. In real life it probably will not be necessary for all to rise in order for those who do to be frustrated, but the critical point cannot be determined in advance except within broad limits. Moreover, to get the benefit of a better view, one usually will not have to be alone in getting to one's feet. All who do are likely to achieve it provided that, to fall back on an unsatisfactory, but almost unavoidable, formula, there are not too many of them. Nevertheless, it remains true that beyond a certain point the number of those who stand up will be greater than the number who benefit from doing so. This truth may, if one insists, be seen as exemplifying the impossibility that emerged as the core of Elster's fallacy of composition, that of getting quarts into pint pots or, indeed, into anything smaller than a regulation two-pinter. But this formal principle exerts no more grip on the lecture hall situation than it does on any other involving aggregation and distribution. Whatever interest the situation has surely lies elsewhere. It lies in the facts about the world and its causal mechanisms that prevent most of the participants from benefiting by a general uprising. That the impossibility here is causal rather than logical seems borne out by the ease with which one can conceive of a situation where the uprising is optimizing, not counterfactual; that is, where it results in everyone having a clearer view. This will be so, for instance, where the seating arrangements happen to be correlated with leg length, with the longer limbed at the rear.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate his conception of causal, as distinct from logical, impossibility, Elster had cited the impossibility of reading every one of a number of books in less than half an hour and that of bringing local broadcasting to all regions of Norway before 1980. It is hard to agree that the impossibility forming the substance

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

off, not simply that, as this wording suggests, they fail to improve their situation. The complication is not significant for present purposes.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps one should add the supposition that those at the front find themselves, when seated, disagreeably low in relation to the podium. The need for such tedious refining merely bears out the point that the crux of the problem lies not in logic but in the messiness of the world.

of the lecture hall situation really is categorially distinct from that which obtains in these examples.

Such a claim has no greater plausibility for the other items on the counterfinality list. There is, for instance, the original Sartrean paradigm: 'Each individual Chinese peasant . . . seeks to obtain more land by cutting down trees, but a general deforestation induces erosion with *less* land available to each peasant than at the outset' (*Logic and Society*, 110). The nub of this situation is contained in a causal story which Elster has informally sketched elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> It seems unlikely that in practice every individual peasant will have to cut down his or her trees before the effects of deforestation are felt. If in a particular case the participation of the very last individual were required to trigger the causal mechanism, that could itself be only a peculiar empirical fact. It would not constitute the kind of closing of a logical ring that transforms a situation by making 'some' into 'all.' Moreover, up to the point where erosion takes over, all who engage in tree felling may be presumed to benefit, and beyond that point all, tree fellers or not, must suffer the consequences. Determining where the switch is likely to occur depends on a range of technical considerations bearing on the concrete case. Although it would be tedious to demonstrate in detail, a similar account may be given of all Elster's counterfinality examples. What they testify to is not, in any nontrivial sense, logical impossibility, but rather the variety of the causal constraints, natural and social, that form the boundaries of the field of human action, and to the paradoxes of causality which arise when human aspirations press against these limits.

### III

Counterfinality provides Elster's basic model of the contradictions of social life. It should be noted, however, that he recognises a second variety of them in the form of 'suboptimality.' The distinction between the two is crucial so far as getting his estimate of Marx into

<sup>6</sup>*Sour Grapes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 21-3

perspective is concerned. Suboptimality is defined as 'the deliberate realization of a non-cooperative solution that is Pareto-inferior to some other payoff set obtainable by individual choices of strategy.' This is explained as the situation that arises 'when all the players adopt the solution strategies, fully aware that the others will do so as well and that they could all have obtained at least as much, and one of them more, than in the solution if some or all of them had diverged from the solution strategies' (*Logic and Society*, 122; emphasis in original removed). A striking difference between suboptimality and counterfinality is that the former involves intended, and the latter unintended, consequences. This, however, just reflects the fact that suboptimality, unlike counterfinality, is a game-theoretic notion. As such it presupposes 'strategic' rationality on the part of the actors, in contrast to the merely 'parametric' rationality of counterfinality:

The purposive-parametric actor assumes that he is free to adjust optimally in a constant or parametric situation. This assumption is, in itself, quite consistent . . . but if entertained simultaneously by all actors it generates counterfinality . . . .

The 'purposive-strategic man,' on the other hand, is 'the actor of game theory who knows that his environment is composed of other strategic actors and that he is part of their environment.' It follows that he will be able 'to realize his goals without any danger of counterfinality' (159). Thus, strategic behaviour is distinguished by the fact that it rests on choices 'that take account of the conjectured or anticipated choices of other agents' (*Making Sense*, 10). The 'paradigm case' of suboptimality, as thus conceived, is the Prisoner's Dilemma, a structure of which the social sciences provide, Elster believes, 'innumerable examples.'<sup>7</sup>

The introduction of game-theoretical issues opens up a large area of debate, and it is fortunate that we shall not need to engage directly with it here. This is so in part because of the way in which Elster

<sup>7</sup>*Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979), 20

draws the notion of suboptimality into the discussion of social contradictions. When he asks the obvious question 'what justifies the term "contradiction" in the case of suboptimality?', the answer that is given is that 'in many cases it is indistinguishable from counterfinality.' This contention seems scarcely decisive in itself, and the arguments offered in its favour are remarkably feeble. Their merits are, however, of little significance for present purposes.<sup>8</sup> If they are rejected, one is left without any reason for involving game-theoretic considerations in dealing with Marx's theory of social contradictions. If, on the other hand, they are found convincing, then, since their whole object is to show that in the relevant context counterfinality and suboptimality are indistinguishable, they undermine the need to give the latter any independent treatment.

There is a more straightforward reason for omitting that treatment: suboptimality plays no significant role in Elster's view of Marx's con-

<sup>8</sup> Elster, *Making Sense*, 122-4. 'The main argument,' he affirms, 'is that in many cases counterfinality and suboptimality are identical as regards overt behaviour.' If, however, one considers only overt behaviour, abstracting from the agents' conception of their situation, it is not clear how, on Elster's premises, one can be entitled to speak of contradictions at all. That one is not may be presumed to be part of the point behind his rebuke to those proponents of dialectics who say 'contradiction' when they should say 'opposition, conflict or struggle' (*Making Sense*, 3). Indeed, considered simply as overt behaviour, it is hard to see how even counterfinality can qualify as social contradiction. Elster's 'additional argument' is even less persuasive. It is that 'both counterfinality and suboptimality tend to generate collective action' because of the 'tension' they involve: 'These tensions are in themselves not contradictions in the rigorous sense of the term used here, but they nevertheless point to the need for a unified terminology' (*Making Sense*, 124). The argument is that suboptimality is to count as a contradiction because counterfinality does, and they share a feature which is not itself a contradiction. This is surely an unconvincing piece of reasoning. It would be so even if Elster had plainly identified a genuine common feature. It is, however, not obvious, and might well be thought unlikely, that 'tension' can mean the same in the case of parametric actors confronted with the unintended consequences of their actions and in that of strategic actors confronting the intended consequences of theirs. For one thing, the element of subjectively experienced frustration must be different in the two situations. It may be concluded that Elster is indulging here in just the kind of uncontrolled analogising he castigates in others. See n. 17 below.

tribution to methodology. In general, Marx scores badly for gametheoretic insight. Thus, we learn that 'although strategic interaction is crucial in economic life, both within and between classes, Marx took little explicit account of it.' It is true that 'as in virtually any social theorist of some stature, one finds in his work instances of the interaction structure known as the Prisoner's Dilemma.' Yet what he says on the topic 'is hardly more coherent and systematic than what may be discovered in Hobbes, Rousseau or Tocqueville,' and he is 'sometimes confused with respect to the crucial distinction between variable-sum and constant-sum interaction' (*Making Sense*, 14-15). Moreover, he displays straightforward incompetence in this area. Thus, he commits the cardinal error of violating the principle of 'mutual rationality' (298). His inadequacy also shows itself in less fundamental, but still important, ways, as in his 'narrow *pre-strategic* conception of power' (406, 421). All of this is in sharp contrast with his achievement as regards the ideas associated with counterfinality. Here he went 'beyond the general notion of his predecessors, from Vico to Hegel, that history is the result of human action,' and by imposing a 'definite structure' on that notion 'transformed it from *Weltanschauung* into a scientific methodology' (27). To note this contrast is to be brought up hard against the major tensions in Elster's account of Marx as a methodologist.

Some elements of tension are easy to identify. Marx's methodological contribution is supposed to relate to counterfinality rather than to suboptimality. In response to critics of *Logic and Society*, Elster has, however, made clear that the conceptual distinction between the two 'corresponds to' the 'historical divide' between traditional and modern societies. Pre-modern societies 'will exhibit counterfinality much more often than suboptimality,' while modern societies by contrast 'have achieved a density of communication and interaction that favours the kind of mutual awareness that is a basic premiss of game theory.'<sup>9</sup> This way of aligning the two distinctions is wholly consistent with Elster's procedure elsewhere. It is given substance by the assumption that in modern capitalist

<sup>9</sup> Elster, 'Reply to Comments,' *Inquiry* 23 (1980), 216-17

societies 'the main classes have become strategic actors in the full sense' (*Making Sense*, 426 n.). This assumption serves in turn to underpin the belief that the formation and interaction of such classes is best understood from the perspective of game theory.<sup>10</sup> Marx's weak and unreliable grasp of that perspective has surely now to be seen as a crippling handicap. It deprives him of the conceptual tools needed to do justice to the central concerns of his social science. What his methodological expertise is geared to is the understanding of traditional societies, a legacy for the anthropologist or ancient historian rather than the student of capitalism. In view of the aspirations and self-conception of his work, this amounts to the very faintest of praise. An additional twist is given by Elster's comment that he 'had little to say about counterfinality in pre-capitalist societies' achieving its transformation into a scientific methodology 'only in the case of capitalism' (*Making Sense*, 27). Given the alignment of the traditional-modern and counterfinality-suboptimality distinctions, this is a somewhat puzzling achievement. The question arises of just how it was possible for Marx to transform the notion of counterfinality with reference not to the form of society corresponding to it but to that with which it is contrasted in the 'historical divide.' The point is not of much importance in itself, but it serves to add an enigmatic touch to the faintness of Elster's praise.

#### IV

There are more serious difficulties lurking in this region. To reveal them, the scope of the discussion should be extended so as to consider the substantive questions with which Marx's methodology has to deal. The position seems in general terms clear enough in *Making Sense*: 'The notion of a social contradiction has the theoretical function of identifying causes of instability and change . . .' (48). Among the many similar formulations in *Logic and Society*, one is told that 'the notion of a real contradiction can and should be the

<sup>10</sup> On this point see especially Elster's 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory,' *Theory and Society* 11 (1982) 453-82.



core of a theory of social change' (4). The notion serves in that work as the declared focus of what is proposed as a 'vindication of dialectics,' an attempt 'to make explicit the logical structure (which one could call dialectical) of the non-methodological writings of Hegel and Marx' (65). With these announcements, the scene is set in an arresting and persuasive way. The actual performance, however, confounds at crucial points the expectations thus aroused. That this is so has to do in large part with the emergence of the idea that what the notion can and should be the core of is, precisely stated, a 'dual theory of social change.' This is a theory, not of two aspects or varieties of change, but of change on the one hand and of its absence on the other. The 'main thesis' Elster wishes to defend is that 'given certain structural conditions . . . contradictions tend to generate collective action for the purpose of overcoming the contradictions' (134). It is a dual theory in the sense that 'Depending upon the kind of contradiction involved, the structural conditions for political organisation may function both as obstacles to change and as agents of change' (150). Indeed, in some cases the contradiction is itself a 'form' of change, and then the action to which it leads 'may have the effect of reversing or halting the process of change.' In Elster's view, these cases may be identified safely with counterfinality, which is itself '*an economic variety of change*' engendering political action 'to restore the *status quo*.' Given a suboptimality on the other hand, a collective action 'will represent the *political variety of change*, a departure from the *status quo*' (134-5). In the working out of these ideas the dualism is firmly maintained: counterfinality is itself change and generates action to counteract change while suboptimality leads to a political process which has change for its objective.

Some paradoxical aspects of this situation are already obvious. What Elster is offering may be described as the core of a theory of the genesis of collective political action. In that context the specific function of the variety of social contradiction represented by counterfinality is, it appears, to theorise the roots of conservative and reactionary politics. The oddity of identifying Marx's methodological achievement with this theme will not need labouring. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that counterfinality is the true paradigm of social contradiction, and that suboptimality qualifies only by virtue of being indistinguishable from it. Hence, it seems

that Elster's thesis would be more accurately expressed by saying that, while social contradictions may themselves be forms of change, the causes which they have the theoretical function of identifying are causes of social stability and stasis. It is surely surprising to have such a view associated with traditional dialectics, still more to have it regarded as part of its vindication.

Even the revised formulation of the thesis has a serious conceptual obstacle to surmount. It should be noted that the connections Elster is concerned with are, strictly speaking, between the 'discovery' or 'perception' of a contradiction and the genesis of collective action. Thus, it is 'crucial' that 'the contradictions be perceived.' A pre-condition of the attempts to organise in which he is interested is that 'the actors perceive that they are behaving in a contradictory manner' (138, 137). The conceptual difficulty is that it seems implicit in his general scheme that once the 'actors' perceive this they are beginning to leave counterfinality behind. Thus, when the farmers who are caught up in that 'paradigm of counterfinality,' the cobweb cycle, realise that their mode of learning is inherently contradictory 'they have taken the decisive step to a *strategic* situation' (112). But this is to enter a world in which, as we have seen, the danger of counterfinality cannot arise. It will help to focus the issues here if one considers what Elster regards as a 'transparently simple example' illustrating his ideas about social contradictions. The situation is one foreshadowed by Marx and identified in Keynesian economics as an 'essential paradox of capitalism.' It is that 'each capitalist wants low wages for his own workers (this makes for high profits) and high wages for the workers of all other capitalists (this makes for high demand).' This paradox is 'at the root of the Keynesian theory of crises and counterfinality.' Like the farmers in the cobweb cycle, however, the capitalists are capable of learning, and may end up by understanding the paradox and understanding that they all understand it, in which case, as Elster remarks, 'the situation is transformed into a game.' Clearly, this development is one from counterfinality to suboptimality, mediated by the actors coming to perceive the contradiction in their original situation. Once the transition is accomplished:

The suboptimality of the situation makes for paradox and tension; it is hard to accept misery when everyone could better their lot if everyone behaved differently. The outcome, given certain structural conditions, is a pressure towards organization, collective action, or government intervention: a case of *contradictions inducing change*. (97)

It is difficult to reconcile the treatment of this example with the claim that counterfinality induces collective action to prevent change. On the contrary, it supports the suggestion that of itself counterfinality induces no collective action whatever. Such action arises only when it is superseded in the switch to a strategic situation, and if the original behaviour then persists it does so as suboptimality. What is generated in that case, and here a consistent thread of argument is resumed, is action to promote, not prevent, change. So far from counterfinality being the core of a theory of conservative politics, such a politics is now left altogether untheorised. Counterfinality is itself merely a form of economic change without a political dimension, while suboptimality engenders politics of a radical kind, collective action to bring about change. It may be said that Elster's argument has worked back by a circuitous route to a point close to the dialectical tradition. For in the end the theme of dualism is cancelled, and a univocal link between contradictions and change is restored. This is achieved, however, at the cost of incoherence in his official stance. Moreover, the route taken strengthens the impression that he has in general a low opinion of the significance for social science of the thinking embodied in counterfinality, as contrasted with the strategic thinking explored by game theory. It appears that it is not just that parametric thinking can be of comparatively little interest to students of modern society. It can be of little interest to those who seek to understand the politics of any society. A methodology focused on this thinking would at best provide some tools for the economic historian of the pre-modern period. To point this out is to underline how little is being said when Marx is credited with the development of such a methodology. The power of faint praise to damn its object could scarcely be better demonstrated.

## V

Elster's handling of dialectical themes should, expanding a hint in the previous section, be situated in relation to the intellectual tradition in the field. For this purpose it is helpful to abstract from the internal difficulties into which the 'vindication of dialectics' runs. Taking the project at face value, as it were, one may ask how well Elster's conception of what is involved accords with the work of those he seeks to vindicate, that is, of Hegel and Marx. The answer that must surely be given is that it is strikingly discordant with their work. The main fruit of Elster's attempt is the dual theory of social change, a theory which postulates parallel links between contradictions on one side and change and stability on the other. Such symmetry is not at all in keeping with the spirit in which these elements are treated in the classic texts. Thus, it is hard to reconcile with the constant Hegelian refrain that contradiction is 'the root of all movement and vitality' and 'the very moving principle of the world.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the exclusivity and intimacy of the bond between contradiction and change have never been given more extravagant expression than they are by Hegel: 'to think the contradiction' is, we are told, to think 'pure change.'<sup>12</sup> The term used for such declarations is, in the original, *Widerspruch*, and in *Making Sense*, Elster has usefully drawn attention to the carelessness of Marx's translators 'whereby not only "Widerspruch" but also "Gegensatz" are rendered into English (and French) by "contradiction"' (43). Viewing Marx's usage in the light of this warning, it is evident that, where he differentiates the two terms, it is precisely the restless, crisis-signifying element that characterises the moment of *Widerspruch*. An instance is provided in a passage cited by Elster in *Making Sense* from the 1844 *Manuscripts*: 'The antithesis (*Gegensatz*) between *lack of property* and *property*, so long as it is not comprehended as the antithesis of *labour*

11 G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen and Unwin 1969); *Hegel's Logic*, trans. W. Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), 174

12 'Es ist der reine Wechsel oder die Entgegengesetzung in sich selbst der Widerspruch zu denken' (G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main 1970]), 130

and *capital*, still remains an indifferent antithesis, not grasped in its *active connection*, in its *integral relation*, not yet grasped as a *contradiction (Widerspruch)*' (93). The point emerges still more clearly in the continuation which is not used by Elster: 'labour . . . and capital . . . constitute *private property* as its developed state of contradiction (*Widerspruch*) hence a dynamic relationship driving towards resolution.'<sup>13</sup> This dynamism is the specific hallmark of the relation of *Widerspruch* in Marx, as in Hegel. It pervades not merely their methodological pronouncements but also the details of their practice. Nowhere does it seem to occur to them to view the relation as a potential mode or instrument of immobility. It is exhibited rather in processes in which the successive stages are perpetually driven to realise what is discrepant and unprecedented. A social science which even-handedly links contradictions not only with 'conditions for change' but also with 'conditions for stability' can hardly claim a significant part of this intellectual legacy (*Logic and Society*, 134).

It will provide a clue to the origins of Elster's divergence from classical models if one considers his argument at a more concrete level. In particular, one should focus on the cases where he connects the perception of what he regards as social contradictions exclusively with change: that is, on the suboptimality. The question to be asked is what is the precise nature of the connection in these cases. The discussion of the Keynesian paradox of capitalism is representative and revealing here. The key mediation in it is the assumption that 'it is hard to accept misery when everyone could better their lot if everyone behaved differently.' It consists, one may say, in a simplistic, but presumably uncontentious, psychological generalisation. Elster is aware of the sketchiness of his remarks in this area, and wishes to defend it before the 'empirically oriented reader' for whom he is 'primarily writing.' His hope is that social scientists will be 'tempted into filling in some of the holes' in his outline sketches, so as to specify 'the precise mechanism for change' (*Logic and Society*, 67). It is plain that what is being envisaged is a causal mechanism, and the language of such mechanism is dominant throughout

<sup>13</sup> K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1974), 87

the discussion.<sup>14</sup> In view of the purely external character of the relationships this involves, it is not surprising that Elster should be just as willing to link contradictions with stability as with change. Invoking again the contrast with Hegel and Marx, it has to be said that for them the link with change is internal to, and indeed partly constitutive of, the relation of contradiction. The relation is by its very nature the harbinger and vehicle of the new. It is not possible in this paper to attempt the kind of detailed account of it that would make such a role fully intelligible. Nevertheless, if in seeking to describe it one had to choose between the modalities recognised by Elster, it would surely have to be said that its character is conceptual rather than causal. The classical dialectic can only exist in the medium of what must, in some sense, be conceptual necessity. A recognition of this is needed not merely in order to explain individual transitions but, even more emphatically, to exhibit a series of such changes as an essentially directed, rational movement. This in turn would seem to be required for the project of a historical dialectic to be viable in principle. Clearly, Elster's account needs drastic modal strengthening before it could accommodate even the first steps here.

The discussion has so far found little to commend in Elster's interpretation of Marx's methodology, and, hence, has been rather consistently negative in tone. It would be unsatisfactory, not to say undialectical, to leave matters in that state. To do so would, moreover, be to miss important aspects of Elster's position. It should be

<sup>14</sup> The terminology most frequently used is that of one occurrence 'inducing' another. There is an egregious instance in the explanation of the way transitions are accomplished in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'The "surfacing" of the contradiction to an explicit object of consciousness induces a change in the form of the consciousness but the new form always turns out to harbour a contradiction of its own, and so on until the level of absolute knowledge has been reached' (*Logic and Society*, 71-2). In Hegel's conception, however, it is surely not the case that the discovery of self-contradiction 'induces' a change in the form of consciousness, for it is already itself such a change. The discovery is, as it were, immediately transformative, without the intervention of a psychological process, of existing forms. Here the causal language corresponds to nothing in the text, and introduces a superfluous layer of mediation so far as conceptualising the transitions there is concerned.

asked whether some forward movement may not be possible from here, whether there are not elements in his position that will serve as building blocks for a more adequate account of Marx. The answer is that there undoubtedly are such elements, and they may be briefly enumerated. They include the basic recognition that Marx's method is in its self-conception a dialectical method and that the crucial dialectical category for its purposes is contradiction. They include also the salutary insistence that the category must retain a logical character if its use is to have any theoretical interest, and the overcoming of the narrow dogmatism of the main analytical tradition by extending the reference of the category beyond purely linguistic items to include the beliefs and desires of human beings.<sup>15</sup> There is, moreover, the encouragement provided by Elster's discussion for the additional step, vital to the prospects for a Marxist dialectic, of bringing actions and practices within the scope of the category. Thus, his social contradictions are constituted by situations involving uncoordinated human behaviour. It seems natural to view this step as a development from his incorporation of beliefs and desires, a development borne on the internal links that bind the key concepts. In conformity with much traditional and contemporary philosophy of action, one can take beliefs and desires to be integral and individuating components of actions. Then one may postulate conceptual, and at any rate quasi-logical, relations of opposition between actions that hold in virtue of full-strength relations of that kind between their corresponding ingredients of belief and desire.<sup>16</sup> To propose this is, of course, to offer merely the basic out-

15 Elster accomplishes the extension in a natural and effective way. Beliefs are brought in by virtue of their capacity to possess truth-values, so that contradictory beliefs are those which logically cannot all be true simultaneously. Desires qualify by virtue of an analogous characteristic in that they may or may not be realised: contradictory desires are those which 'as a matter of logic must remain unrealized' (*Logic and Society*, 71).

16 For a discussion of these issues in a Wittgensteinian framework, see P. Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1958), Ch. 5; and for a discussion in a Hegelian framework, see C. Taylor, 'Hegel and the Philosophy of Action,' in L.S. Stepelevich and D. Lamb, eds., *Hegel's Philosophy of Action* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press 1983) 1-18.

line of what is needed here, and one that is already contentious at various points. It may, nevertheless, serve the immediate purpose of suggesting a programme for work in Marxist theory that has roots in Elster's discussion.

That discussion contains another pointer to the way ahead. It is the claim that Marx's theory of social contradictions is 'derived largely' from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a source that is to Elster 'without comparison Hegel's greatest work' (*Making Sense*, 37; *Logic and Society*, 65). The possibility this opens up is that Marx's dialectic may be conceived phenomenologically, as a process through which subjects are formed and transformed by the discovery of contradictions. It seems reasonable to assume that in Marx's appropriation of the phenomenological theme the primary subjects are social classes and the dialectic becomes a dialectic of class consciousness. A further step has still to be taken in order to complete this schematic picture. It derives from the need to encompass not simply classes as subjects but also the dimension of class struggle, of antagonistic relations between such subjects. In view of the significance of this dimension in Marx's thought, it may be supposed that if there is to be a Marxist dialectic, class struggle must constitute its paradigmatic sphere of operation. Once again, it is a requirement which does not seem theoretically difficult to accommodate. It would, after all, be merely dogmatic to insist that all contradiction must be self-contradiction. In keeping with everyday usage and the logic of natural language, one may suppose that subjects contradict one another as well as themselves. Thus, one may represent the opposing poles of the relationship as lodged in distinct centres of subjectivity. The way is then open to conceive of class struggle as a medium for such relationships, a dialectical field of force in which the contending entities are classes. This seems to put one well on the way towards a vindication of Marx's dialectics using materials provided by Elster. It should be noted, however, that his work also contains what appear to be elements of resistance to any enterprise conceived in these terms. To note them is to come in contact with important features of his position, and, incidentally, to gain an insight into the difficulties which a programme of the kind sketched here has to face.



## VI

The first of these elements is Elster's much-canvassed attachment to the principle of methodological individualism, one of the most prominent themes in his dealings with Marx's methodology. It is an attachment which might on general grounds be thought to sit uneasily with the kind of existential legitimacy accorded to collective social actors in our outline programme. For all the prominence of the theme, it is, however, surprisingly difficult to know precisely what to make of it and, hence, to judge how serious the present obstacle is. The problem is that Elster's presentation is by no means as clear and consistent as one could wish. There is uncertainty as to the kind of explanatory moves which are licensed and, more especially, prohibited by his methodological commitments.<sup>17</sup> Thus, *Making Sense of Marx* contains many professions of loyalty to methodological individualism, and almost as many warnings of the

17 Another source of unease is the fact that Elster makes no serious attempt to provide any rational grounds for these commitments. Early in *Making Sense* we are told that the principle of methodological individualism will be justified later, but the justification when it comes is cursory and question-begging. It depends entirely on the bare assertion that 'To go from social institutions and aggregate patterns of behaviour to individuals is the same kind of operation as going from cells to molecules' (*Making Sense*, 4-5). If they really are the same, one has no doubt been given a reason for preferring methodological individualism in social science. But whether this is so or not is itself part of what is at stake in the debate. In the absence of any discursive backing, all that Elster has offered is a more-or-less arbitrary analogy of the kind he is quick, and fierce, to condemn in the work of others; see *Making Sense*, 508-10 and n. 8 above. Elsewhere in his writings a promising text is the paper on 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory' which is subtitled 'The Case for Methodological Individualism' (*Theory and Society* 11 [1982] 453-82). The expectations aroused by the subtitle are, however, left altogether unsatisfied, as the paper fails to project even the shadow of a case for methodological individualism, being wholly taken up with other matters. This has been noted by Philippe Van Parijs: 'Not only does Elster not provide a case for methodological individualism, contrary to what his misleading sub-title suggests, but also he does not even believe in it . . .' ('Functionalist Marxism Rehabilitated: A Comment on Elster,' *Theory and Society* 11 [1982], 510, n. 3). Van Parijs goes on to give an interesting justification for the second part of this comment.

danger of insisting on it 'at the current stage.' To do so may involve a 'premature reductionism' which yields only 'sterile and arbitrary explanations' (6, 359, 363). Thus, Elster's individualism has a utopian aspect, functioning for much of the time as an ideal which is too good for the here and now. It is, however, by no means plain sailing even where he is not consciously waiving, and may be assumed to be presupposing, the principle. For it is not clear what constraints it imposes on what may properly be predicated of the agents in these cases. It was noted earlier that he regards the main classes in modern capitalist societies as strategic actors 'in the full sense.' Given his understanding of what the strategic mode involves, this is to equip them with substantial and extensive capacities. Thus, it allows the satisfaction of the condition that 'A revolutionary class must be capable of waiting, of marking time, of saying No to favourable opportunities' (*Ulysses and the Sirens*, 11). It presumes, that is to say, highly developed forms of self-conscious intentionality. In the light of this it is not at all surprising to learn that a collective actor is as such capable in principle of devising a deliberate policy to achieve its purpose, and of guiding a process towards an end (*Making Sense*, 35, 116). This in turn seems to open the way for teleological explanation in history, an implication that Elster is at times willing to accept. Thus, he concedes that if the bourgeoisie of mid-nineteenth century France had been 'a fully class-conscious collective actor' they might well have behaved in the way postulated by Marx, and so have redeemed the 'teleological tendency' of his views on them (434). Elster's objection to these views is not to their teleology in itself. It derives from the belief that, as a matter of fact, the actors had not attained, or had not been shown to have attained, the stage of development needed for an account in such terms to succeed. The disagreement with Marx rests here not on theoretical grounds but on a different reading of the history.

This example brings out another feature of the situation which is important for present purposes. It suggests that what classes are essentially endowed with as collective actors is class consciousness. Elsewhere, Elster writes as if willing to accept, as a matter of definition, that for them to crystallize into collective actors simply is to achieve such consciousness (*Making Sense*, 344). The chief difficulty with his presentation may now be stated. It is the difficulty of see-

ing what more any Marxist adherent of methodological collectivism could need in practice, over and above what his methodological individualism allows. More specifically, it is the difficulty of seeing what has to be postulated of classes as dialectical subjects which is not granted in his vision of them as class conscious strategic actors. Indeed, it might be thought that they are provided there with just the right sort of qualifications for getting the dialectical scheme off the ground. If this is so, it surely points to a potentially fruitful area of collaboration between dialectics and game theory. For the present, however, one should simply conclude that any impression of resistance on methodological individualist grounds to our outline programme is a surface, and not deep, feature of Elster's position.

There is a second element in Elster's work that seems resistant to the working out of the proposals outlined above. It is grounded in considerations of textual evidence, and has to do not with the legitimacy of class subjects but with the integration of class struggle into the dialectical scheme. If class struggle is to be regarded as the true home of Marx's dialectic, it would be reassuring to establish that he thought that a relation of contradiction could hold between classes as well as within them. This is a conclusion which Elster is consistently, and rather curiously, disinclined to accept. In *Logic and Society* he asserts that to his knowledge Marx never refers to a *Widerspruch* (contradiction), as distinct from a *Gegensatz* (opposition), between labour and capital (90, n.1). In *Making Sense of Marx* this claim is retracted, and some instances of the usage in question are cited. Nevertheless, he still wishes to deny that these are references to class struggle: 'he never to my knowledge refers to a struggle between two classes as a "contradiction" only as an "opposition"' (44; 44, n.1). It has to be said that this propounds a somewhat odd sticking point for Marx to have adopted.

'Contradiction' denotes a relation of dialectical antagonism which may, Elster admits, hold between labour and capital. But the labour-capital relationship may also, for Marx, as is plain from voluminous evidence, be seen as instantiating the notion of class struggle. It is difficult to see how any theoretical point could be served by rigidly holding the two forms of description apart in the way Elster supposes. Indeed, there is something question-begging in his procedure; in, that is, acknow-

ledging the references to contradictions between classes while repudiating any link with class struggle. It is difficult not to feel that some theoretical preconceptions may be exerting an influence here. For, without them, it might well be thought at least equally reasonable to take the invocation of class contradictions as serving of itself to introduce the dimension of class struggle where its presence is not manifest in other ways.

The textual evidence itself does not in any case support Elster's stand. Insofar as Marx does distinguish *Widerspruch* from *Gegensatz* it is, as we have seen, by virtue of its association with the moment of overt conflict and resolution, of the crisis preceding a new birth.<sup>18</sup> In the context of class relationships it is surely natural to regard this as a moment of class struggle. Thus, the notion of that struggle seems plainly enough adumbrated in the passage cited earlier which refers to the *Widerspruch* of labour and capital as a 'dynamic relationship driving towards resolution.' The conclusion of *The Poverty of Philosophy* is particularly worth noting in this connection. There Marx refers to the 'antagonism' (*antagonisme*) between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as 'a struggle of class against class (*une lutte de classe a classe*),' and asks rhetorically 'is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition (*sur l'opposition*) of classes should culminate in a brutal contradiction (*contradiction brutale*), the shock of body against body, as its final *dénouement*?'<sup>19</sup> This passage is itself evidence enough to dispose of the idea that Marx is unwilling to think of contradictions between classes in connection with class struggle. In concluding that it may be disposed of, one is admittedly discounting an obstacle raised by Elster's discussion of Marx to the carrying out of our dialectical programme. To do so is, how-

18 See *Making Sense*, 93, and n. 13, above; cf. K. Marx, *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Manuskript 1861-3)*, *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz 1976), Vol II. 3, 1141, 1247; *Capital* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976) Vol. 1, 236.

19 K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1955), 152; *Misère de la Philosophie* (Paris-Brussels: Frank-Vogler 1847), 117. As one might expect, the standard German translation, which was supervised by Engels, uses *Gegensatz* for both *antagonisme* and *opposition* and *Widerspruch* for *contradiction*.

ever, simply to enable what is of real value in that discussion to be properly exploited.

The starting point of this discussion was Elster's identification of Marx's central contribution to the methodology of social science as a contribution to the understanding of counterfinality, a type of situation in social life which embodies the fallacy of composition. The discussion then traced the way in which, in expounding the fallacy, Elster's formulations progressively shed the strictness and precision of logic in the face of the need for empirical relevance. Moreover, his examples of counterfinality turn out to be indistinguishable in kind from others which he cites as illustrating causal, as opposed to logical, paradox. The best comment on all this has been provided by Elster himself in warning of 'the temptation to play upon the logical connotation in order to make our opinions seem interesting, and then fall back on the non-logical connotations in order to make them look plausible' (*Logic and Society*, 3). The results do nothing to justify his confidence in the value of formal techniques to social scientists, at least where these are drawn from modal logic. The discussion went on to show that his attempted vindication of dialectics is not coherently worked out, and fails altogether to capture the position of those he seeks to vindicate. Their conception of the relationship between contradictions and change is framed not in dualistic but, as one might say, in monolithic terms by virtue of operating in a more stringent modality than he seeks to employ. By this stage of the discussion it was clear that Marx's methodological achievement could amount, on Elster's showing, to very little. It has something to contribute to the study of economic change in traditional societies, but nothing of significance to contribute to his own project of grasping the dynamics of capitalism. Indeed, by Elster's lights, Marx seems singularly ill-equipped for such a project, in view of his ineptness in game-theoretical matters. At this point one comes up against a curious difficulty in characterising Elster's relationship to Marx. The relationship is in some obvious ways a harmonious and positive one. Elster professes to be a Marxist, even if not 'in the traditional sense,' and there are, as we have seen, elements in his work that may be used in reconstructing Marxist theory in contemporary terms. Moreover, he declares that he can trace back to Marx 'most of the views' that he holds to be 'true and im-

portant,' and methodology is explicitly said to be included in this category.<sup>20</sup> Yet his writings display no active interest in the parametric predicaments of traditional actors, while they are pressingly concerned with the application of game-theoretic insights to the mutually aware actors of modern societies. Hence, his declaration of allegiance to Marx's methodology is quite mysterious. It is impossible to see what could be of any personal significance for him there. The declaration may perhaps be taken as illustrating a tendency to make rhetorically striking claims which are then undermined by the details of their elaboration. From another perspective, it is merely the culmination of a series of obscurities which have emerged in the course of the present discussion of his dealings with methodological aspects of Marx. His work in that area is strongly marked by ingenuity and forcefulness, but not by fidelity to its object nor by clarity and rigour of argument. In engaging with this work one has to face the constant difficulty, to borrow a pregnant phrase, of 'making sense' of it.

<sup>20</sup>*Making Sense*, 531. On the general question of Elster's relationship to Marx, there is some further discussion in J. McCarney, 'A New Marxist Paradigm?' *Radical Philosophy* 43 (Summer 1986) 29-31; with correction, *Radical Philosophy* 44 (Autumn 1986), 48.

## Marxism and Popular Politics: The Microfoundations of Class Conflict

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A particularly important topic for Marxist theory is that of popular politics: the ways in which the underclasses of society express their interests and values through collective action. Classical Marxism postulates a fundamental conflict of interest among classes. It holds that exploited classes will come to an accurate assessment of their class interests, and will engage in appropriate collective actions to secure those interests. The result is a predicted variety of forms of underclass collective action: boycotts, rent strikes, tax and food riots, rebellion, and revolution. Underclass members of society instigate and support such protests because it is in their material class interest to do so. It will emerge, however, that this account is too schematic to provide a basis for explanation of popular politics. The microfoundations approach to Marxist theory will prove useful in this context because it directs us to some of the resources needed to provide a more adequate account of popular collective action.

This paper has two chief aims, one methodological and the other substantive. First, I intend to offer support for the microfoundational approach to Marxism; and second, I aim to contribute substantively to a more adequate theory of popular politics. These two concerns are linked. For it will emerge that macro-Marxism does not provide an adequate explanation of an important range of phenomena (popular politics). Once we move down from the description of popular politics in terms of class alone, to a more finegrained ana-

lysis of political behavior in terms of class, political culture, organizational resources, and the like, however, we find that there are strong regularities; moreover, these regularities correspond closely enough to what classical Marxism would predict as to count as a weak confirmation for classical Marxism. Providing microfoundations for a Marxist theory of politics, then, promises to enrich and strengthen the latter.

## I Analytical Marxism and the Mechanisms of Social Change

Analytical Marxism represents a striking new development in Marxist thought: the marriage of some of the foundational ideas of classical Marxism with the methods and tools of rational choice theory.<sup>1</sup> Marxism is concerned with explaining a variety of largescale processes of economic and political change e.g., the logic of development of capitalism, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the evolution of the absolutist state, or the occurrence of peasant rebellion. And analytical Marxists have argued that the mechanisms that underlie these processes of change depend upon the rational actions of individuals, given the political and economic institutions in which they choose and given their objective material interests.<sup>2</sup>

1 Some of the chief writings within analytical Marxism include John McMurtry (1977), *The Structure of Marx's World-view*; G.A. Cohen (1978), *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*; John Roemer (1981), *Analytical Foundations of Marxism*; Jon Elster (1985), *Making Sense of Marx*; and Adam Przeworski (1985), *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. Two excellent collections of articles have appeared as well: Terence Ball and James Farr (1984), eds., *After Marx* and John Roemer (1986b), ed. *Analytical Marxism*. Not all these authors share the belief that rational choice theory promises to illuminate classic problems within Marxism.

2 This approach is particularly central to the work of Elster, Roemer, and Przeworski. Robert Brenner's work represents the application of this approach to the process of political and economic change in early modern Europe. Robert Brenner (1976; 1982), 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe' and 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism.' Both essays, as well as a number of important responses, are collected in T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (1985), eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*. In *The Scientific Marx* I argue that Marx's explanations in *Capital* generally take the form of rational-choice

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This approach therefore resorts to a handful of analytical tools based on the assumption that individuals make calculated choices in their economic and political behavior: theories of individual motivation and rationality; theories of organization and leadership; and theories of the logic of collective action. Jon Elster emphasizes primarily the pertinence of game theory for Marxism (Elster 1982); but collective action theory, social choice theory, and general equilibrium theory appear to be comparably important.<sup>3</sup>

A central tenet of analytical Marxism is that macro-explanations in social science require microfoundations.<sup>4</sup> This doctrine maintains that macro-explanations of social phenomena must be supported by an account of the mechanisms at the individual level through which the postulated social processes work.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, the thesis

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explanation, in which a feature of capitalism is explained as the aggregate result of large numbers of rational actors choosing within the structured circumstances of choice posed by the economic structure of capitalism (Little 1986, ch. 5).

<sup>3</sup> Thus John Roemer writes, 'In seeking to provide micro-foundations for behaviour which Marxists think are characteristic of capitalism, I think the tools *par excellence* are rational choice models: general equilibrium theory, game theory, and the arsenal of modelling techniques developed by neo-classical economics' (Roemer 1986a, 192).

<sup>4</sup> In a representative vein, Roemer writes that 'class analysis must have individualist foundations. . . . Class analysis requires microfoundations at the level of the individual to explain why and when classes are the relevant unit of analysis' (Roemer 1982b, 513).

<sup>5</sup> The microfoundations thesis bears a close relation to the doctrine of methodological individualism. Jon Elster describes this doctrine in these terms. 'By [methodological individualism] I mean the doctrine that all social phenomena their structure and their change are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions' (Elster 1985, 5). The microfoundations thesis is not identical with methodological individualism, however; for it is entirely possible that a micro-foundational account of the determinants of individual action may include reference to social relations, structures, etc. The latter are grounded in facts about individuals; but it is not part of the microfoundations thesis to insist that the explanation should supply the details of such a grounding. The microfoundations doctrine has provided a needed corrective to a tendency towards

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holds that an assertion of an explanatory relationship at the social level (causal, functional, structural) must be supplemented by two things: knowledge about what it is about the local circumstances of the typical individual that leads him to act in such a way as to bring about this relationship; and knowledge of the aggregative processes that lead from individual actions of that sort to an explanatory social relationship of this sort.<sup>6</sup> This doctrine may be put in a weak and a strong version: weakly, social explanations must be *compatible* with there being microfoundations of the postulated social regularities, which may, however, be entirely unknown; and more strongly, social explanations must be explicitly grounded on an account of the microfoundations which produce them. I will assume the stronger version: that we must have at least an approximate idea of the underlying mechanisms at the individual level if we are to have a credible hypothesis about explanatory social regularities at all. A putative explanation couched at the level of high-level social factors whose underlying individual-level mechanisms are entirely unknown is no explanation at all.

The justification for the microfoundations thesis is *not* simply a general preference for inter-theoretical reductionism a preference sometimes found within the philosophy of biology and the philosophy of psychology as well. It depends rather on a specific feature of social causation and social regularities. In cognitive psychology there are strong regularities among cognitive phenomena; so it is credible to hold that various elements of the cognitive system are causally related to other elements without having specific knowledge about the neurophysiological mechanisms that underlie them.<sup>7</sup>

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providing functionalist explanations and aggregate-interest explanations within Marxism exactly because the latter are often inclined towards explanations that are incompatible with what we know about political and economic behavior at the individual level.

<sup>6</sup> We may refer to explanations of this type as 'aggregative explanations.' Thomas Schelling's (1978) *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* provides a developed treatment and numerous examples of this model of social explanation.

<sup>7</sup> Jerry Fodor (1980; 1979) provides an important discussion of some of the relations between levels of psychological theory and brain science in 'Special

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In social science, however, we do not find the strong types of regularities and laws that would make us confident in the causal connectedness of social phenomena; instead, we find laws of tendency and exception-laden regularities. (For developed arguments to this effect in connection with Marx's economic analysis, see Little 1986, 24-9; 167-72.) It is therefore mandatory to drop from the weak regularities at the social level to an analysis of underlying causal mechanisms at the individual level if we are to be able to discern causal relations among social phenomena at all. In brief, social causation always and unavoidably works through structured individual action; and causal relations among social phenomena can only be established through analysis of the latter because of the weakness of the causal regularities at the social level.<sup>8</sup>

This qualification notwithstanding, it is true that there are domains of social phenomena within which there are perceptible regularities or tendencies. Marx's treatment of the laws of motion of capitalism represents this possibility; there is a perceptible tendency within capitalism towards technological innovation, and this regularity can be explained on the basis of analysis of the rational choices of individual capitalists within the context of a capitalist economy. Here the microfoundations thesis requires simply that the higher-level generalizations or regularities should be *grounded* in an account of the causal mechanisms that produce them one or more levels down in the direction of individual activity. There is a worse case that occurs in social research as well, however; for it often emerges that for a given class of social phenomena there are no clear regularities visible at the macro-level at all. In this case we can either give up altogether on the project of explaining the macro-level phenomena, limiting ourselves to providing narratives describing various particular phenomena. Or we may turn to an analysis of the underlying mechanisms that produce phenomena of this type. And when

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Sciences, or the Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis' and *The Language of Thought*.

<sup>8</sup> For an exceptionally clear treatment of reductionism and physicalism see Jeffrey Poland (forthcoming).

we provide an analysis of these mechanisms it may emerge that we find that there are regularities at the lower level. In this case analysis of the microfoundations of the aggregate activity is essential if we are to arrive at a description of the phenomena as law-governed at all.

Phenomena of popular politics illustrate the latter possibility. Study of a variety of examples of exploitative class societies shows that we do *not* find the regularity that classical Marxism would predict at the macro-level that exploited groups eventually come to support popular movements aimed at assaulting the class system. However, when we move to a lower-level description of the phenomena of popular politics one that analyzes group behavior in terms of the specific class arrangements in which it finds itself, the variable character of individual political motivation, the forms of political culture available to the group, and the forms of organization and leadership available to the group we find that there *are* regularities that emerge that divide the phenomena into a number of subclasses:

exploited groups with strong political cultures and ample organizational resources tend to be politically active, tenacious, and effective;

exploited groups with weak political cultures and ample organizational resources tend to be only moderately active, vacillatory, and ineffective;

exploited groups with strong political cultures and no organizational resources tend to be vigorously active, tenacious, but ineffective;

exploited groups with weak political cultures and no organizational resources tend to be inactive, vacillatory, and collectively ineffective;

and so forth.

It is clear that the search for microfoundations is even more critical in the case where no apparent social regularities exist at all than in the case where there are discernible tendencies or regularities at

the social level. In the latter case the demand for microfoundations stems from a need to bolster an explanation already available at the macro-level; but in the former, we need to identify the microfoundations of the social phenomena in question if we are even to be in a position to identify the macro-level regularities at all. Attention to some of the concrete mechanisms through which political behavior is shaped, then, should permit the construction of a more empirically adequate theory of popular politics from a Marxian perspective.

## II The Problem of Popular Politics

Underclass collective actions—riots, strikes, jacqueries, protests, and rebellions—are a recurring thread in human history. French farmers of the Vendée rise up in rebellion against the Revolutionary government in Paris; Chinese peasants support millenarian Buddhist revolts against the Qing state; Vietnamese rural poor support violent mass demonstrations against the French colonial government. These are all instances of *popular politics*: collective actions supported by large numbers of ordinary people in pursuit of some shared goal. The dynamics of popular politics are critically important in the process of historical change: regimes rise and fall, national political movements find support or wither, wars are won or lost, and colonial powers survive or retreat, depending (in part) on the political behavior of the masses.

Classical Marxism offers a simple yet powerful theory of popular politics. According to that account, exploitation and class are the central factors that explain processes of underclass politics. Class society—capitalism, feudalism, slavery, or agrarian landlordism—rests upon a system of exploitation in which surpluses are extracted from producers for the use and benefit of an elite group.<sup>9</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> Marx's analysis of exploitation as a system of surplus-extraction is most fully developed in *Capital I*. This account is developed with reference to capitalism; but it is simple to extend the model to other class societies, in which an economically dominant class, using its powers and property entitlements, extracts the surplus product from the immediate producers through rent, trib-

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system is constituted by a set of social relations of production. The social relations of production are the relations of power and authority that govern the use and enjoyment of the forces of production in brief, the property relations.<sup>10</sup> These relations define the objective interests of members of the various classes. This system thus constitutes a set of classes within society whose most basic material interests are defined by the particulars of the property system. Further, Marx holds that there is an endogenous tendency for members of a class to come to accurately perceive their shared material interests. Finally, Marx supposes that, as rational agents, members of exploited classes will come to support a revolutionary movement to overthrow the system of exploitation. Members of exploited groups have the capacity to come to recognize the nature of the system of exploitation that constrains them, and as rational agents, they adopt political means for struggling against that system.

Classical Marxism thus identifies *classes* as the politically salient groups in society. It holds that such classes come to identify themselves as such, and that members of classes engage in collective action in defense of their material interests. Marx believed that revolution is the natural culmination to the historical development of a class society: class society involves the exploitation of the many by the few, and eventually the many will acquire both the will and the means to overthrow the economic relations that govern them. Thus classical Marxism advances a fairly simple macro-level causal claim: the social tensions created by an exploitative economic system, and the conflicts engendered between landlord and peasant, capitalist and worker, master and slave, give rise to underclass collective action (food riots, social banditry, rebellion). And the mechanism establishing this causal relationship is described by an abstract model of rational political calculation: the structure of the system of exploitation defines the material interests of the various classes;

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ute, interest, etc. Jeffrey Paige (1975) applies the theory of exploitation to agrarian politics in *Agrarian Revolution*. John Roemer (1982a) provides a penetrating and general theory of exploitation in *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*.

<sup>10</sup> G.A. Cohen (1978) provides a thorough explication of these ideas in *Karl Marx's Theory of History*.

and members of those classes, as rational agents within a structured environment of choice, act in a variety of ways so as to defend their interests. There is a straightforward connection between the objective conflicts of interest embodied in the property system and the political behavior of the various participants. Rebellions and popular collective action are rational strategies of collective self-defense on the part of subordinate classes.<sup>11</sup>

It will be argued here that this theory, insightful though it unquestionably is, is deficient because it fails to provide analysis of a number of factors that are critically important to the occurrence of popular collective action. Whereas this class-conflict model tacitly presupposes a transparent and direct relation between class interests and class behavior, study of any of a number of class societies shows that this is not the case. Instead, class structures, and the group interests they define, are mediated in their effects on collective action by a large number of other social circumstances which are causally independent from the class structure. Thus the behavior of persons and groups within a given class structure is indeterminate; we need to know much more about them and their environment before we can arrive at an expectation of rebellion, jacquerie, private strategies of survival, or passive acceptance.

This argument is not intended to refute the class-conflict model, it should be noted; instead, my aim is to indicate some of the important factors connected with underclass collective action that this model tends to overlook. It may well emerge that the most satisfactory account of popular politics will be one which gives special

<sup>11</sup> This model has been applied to processes of social change in a variety of historical contexts. Thus Geoffrey de Ste. Croix argues that the categories of class and exploitation are critical in understanding the dynamics of ancient society (Ste. Croix 1981, 45). Rodney Hilton analyzes some of the peasant rebellions of the European middle ages in similar terms: 'I aim to demonstrate that peasant society in medieval Europe, from the Dark Ages to the end of the fifteenth century, like peasant societies at all times and in all places, contained social tensions which had their outcome in social movements, some on a small and some on a large scale, some peaceful and some violent' (Hilton 1973, 19). And Asian agrarian change has been analyzed in similar terms by Chesneaux (1973), Vlastos (1986), Marks (1984), Selden (1971), and Paige (1975).

primacy to class factors, while at the same time building in an account of the other non-class factors to be discussed below. This approach is very much in the spirit of much work being done within analytical Marxism today. For I will discuss a number of the mechanisms which underlie collective action in particular times and places. And I hope that this discussion will contribute to a more adequate account of the micro-mechanisms of class-struggle.

The chief deficiencies of the class-conflict theory of underclass politics fall in several areas. First, the notion of objective class interests is ill-defined because it ignores an important array of local and regional variations in group interests. This point will be explored in the next section. Second, we need to have a more detailed analysis of the political motivation of members of exploited classes. Third, this account has virtually nothing to say about the role of the political organization and leadership of the revolutionary class. It is plain from historical experience, however, that mass militancy, even if present, does not automatically translate into successful political action without organizational resources formation of strategies and tactics, gathering of information, collection of resources, mobilization and motivation of widespread support for their program.<sup>12</sup>

### III Is Class Politically Salient?

The Marxist account of popular politics rests most heavily on the assumption that class membership is salient to politics: that is, that class membership contributes to the formation of politically active groups with shared purposes and values.<sup>13</sup> Classical Marxism depends on a structural definition of class: a class is a group of persons who share a position within the economic structure (the social

<sup>12</sup> Charles Tilly devotes a great deal of attention to these problems in his analysis of the popular political history of France. See, for example, *The Vendée* and Tilly et al. (1975), *The Rebellious Century 1830-1930*. Lenin, of course, paid special attention to the role of the vanguard party in the process of revolution.

<sup>13</sup> This formulation owes much to Elster's discussion of class (1986) in 'Three Challenges to Class.'



relations of production).<sup>14</sup> In order to discern the class structure of a given economy, then, one needs to identify the property arrangements through which the means of production are controlled and the product distributed. For each type of ownership relation to the means of production we have a distinct class.<sup>15</sup>

The assumption that class membership is politically salient amounts to the claim that members of classes so defined will come to identify themselves as such and to acquire a disposition to act in accordance with shared class interests. This view may be unpacked in the following terms.

The class structure of an economy defines a small number of groups defined in terms of their positions within the property relations.

Members of classes so defined share a set of material interests, and these material interests are fundamental to the decision-making of individuals.

<sup>14</sup> See Cohen (1978) for a careful analysis of this theory of class. Erik Olin Wright's work represents an effort to provide an account of class that is both theoretically grounded and empirically adequate (Wright 1978). And Adam Przeworski (1985) provides an extensive analysis of the underlying political composition of European working classes. Przeworski argues against the salience of the structural definition of class in explaining political activity; it is classes as deliberate collectivities that are political agents not structurally defined groups.

<sup>15</sup> Jon Elster provides a synthesis of much current thinking on the definition of class in these terms. 'A class is a group of people who by virtue of what they possess are compelled to engage in the same activities if they want to make the best use of their endowments' (Elster 1986, 147). The structural account requires several elaborations. First, in any given economic structure there are often a variety of property-forms to be found for example, slavery survived within European feudalism on a small scale, and bonded labor coexisted with wage labor in medieval rural China (Elvin 1973). Second, it is possible to provide a more fine-grained description of property ownership for example, distinguishing between finance capital and industrial capital, or between skilled and unskilled labor. Each of these distinctions introduces further stratification into the class structure as well and complicates the analysis of class politics, since it emerges that there are significant conflicts of interest *within* class as well as across classes.

Individuals make political choices on the basis of a rational calculation of cost and benefit based on their material interests.

It is possible or probable that members of classes will come to recognize their material interests, and to recognize that they share these interests with other members of the group.

It is further possible or probable that members of classes will come to believe that they can best advance their material interests through collective action with other members of the class.

Class is salient to politics, then, because material interests are fundamental to individual political action, and because the class structure defines people's material interests. Groups will tend to coalesce around class lines (rather than ethnic or religious identity, kinship group, patron-client relations, etc.).

At the abstract level at which this thesis is formulated it is radically incomplete. As a start, we need to have an account of the processes through which individuals come to adopt a collective identity. The formulation above refers to a highly abstract group: a spatially and socially dispersed group of persons sharing an abstract characteristic (position in the property system). Members of this group do not share a set of homogeneous material interests; and they are not bound together by shared circumstances of life, patterns of everyday association, or uniform material interests. It is of course true that various subgroupings of classes are bound together in these ways. Workers in a particular factory or industrial city or miners in a complex of mines are in everyday contact with one another in ways which may plausibly lead them to identify themselves as a cohesive group. But coal miners in Pennsylvania, farm laborers in California, and industrial workers in Detroit, form a highly diverse and heterogeneous group; and yet they share the position of 'wage-laborer' in the property system, and they are all exploited by ownership of the means of production. So why should we suppose that the abstract feature of class membership is likely to become politically salient for members of these groups? The class-conflict model thus encounters problems concerning the proper level

of aggregation in its description of groups, group interests, and group identity. This point involves two considerations. First, 'class' interest may be specified on a variety of levels, from local to global and from specific occupation to abstract class. Second, group identity may be expected to take shape in different ways at different levels of group definition.

*1. Level of group aggregation.* Consider first the problem of identifying the description under which to characterize a group's material interests. There are several important dimensions of diversity that affect this problem, which we may characterize as geographical and occupational. Consider first the geographical side. The class-conflict model does not incorporate any regional specification; it treats a class as an undifferentiated whole over the full society. But it is plain that there are politically significant differences of interests within classes over space. For example, peasants of late-Qing Henan had an interest in famine relief that peasants of the Yangzi did not share (because food supplies were more stable in the latter region), whereas the latter group has a crucial interest in water works not shared by the former; these variations derive from differences in the farming systems and ecologies of the two regions. Regional differentiation thus imposes interests on segments of a class that may be politically significant.<sup>16</sup>

Class interests may thus be viewed from a range of perspectives from the local to the global. For example, tenant farmers in a given village or marketing community share certain interests in common (e.g. water rights, access to firewood, etc.), which give them a material basis for engaging in collective action together. But class interests may be defined on a more comprehensive geographical scale as well; thus, for example, tenant farmers throughout all of north China share certain material interests economic and political with each other. (A concrete example of shared interests is imperial tax

<sup>16</sup> G. William Skinner's analysis of the importance of geographical differentiation on a variety of economic, political, and cultural processes is an important contribution to our understanding of late imperial China, and highly pertinent in the current context (Skinner 1964-65; 1977).

policy should taxes be remitted in times of crop crisis, should taxes be assessed to land or to farmer, etc.) Once we recognize the range of levels at which group interests may be defined, however, it becomes clear that there may be fundamental *conflicts* of interest within groups defined at the higher levels. Thus a strategy of demanding tax relief for farmers in Henan may impose greater tax burdens on farmers in Sichuan. There is thus a material basis for mobilization of local politics on the basis of local interests in direct opposition to global class interests. This point makes it plausible to suppose that local material interests might mask global class interests local elites and peasants may join together in violent action against neighboring villages in conflict over water rights, disputed land rights, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Turn now to occupational diversity. The structural definition of class distinguishes among a small number of social categories, depending on position within the property relations. On this criterion, all tenant farmers belong to the same class; all industrial wage laborers belong to a single class; all owners of industrial wealth constitute a class; and so forth. However, it is obvious upon closer analysis that there are important forms of diversity within classes so defined that may produce importantly different interests for the various sub-groups. Tenant farmers in a wet-rice region, for example, have different interests with regard to the state than do tenant farmers in dry cropping areas, because they are more dependent on state-

17 In this connection Lucien Bianco argues that peasant political interests in pre-revolutionary China were invariably localistic in nature, often cutting across class. In his study of spontaneous peasant uprisings in Republican China he writes, 'The spontaneous peasant movements analyzed above show three main characteristics. The first is the weakness of class consciousness among the peasantry, a weakness illustrated by the comparative rarity and traditional nature of the social movements directed against the wealthy. . . . The second main characteristic of spontaneous peasant movements is their parochialism. In default of class consciousness, there was a sense of belonging to a local community, which overrode distinctions of class. . . . The need to limit themselves to survival strategies, which dictated these attitudes, also explains the third characteristic of peasant agitation, namely its almost invariably defensive nature' (Bianco 1986, 301-2).

financed water works. Unskilled workers, semi-skilled workers, and skilled workers, to take a different example, have different interests concerning technological change; as a result, these different strata of the proletariat may be mobilized in support of very different economic policies and political actions.<sup>18</sup>

There is a tendency among class-conflict theories of underclass politics, however, to consider class interests on too high a level and on the basis of too homogeneous an account of the circumstances identifying material interests. But it is entirely possible that vertical local interests may loom larger in the material welfare of members of a micro-class than horizontal regional interests thus making it difficult to secure collective action around regional class interests. A policy or strategy may be prudent at one level of interests and counterproductive at higher or lower levels. These considerations suggest that class-conflict theories confront a serious difficulty in arriving at an analytically justifiable level at which to characterize group interests and identity which must be done if we are to speak meaningfully of class and class conflict.

2. *Group identity formation.* Turn now to the problem of group identity formation. What mechanisms would lead a group characterized in terms of its shared material interests to come to identify itself as a political agent? The simplest and most plausible case is that at the low end of both spectrums above: groups that are geographically compact and occupationally homogeneous. Members of groups of this type have a set of prominent material interests in common, and they have concrete opportunities for developing political activity together, through shared organizations and acquaintances and a shared life experience. But most analyses of class politics proceed at a higher level of aggregation. When Robert Marks writes that the

<sup>18</sup> For an extensive discussion of the politics of work within contemporary industrial capitalism, and the variations in material interests among these groups, see Charles Sabel's (1982) *Work and Politics*. Sabel emphasizes also that different strata of the working classes of Europe and the U.S. have very different social psychologies or worldviews differences which have profound implications for their political behavior.

peasants of Haifeng County began to conceive of themselves as a class in the middle and late nineteenth century, does he mean that poor peasants of a given *village* came to recognize their joint interests, or that poor peasants throughout the region came to recognize their joint interests with other peasants beyond their own acquaintance and social intercourse? At the local level it is possible to imagine the social mechanisms through which such group identity might emerge through normal social contact (though it is also possible to identify mechanisms working in the opposite direction e.g., competition for the right to rent a piece of land or cross-class allegiances based on lineage or patron-client relations). But it is more difficult to conceive of mechanisms at work in local society that would lead to a substantially broader sense of group identity, in which poor peasants of many lineages, many villages, many market systems, and several different ethnic groups should come to regard themselves as a cohesive class, sharing important interests and disposed to engage in political activity in support of those interests.

Finally, it is an important truth that much observed collective action in the non-industrial world does *not* occur along clean class cleavages; instead, much collective action involves alliances between local elites and lower classes. This is true, for example, in the context of intervillage conflicts of interest: e.g., water and land rights. Prasenjit Duara describes some of the forms of organization through which North China villages and market towns mobilized cross-class support for the purpose of defending water rights (Duara 1988). Second, Chinese village self-defense and militia organizations typically had a cross-class character with elite leadership (Kuhn 1970). Third, local society was capable of providing collective goods e.g. village water resources (flood control and irrigation); and, once again, these forms of collective action typically proceeded under elite leadership. Peter Perdue's historical treatment of the organization of waterworks in Hunan illustrates this point (Perdue 1987). These examples suggest, however, that class factors were often eclipsed by economic interests shared across village society as a whole.<sup>19</sup> In

<sup>19</sup> Peasant collective action in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had led to a considerable amount of rural social violence in Haifeng, but these disrupt-

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each of these cases we find that collective action occurs under the leadership of village elites—landlords, village headmen, local literati. But this poses a problem for the class-conflict thesis; if much traditional collective action occurs through vertical organizations and with elite leadership, then what resources are available to create horizontal organizations and leadership?

These considerations present the class-conflict theory with an unresolved but deep problem: what social mechanisms would permit a geographically dispersed class to arrive at a group identity based on its shared material interests in opposition to other, regionally based interests that may be shared with locals from other classes? What would lead the landless peasants of the Vendée to identify their fortunes and goals with those of the Languedoc, rather than with local elites? Why should we expect textile workers in Manchester to identify their interests with metal-workers in Lancashire? The apparent answer to this question unavoidably involves reference to supra-local organizations—a topic I will consider in a later section. But it would appear dubious that there is an endogenous tendency for dispersed groups to come to identify their interests as classes rather than as groups of other sorts.

We may draw several tentative conclusions on the salience of class. Most importantly, an adequate theory of popular politics must provide an account of the local processes through which group identity is formed and through which members of groups come to identify themselves as political actors. Agents act deliberately, on the basis of their own understandings of their interests, allegiances, rights, and the like; consequently, in order to explain the political behavior of a group it is necessary to give some account of the processes through which this particular group identity and set of collective goals have been formed. It is essential to analyze the processes of political identity-formation through which a group is transformed into a political agent with shared goals, beliefs, values, commit-

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tions could hardly be described as class conflict. Most of the conflict for which we have documentation occurred between lineages or the Red and Black Flags, vertically aligned social groupings, or between state and society, as in the food riots' (Marks 1984, 96).

ments, and plans. And these processes are typically *local* if spontaneous, and dependent on competent organizations and leadership if supra-local. For spontaneous group identity, it would seem, emerges from contiguity and shared perceptions of the social world; it requires a common history of struggles, demands, successes, and failures. If a geographically and socially dispersed group is to acquire such a self-conscious identity, it is difficult to see how this could occur without the deliberate efforts of a competent regional or national organization. It is necessary to formulate a diagnosis of the social world and a political program that will permit dispersed members of such a group to come to regard themselves as part of a meaningful political agent; and this vision must be communicated to members of the group through competent local cadres. All of this requires organization, however; and without such, it is unlikely in the extreme that class consciousness on a national scale would emerge spontaneously.

Second, it emerges from this discussion that class is at best a latent factor in political behavior on any but the local level. It is *possible* to mobilize members of classes around their class interest, and to cultivate a class identity among members of classes. Class membership constitutes a *possible* basis for mobilization because it does in fact identify a set of interests that are shared by members of the group; and these interests are, as Marxism postulates, particularly fundamental. But there is no reason to expect that either group identity or political action will emerge spontaneously around class position. The prominence of purely local interests and issues threatens to swamp the emergence of more global concerns and identity. Thus latent class interests can only be converted into effective political motivations for a dispersed group through skillful organization and mobilization on a regional or national level.

#### IV Political Motivation and Collective Action

Let us now turn to the problem of political motivation. Let us assume that we have resolved the problems about the salience of class raised in the preceding section, and postulate that the structural definition of class identifies groups of people who share the most basic



material interests. May we then conclude that individuals will act on the basis of their objective class interests? What factors would lead a rational member of a group to join in support of collective action oriented towards the defense or extension of shared interests? Why should we expect that an exploited class will gradually be brought into militancy over its class interests?

Marx's theory of political behavior, like his theory of capitalist economic behavior, is ultimately grounded in a theory of individual rationality: agents as members of classes behave in ways calculated to advance their perceived material interests.<sup>20</sup> This framework may be extended to a variety of political phenomena e.g., the concerted activity of members of the bourgeoisie to control the state, the efforts of workers to win the right to form unions, or the eruption of rural social violence. In each case, a political movement is analyzed in terms of the deliberate, calculated efforts of its supporters to forward a set of shared material interests. However, there are several reasons to doubt that class identity translates directly into collective behavior. First, narrow self-interest will not generally be sufficient to elicit underclass political action, since freerider problems may prevent individuals who possess an accurate perception of their class interests from supporting collective action in defense of those interests. Second, though, when we consider what other

20 Marx's chief efforts at political explanation occur in his treatment of a variety of political phenomena e.g., the forms that working class political action took in 1848 in France (*Class Struggles in France*), the reasons for Napoleon III's overwhelming electoral victory in 1849 (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*), and the efforts by organizations of the English working class to achieve the Ten Hours Bill (*Communist Manifesto, Capital I*). In each case Marx gives primacy to the rational calculation of interests on the part of the various class participants. It is apparent that there is much in common between this political theory and the rational-choice model of political behavior. The rational-choice approach postulates that individuals' political behavior is a calculated attempt to further a given set of individual interests income, security, prestige, office, etc. See, for example, Norman Frohlich, Joe Oppenheimer and Oran R. Young (1971), *Political Leadership and Collective Goods*. For an application of this model from a Marxist point of view, see Adam Przeworski (1985), *Capitalism and Social Democracy*. And for an application of this model to peasant behavior, see Samuel Popkin (1979), *The Rational Peasant*.

motivational features are relevant to political behavior, it emerges that there are important variations across communities of underclass people which share the same structural circumstances. This implies that members of different segments of the same class may behave quite differently, depending on the nature of the 'political culture' within which they find themselves. Some may lack the traditions and norms of political activity that facilitate collective action. Finally, members of classes may have both the knowledge and the commitment to support collective action, but may lack the means to do so. In particular, they may not have access to the organizational resources and leadership necessary for successful collective action (the topic of the next section). And on the side of the forces of order the state may possess such a preponderance of power over the underclasses as to make collective action totally imprudent.

These considerations show that the mobilization of members of a class in support of a political movement that genuinely supports their objective interests is problematic. It is possible to provide some further analysis of each of these problems, using the resources of the theory of collective action. Classical Marxism tends to expect that there is a direct, transparent relation between objective interests and political behavior. But it is clear that political behavior of members of groups is substantially more complex and underdetermined than this account would suggest.

*1. Individual decision making.* We need first to ask, on what basis does the worker make the decision to support a collective action? This is a question that is central to efforts to provide a rational-choice analysis of political behavior within the public choice framework.<sup>21</sup> Let us assume for the moment that the worker chooses on the basis of narrow self-interest. He will adopt that strategy which appears to best serve his own interests over a given timeframe. If we assume that each person makes his political choices on the basis of a calculation of his own individual costs and benefits and nothing more, then the public goods problem arises immediately. As a number of

21 See Popkin (1979) and Przeworski (1985) for examples of this sort of approach.

authors have shown, there is a collective action problem that intrudes on the theory of individual political motivation postulated here: even if proletarians share a group interest in revolution, this interest does not necessarily disaggregate into individual interests in supporting collective action.<sup>22</sup> The achievement of revolution is a public good for all workers; the benefits of revolution cannot be denied to non-contributors. This being true, each worker may reason that the costs of contribution are significant, while the benefits will flow to him whether or not he contributes. Thus rational proletarians, calculating on the basis of narrow self-interest, would choose to sit out the revolutionary situation as freeriders. This line of thought suggests that the self-interested proletarian will not contribute or will contribute at a level so low as to make the costs and risks negligible. (For example, he may decide to turn up for mass demonstrations within which he will be safe and anonymous, but to refrain from events that are more likely to lead to significant personal costs and risks.)

These arguments would suggest that successful collective action is impossible or extremely difficult whether along class lines or any other for a group of rational decision-makers. It would appear, however, that the hypothesis of narrow self-interest is inadequate as a theory of political motivation. It is plain that persons take some account *both* of private interest and group interest (at some level of description) that is, decision-makers are a mixture of altruists and egoists.<sup>23</sup> Appeals to shared group interests have *some* motivational

<sup>22</sup> The classic exposition of the collective action problem is Olson (1965). Russell Hardin (1982) provides a more extensive and nuanced analysis of the structure of collective action. Allen Buchanan (1979) provides the most extensive application of the freerider problem to the Marxist theory of revolution; but others have made the point as well e.g. William Shaw (1984), 'Marxism, Revolution and Rationality' and Michael Taylor (1988), 'Rationality and Revolutionary Collective Action.'

<sup>23</sup> A.K. Sen's (1979) penetrating critique of narrow economic rationality, and his argument for a conception of rationality that provides for the motivational efficacy of commitments, is provided in 'Rational Fools.' See also his more general arguments in *On Ethics & Economics* (1987).

weight, and are taken into account in the calculation of which alternative to choose; and of course, the same is true of self-interest. These two sorts of 'interests' plainly have different weights in different decision-makers (and in different types of decision-making circumstances).<sup>24</sup> Let us suppose, then, that our workers are prepared to make tradeoffs between personal risk and cost and group benefits: if the group benefits are sufficiently high, then the individual is prepared to bear a certain level of cost and risk. We will assume, that is, that workers are conditional altruists (Elster 1982): they are prepared to contribute to collective action if they are assured that enough other potential contributors will do so as well in order to give the action a sufficiently high probability of success. On this assumption, under what conditions is it rational for a worker to support a revolutionary movement?

To begin with the obvious: it is rarely true that the oppressed have *nothing* to lose but their chains.<sup>25</sup> More typically the immediate producers have achieved *some* level of welfare and security in existing production relations that would be jeopardized by participation in revolution or other forms of class militancy. Wages will be foregone; crops will not be planted; the security of anonymity will be replaced by the hazards of visible protest; and so forth. In other words, workers are presented with a genuine choice in which interests and risks are present in each alternative. (This means that the revolution 'game' does not collapse onto compulsory strategies on the part of workers. Workers are not like passengers on a sinking ship who must throw themselves into the water in spite of the obvious risks.)

The worker, therefore, is confronted with a choice with something like the following structure. He may first consider the revolutionary program and its prospects. This amounts to considering the

<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to provide a model that plausibly aggregates individual and group interests, but several investigators have made an effort to do so. For one extensive effort to work out such a view see Howard Margolis (1982), *Selfishness, Rationality, & Altruism A Theory of Social Choice*.

<sup>25</sup> This is suggested by the famous closing lines of the introduction to the *Communist Manifesto*.

choice from the collective point of view: would workers as a class be better off as a result of a successful revolution than they would be in the foreseeable future within existing social and political arrangements? If the answer to this question is negative, then *prima facie*, the worker will conclude that he ought not support the revolutionary movement. (Note that a negative at this stage might follow either from doubts about the revolutionary program itself, or from doubts about the capacity of the existing movement and organization to implement this program.)

Suppose, however as classical Marxism certainly expects that the worker concludes that the revolutionary movement would benefit the class as a whole and each member of the class. This judgment is complex; it encompasses both the judgment that the revolutionary program serves the interests of members of the class, and that the movement has a credible prospect of success. Now, however, the worker moves to the next stage, in which he deliberates about his own best strategy in the circumstances. Given that he would prefer that revolution should occur, and given that it can only occur if large numbers of workers support it, should he support the movement; and if so, at what level? Under favorable circumstances it is reasonable to conclude that it is rational to contribute; the problem is to specify the circumstances. We assumed above that workers are conditional altruists that is, that they are prepared to act in support of group interests if they are convinced that a sufficient number of other members of the group will do so as well, and that the resulting collective action has a reasonable likelihood of success. (Each of these assumptions represents a parameter that may well vary from one decision-maker to another.) So the problem before us reduces to this: what circumstances must be in place in order to give conditional altruists sufficient reason to support collective action? What will provide workers with a sufficient level of assurance in the behavior of their fellow workers and the prospects of the collective activity, to permit them to join in?

Without attempting to provide an exhaustive account, at least these factors are relevant. First, the conditional altruist must be assured that a significant number of other potential contributors will in fact join in. This assurance in turn depends on the bonds of trust and solidarity that are present within the group, as well as the work-

er's perception of the competence of local leadership and organizations to mobilize support. Next, the worker must be persuaded that the joint activity has a sufficiently high likelihood of success. This judgment will turn on the worker's perception of the strength of the forces available to his group (including the competence of leadership, the organizational resources available, and the resources available to the group in mounting its collective action), as well as the worker's assessment of the strength and competence of the forces of order. We may thus hypothesize an optimal scenario for collective action: one in which the members of a group have a high level of intra-group trust and solidarity; in which there are competent leaders and organizations available to mobilize and direct the action; and in which the forces of order (local elites, police, army units, etc.) are in a weakened condition. Under these circumstances, the rational conditional altruist will choose to support the collective action. Note, however, that this scenario depends on three critical variables: the availability of bonds of solidarity and trust, the availability of organizational resources, and the state of readiness of the forces of order. In other words, successful mobilization of support for a political action depends on features of local society that are contingent from the perspective of the pure theory of class.

The problem of the level of contribution is also significant. It is possible to support a political movement in a spectrum of levels of commitment, from mere financial support to cautious and selective attendance at political events, to fullscale and unstinting acceptance of the will of the leadership. Each worker's level of commitment determines the amount of risk and cost he is prepared to absorb in support of a given revolutionary tactic. If we suppose that workers are deliberative in this decision as well, then we would expect that the mean level of commitment will fall substantially short of full and unstinting commitment. This is because increasing numbers of workers will weigh the risks of further commitment and will refrain from further increments in commitment. And if the mean level of commitment is low for example, if each worker privately decides that he will support mass demonstrations up to the point where the state makes it plain that it will use massive force to put them down then revolutionary actions will be difficult to sustain. The ability of the Chinese Red Army to sustain the commitment of its followers

during the Long March is a striking example of a group with a high level of commitment; but had peasant followers had a substantially lower level of commitment, the army would plainly have dissolved into the countryside long before it reached Shaanxi.

2. *Local political culture.* Much of the discussion to this point has adopted a fairly narrow vision of the explanation of collective behavior in terms of the material interests of participants and their calculations about the effects of various possible collective actions. However, a variety of authors cast doubt on the adequacy of an explanation of underclass collective action based on narrow calculation of costs and benefits. In her treatment of the White Lotus rebellions of nineteenth-century North China, Susan Naquin (1976, 1981) shows the relevance of cultural and religious beliefs in the occurrence of political behavior, so that it is not possible to analyze peasant behavior solely in terms of material interests. Likewise, in his important study of the depression rebellions in Vietnam and Burma, James Scott (1976) shows that political behavior is mediated by a culturally specific moral system defining just and unjust social arrangements—once again implying that a narrow analysis of material interests will not suffice to explain political behavior. In the context of popular politics, the point may be put in these terms: most political action involves a normative component that cannot be reduced to narrow self-interest *or* to the class structure within which it functions. So it is necessary to extend the conception of political motivation to include such factors as solidarity, class consciousness, or communal values. This is an empirical point; it represents the assertion that the causes of individual political behavior are more varied than the class-conflict paradigm asserts, and that it is necessary to give some account of the moral values and worldview through which agents deliberate. This does not lead to the conclusion that political behavior is not rational; rather, it insists only that rational, deliberative political choice always occurs within the context of a normative worldview that affects the outcome.

Marx's concept of class consciousness provides some leverage in approaching this problem. The term refers to a set of motivations, beliefs, values, and the like, that are specific and distinctive

for a given class (peasantry, proletariat, petty bourgeoisie). Marx holds that these motivational factors serve to bind together the members of a class and to facilitate their collective activities. A class is supposed to develop its own conscious identity of itself as a class. Class consciousness takes the form of such motives as loyalty to other members of one's class, solidarity with partners in a political struggle, and commitment to a future social order in which the interests of one's class are better served.<sup>26</sup> Insofar as a group of people who constitute a structurally defined class fails to acquire such attitudes, Marx denies that the group is a class in the full sense at all (a class-for-itself as well as -in-itself). Thus, in his famous view of peasants as a 'sack of potatoes,' Marx writes:

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their cultural formation from those of the other classes, they form a class. In so far as these small peasant proprietors are merely connected on a local basis, and the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community, national links, or a political organization, they do not form a class. (Marx 1852, 239)

Here Marx's point is *not* that the peasantry fails to constitute a class in the objective sense a group of persons sharing a distinct position within the property and production relations but rather that the conditions of life that characterize peasant existence systematically undermine the emergence of collective action and political con-

26 Marx describes such a complex of psychological properties, and their social foundation, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. 'A whole superstructure of different and specifically formed feelings, illusions, modes of thought and views of life arises on the basis of the different forms of property, of the social conditions of existence. The whole class creates and forms these out of its material foundations and the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives these feelings, etc. through tradition and upbringing, may well imagine that they form the real determinants and the starting-point of his activity' (Marx 1852, 173-4). And in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844) Marx writes of the process of political consciousness formation among Parisian workers in terms that emphasize the contingent features of social life: eating and drinking together in political clubs become part of the process that establishes the bonds of social solidarity among them.



sciousness. In other words, peasants fail to arrive at a state of class consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

Marx does not provide an extensive analysis of the process through which class consciousness emerges, even within capitalism, but he suggests that it takes form through a historical process of class struggle. As workers or peasants come to identify their shared interests and as they gain experience working together to defend their shared interests, they develop concrete ties within their political groups which provide motivational resources for future collective action. Thus Marx writes in the *Communist Manifesto* in these terms: 'This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier' (Marx and Engels 1848, 76).

Marx's own writings provide only a schematic notion of this broader theory of political motivation. However, twentieth-century Marxist historians e.g., E.P. Thompson (1963), Eric Hobsbawm (1959), Albert Soboul (1975), and Eugene Genovese (1974) have made fruitful efforts towards analyzing this side of the basis of underclass political behavior. Thompson refers to what he calls a 'moral economy' of class: a set of shared values and commitments which lead persons to behavior furthering their shared group interests even at the expense of their individual material interests. And Thompson analyzes in great detail the processes through which a group of people can over an extended period of time develop the intra-group strands of commitment that give rise to loyalty and solidarity. Similarly, Hobsbawm provides a detailed account of some of the processes through which European workers and peasants established political communities that gave them the collective capacity to struggle against employers and landlords. And many recent authors have

<sup>27</sup> Michael Taylor argues that this conception of peasant politics is badly off the mark. 'In all [peasant societies] there was cooperation amongst the peasants in the agricultural work which dominated their lives and usually communal regulation of the use of communal land' (1986, 7). Taylor reminds us that peasants have historically been *more*, not less, capable of collective action in rebellion than workers.

shown e.g., James Scott, Robert Brenner, and Charles Sabel that there are differences in these factors in specific communities that lead to significant differences in political behavior; one exploited community may erupt in violent protest, while another, subject to the same structural patterns of exploitation, may fracture into demoralized strategies of individual survival.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the narrow theory of political rationality is insufficient as an explanation of political behavior. Instead, it is necessary to give some prominence to an ensemble of factors local religious beliefs, kinship loyalties, moral and political commitments, ideology, and the like that may be referred to as a local *political culture*. This construct refers to a shared tradition defining the moral and social worldview within which individuals locate themselves. Such a tradition might include some or all of the following elements: a popular conception of justice in economic, political, and social matters; a popular vision of group solidarity; shared models of how popular protest should be organized (e.g., the traditional bread riot or the eat-in); shared recollections of moments of solidarity in the past (1848 for French workers, the Nghe An-Ha Tinh rebellion for Vietnamese revolutionaries); and a shared body of songs, sayings, aphorisms, folk heroes, etc., embodying various elements of shared values. (No doubt one could add other elements as well.) These factors affect the process of individual decision-making on the part of potential participants because they constitute a set of motivational factors that may serve to bind together the members of a group loyalty to other members of the group, solidarity with one's partners in a political struggle, and commitment to a future social order in which the interests of one's group are better served.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Philip Huang provides examples of these divergent patterns in a number of villages in North China under the stresses of increasing commercialization, increasing tax demands, and falling cotton prices (1985, 259-74).

<sup>29</sup> Barrington Moore's (1978) *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* places the particulars of the political culture of an oppressed group at the core of his account of the political behavior of the group. Moore's central contention is that the historically specific sense of justice possessed by an exploited group is crucial to understanding its political behavior. Charles Tilly's contributions

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Different societies and different segments within one society generally have very different political cultures. French workers, for example, had a shared tradition of violent popular demonstrations that English workers lacked; this difference led, on the whole, to a pattern of peaceful assembly in England and violent street fighting in France in the nineteenth century. Various authors (Marx among them) have suggested that the material conditions of life of a group—patterns of settlement, forms of cooperation involved in agriculture, and the history of shared political activity—give rise to distinctive features of social consciousness—moral commitments, an experience of solidarity, and a moral vision of the social world in which they live. Thus Marc Bloch held that the French peasantry had developed a strong political tradition and a high level of solidarity through the joint influences of communal control over agriculture and ongoing political struggles against the seigneurial system. This political tradition, Robert Brenner maintains, permitted French peasants to develop the resources necessary to defend traditional rights in land ownership at a time when English peasants were losing those rights (1976, 1982). The analytical point is, then, that groups within the same class may have rather different historical experiences and different material circumstances, and these differences may generate very different political cultures. As a result, such groups may react to changing circumstances in very different ways—rebelliousness, resignation, emigration. From this it follows that an adequate explanation of political behavior must take account of the particulars of the political culture of the group whose behavior is at issue.<sup>30</sup>

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to the theory of political behavior and collective action are also quite important in this context.

<sup>30</sup> One of the contributions of the moral economy literature is its elucidation of the specifics of the moral and political cultures of various peasant societies. Here Scott (1976, 1985) and Thompson (1963) are particularly important. Scott urges quite plausibly that we cannot understand the political behavior of a group until we have some accurate understanding of the moral worldview of the members of that group—how they regard their relations to landlords, the state, the religious authorities, and the like; and how they conceive of legitimate political activity. In a related vein, Michael Taylor (1982, 1988) has provided a rich analysis of political behavior through his treatment of the dynamics of

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Some Marxist political theorists have paid attention to these features of social movements. However, in general it is plain that class conflict theories must pay more attention to this variable. The class-conflict theory implicitly assumes a direct connection between material interests and collective action. However, political action unavoidably proceeds through the prism of local political culture. The concept of political culture functions as a bridge, then, between individual interests and collective interests in explaining collective behavior. The elements of a local political culture can (but need not) provide individuals with effective motivation to undertake actions and strategies that favor their group interests, and it gives them the motivational resources needed to permit them to persist in these strategies even in the face of risk and deprivation (i.e., in circumstances where the political strategy imposes extensive costs on the individual's interests). This treatment of political culture leads to a sensitivity to the point that political behavior is often driven by a set of motives that are richer than a narrow calculus of self-interest.

In order to explain the political behavior of a group, then, it is insufficient to know what the group's interests are, whether local or class. Even if we supplement a class and interest analysis with an account of organizational resources, we will still be unable to predict political behavior. Rather, it is necessary to have a fairly specific account of the moral values, religious beliefs, political traditions, community structures, and cultural worldview within the context of which material conflicts are played out.<sup>31</sup>

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community. Taylor argues that the arrangements that constitute groups into *communities* deeply condition the feasibility of successful collective action by these groups (1988, 67-9). More cohesive communities are more capable of mounting successful political actions; this greater effectiveness stems from such factors as shared traditions of collective action, a high level of intra-community trust, a recognition that the interests of the community are durable and inseparable, and so forth.

<sup>31</sup> In *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* Joseph Esherick (1987) provides an analysis of the origins of the Boxer uprising that is particularly sensitive to the salience of local political culture. His account is exemplary in this context in its attempt to incorporate features of the class conflict model along with analysis of the mechanics of local politics and the importance of local political culture in explaining collective action.

## V Organization and Leadership

Suppose, finally, that a group possesses both a set of objective material interests in common, as well as the motivational resources needed to permit mobilization of collective action in support of those interests. The political behavior of the group is still indeterminate because successful political action requires competent organization and leadership, if it is to go beyond short-term and sporadic outbursts. There is a tradition within Marxist historiography, however, which tends to downplay the importance of organization and leadership, and to emphasize instead the potential for spontaneous mobilization on the part of exploited classes. Thus Mark Selden (1971) and Robert Marks (1984) both emphasize that the impulse for revolution in rural China came from below not from a radical intelligentsia or party. Likewise, Marxist scholars have paid little systematic attention to the problem of leadership within political action. It is thought that emphasis on the role of leadership is inconsistent with materialism and reflects an inappropriate attention to subjective rather than objective factors. Revolutions occur, on this account, because of objective class conflicts, not because of the particular personalities of the leadership. I will argue here that effective leadership and organization are necessary (though not sufficient) conditions for successful popular political movements. It is therefore important to have a basis for analyzing the features of leadership and organization that contribute to successful and unsuccessful popular movements. The presence of mass militancy is likewise a necessary causal condition, and one might plausibly hold that the latter is more critical because more difficult to provide if lacking (whereas new leaders can be recruited). Attention to organization and leadership is in no way inconsistent with historical materialism, however; rather, it reflects recognition that social processes depend on complex social mechanisms, and an adequate theory of popular politics must take into account all the chief causal factors. Leadership and organization are among the 'micro-mechanisms' that underlie popular politics.

Let us turn, then, to the problems of organization and leadership within a revolutionary movement. What is the systemic role of the revolutionary organization in the processes of revolution? In what ways can appropriate use of organizational resources facilitate

mobilization and action? And how important is leadership in the process of popular politics? What motivates leaders; must we suppose that leaders are simply selfless agents of class interests, or should we attempt to understand their behavior and choices in terms of some complex mixture of private and public motivations?

The experience of underclass collective action over the past century shows that the availability of competent organization is a necessary condition for the success of a revolutionary movement, for a variety of fairly obvious reasons.<sup>32</sup> First, revolution demands effective mobilization of followers which, on a large scale, requires competent organization. In order to create a revolutionary movement that is self-sustaining, it is necessary to recruit followers, maintain the level of commitment of current followers, raise funds, and create groups specializing in planning, communication, training, and so forth. But mobilization of funds and followers depends critically on the ability of the organization to make its competence credible to potential or current followers. Given the inherent risks of rebellion or revolution, potential followers will be calculating in their judgment of the likelihood of success; and the competence of leadership and organization will be central variables in their calculations.

Second, revolution requires complex coordination of activities by large numbers of persons, which likewise requires effective organization. In order to seriously challenge the state it is necessary for a revolutionary movement to undertake complex collective actions based on accurate information and sound strategic analysis; and it is necessary to be able to collect resources to fund such actions. All of these features of successful revolution demand organization, how-

<sup>32</sup> A number of scholars of Asian rural society have shown that peasant movements can only succeed in becoming national revolutionary movements if there are competent, sophisticated organizations and leaders available to them. Chalmers Johnson (1962), *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1937-1945* and Yung-fa Chen (1986) make this argument for the Chinese Revolution. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1983), *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* and Samuel Popkin (1979), *The Rational Peasant* provide analysis of such movements in Vietnam. John Wilson Lewis, ed. (1974), *Peasant Rebellion & Communist Revolution in Asia* provides analysis of a number of Asian peasant movements since World War II.

ever, and it is difficult to see how they could emerge from spontaneous local militants. In order for such complex collective actions against the state to be successful, there is needed a high level of coordination among spatially separated groups of rebels. This requires access to a reliable form of communication among groups. It also requires discipline; the leadership needs to be able to count on different persons and groups carrying out their assigned tasks. Finally, planning of such an action requires accurate information for example, concerning the disposition of the regime's local military forces.

Finally, organizations are needed to overcome the inherent localism of spontaneous underclass struggles. Lucien Bianco (1986) holds, for example, that the Chinese revolution would not have occurred in spite of the class tensions present in Chinese rural society had the CCP not been present. This is so in large part, Bianco holds, because spontaneous peasant activism is invariably localistic. It is concerned with improving local conditions resisting taxes, reducing the power of local elites, enforcing charity in times of famine, defending a village against bandits or soldiers, etc. Once the immediate occasion for protest and resistance has passed, however, this localism dictates that peasants will attempt to return to their ordinary lives. This means that a peasant movement will be continually on the brink of dissolution into its component parts.

How do organizations work? How do they manage to mobilize support, keep followers, raise funds, and formulate plans? These are critically important questions that cannot be adequately addressed here. But several points are fairly clear. Consider one important recent example: Samuel Popkin's analysis of the role of organization in rural Vietnam during the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century. Popkin gives the problem of organization a good deal of attention. First, an organization must disaggregate its goals into a series of realizable sub-goals. This is true for at least two reasons: potential followers are not likely to be moved by grand ultimate purposes, and potential followers need to be convinced of the attainability of the movement's goals. Second, successful organizations need to provide ongoing benefits to followers. In his analysis of the popular movements of early-twentieth-century Vietnam, Popkin refers to adjudication services, provision of literacy and

bureaucratic competence, and protection from bandits, as some of the ongoing benefits provided by the Catholic Church, the Viet Minh, and the Hoa Hao sects. To an important extent, then, the organization needs to 'piggy-back' its longterm goals on more immediate interests and services for local followers.<sup>33</sup> Finally, it is clear that organizations need resources, financial and intellectual, in order to do their work of planning, implementing, coordinating, and mobilizing; and this requires effective resource-gathering on the part of the organization.

Organizations need leaders; and a prominent part of the histories of various successful popular movements is the character of the men and women who have led them. Lenin, Robespierre, Mussolini, Zapata, Ho Chi Minh, Mao each of these figures imposed his stamp on the nature and direction of the movements he led, and arguably played a critical causal role in the successes of these movements. How critical is effective leadership, and its strategies and tactics, in the process of revolution? In analyzing the role of leadership we need to confront several basic questions. First, what is the function of leadership within popular politics what do good leaders provide for their movements? Second, what sorts of motives guide the behavior of leaders? And finally, what is the role of ideologies in the behavior of leaders? In what ways do expressed political values shape their behavior? And in what ways do expressed theories of social change aid or impede their plans and strategies?

Begin with the function of leadership within a popular movement. Once again, this is not a question that can be treated extensively here. My point is only to raise the problem of leadership and to indicate its centrality in collective action. But even cursory attention makes several points clear. First, a successful popular movement is goal-directed; it is a complex, spatially and temporally extended set of actions aimed at implementing a program of change. And the goals of the movement need, at least in schematic form, to be shared by the followers of the movement. But this requires a process of social definition of the beliefs, values, and purposes of the members

<sup>33</sup> As Chen (1986) shows, the CCP made consistent and successful attempts to combine its longterm programmatic goals with short-term benefits for followers.



of the group. Leaders play a critical role in this process; they articulate a vision of the group's interests, purposes, and complaints which can then serve as a point of convergence around which popular consciousness can coalesce. Plainly this process requires deft work on the part of the leader; for his task is to arrive at a program that can be shared by the mass membership of the group. This means starting with an assessment of the current values, aspirations, and beliefs of the group, and attempting to shape these into a program for future political action. Plainly there are both constraints and opportunities for leadership at this stage. The leader cannot hope to establish a program that is profoundly inconsistent with the membership's current interests and values; on the other hand, there are a variety of currents of values and interests on which the leader can build. Material interests, class identity, religious or ethnic identity, a shared experience of resentment or injustice, patriotism and nationalism all these are currents of values and popular consciousness that present building blocks for the leader, on the basis of which to attempt to put together a political ideology and program. And the effectiveness of the leader is measured by his success at articulating a program that successfully forges a political identity among his potential followers.

Turn now to leaders' motivations. There is a spectrum of possible views. On one extreme, we may conceive of leaders as the embodiment of an ideology or set of social and political values. On this account, the leader is highly committed to the values he espouses, and devotes his efforts towards implementing these values. At the other extreme, we may conceive of the leader as a 'political entrepreneur' whose behavior is motivated by self-interest the attainment of wealth and power, status and prestige, through control of a political organization. On this approach ideology and expressed values are instruments through which the leader pursues his more basic goals self interest and personal advancement.<sup>34</sup> It is not possible to choose among these theories on the basis of a priori reason-

<sup>34</sup> Norman Frohlich, Joe Oppenheimer and Oran R. Young (1971) provide analysis of the concept of political entrepreneurship in *Political Leadership and Collective Goods*. Popkin (1979) makes extensive use of this concept in his analysis of rural politics in Vietnam.

ing; it is ultimately an empirical question to determine whether a given leader is motivated by the one or the other. Moreover, it is obvious that the two types of goals are not incompatible; it is possible (perhaps probable) that a given leader's behavior will be the result of a combination of commitment to the political program and an assessment of self-interest. It is plain, however, that the most prominent examples of political leadership have a large component of genuine political commitment. (It may be that there are good practical reasons why this would explain their success as leaders.)

The conclusion I draw from considerations in this section is this: the theory of popular politics contained in classical Marxism fails to pay adequate attention to some of the essential mechanisms of collective action organization and leadership without which large-scale popular political cannot occur. Moreover, these features of collective action have been extensively studied by social scientists outside of the Marxist tradition largely within the public choice paradigm. The results of these inquiries need to be appropriated and utilized by Marxist political theory.

## VI Is Class Struggle Likely in Class Society?

Let us conclude. Is there any reason to suppose, in light of these elaborations on the factors involved in popular politics, that class struggle is probable in the theoretically optimal cases cases in which exploitation is sharp and visible? What further elements have to be added in order to make class struggle probable? The analysis above has suggested a number of elements critical to the occurrence of class-based collective action. First, we have seen that it is necessary to provide a more detailed account of both class interests and political culture before we can derive predictions about the political behavior of members of an exploited class. Second, it is hard to see how revolution can occur in the absence of a cadre of committed revolutionaries who possess the knowledge and skills necessary to organize a political movement. Third, revolutionary action is clearly facilitated by a popular history of collective action on which revolution can piggyback; conversely, classes that lack such a history will be more difficult to mobilize for revolutionary politics. Groups

that have the resources of unified *communities* will be more capable of collective action than those who lack such resources. Fourth, the availability of organizational resources and leadership that can be coopted for revolutionary purposes is critical for the occurrence of revolution.

These considerations show, contrary to at least some prominent themes in classical Marxism, that there is nothing *inevitable* about the occurrence of revolution within class society. There is no ineluctable process of social change that leads from sharp exploitation and domination, to the occurrence of revolution; class societies do not automatically self-destruct through the unavoidable emergence of a revolutionary underclass capable of overthrowing the existing order. Exploitation is one important causal factor in producing underclass collective action, and the one that is systemically present in class society; but other factors must be present as well e.g., the presence of skilled leaders and effective organizations, as well as historically adventitious events such as war or global economic crisis that are *not* essential to class society. This means, among other things, that there are strategies available to the dominant classes in exploitative societies that may make revolution permanently improbable even within a sharply exploitative society. These include intimidation or cooptation of potential leaders; subversion of lower-class organizations; and maintenance of an ideology that works against lower-class militancy. We may conclude, then, that exploitation and class-conflict provide a basis for the occurrence of underclass political action; but that popular movements also depend on a variety of other variables available political culture, organization, leadership, and adventitious political circumstance that make the occurrence of sustained collective action possible but problematic.

We may also draw an important methodological conclusion from the above discussion. For we have found that the grasp of Marxist social science is substantively strengthened by attention to the micro-foundations of popular politics. We have seen that the macro-level predictions concerning popular politics of classical Marxism are not born out; there is no strict or observable correlation between exploitative economic structures and vigorous popular protest and revolution. However, we have also seen that an account that provides

analysis of the underlying mechanisms of popular politics including the micro-mechanisms of class as well as the features of political culture, organization, and leadership that facilitate collective action constitutes an analysis of popular politics that assigns class and exploitation a central causal role. This level of analysis permits us to discern regularities among the chaos of the phenomena of popular politics that are not visible if we pay attention only to macro-level factors. This constitutes, then, a powerful new reason for adopting a microfoundational approach to Marxist social science.

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## Community, Tradition, and the 6th Thesis on Feuerbach<sup>1</sup>

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'Feuerbach,' Marx famously complains in the first paragraph of the 6th Thesis, 'resolves the essence of religion into the essence of *man*. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.'<sup>2</sup> This paper takes it that Marx was saying more than that people's identities are socially formed. In his day, as in ours, this must surely have been recognized as banal by everyone except those with obviously ideologically warped perspectives.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, it is debatable that Marx meant this Thesis, or any of the other 10, to express

1 A version of this paper was read at the 1988 World Congress of Philosophy meetings in Brighton at a roundtable devoted to the 6th Thesis, and subsequent presentations of aspects of the paper were made at Queen's University, the University of Wisconsin and Rice University. I am grateful for the comments of participants in these sessions, and for comments by G.A. Cohen, Henry Laycock, and Robert Ware, whose criticisms did not entirely cancel one another out.

2 Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach,' in *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1974-) Vol. 5, 3-5 at 4 (written in 1845)

3 Thus Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*: 'Individuals have always proceeded from themselves, but of course from themselves within their given historical conditions and relations, not from the "pure" individual in the sense of the ideologists,' *Collected Works* Vol. 5, 19-539 at 78 (written in 1845-6).

a philosophical theory, for instance of epistemology or philosophical anthropology. In this essay the comment is taken just as a critique of Feuerbach for allowing philosophical bias to misdirect him from empirical study of real world conditions in the service of progressive practical activity.<sup>4</sup>

Marx understood Feuerbach to trace religious belief, and hence its alienating effects, to certain putative facts about all human beings (their capacity for projection, self-deception, and so on). In the 6th Thesis, Marx characterized this approach as a consequence of Feuerbach's failure critically to study the social conditions out of which religious views arise. Integrated with the resulting abstractly universal conception of human nature, Feuerbach's depiction is of individuals as instantiations of what he takes as the essence of humanity rather than in terms of their historically changing conditions and relations, thus failing to adopt what we might call a 'sociological perspective.'<sup>5</sup> Most, if not all, of what Marx has to say in the other Theses may be read, on the one hand, as the germ of an explanation of how Feuerbach could have sustained such a simultaneously universalistic and atomistic perspective (by addressing the problems important to bourgeois theorists and by adopting the 'standpoint' of bourgeois civil society Theses 9 and 10)<sup>6</sup> and, on

4 This orientation toward Feuerbach and philosophy is in keeping with the comment in *The German Ideology* that when one conceives things 'as they really are and happened . . . every profound philosophical question is resolved . . . quite simply into an empirical fact' (ibid., 39). For a defence of a similar claim regarding the Theses on Feuerbach 1 and 3 see the article co-authored by Daniel Goldstick and me, 'Activism and Scientism in the Interpretation of Karl Marx's First and Third Theses on Feuerbach,' *Philosophical Forum* 8, 2-4 (1978), 269-88.

5 In his gloss of the 6th Thesis, Nathan Rotenstreich notes Marx's use of Hegelian terminology in pejoratively describing an account of something in isolation from its relations as 'abstract,' *Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill 1965) 72. The term 'sociological perspective' is, of course, not Marx's and is used in this paper without the ahistorical connotations sometimes carried by it.

6 In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels distinguish between a broad and a narrow use of 'civil society,' and say in respect of the latter: 'Civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie' (89). I take it that the phrase in the 9th and 10th Theses is used in this narrower sense.

the other hand, as a prescription to discover social antagonisms giving rise to alienation and to take revolutionary action to overcome them (Theses 3, 4, 8, & 11).

Thus regarded, Marx's Thesis invites situating his approach with respect to two contemporary debates: the controversy over methodological reductionism and the debate over political norms between communitarians and their individualist critics. This essay will first displace the methodological controversy onto the normative terrain of debates over communitarianism. Then a way will be suggested to relate these debates to a problem for Marx insofar as he wished to combine a sociological perspective with an activist stance favouring radical critiques of existing traditions. The paper concludes by suggesting a solution to this problem in which democracy mediates tradition and critique.

## I Individualism and Holism

Andrew Levine, Elliot Sober, and Erik Olin Wright, have performed a useful service in their examination of this controversy among social-scientific methodologists by distinguishing the different positions that are often conflated in its conduct.<sup>7</sup> On the side of the individualists they distinguish between 'atomism' and 'methodological individualism.' Each position recognizes that society comprises individuals standing in relations to one another, but they differ on whether reference to the relations is indispensable to social-scientific explanation. Methodological individualists think relations must be referred to, atomists deny that relations 'are ever genuinely explanatory.'<sup>8</sup> 'Radical holists' and 'anti-reductionists' both take social macro entities (e.g., capitalism) as proper objects of study, but the radical holist denies that any explanations at the macro level can be reduced to micro-level explanations, while the anti-reductionist sees this as

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Levine, Elliot Sober, and Erik Olin Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism,' *New Left Review* 162 67-84 (March/April 1987) 67-84

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 70

sometimes possible. Also, the holist, in contrast to the anti-reductionist, thinks that macro processes are never affected by micro ones.

Levine et al. take the credible contenders in these controversies to be methodological individualists and anti-reductionists. Arguing against the individualists, they maintain that some macro properties, such as market competitiveness, are 'supervenient' on their micro realizations in the way that 'fitness' in evolutionary biology is supervenient, since no limited list of micro realizations could exhaust all the things that might make a capitalist firm competitive just as one cannot specify all the ways an organism may be fit. Against radical holists they argue that some macro-level explanations can be reduced to micro-level ones, it being an empirical matter which macro explanations may be reduced. When reduction is deemed both possible and desirable, it will involve tracing out the processes on an individual level by means of which an outcome describable at the macro level comes about. Such processes may be explicated within alternative theories of individual behaviour, e.g., of role theory or psychoanalysis.<sup>9</sup> The example given in the article is of rational decision theory and in particular the approach by Jon Elster to the macro-phenomenon of class consciousness.

Elster analyzes this phenomenon in terms of the decision-theoretical free rider problem. Any self-interested and rational member of an oppressed class would see it as in his or her interests to avoid the risks and effort of active commitment to class struggle in anticipation of benefiting from successful struggle by others. Class consciousness has been attained, on this perspective, when the free rider problem has been overcome. Given the way decision theorists frame the problem, this requires, Elster notes, that those possessed of class consciousness must either be acting irrationally or not acting on self-interest.<sup>10</sup> Levine et al. see reduction of macro problems

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 83

<sup>10</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985) 345-71; a similar approach is employed by Allen Buchanan in *Marx and Justice: The Radical Critique of Liberalism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld 1982) 88-102.

(when possible) as useful to establish the credibility of macro explanations and to deepen them by exhibiting the 'nuts and bolts' of macro processes. They are also useful to guide research. Thus they endorse Elster's approach for encouraging radicals to 'explore the social conditions which enhance or undermine conditional altruistic preference orderings and which facilitate or hinder the translation of individuals' preferences into solidaristic practices.'<sup>11</sup> We shall return to an evaluation of this endorsement.

Two features of the approach to individualism methodologically construed in the manner of this article sit well with the empirical and pragmatic orientation of Marx's Theses. Whether some macro explanation is reducible to a micro one is an empirical matter to be decided case-by-case,<sup>12</sup> and the value of pursuing a reductive analysis depends on the effect this would have orienting practically useful research.

At this point it will be helpful to refine the classification of methodological positions to distinguish between strong and weak versions of methodological individualism. The former sees any account of social phenomena employing only macro descriptions (of both entities and relations) as always inadequate; while the weak methodological individualist allows that macro accounts are sometimes satisfactory explanations. To situate Marxist social science with reference to these positions, one may start by agreeing with the argument of Levine et al. that only 'sloppiness and rhetorical excess' in the formulation of some Marxist explanations can lend plaus-

<sup>11</sup> Levine et al. 81

<sup>12</sup> Levine et al. wish to exempt from this judgment explanations of types (as opposed to tokens) of social entities, since, like 'fitness,' which may be realized in indefinitely many kinds of ways, but unlike 'water,' which is always and only realized as H<sub>2</sub>O, social types are supervenient on their micro-realizations (77-8). One might still argue that whether reduction is possible is an empirical question in two ways. To be supervenient, a macro entity must admit of no realistically enumerable ways of being realized, and it could be argued that which macro entities are of this sort is an empirical question. Alternatively, it could be argued that what concerns practically oriented social scientists are tokens, e.g., contemporary Western capitalism, about which Levine et al. admit the question of reduction is empirical.



ibility to an interpretation of Marxism as a species of radical holism,<sup>13</sup> and it goes without saying that Marxists are not atomists in the sense defined above. Thus, on the assumption that we approach a taxonomy of positions, this leaves anti-reductionism and methodological individualism, where the latter must be given a weak interpretation since many Marxist explanations are couched in macro terms. My first main hypothesis is that there is neither any adequate formal criterion for classifying Marx as a theorist of society in either of these categories, nor is anything to be gained by trying to find one.

The weak methodological individualist need not reduce macro explanations to micro explanations, and the (non-radical holistic) anti-reductionist sanctions reduction in those cases where it is possible. One difference that some may be tempted to attribute to the two approaches is that the methodological individualist would be more inclined to try to effect reductions, thinking them always possible in principle. However, there is no reason to suppose such a bias. Those who think that an 'auto trip' is still properly so called when interrupted by carriage on a ferry boat will think it possible in principle to travel by car from Toronto to Detroit by way of Bombay, but this person would be no more inclined to take such a route than one who, in virtue of holding a different definition of 'auto trip,' thought this impossible to do even in principle. Nor need the anti-reductionist be biased against attempting to effect reduction. Indeed, thinking it an empirical question whether reduction is possible, the anti-reductionist might even be more keenly on the lookout for possibilities of reduction than the individualist, who, always assuming 'in principle' reduction, may not feel constrained to seek out possibilities of actual reduction.

One might think that the methodological individualist will be prone to ignore such politically important macro phenomena as mass action and class solidarity or that the anti-reductionist will be insufficiently attuned to micro-level concerns such as qualities of leaders or the bearing of psychological matters on class consciousness. This is a more challenging objection, since those who call themselves

individualists or anti-reductionists are often blinkered in the suggested ways. Perhaps we have a case of protagonists of these positions being themselves unclear about the boundaries of their own perspectives and confusing them, respectively, with atomism or radical holism. However, at issue is whether there are features inherent to the positions that necessitate bias.

Pertinent to an understanding of individualism is a recent article by Robert Ware, who marshals persuasive arguments against those who claim that groups and group properties lack existence; while admitting the conceivability of 'research programmes' that would, if ever successful, reduce macro-level explanations to micro ones, and he gives reasons of the sort Marx would applaud for why it is important that social theorists attend to the groups whose existence Ware has demonstrated rather than await completion of research promised by the reductionists.<sup>14</sup> Ware's arguments show how consistently with belief in 'in principle' reduction one may still recognize social phenomena as facts in the world to be studied just as the existence of individual human beings can be recognized consistently with belief that they are composed of physical micro parts.

As to anti-reductionist bias blocking attention to micro matters, again, of course, such a danger exists, but also as in the case of the individualist, there are counteracting considerations. The two advanced by Levine et al. are that tracing micro mechanisms deepens and makes more credible a macro explanation couched in terms of that of which the mechanisms are parts, and that reduction usefully guides research when the demands of practice require explanations of specifically psychological phenomena.<sup>15</sup> To these considerations may be added the arguments of E.P. Thompson directed against Althusser (whether appropriately nor not), where he calls attention to the anti-democratic dangers inherent in radically anti-individualistic historical and social-scientific accounts.<sup>16</sup> (It is note-

14 Robert Ware, 'Group Action and Social Ontology,' *Analyse & Kritik* 10, 1 (June 1988) 48-70

15 Levine et al. 81

16 E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press 1978) 149ff.

worthy that Levine et al. advance these cautions about the one-sidedness of anti-individualism while themselves espousing anti-individualism, and that Thompson's anti-holism does not prevent him from couching much of his celebrated historical accounts in holistic terms.)

## II Communitarianism and Individualism

Returning to the 6th Thesis, assuming that Marx was neither a radical holist nor a radical individualist, and viewing the choice between seeking (modified) holistic or (modified) individualistic explanations as one to be made on a case-by-case basis, criteria are required to make such choices. Let us see how far we can go in this search by examining the normative debate between the communitarian and the individualist positions, in each case attending to those either clearly on the left or at least appealed to by contemporary left social theorists.

By 'communitarianism' I have in mind the view of such as Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, and Alasdair MacIntyre that guidelines for individual human action, for a meaningful life, or for a concept of the good society, ought to be found in, and in fact can only be found in, the norms traditionally embodied in communities. MacIntyre expresses the core of the case thus:

[W]e all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. This constitutes the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity.<sup>17</sup>

Like the other communitarians, MacIntyre wishes to argue both that people's conceptions of their own good are actually conditioned by

17 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1981) 204-5

the traditions of their social roles and that these conceptions are ones they ought to harbour.

Defence of this prescription typically involves an element of 'ought implies can' argumentation, but it obviously cannot appeal entirely to inevitability. If people were not capable of pursuing goods other than those embodied in their traditional roles, there would be no need for communitarian injunctions at all. Rather most communitarians probably endorse the claim of Walzer that political philosophizing that seeks to explicate and order the values which communities of people already have philosophizing that remains within Plato's cave, as Walzer nicely puts it is more realistic and practical than more abstract efforts, while recognizing the possibility of alternatives.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, a main thrust of communitarianism has been to attack rival efforts for reinforcing modern amoralism and isolation.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, communitarians try to exhibit the positive benefits of their approach, in the way for example, that MacIntyre links respect for traditional values with the virtues<sup>20</sup> or that Taylor endorses Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* as necessary to avoid the alienation of atomistic individualism.<sup>21</sup>

It is appropriate to the task at hand to ask whether such a communitarian perspective is available to Marx and how it might help one to displace the holist/individualist antagonism. The perspective's potential in the latter respect may be illustrated by consideration of Richard Miller's critique of the attempt to analyze problems of class consciousness in terms of the free rider problem. Explicitly criticizing Allen Buchanan on this score, Miller attacks left individu-

18 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books 1983) xiv; for examples of conventionalist views see 28-30, 88n, 134. A pertinent critique is in Joshua Cohen's review of Walzer's book in *The Journal of Philosophy* 83, 8 (August 1986) 457-68.

19 E.g., Michael Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983) 122ff.

20 Alasdair MacIntyre *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1981) ch. 15

21 Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975), 377-8, 384

alists for adopting what he calls 'the commercial model of rationality in academic decision theory.'<sup>22</sup> This approach, Miller contends, falsely supposes that active commitment to class struggle must be motivated by extra-rational, and in particular moral, sentiments, since the only alternative is rational self-interest, which would dictate the inactivity of free riding. As an alternative Miller endorses what he takes to be Marx's view that in the history of working class struggle there had come into being 'a model of character' wherein part of what it meant to be a worker was to have 'concern for a group with whom one shares common enemies and with whom one frequently cooperates on the basis of real and growing reciprocity.'<sup>23</sup>

Abstracting from Miller's contested claim that appeal to a model of character obviates a need for any Marxist morality,<sup>24</sup> his point can easily be put into communitarian terms: workers (or at least some workers) are members of a class community whose shared traditions centrally include solidarity even to self-sacrifice in the pursuit of class specific goals. Insofar as this is the good of the community it is and should be part of the good of individual workers too. When the world is unfolding as it should, people act in accord with the values of their communities, and the job of the social-scientifically inclined communitarian is to explain how the communities there are have formed and to predict how new communities might gel or old ones change. Since communities are macro entities, the appropriate explanations are likely holistic. When, however, some individuals

<sup>22</sup> Richard Miller, *Analyzing Marx: Morality, Power and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984) 71; the specific target of Miller's criticisms is Allen Buchanan's, 'Revolutionary Motivation and Rationality,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, 1 (1979) 59-82.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 67; see 63-78.

<sup>24</sup> Some sample articles debating the question of whether Marxism incorporates or ought to incorporate a moral theory may be found in Kai Nielsen and Steven C. Patten, eds., *Marx and Morality* (Guelph: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy 1981); for contrasts to Miller's position see the contributions of Allen, Reiman, and Shaw. I have criticised Miller's theory in my *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987) 155-6.

act out of accord with what one would expect on the basis of their communal identities, special explanations are required. One might hypothesize that macro explanations are still appropriate to this task, as for example, when the dissidents are members of overlapping and conflicting communities, but unless this is clearly the case, it is likely that more fine-grained explanations, some of which address individuals, are required.

Psychological or small-group sociological explanations come to mind as obvious candidates. Rational decision theory might also be appealed to, but in a different way than as used by Elster. For him, appeal to the free rider problem is employed to situate explanations of how class-conscious cooperation is possible. On the communitarian perspective, however, this is not problematic, and what needs to be explained is rather why such cooperation fails when it does. Decision theory might prove useful (again to situate explanations rather than itself to explain) by sorting the situations under which one might decide to free ride.

The conclusion to which this train of thought leads is that somebody prepared to seek either holistic or individualistic explanations depending on the pragmatics of the context in which explanation is sought and who is a communitarian may take as a presumptive criterion that holistic explanations are to be sought for the origins and destinies of communities, which explanations will also serve to interpret the behaviour of those who are acting to further the communal good. Individualistic explanations are appropriate for individual behaviour that differs from what holistic, community-directed explanations would lead one to expect. Such explanations are worth seeking when, as in the case of working class free riders for Marxists, counter-community behaviour is deemed pernicious. Thus put, the communitarian perspective provides a criterion of choice, which, conjoined with arguments to soften each of the individualist and the holist positions, allows one to displace the individualist/holist controversy.

The reason to characterize this as a displacement instead of a solution is that severe problems, which individualist critics of the communitarians have not been slow to point out, remain to be solved. Will Kymlicka summarizes one criticism thus:

If freedom indeed has to be "situated," does it follow that the individual has to be understood as "situated" in some specific communal role or practice? I think it is one of the central fallacies of communitarianism to make this equation. The "purposes" which are presupposed in the liberal account of the value of freedom could come from an acceptance of communal ends as authoritative horizons, but they could also come from freely made personal judgements about the cultural structure, the matrix of understandings and alternatives passed down to us by previous generations, which offers us possibilities we can either affirm or reject.<sup>25</sup>

And referring to the passage quoted from MacIntyre above, Amy Gutman complains:

[N]one of these roles carries with it only one socially given good. What follows from "what is good for me has to be the good for someone who was born female, into a first-generation American, working-class Italian, Catholic family"? Had Geraldine Ferraro asked, following Sandel, "who am I?" instead of "What ends should I choose?" an answer would not have been any easier to come by.<sup>26</sup>

These typical criticisms direct two distinct challenges toward the communitarians: that they harbour a fatalistic concept of the person and that they have a simplistic conception of community. Attempting to evaluate the first criticism would take us directly into some deep philosophical waters; however, perhaps this can be avoided by returning to the question earlier set aside about whether a communitarian displacement of the methodological problem is available to Marx. A partial analysis of the notion of a 'community' will help to address this question.

I take it that whatever other conditions something must satisfy properly to be called a 'community,' it must be such: (a) that its members share certain circumstances, e.g., being of a common nationality, class, or ethnicity or having been raised within a common

25 Will Kymlicka, 'Liberalism and Communitarianism,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (June 1988) 181-203 at 188-9

26 Amy Gutman, 'Communitarian Critics of Liberalism,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (Summer 1985) 308-22 at 316

religious tradition, which they find themselves sharing (typically by inheritance from prior generations, rather than having invented the circumstances themselves) and at least partly by reference to which they identify themselves; and (b) that among these circumstances are traditionally held beliefs with generally understood non-instrumental normative implications regarding domains of behaviour appropriate to the shared circumstances of community members in their ongoing life.

The term 'non-instrumental' is employed to capture the idea pressed by communitarians that community norms are perceived by community members as ones which obligate behaviour in accord with them rather than as useful means to attaining other goals (as for example, in the case of the instrumental norms of proper behaviour in impersonal market transactions). The qualification about 'ongoing life' is meant to indicate that, being implicated in people's sense of their own identity,<sup>27</sup> norms are always part of common sense and hence of the daily life of community members. While in a premodern era communities were probably typically regionally localized and neighbourhoods were composed of relatively homogenous co-extensive clusters of communities, this definition departs from some standard ones in not laying down shared spatial territory as a conceptually necessary condition for something to be a community.<sup>28</sup> This absten-

27 It was suggested to me by Erik Olin Wright that community traditions determine members' senses of identity, but not their moral values; while by contrast Henry Laycock criticized my conflation of traditions with role-norms. This and a (by no means exhaustive) survey of relevant literature suggests that the concept of 'community' is a contested one, and that further analytic work is in order. I speculate regarding Olin Wright's point that while not all aspects of people's senses of their identity are community determined, some community conditioned beliefs implicated in a sense of self are either straight forwardly moral or at least colour, so to speak, one's morally normative views. However, even if this judgment is mistaken, the prescriptive communitarian claim remains that protection of community-specific identities should be respected. Similarly, regarding Laycock's objection, the communitarian prescriptions may be taken to apply to those cases where traditions are implicated in role-norms, granting that sometimes they may not be implicated.

28 Raymond Firth's core definition of a community as 'a body of people sharing

*(footnote continued on next page)*



tion allows one to talk of religious or class-constituted communities cutting across local frontiers. A fuller definition would require specifying the sorts of circumstances that must be shared and laying down criteria to determine what counts as being 'appropriate' to a circumstance thus shared. This obligation can be sidestepped for present purposes.

Perhaps communitarians and individualist can agree that defined this way there are such things as communities. Individualists like Kymlicka take issue with a communitarian prescription that the norms partially constitutive of a community *ought* to be followed just in virtue of being community norms. The argument of the passage quoted from Gutman is that the communitarian prescription, even if it were not objectionable on ethical grounds, is unworkable. How could Marx stand on this question? In the *German Ideology* he and Engels maintain that 'only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community.'<sup>29</sup> In a gloss on this passage, Kymlicka is probably right to note that it does not offer Marxist support to the communitarians.<sup>30</sup> As he observes, Marx was not referring to existing communities, but lamenting the way that in a world of class oppression and a forced division of labour 'illusory' communities had fettered individual freedom.<sup>31</sup>

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

common activities and bound by multiple relationships in such a way that the aims of any individual can be achieved only by participation in action with others' is supplemented by the rider that community members 'normally' occupy a common territory. Firth adds as well that communities must include as 'constituents essential to social existence' social alignment, social control, social media, and social standards (*Elements of Social Organization* [Boston: Beacon Press 1963] 41-3). Even though Firth is addressing small communities, the latter three constituents can be brought into phase with the definition employed in this paper if regarded as aspects of the way that shared community norms ought to be implicated in ongoing daily life.

<sup>29</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 78

<sup>30</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989) 101-2

<sup>31</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 78

However, it is doubtful that the comments on this topic in the *German Ideology* sustain Kymlicka's further interpretation that Marx envisaged a time when one's 'truly human relations to others and to the community are not to be mediated by any social roles.'<sup>32</sup> The well-known passage Kymlicka cites for this interpretation is worth quoting in full:

[A]s soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.<sup>33</sup>

Taken alone, perhaps this passage is compatible with the view that Marx adhered to a theory of philosophical psychology in accord with which, given the right conditions, individuals are somehow exempt from social conditioning, but such an interpretation does not sit well with the sociological concept of human individuals expressed in the 6th Thesis or with the several passages of Marx's writings which endorse a more deterministic perspective. Moreover, there is an alternative interpretation, which, as in the criticisms of Feuerbach, confines itself more to political than to philosophical matters. On this view, Marx was not making the general claim that people can divest themselves of the influences of their social roles. Rather he was picturing two worlds: the present one in which social roles lock people into limited life activities and a possible future world in which social roles are such as to facilitate multiplicity of activity.

From this perspective, the problem is not to defend a choice between philosophical determinism or philosophical voluntarism, but

<sup>32</sup> Kymlicka, *Liberalism*, 101

<sup>33</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 47

to find a way that one can recognize the possibility and encourage the exercise of a critical attitude toward people's social roles while also recognizing the way such roles are in some crucial ways constitutive of those very people's identities.

Of course, there is more to a community than social roles, and not all roles need be directly community related. In one respect this makes the construction of a Marxist position less difficult (since one need not develop or defend some general sociological theory of roles), but in another respect it complicates the issue. Analogous to social roles in the way Marx and Engels refer to them in the *German Ideology* passage are the traditional norms embodied in communities, and one might easily make out a Marxist case that class-oppressive society makes people subservient to such norms insofar as it makes it difficult to criticize and change one's traditions.

However, full extension of this analogy is strained. Though some might find the prospect intriguing, it would be odd to picture a future world in which one may be a Catholic in the morning, a Buddhist in the afternoon, and a secular humanist in the evening, or to be a Franco-Quebecer, an Anglo-Canadian, and then an Argentine, and so on. Rather, the analogue of role jumping in the case of communities is the ability of people critically to reflect upon and even to reject some aspects of their traditions without necessarily thereby being entirely cut off from them, to reflect on and rank the traditional norms of several communities of which they may be simultaneously members (as Gutman insists should be possible), and to affect the ways traditions of their communities might change.

These are the sorts of things individualists chastise communitarians for not accommodating. The communitarian counter charge is typically expressed by MacIntyre in his recent, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* where he argues, that 'it is an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground . . . which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions,'<sup>34</sup> and that instead traditions have within them the means of their own evaluation. One of his arguments is that 'at any point it may hap-

34 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1988) 367

pen to any tradition-constituted enquiry that by its own standards of progress it ceases to make progress' thus precipitating an 'epistemological crisis' and forcing change.<sup>35</sup> A second argument is that at any time one may encounter and learn the concepts of an 'alien tradition' from which 'the limitations, incoherences, and poverty of resources of their own beliefs' can be identified.<sup>36</sup>

MacIntyre's negative argument surely has some force. An Archimedean point seems to have eluded political philosophers as it has eluded the epistemologists and ethicists. But at the same time, MacIntyre's positive arguments do not seem up to the task at hand. That task is to find a way that somebody who holds that people are the ensemble of their social relations and who interprets this to mean in part that their values are importantly conditioned by their community memberships, can allow for critical reflection on these traditions so as to evaluate, abandon, order, combine or otherwise to change them. We have also been asking whether some such approach is available to Marx. In respect of MacIntyre's views, however, this task can be circumvented by asking whether, even if feasible and (on some interpretation of Marxism) available to Marx, these communitarian alternatives *should* be appropriated by somebody who shares Marx's political goals. There are good reasons to give negative answers.

The account whereby change in a tradition is triggered by failure to progress in terms of its own criterion of progress makes the questionable assumption that any tradition does have such a criterion; indeed, it is precisely the charge of many anti-traditionalists that traditions typically do not value progress at all. Granting the assumption, however, this approach should be resisted on political grounds. Unless Marxists (or anyone else who accepts MacIntyre's account) can somehow have achieved the supra-traditional, Archimedean point he denies is possible, they must (or at least might well) perceive themselves as thinking within a tradition (e.g., of the working-class or of revolutionary socialism) which incorporates some criteri-

35 Ibid., 361-2

36 Ibid., 387-8

on of progress. Such Marxists might, in accord with MacIntyre's optimistic picture, always be on the lookout for non-progressive weaknesses in their system of beliefs. However, they might just as well strive to make their beliefs change-proof and hence always 'progressive' on their own terms. This is not just a hypothetical possibility. It is commonly called 'dogmatism.' Political dogmatists have proven themselves quite adroit at explaining away even blatant and obvious challenges to their systems of belief, with the unfortunate consequences well-known in the history of left wing politics.

One might relax the constraint of facing a dichotomy between uncritical acceptance of a tradition's values or attaining Archimedean transcendence and allow that some traditions include room for reflection about themselves, albeit reflection guided by precepts internal to the tradition. There is still a political danger. The Marxist armed with MacIntyre's criterion and reflecting on the prospects of change in whatever traditions Marxism is supposed to inhabit now reflects on the prospects for progressive change in Marxism. What grounds for confidence has such a person? A perspective that could be adopted is that the Marxist should simply work away within the Marxist tradition until anomalies are encountered. This confronts the dilemma that if the work is not pursued with vigorous effort to defend Marxism against apparent failures, it will not be known whether the latter are indeed genuine anomalies, but vigorous pursuit is again conducive, in practice if not necessarily, to dogmatism, or at least so it seems to me.<sup>37</sup>

37 The reasons for this are twofold: First, the social-scientific rivals of Marxism, like Marxism itself, are bound to be of a largely speculative nature, and the data base for testing the relative merits of theories is hard to control or isolate (there are few occasions for crucial experiments or for rigorous application of the method of sameness and difference); hence, just as there will seldom if ever come a time when Marxism is indisputably verified as superior to any possible rival, there will also not come a time when it is falsified vis-à-vis rivals, and its vigorous defender will therefore not have occasion for doubt. Second, insofar as Marxism is a theory designed to be put to practice, the vigorous defender (as envisaged here against the background of MacIntyre's perspective) will have the added impetus to minimize or overlook straining 'anomalies' that might necessitate undoing practices and institutions that have become entrenched (and perhaps gained at the expense of breaking a good many eggs).

A perspective at once more tempting and more pernicious for this Marxist to adopt is the complacent one that Marxism will necessarily progress. This perspective is tempting because it is comforting to believe and because it fits in with the stream of revolutionary thought that sees success as teleologically necessitated. It is pernicious for just this same reason. It hardly needs to be observed that belief that one's political activities are fated to reach a preordained goal is conducive to sectarianism and even brutal fanaticism. In his interpretation of the Theses on Feuerbach, Nathan Rotenstreich attributes such a teleological perspective to Marx, and criticizes Marxism exactly for what he sees as having these practical implications.<sup>38</sup>

MacIntyre's second solution to the problem of how communitarians can accommodate critical change in a tradition is to claim that this happens when alien traditions are encountered. However, this solution courts the same political dangers as the one just discussed, since encountering an alien tradition is one case of an anomaly for the invaded tradition. And there is an additional problem. Somebody within one tradition who encounters a rival tradition might be regarded to have three global choices: to agree to disagree and keep distance; to fight; or to switch. MacIntyre's perspective renders the first option useless for his purposes, which are to explain how traditions might change, and there is reason to be sceptical about his own anticipation of the third option. At least as likely is that aliens are considered dangerous foes to be driven away or obliterated. As in the case of a teleological perspective, this one, too, is attributed to Marxism by more than one interpreter, including some Marxists themselves in viewing Marxism in power-political terms. Also, as in the case of the teleological perspective, there are good reasons to avoid a power-political orientation, with its concomitant intolerance and tendency to amorality.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Rotenstreich, 103-4; see, too, 38-9.

<sup>39</sup> See my *Democratic Theory* 94-5, 153.

### III Tradition and Democracy

Perhaps there are other communitarian strategies to show how one may break out of traditional circles, and no doubt individualists can think of ways to defend their approach against the charge of being unrealistically anti-sociological. However, there is an alternative perspective whereby one can retain the liberatory visions of Marx consistently with appreciation for communitarian descriptive and prescriptive views of tradition. Required is something that can mediate, so to speak, between radical critique and respect for tradition. The candidate I have in mind is democracy. Democratic practices and attitudes understood in a generic way as pertaining to how people may collectively determine life environments they share have two features that make them uniquely suited for such mediation.

First, democracy simultaneously requires both respect for tradition and the active promotion of critical attitudes toward traditional values. The former of these requirements is sometimes underemphasized by those democratic theorists (not excluding myself in earlier reflections on this topic)<sup>40</sup> who focus on the feature of democracy that it should promote a situation where collective decisions are consciously and critically made in freedom from tradition's dead weight.

An easy way to make out the case for the compatibility of respect for tradition and democracy is to think of the basic unit of democratic decision-making as the community (traditionally welded with common values) rather than as the individual. But this approach is *too* easy. It purchases compatibility of democracy and tradition at the expense of the problems raised by Gutman and Kymlicka. Moreover, the approach is at such variance with main tenets of liberal democracy that the socialist would have to adopt the viewpoint that there are radically different kinds of democracy such that those in contemporary liberal-democratic societies are mistaken in their view of what democracy is and should follow the socialist in establishing an entirely different democratic order. In addition to the effect such

<sup>40</sup> The treatment of tradition in *Democratic Theory* is at 110-13.

an approach is bound to have of alienating support for socialism, there are well known arguments of the sort the late C.B. Macpherson advanced that critical contact with the democratic habits and values of the socialist's political environment is both possible and desirable. These arguments need not be rehearsed.<sup>41</sup>

In any case, there is a more straightforward approach. Any sincere democrat must appreciate the importance of avoiding paternalistic practices whereby people's wills are thwarted (purportedly to advance their true, but unrecognized interests) in the name of democracy. Paternalism may sometimes be justified, and one may assert (dubiously in my view) that anti-democratic paternalism is necessary to pave the way for major democratic gains in a future free from false consciousness, but it is dangerous to describe paternalism as itself a democratic practice. Paternalism thus construed has a way of entrenching itself, as paternalists must sustain institutions blocking people whose values they criticize from being able effectively to participate in collective decisions, and they can rationalize this to themselves on putatively democratic grounds. However, if democracy requires a presumptive respect for the ability of people to make their shared social environments conform to their subjectively held values, then the democrat must also recognize that these values will often be the ones embodied in traditions.

At the same time, the democrat should recognize that such respect pertains to only one of the requirements for ongoing democracy. Taken alone it is compatible with the orientation of conservative communitarians like Michael Oakeshott for whom: '[P]olitics is the activity of attending to the general arrangements of a collection of people who, in respect of their common recognition of a manner of attending to its arrangements, compose a single community.'<sup>42</sup>

41 A main source of Macpherson's views is his *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1973). I have defended Macpherson's approach in 'The Socialist Retrieval of Liberal Democracy,' in *International Political Science Review*, forthcoming, and in Part Two of *Democratic Theory*.

42 Michael Oakeshott, 'Political Education,' in Michael Sandel, ed., *Liberalism and Its Critics* (New York: New York University Press 1984) 129-238, at 229. Oakeshott also thinks that politics requires traditions to be amenable to change.

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The problem is the one Gutman raises about the multiplicity of traditions. Assuming that any individual will not only be acquainted with a variety of traditions, but will unavoidably be thus acquainted, insofar as his or her identity is not likely formed entirely by just one hegemonic tradition, then some stance is required toward alternative traditions. Of course, intolerance is always possible (though difficult to sustain when this would require schizophrenia), but intolerance is clearly not in the interests of democracy.

A controversial, but nonetheless persistently advanced claim of democrats is that democracy in some societies is incompatible with anti-democratic behaviour on its part toward other societies. As Engels put it, 'a nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations,'<sup>43</sup> and the point applies to any other type of communal entity. Critics of this opinion point to societies like the United States that apparently combine internal democracy with external oppression. The appeal of such an example, however, depends upon taking a static and superficial view of democracy. One who regards democracy as a matter of degree and who demands as a mark of genuine democratic advance more in the way of effective collective self-determination than is provided by the formal representative structures of U.S. government with its current attendant political party system will see anti-democratic behaviour abroad as consistent with severe deficiencies in domestic democracy.

The democrat's point is that external democratic tolerance is required to make levels of democracy attained in a society secure and

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His analysis of how this takes place is by evolution, a conservative analogue of MacIntyre's view whereby change results from contradiction with the demand for progress. MacIntyre's own effort to make room for critical thinking in the face of conservative approaches is to maintain that one of the traditional virtues is to reflect on one's own tradition so as to see what 'future possibilities the past has made available to the present' (*After Virtue*, 207). In addition to exhibiting a questionable optimism about traditional progress, this view does not easily capture the element of pluralistic tolerance I think is required for an adequately democratic critical attitude.

<sup>43</sup> Frederick Engels, 'Speech on the 17th Anniversary of the Polish Uprising of 1830,' *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works* 6, Vol. 389-90 (made Nov. 29, 1847)

to facilitate future democratic progress. In brief, the ground for this is that extending the breadth and depth of freedom in one community requires democracy internal to that community, but intolerance toward other communities breeds habits and institutions inimical to this goal. In turn, tolerance toward the traditions of others requires a critical attitude toward one's own. Attitudes of intolerance, no more than any other attitudes that can pervade a community of people, are not always foreign intruders into the traditions of that community, but they are often themselves interwoven with these traditions. Hence it is in the interests of one who values the preservation of those aspects of his or her traditions compatible with community-wide democracy to reflect on other aspects which defeat this aim.

At this point one can imagine the objection that many, if not all, traditions are too tightly closed to respond to democratic pressures, and hence it is unrealistic to think that they may accommodate the required measure of critical reflection. One popular response on the part of democrats is to describe democracy itself as a tradition which is at the core of a unique community. This is the position of Robert Paul Wolff, who concludes his critique of liberalism by arguing that democracy ('rational community' in his terminology) 'is achieved and sustained by equals who discourse together publicly for the specific purpose of social decision and action' and is perceived 'as an end in itself for it is itself a social value.'<sup>44</sup> However, it is one thing to value democracy and another to perceive democracy as an end in itself. The latter is required to think of democracy as a community-constituting tradition, but there are reasons not to adopt this perspective. Among other difficulties,<sup>45</sup> such a perception is in danger of counterposing the envisaged democratic community to other traditions, when what is required is to promote the integration of democratic values with the traditions of all communities.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Robert Paul Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press 1968), 192-3; italics removed and punctuation altered.

<sup>45</sup> I discuss this topic in *Democratic Theory* 58-60, 188-91.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Taylor opines that calls for the realization of a general will (of which

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This brings us to a second cluster of general features of democracy that suits it as a mediator between radical critique and a tradition-sensitive sociological perspective. An alternative to Wolff's solution is to endorse his prescription that democracy be valued but to see it as something that attaches to the *way* communities of people pursue their various goals and relate to other communities. One feature of the perspective from which democracy is thus viewed is that it is seen to be highly context relative. There may be a certain sense in talking of the 'liberal-democratic tradition' insofar as there are political communities the members of which share certain values and which incorporate institutions that have come to be called liberal democratic. Hence somebody who identified democracy with liberal democracy (or with some favoured alternative) might talk of democracy as a value at the heart of its own community. For what we may call the 'democratic contextualist' this is misleading.

Democracy should be regarded as a matter of the alternative ways that groups of people (including communities) might collectively determine themselves; those ways that involve the greatest number of people (ideally everyone) in full participation in such determination are to be preferred from the point of view of democracy.<sup>47</sup> Implicated in this conception is that democracy is a matter of degree and that it need not be foreign to any society of people whose interactions are sufficiently mutually affecting and ongoing to warrant concern over how such interaction might take place. Some democrats, like John Dewey, think that a measure of democracy is essential for any ongoing human collectivity,<sup>48</sup> and while I am inclined to agree with this, one need not go that far to see how on the contextualist view democracy might realistically be thought to mediate critique and tradition.

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Wolff's endeavour is probably an example) result from the breakdown of traditions (Hegel, 411).

<sup>47</sup> A concise example of a 'contextualist' approach is Macpherson's *The Real World of Democracy* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1965).

<sup>48</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Denver: Alan Swallow 1957); see, for example, 148.

If democracy is a matter of degree, then things that are (more or less) democratic will be processes in respect of their measure of democracy. That is, even leaving aside the question of whether there are upper limits to how democratic this or that sort of collective can or should become, there is the possibility that something that is slightly democratic may, under the right conditions, change to become much more democratic. This, in turn, means that even a modicum of democracy in a community has the potential for being expanded. This should give the democrat cause for realistic optimism. One is not faced with an all-or-nothing situation, and an already existing level of democracy or some modestly achieved level may serve as the base for making democratic advances. Among other things this means, as Walzer insists in his recent book on this topic, that democratic critics of a society need not view themselves or be viewed as entirely alien to its traditions.<sup>49</sup> It also means that as people come to appreciate the several benefits of doing things in democratic ways (as the democrat claims they will)<sup>50</sup> they should become increasingly disposed to develop and exercise the critical skills required for secure and persisting democracy.

#### IV Marxism and Democracy

The argument of this paper has challenged, as unnecessary and constraining dichotomies, that someone simultaneously sharing the sociological and the radical activist orientation expressed in Marx's 6th Thesis on Feuerbach must choose between social-scientific holism and social-scientific individualism, on the one hand, or between nor-

49 Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the 20th Century* (New York: Basic Books 1988). The supposed ground of possibility for internal critique in Walzer's approach seems that of MacIntyre's regarding progress. Thus Walzer: 'The critic starts, say, from the view of justice embedded in the conventional code or from the bourgeois idea of freedom, on the assumption that what is actual in consciousness is possible in practice, and then challenges the practices that fall short of these possibilities' (19).

50 Chap. 4 of *Democratic Theory* argues this case.

mative communitarianism and normative individualism, on the other. What sort of explanations it is important to seek will depend on one's practical needs. Recognizing the existence of communities and their traditional values as important features of the social world, but finding standard communitarian prescriptions at odds with the demands of radical practice, the activist social inquirer confronts the problem of finding a realistic and desirable standard to guide both theory and practice with respect to communities. Democracy, it has been urged, is just such a standard. By appeal to the demands of promoting democracy one can justify both respecting community traditions and critically calling them into question. The radical inquirer will strive to facilitate both these things, employing whatever kinds of explanations prove most useful to this end.

We have not so far addressed the question of whether the suggested solution would have been available to Marx. Concerned as he was to criticize the capitalist-serving ideological dimensions of popular culture and to project a radical, communist alternative, Marx had little positive to say of existing traditions. Still, at least the *form* of the prescribed approach is classically Marxist. In the Theses on Feuerbach, in particular, Marx insisted that matters of abstract theory be subordinated to the demands of radical practice; he recommended that one simultaneously maintain what has here been called a sociological perspective and encourage radical criticism of existing values; and, given his historical approach to political institutions and concepts, it is likely that Marx would have endorsed a 'contextualist' approach to democracy.

As to how far Marx could have agreed with the content of hypotheses sketched above, one can only speculate. If the argument that one need not choose between methodological holism and methodological individualism as exclusive alternatives is sound, an answer to this question does not obviously depend on how Marx is interpreted on this score (crudely put on whether he is read through the eyes of Althusser or of Elster). Granting this claim, then, the issue may hinge on how one situates Marx's thought with respect to democratic theory and practice. Those who view Marx as a fatalistic teleologist or as a power-political amoralist will undoubtedly have difficulty squaring his views with the ones herein advanced. I, myself, do not confront this difficulty.

## Methodological Individualism, Psychological Individualism and the Defense of Reason

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Jon Elster believes that methodological individualism is self-evident (Elster 1986, 66). Not finding it so, and being suspicious of philosophers who claim that their views are so obvious as to demand no arguments in their favor, I went back to retrace the outlines of the methodological individualism debate. It turns out that the participants to the debate disagree widely as to what they are arguing about; it is not obvious to them what methodological individualism is. The defenders of methodological individualism agree with their critics much more than those critics acknowledge. Each side ascribes views to the other which its proponents disown explicitly.

The central issue for the defenders of methodological individualism turns out to be what Popper has called the 'defense of reason.' Reason needs defending because views, like those ascribed to Marx about the class origins of our beliefs, seem to imply that however hard or carefully persons reason, their class background or other social causes will determine the results of their thinking, not its logical validity or the reliability of the facts consulted. Methodological individualism attacks views about the social causes of thought that seem to imply that careful reasoning cannot enlighten and therefore cannot be a reliable guide to social reform.

That defense of reason is obviously an important philosophical enterprise. But why does it commit one to methodological individualism? I will argue that the transition from the defense of reason to methodological individualism rests on a premise, which I shall call 'psychological individualism.' I will suggest several reasons for being wary of that premise.

Methodological individualism turns out to be anything but self-evident. It may well be a bad defense of reason.

I

According to Machlup, the term 'methodological individualism' was introduced by Schumpeter in 1908 but was intended to apply exclusively to 'the description of certain economic processes.' Methodological individualism, according to Schumpeter, had nothing in common with political individualism (Machlup 1951). The term reappeared in the wake of World War II, in the midst of the defeat of a corporatist regime in Germany, and the emergence of Stalinist Russia as a world power. First Friedrich Hayek and then Karl Popper asserted a doctrine that Hayek called 'individualism' (Hayek 1948, 1952), and Popper called 'methodological individualism' (Popper 1964, 1966). In current usage, as we shall see below, 'methodological individualism' does not refer only to a view about economics, nor does it eschew political claims.

Elster formulates methodological individualism as follows:

. . .all phenomena their structure and their change are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions.<sup>1</sup>

This assertion has provoked various responses, ranging from bemused puzzlement (Wood 1986) to outraged rejection (Meikle 1986). Earlier assertions of methodological individualism also met with con-

<sup>1</sup> See Elster 1985, 5. this is, as we shall see below (end of section II), an oversimplified statement of Elster's views.

siderable opposition (Mandelbaum 1955, Goldstein 1956, Brodbeck 1968, Gellner 1968); the critics of methodological individualism were in their turn attacked (Watkins 1968); and then came the clarifiers who tried to lay the debate to rest by clearing up its confusions (Danto 1985, Lukes 1977).

As we look over the contributions to this debate, a number of features stand out:

1. In the course of the debate, each side accuses the other of holding views which that side either has denied explicitly or has, at least, not asserted. The discussants seem clearly to talk past each other. This may well be due to the fact that

2. It is not unambiguously clear what the debate is about.

(a) to begin with, there is disagreement as to what theses methodological individualists are committed to defend, e.g. are they committed to some sort of reductionism or not? Critics tend to accuse them of reductionism, while the methodological individualists reject that accusation.

(b) But there is also disagreement over whether methodological individualism involves normative claims or not. Hayek and Popper insist over and over that the central concern of methodological individualists is a normative one: they accuse their opponents variously called 'holists,' 'collectivists,' 'methodological collectivists,' 'historicists' of denying the efficacy of human reason and the importance of free institutions, in favor of centrally run, planned and authoritarian social orders.

Hayek, Popper and Watkins attack what they see as a certain view of society and the devaluation of traditional democratic processes which those views entail. They argue against a certain view of method in social science because, they think, that view entails certain kinds of political and governmental strategies exemplified by the corporativism of Fascist Germany and Stalinist Russia.

I shall refer to this normative stance as 'the defense of reason' because that is how Popper presents it. Methodological individualism, so-called, is not merely *methodological*. It serves to defend a normative position. But the use of Schumpeter's original term has obviously contributed a good deal to confusing the debate.



Both Danto and Lukes refer to these normative considerations only at the end of their clarificatory discussions, and put them aside as subsidiary considerations that should be separated from the main methodological individualism debate. They insist that the debate about method in social science what form acceptable explanations in social science must take is logically independent from the normative position that opposes social planning in favor of free and democratic institutions. A number of other discussions of methodological individualism do not refer to these normative issues at all, but focus attention exclusively on the methodological controversies (Nelson 1986, Kincaid 1986, Fetzer 1986).

3. Most striking of all is the fact that while the debate is about a species of *individualism* the question: what is an individual, or what are we saying about a person when we call her or him an individual? that question is never raised by any of the participants in the debate. All seem confident that there is no interesting philosophical problem about the nature of individuals that has a bearing on the debate about methodological individualism. We shall see below that that confidence is misplaced. A certain conception of what it means to be a person will prove central to the entire discussion of methodological individualism.

## II

Confusions and miscommunications abound. It will be important to trace out some of these miscommunications in order to see that a good deal of ink has been spilt refuting views which few, if any, participants to the debate were willing to defend. It is not as obvious what methodological individualism is, as Elster thinks.

1. On the one hand we are told, by their opponents, that the methodological individualists deny the existence of societal facts, insofar as they claim that societal facts are reducible to facts about individuals, or that they claim that all laws about social institutions are reducible to laws about the actions, etc., of individuals (Kincaid 1986). 'Societal Facts' was the title of Mandelbaum's influential 1955 paper. By a 'societal fact' he understood 'any facts concerning the

forms of organization present in a society' (Mandelbaum 1955, 307). He believed that methodological individualism was committed to denying the existence of societal facts and that that view implied a reductionist position: 'those concepts which are used to refer to the forms of organization of a society cannot be reduced without remainder to concepts which only refer to the thoughts and actions of specific individuals' (Mandelbaum 1955, 307).

Now it is true that Popper, for instance, does seem to deny the existence of societal facts in some less than careful formulations (Popper 1966), but many times he also affirms them: 'Social life . . . is action within a more or less resilient or brittle framework of institutions and traditions and it creates . . . many unforeseen reactions to the framework. . .' (Popper 1966, 95; Watkins 1968, 271). Taking his views, as a whole, there is little indication that Popper expects us to understand this 'framework of institutions and traditions' as short for 'the thoughts and actions of individuals.' The same seems true for the other methodological individualists. Hayek insists that for individualism to succeed in creating and maintaining a free society, everyone needs to respect conventions not just the opinions of individual persons, but social conventions and must submit to the 'anonymous and seemingly irrational forces of society' by which he means, first and foremost, 'the hard discipline of the market' (Hayek 1948, 24). The market is not just a complex set of relations between specific individuals John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, Ivan Boesky and many others. The market consists of relations which confer certain social roles on the individuals that sustain those relations. The market is, in that sense, a social institution just the sort of thing Mandelbaum christened a 'societal fact.' Elster acknowledges the existence of 'societal facts' explicitly. Social events are brought about by 'individuals together with their relational properties' (Elster 1986, 67), where 'relations to property and other property owning individuals' are examples of the relevant relations. But the institution of property is, of course, just what Mandelbaum calls a 'societal fact.' It is not at all clear that the methodological individualists disagree with their critics on the existence of these societal facts.<sup>2</sup>

2 In terms of the distinctions introduced by Levine et al., Mandelbaum and the

*(footnote continued on next page)*

While the first set of objections to methodological individualism focuses on societal *facts*, another set of objections takes aim at the conception of social *laws*. Their opponents often allege, that methodological individualists claim that all social laws are really laws about the thoughts and behaviors of individuals (Brodbeck 1968, Nagel 1961). But that does not seem to be a valid criticism, either. The thesis defended by methodological individualists is, actually, much narrower namely that 'the conscious actions of many men produce undesigned results . . . [in which] regularities are observed which are not the result of anyone's design' (Hayek 1952, 39). This means, as far as I can see, that

(a) Societies consist of individual members and institutions. Statements about institutions are not translatable into statements about individuals without residue, i.e., there are societal facts.

(b) What happens in a society is to be explained by reference to (i) the actions, intentional or otherwise, of individuals; (ii) the unforeseen consequences of such actions, which are shaped by; (iii) the actions of other individuals, and the foreseen and unforeseen consequences of those actions, as well as; (iv) by social institutions. If there are social science laws at all, then there certainly are laws about the behavior and change of institutions and about the influence of those institutions on the *unforeseen* consequences of the beliefs, etc., of individuals.

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other critics of methodological individualism attack 'atomism' which needs to be distinguished from methodological individualism proper because, unlike atomism, it is willing to countenance relational properties (Levine 1987).

The paper by Levine, Sober and Wright is extremely valuable because it manages to clarify a number of central issues very elegantly. In addition, their observation that it is an *empirical* question whether, in the end, all explanations in social science will be in terms of individuals i.e. whether methodological individualism is true is of major importance. Robert Ware makes a similar point in his excellent paper (Ware 1988).

But Levine et al., cannot quite take that point seriously because they *want to argue* against methodological individualism even though they have already pointed out that we should refrain from a priori arguments about it. I think that they are caught in a dilemma here between thinking that the methodological individualism debate rests on a mistake and disliking the view of Elster et al., so much that they go and argue against it anyway.

Not only is that thesis much more specific than what the critics of methodological individualism ascribe to it, but it is also open to more than one interpretation:

(a) 'Societal facts' shape the consequences of individual actions, but they do not shape the individuals' actions (or beliefs) themselves. Thus the effect of social institutions is limited to the unforeseen consequences of what individuals do. Their beliefs, actions and intentions are under the control of individuals themselves and are not the effects of social institutions.

But that seems a very strong thesis. It seems obvious that social institutions do not only shape the consequences of human actions, but also the actions themselves, as well as the beliefs that underlie some of these actions. Perhaps we need to explicate methodological individualism in a more moderate form, namely

(b) That institutions shape the unforeseen consequences of individuals' action, and do shape the actions (and beliefs) of individuals, but *never do so nonrationally*. This formulation has been proposed by Richard Miller: Insofar as methodological individualists admit that individual acts and beliefs are shaped, within limits, by social institutions, they must claim that this shaping is always a rational process: beliefs are shaped by social institutions insofar as we have experience of them, try to understand them, form theories about them: '. . . any non-trivial version of methodological individualism must exclude appeals to non-rational processes. . .' (Miller 1978, 388).

The thought underlying this claim is as follows: Methodological individualists are critical of the view they ascribe to their opponents, that 'all our opinions . . . are the products of society or of a certain class situation' (Popper 1966, 208). If methodological individualism, nevertheless, acknowledges that beliefs, desires, motivations are shaped by social institutions, how does their position differ from the one they are attacking? Methodological individualism must rule out *certain kinds* of shaping of beliefs, etc. by social institutions, in order to differentiate itself from its opponents, and Miller thinks, not at all implausibly, that what must be ruled out, is any nonrational shaping of opinions by social institutions. Methodological individualism then would admit that social institutions shape our opinions but only insofar as we think about these institutions and draw conclusions from our thinking about them. They deny that

there are influences from social institutions on opinions that are not mediated by thinking.

On this interpretation, methodological individualism does not deny that there are laws about social institutions that are not reducible to laws about individuals. But methodological individualism does deny that there are laws governing the nonrational shaping of the beliefs and actions of individuals by social institutions, e.g. laws that allow us to predict a person's support or opposition to capitalist institutions from his or her class position. Insofar as individual beliefs, etc., are shaped by social institutions, those processes are governed by the laws of logic and rational systematic methods only.

(c) Slightly more moderate seems to be Elster's view of methodological individualism. It admits that our beliefs are shaped by such irrational mechanisms as wishful thinking or self-deception (Elster 1985, 19). But it denies that they are formed by *non-rational* ones. The difference is that irrational effects on thinking can be remedied by thinking more rationally. Non-rational influences are not accessible to the powers of reason and thus undermine the efficacy of reason irreparably. All that methodological individualism denies, in this version, is that the beliefs, attitudes, intentions, etc. of individual agents are exclusively determined by institutions, e.g. by non-individual forces. Popper tells us, for instance, that 'our beliefs and opinions, though largely dependent on our upbringing, are not totally so' (Popper 1966). The only thing that Popper and other methodological individualists will insist on is that what we believe, etc., is not *exclusively* determined by upbringing or other external social forces.

I will return to this interpretation of the methodological individualism in the next section.

2. It is safe to say that most critics of methodological individualists have ascribed much more radical positions to them. But methodological individualists, in their turn, have also misrepresented their opponents. They have characterized them as 'collectivists' or 'historicists' who hold that 'All our opinions. . . including our moral standards, depend on society and its historical state. They are the products of society or of a certain class situation' (Popper 1966, 209), or that social wholes are governed by laws that are *sui generis*, i.e.

they do not serve to explain individual behavior except insofar as individual behavior is considered a mere epiphenomenon to social events (Watkins 1968).

Mandelbaum objects to this characterization of his position: 'One need not hold that a society is an entity independent of all human beings in order to hold that societal facts are not reducible to the facts of individual behavior' (Mandelbaum 1955). Thus the claim that there are 'societal facts' that facts, say, about banks are not all of them facts about the owners, or employees, or customers, or robbers of the bank does not commit one to saying that the explanations of what happens to banks, or of what banks do, do not refer to the owners, employees or customers of the bank, but are 'sui generis.'

Nor does the assertion that there are 'societal facts' commit one to the view that 'individual men are the pawns of society' because if one holds that there are societal facts not reducible to individual facts, that is not to deny that societal and individual facts interact, and thus while the lives of individuals are affected by societal structures institutions, traditions, markets these institutions, etc., in their turn are affected by individuals (Mandelbaum 1955, 316).

### III

As Elster presents it, methodological individualism makes a claim about the proper way of explaining societal facts. The requisite explanations may well consist of causal explanations of beliefs. There are two kinds of causal mechanisms: 'hot' and 'cold.' The former are what are often called 'irrational,' such as self-deception or wishful thinking, the latter are 'rational' processes of inquiry and observation. Social institutions are explained by reference to the beliefs and actions of individuals, as well as by the unexpected consequence of such beliefs and actions themselves formed by these social institutions. All that the methodological individualist denies is that the effect of social institutions on individual beliefs, desires and actions is ever *completely* unmediated by conscious processes. A person's beliefs concerning a particular topic may well be utterly irrational, the product of superstition, blind prejudice, self-decep-

tion, wishful thinking and outright hallucinations. But it is always, in principle possible, for that person to recover their objectivity and to recognize the utter irrationality of their earlier beliefs and then to change them. Our beliefs are exclusively shaped by social institutions only if this possibility of uncovering deceptions and errors does not exist. Beliefs are exclusively shaped by social institutions only when the individual cannot help but have a certain belief and that belief is therefore immune to rational testing and, possibly, change.

With this formulation of methodological individualism in hand, we are in a better position to see why we need to take seriously the normative questions that have, all along been the background motivation for espousing methodological individualism. The project is to 'defend reason,' to develop a view of explanation in social science which does not deny that human thinking is efficacious, that we can genuinely learn if we apply our cognitive faculties.

Thus Popper dedicates *The Poverty of Historicism* to the 'Memory of the countless men and women of all creeds, or nations, or races who fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny' (Popper 1964). The ultimate issue, for him, is 'irrationalism' which, he thinks, 'must lead to an appeal to violence and brutal force as the ultimate arbiter in any dispute' (Popper 1966). The positions of his opponents 'amount to a belief in social and political miracles, since *it denies to human reason the power of bringing about a more reasonable world*' (Popper 1964, 50; italics in the original). The debate is over nothing less than the power of human reason to ameliorate the human condition and to replace violence by rational discussion as the method for settling human disagreements.

Hayek, for his part, appears much more sceptical of the power of human reason, but on closer inspection that scepticism amounts to a view very similar to Popper's namely, a profound distrust of social planners, or centralized government of any sort. He begins with a thesis about method in social science: 'that there is no way toward an understanding of social phenomena but through our understanding of individual actions directed toward other people and guided by their expected behavior' (Hayek 1948). This is the only view which, Hayek believes, 'can be defended consistently' but that is important only because 'individualism [Hayek's name for his

position] teaches us that society is greater than the individual only insofar as it is free' (Hayek 1948). His opponents communists, socialists, welfare state liberals all believe, Hayek thinks, that the society as a whole is more important than the individual. He rejects that claim except in the case where the society is free, i.e. where the social whole has minimal if any power over the individual. Here society is more important than the individual precisely because it does not assert its power over those individuals but leaves them free to lead their lives as they wish.

Watkins frames the issue in similar terms: 'The central assumption of the individualistic position . . . is that no social tendency exists which could not be altered if the individuals concerned both wanted to alter it and possessed the appropriate information' (Watkins 1968). Methodological individualism, accordingly, suggests social policies that Watkins prefers, namely 'altering situations' of people instead of 'sending anyone to prison' (Watkins 1968).

This defense of reason does not require that we claim that all beliefs are shaped by rational processes, for that is obviously false. People do deceive themselves, they do engage in wishful thinking, they commit many sorts of errors. But errors are corrigible; self-deception can be unmasked and wishful thinking can be exposed for what it is and its results scrutinized once again. The defense of reason consists of leaving open the possibility that human beings can learn and that there is a difference between changing one's beliefs and really learning that they can unmask their self-deceptions, recognize their irrationalities, and counteract the irrational influence of their social conditions. The methodological individualist need not fear the claim that our beliefs are shaped by class position although Popper rejects this thesis vehemently but only the additional claim that no human being can ever succeed in transcending their class positions and thus shape their beliefs in defiance of the influence of social institutions.<sup>3</sup> The only claim the methodological individu-

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to remember that Marx and Engels, explicit targets of Popper's critique, were quite willing to recognize that people, such as they themselves, could transcend their class position and speak for the members of a different class.



alist is at pains to oppose is that human beliefs are shaped by forces that are not corrigible by our intellectual faculties. If beliefs are the product of environmental forces such as economic systems, or class membership, and if that influence is not mediated through experience, observation and thinking, then these beliefs are not open to criticisms and correction. If that is the case then we cannot be certain that what we believe, however well founded it may be, as far as our thinking is concerned, is not the result of causal forces that are opaque to us and that may completely distort our understanding of the world.

#### IV

This view is powerful and is widely shared by philosophers. I doubt whether Richard Miller is right that Marx would also have rejected it (Miller 1978).<sup>4</sup> It is not a view that the critics of methodological individualism are eager to attack. They are not, after all, collectivists, spokespersons for totalitarianism, or the view that any society is more important than the individual, or that the demands of a government should take precedence over the rights of individuals. It remains unclear, therefore, what is really at issue in the methodological individualism debate. The defenders of methodological individualism believe that their view is needed in order to defend reason. Their critics are quite prepared to defend reason themselves but do not seem to believe that methodological individualism will be needed to do the job. Thus a new issue arises in this debate, namely whether the defense of reason really commits one to methodological individualism.

<sup>4</sup> Miller discusses a strong version of methodological individualism that beliefs cannot result from nonrational causes. That version, most likely implies, that social conflicts can be settled by argument, if all parties only try hard enough. That is, no doubt, a view that Marx would not have espoused. But, as we have seen, the defense of reason needs only to make a weaker claim, namely that beliefs, whatever their origins, are sometimes open to rational criticism and correction. Marx certainly would have subscribed to that view.

Popper and his philosophical allies, we have just seen, are strongly committed to the defense of reason, that

(a) no human beliefs are exclusively determined by social institutions. They also believe that

(b) all social institutions are explicable by reference to individuals only.

There is no overwhelmingly obvious connection between the two. We must therefore ask why people who clearly believe (a) feel compelled also to assert (b).

The essence of the defense of reason is the claim that no social structures affect human thinking and action except in a process in which rational thought is, or at least can be, an ingredient and that therefore, however irrational our beliefs may be, they are, in principle open to reexamination and rational revision. But suppose there existed social laws, like the ones appealed to in the Marxist tradition, which connect historical events exclusively to supra-individual entities like classes, or socio-economic systems, or states. We would then be compelled to explain human actions, which are ingredients in historical events, by reference to these supra-individual agents. But agents, at least some of the time, act in the light of their beliefs. They do what they do *because* they have certain beliefs. If there are the sorts of laws, that Popper and Elster understand Marx to be looking for, then we are also compelled to explain a person's beliefs as the effects of such supra-individual entities like classes or socio-economic systems or states. Reason then turns out to have no defense. It is powerless to ameliorate the human condition because our views and understanding of the world are not shaped by evidence and by logic but by class position, or the dynamics of the social system.

But if individual beliefs, and the actions that are consequent on them are caused, non-rationally, by supra-individual entities, reason cannot resolve problems and 'violence and brutal force' may well become the 'ultimate arbiter' of social conflict, as Popper feared.

It is now clear what the structure of the argument is that moves from the defense of reason to methodological individualism, proper.

(i) *Only human individuals think.* Only the thoughts of human individuals are capable of rational criticism and of being rational themselves.

(ii) Supra-individual entities, like groups, classes, etc. do not think. They are not capable of being either rational or irrational.

(iii) The effects of groups on individuals therefore also cannot be rational, i.e. beliefs exclusively caused by supra-individual entities cannot be rational beliefs.

(iv) The defense of reason asserts that individual beliefs are open to rational criticism.

(v) If the defense of reason is valid, individual beliefs cannot be caused exclusively by supra-individual entities.

(vi) The defense of reason is valid.

(vii) Hence we must conclude that human beliefs are not *exclusively* caused by non-individual entities.

Thus we are led to methodological individualism. 'Social phenomena their structure and their change are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals' (Elster 1985), and, as we saw earlier, their social relations (Elster 1986). Social phenomena are explicable by reference to individuals and their social relations and thus to the institutions that shape these relations, and the unforeseen consequences of human actions. But what is not admissible as an explanation is a direct causal law between institutions and the beliefs of individuals and the actions that flow from those beliefs.

Making the argument explicit at the same time shows that methodological individualism is not merely methodological, since it includes premise (i) above, that only individuals think, which is clearly an ontological assumption about the nature of persons. I shall refer to this claim as '*psychological individualism*.' It is that premise that connects the defense of reason with methodological individualism. The premise that individuals are the only beings capable of thinking, is thus an important ingredient in the views held by methodological individualists.

V

How plausible is psychological individualism? There is not enough space here to argue conclusively that we should jettison psychological individualism. I will have to be content with suggesting several different sorts of reasons for being quite wary of psychological in-

dividualism: (a) it appears to create serious difficulties for understanding language; (b) the defense of reason would, in fact, proceed more smoothly without it; and, finally (c) its provenance in traditional patriarchy makes it suspect.

(a) Elster himself cites a serious difficulty with methodological individualism. It appears that languages are not explicable exclusively by reference to individuals, since language behavior is constrained by rules, and linguistic rules are precisely the sorts of supra-individual entities which, according to methodological individualism, may not figure exclusively in our explanations of social phenomena. Languages seem to be counterexamples to methodological individualism, because the behavior involved in using a language is not explicable by reference to the behavior of individuals alone. What I do, as a speaker of English, is constrained by the rules of language which appear to be clearly one of the supra-individual entities which methodological individualism rejects as exclusive components of acceptable explanations of behavior.

Elster denies that language is a valid counterexample for the following reasons: 'True, the full set of conceptual or linguistic practices at any given moment may appear as a supra-individual entity that dominates and constrains the individual members of society. Yet in the study of linguistic and conceptual *change* we find that the cracks in the structure appear when individuals find some constraints intolerable . . .' (Elster 1985, 460). Language is not a 'supra-individual' constraint because linguistic change is effected by individuals.

Let us look at linguistic change more closely. If I use English in a new way, I do so *as* an English speaker who is accepted by others as a competent speaker of the language. If the others think that I am a foreigner who does not speak good English, they will treat my new use as a mistake, and perhaps correct me. If they consider me a competent English speaker who is, however, careless or uneducated, they may ignore my lapse. Whether the change I introduce is acceptable to others, or will be ignored or criticized, depends, in part, on what sort of change it is. Languages include rules for change, rules governing the introduction of new words through definitions, for making compound nouns, using verbs as nouns, and vice versa. Language change is still constrained by rules. In addi-

tion, a new usage will be acceptable to others only if it makes sense to them. That requires that it conform to the general features of the language in question. If one used German sentence structure in English, one would be criticized, not imitated, for one's sentences would not be comprehensible. We must conclude that language is of course made and maintained by individuals, but not qua individuals but as members of a group that maintain rules, as they are constrained by them.

There is good reason to think that language is a serious counterexample to methodological individualism. What is more, language, is, of course, only one such counterexample: there are other sets of social rules, e.g. rules that govern philosophical argumentation, or, more generally, rules governing acceptable academic behavior, which clearly do change and change because identifiable individuals make changes. But not any change made by any individual is acceptable, and there are rules governing what sorts of changes will be acceptable. It seems doubtful that such changes of rules are explainable by reference to individuals alone.

We need to remind ourselves here of the origins of this problem. The defense of reason requires that human beliefs and actions not be completely determined non-rationally. If we accept psychological individualism, the view that only individuals think, then rules of language, by definition, determine human beliefs and actions non-rationally. In that case, the very existence of language seems to show that methodological individualism is false and that the defense of reason fails. If language does turn out to be an effective threat to the defense of reason, it is the commitment of the methodological individualist to psychological individualism that makes the defense of reason vulnerable. A commitment to psychological individualism is, therefore, a liability for the defenders of reason.

(b) If we must reject methodological individualism, must we reject the defense of reason also? Clearly, as long as we uphold psychological individualism, the defense of reason weakens progressively as methodological individualism loses plausibility. Perhaps the time has come to give up both psychological and methodological individualism.

What is at issue here? Persons are human beings, as opposed, on the one hand, to animals and, on the other, to social entities such

as banks, or groups like research teams, families, pairs of lovers, party cells, or faculty committees. Psychological individualism asserts that only individuals think and that groups which it refers to as supra-individual entities do not. But is it really so obvious that certain sorts of groups, such as language communities, research teams, groups of friends, pairs of lovers, committees, etc., do not think? John Dewey thought that thinking is a social process. Is that really a bizarre suggestion, or one that should not be taken literally? All these questions are answered affirmatively by the psychological individualist because s/he conceives of persons in a particular way, namely as *exclusive owners of their mental states* and their actions. They may share their thoughts, for instance, by talking them over with others, they may work jointly with others, but in all of those cases it is, in principle, always possible, to identify the single owner of a thought, an argument, an insight etc. To that extent, individuals are separate from one another: their mental assets, their knowledge, beliefs, values, insights, as well as prejudices, fears and loves, are always exclusively their own. There is no such thing as a shared thought, a shared emotion, if by that we mean a thought or an emotion that does not have an exclusive owner. They are only thoughts that more than one person may have, roughly at the same time, or an emotion that two or more people have at the same time.

The claim that only individuals think thus amounts to saying that groups families, pairs of lovers, committees, research teams, do not *literally* think, that all their thoughts are, in fact, the thoughts of the separate individual members of these groups. Psychological individualism denies that there are genuinely collective mental phenomena. But if we return to the previous discussion of rules of language, we can see that that is by no means convincing. Suppose, once more, that I use an English expression in a new and unaccustomed way. My new use constitutes a change of English only if others accept this change of rules and take up the change. As they do this, a new rule is born which is strengthened by continued usage. The active participation of an unspecified number of speakers is needed to bring about linguistic change, to create new rules or to maintain the existing ones. What is more, if we could trace the gradual adoption of a new locution, there is no particular person who is the *n*th user of the new locution whom we could con-

gratulate as having definitely established the new locution as a bona fide expression of the language. The contributions of many persons, essentially anonymous, change the language, not the individually owned speech acts of particular individuals. Language rules are not the exclusive property of anyone, but are, instead, an example of joint ownership and evidence that psychological individualism is false because mental properties, like knowing how to speak English, are not owned exclusively. English is the *joint* product of all its users. It is thus genuinely joint property. But such an understanding of language is not even accessible as long as we subscribe to psychological individualism.

I believe that we should reject psychological individualism. But that view is very firmly entrenched, partly for the reasons stated below. Any attempt to clarify this rejection and render it plausible would require a number of separate papers and cannot be done here.

If we give up psychological individualism, we may still defend reason. Methodological individualism was intended to defend reason against the claims of theorists who try to explain human action by reference to entities that are not corrigible by human thought. Classes, according to Marx, as Popper and Elster and others read him, shape the thoughts of individuals but their influence is not corrigible by rational thought. The effect of class position on a person's thinking is not mediated by thinking and thus not corrigible by thinking. To the extent that one's beliefs are shaped by one's class position, they are not corrigible by reason and thus reason is powerless to improve our understanding of the world and thereby to ameliorate the human condition. But if we surrender psychological individualism and acknowledge that social groups, including classes, are capable of thinking, then their influence is, at least in principle, capable of being mediated by thinking and thus it appears that reason does not require the Popper-Elster defense.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In the social ontology of Elster, or of Popper, classes are, like language, supra-individual entities and thus threats to the autonomy of reason. But if language must be thought of as a joint product of many persons, perhaps classes must also be conceived as the complex relations between many persons and class consciousness as beliefs and values owned jointly by them. Understood in

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(c) Why has psychological individualism remained so popular?

If mental states cannot be jointly owned by more than one person, neither can the collections of mental states, which we refer to as someone's personality or identity. Psychological individualism is therefore committed to denying that who a person is, his 'identity' or her personality, is in any essential way dependent on the personality and the identity of other persons. It therefore makes no literal sense to say that a person is who s/he is only in relation to another person. Psychological individualism is firmly committed to the claim that persons are essentially separate from one another. Many philosophers regard this conception of persons as separate as so commonplace that they think that it is necessary truth (Dilham 1987, 98). It has only recently been subjected to criticism, but mostly by feminist psychologists (Miller 1976; Gilligan 1979, 1982, 1986; Chodorow 1974, 1978, 1986).

The essence of that critique of psychological individualism, with its commitment to the view of persons as separate from one another, is that it is sexist. The underlying argument is a long one. I have developed it elsewhere (Schmitt 1988) and can only present it in outline here: Philosophers, almost to a man I use that expression advisedly believe that human beings are separate from one another. This amounts to saying that persons are exclusive owners of their states (Locke 1952, 17). It follows that thoughts and beliefs are also exclusive property of individuals and that therefore only individuals think. Psychological individualism follows from the separateness thesis. So does the view that what a person is, his identity, depends only on his exclusively owned properties. *Relations to other persons are not constitutive of any individual's identity*. But this, many feminist authors have argued, is a picture of the person which may, perhaps, apply to men. It does not apply to women. The picture of human beings as separate therefore makes male ways of being paradigmatic for all human beings. It conceals the particular ways in which women, more often than not, are persons. It is an important ingre-

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that way, classes may well turn out to be less threatening to the efficacy of human reason and hence the possibility of human liberation. But that is the topic for another paper.



dient in the traditional ideology of patriarchy.<sup>6</sup> Psychological individualism is such a self-evident conception for most (male) philosophers because it reflects the traditional patriarchal conception of a man as

. . . the separate, self-enclosed subject, remaining self-identical throughout its exploits in time. Its relations do not affect its essence. Indeed to sustain its sense of independence, such a subject is always liberating itself from its bonds as though from bondage. Intimacy, emotion and the influence of the Other arouses its worst anxieties . . . It proves its excellence through the tests of separation . . . Virility lies above all in impermeability.

and

the separate self is . . . its own property . . . . (Keller 1986, 8)

Psychological individualism is firmly anchored in traditional patriarchal patterns of thought. Once we surrender those, we find that it is not even particularly plausible.

VI

The defenders of methodological individualism have assumed that psychological individualism is self-evident. They have accordingly believed that the defense of reason entails methodological individualism, and that anyone who is critical of methodological individualism is, therefore, also critical of the defense of reason. Accordingly, they accuse their critics of despairing of reason, of advocating the primacy of the state over the individual, of defending the bureaucratic police state. These accusations, as we have seen, appeared totally unmotivated to the critics of methodological individualism.

But psychological individualism is open to serious objections. What is more, it takes stereotypical (white) male ways of being as

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that there is considerable evidence that the notion of the person as separate from anyone else, in the sense defined, is not at home in African thought either (Harding, 1987). To the extent that that is true, psychological individualism is not only sexist but racist.

paradigmatic of being a person. It is therefore not a good companion to the defense of reason which aims at guarding the ability of human reason to ameliorate our human condition. A defense of reason that defends only (white) male reason is not likely to ameliorate the condition even of (white) men. The move from the defense of reason to methodological individualism is likely to undercut the defense of reason by reenforcing the domination of stereotypical (white) men. Only a defense of reason which clearly separates itself from psychological and therefore from methodological individualism is likely to meet its own high goals.

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### III MARXIAN EXPLOITATION

## Second Thoughts on Property Relations and Exploitation\*

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Since my book *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class (GTEC)*<sup>1</sup> was published in 1982, a number of good criticisms have been raised against the property-relations definition of capitalist exploitation that I put forth. In light of these remarks, I would like to amend my definition.

The definition of capitalist exploitation that I put forth was as follows. Let a society be divided into a coalition S and its complement S'. S is exploited and S' is exploiting if: (1) S would be better off if it withdrew with its per capita share of productive, alienable assets; (2) S' would be worse off if it withdrew with its per capita share of productive, alienable assets; and (3) S' would be worse off if S withdrew from society with its own assets. Call this the property relations (PR) definition of exploitation. I favored the PR definition over the traditional approach, which focuses upon the relationship between capitalist and worker mediated by a labor market and con-

\* I am grateful to my critics, who have helped to clarify, for me at least, what exploitation really means. This work has been supported by a research grant from the National Science Foundation.

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982

summed at the point of production, because the classical approach fails to locate the source of exploitation in the unequal and unfair distribution of the productive assets.

The criticisms that I will discuss take me to task chiefly on two points: that the PR definition fails to capture the relation of dominance or dependence between exploiter and exploited, and that it does not mention labor. I will be using the labor-exchange definition of exploitation that I used in *GTEC*; it will be helpful in this paper to have that definition at hand. Imagine an economy in which a coalition  $S$  and its complement produce some net product. The labor embodied in the net product is equal, by definition, to the total labor expended by  $S$  and its complement  $S'$ .  $S$  is said to be exploited if the share of the net product that it receives (i.e., comes to own) embodies less labor than its members expended in production. This is equivalent to saying that  $S'$  receives a share of the net product embodying more labor than its members expended. Call this the unequal-exchange (UE) definition of exploitation. In *GTEC* and a more recent article, I took the position that the PR definition was a generalization of, and superior to, the UE definition.<sup>2</sup> I am now less convinced of PR's superiority to UE, a point I'll discuss near the end.

Jack Pitt<sup>3</sup> points out that I intended the role of clause (3) of the PR definition to capture the relation of domination of the exploiters over the exploited, but that it fails to do so. (The definition works in diagnosing no exploitation in the following case, where there should not be any. There are two islands, rich and poor in resources, but inhabited by identically skilled populations. There is no trade between the islands. The inhabitants of Rich Island can subsist with 3 days labor a week while the inhabitants of Poor must work 6 days. Clauses [1] and [2] suggest that Rich is exploiting Poor, but [3] blocks that wrong conclusion.) Consider the case of the invalid ( $S'$ ) who

2 'Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985)

3 'Roemer on Dependence,' Dept. of Philosophy, California State University at Fresno



is supported by the rest of society (S). According to PR, it appears that society is exploited and the invalid an exploiter. This is not intuitively right, and so the definition of exploitation is inadequate.

I intended the PR definition of capitalist exploitation to work only in cases that can be described as arm's length economic transactions. Clearly, the clauses of the PR definition are not sufficient to guarantee this. Deciding what an arm's length transaction is may be, in some cases, delicate. I propose to require, in partial fulfillment of the requirement, that *there be no consumption externalities between the coalitions S and S'*, and that all agents be utility maximizers. Thus, the PR definition is not applicable in the invalid case, because the invalid's welfare enters the utility function of the rest of society. (If it didn't, society would ignore the invalid.) The consumption externality clause also works to prevent us from concluding that a child exploits its parents.

Jon Elster proposes the next example, to show that the PR definition of exploitation fails to capture the right relationship between S and S'. His objection to the PR definition is that it characterizes exploitation counterfactually, while the kind of interaction between S and S' that is in fact necessary for exploitation cannot be captured by counterfactuals alone. Consider a society

composed of two groups, R and S, of equal size and with equal assets. They do not interact economically. R has a puritan religion that makes the members work long hours and produce much, but the religion only motivates them to work if they have before their eyes the lazy group S whom they smugly believe to be condemned to eternal suffering. Group S members work very short hours, because they wrongly think that the rigid, and to them abhorrent, life style of group R is due to the long working hours, not to the religion.<sup>4</sup>

From the PR definition, one would conclude that S is exploited by R, because S is working less, and is the worse for it, than it would be were R absent, and R's members, apparently, would be worse off if they did not have the large level of consumption that they only enjoy by virtue of S's bad example.

4 Jon Elster, 'Roemer vs. Roemer,' *Politics and Society* 11 (1982), 368

Note that this case is dealt with by the consumption externality clause. The actions of the members of each coalition are an input into the utility functions of the other coalition's members. (R's members would not be so content, working as hard as they do, without observing S.)

Erik Wright maintains that for exploitation to occur it is necessary that the exploiters gain by virtue of the efforts, or labor, of the exploited.<sup>5</sup> Consider the case of two agents, Rich and Poor, who are initially endowed with 3 and 1 units of capital, respectively. This distribution is unfair: suppose that the fair distribution is egalitarian. Rich wants to consume prodigiously, while Poor only wants to subsist and write poetry (a good for which there is no market). Rich works up all his capital stock, but wants to consume even more than what is thereby produced, and so Poor hires Rich to work up Poor's capital stock, paying Rich a wage and keeping enough of the product to enable him to subsist.<sup>6</sup> According to the PR definition of exploitation Rich is an exploiter and Poor is exploited. But this seems intuitively wrong because although Rich gains by virtue of being unfairly rich, he does not gain by virtue of the labor of Poor. I previously wrote that Rich did exploit Poor in this example, but I now do not think so. Therefore, I would substitute, for clause (3), the following: *S' gains by virtue of the labor of S.*

This example is a difficult one precisely because the UE definition and the PR definition give opposite verdicts. We feel that Poor may be taking unfair advantage of Rich's driving consumerism: but on the other hand, Rich had more than his fair share to begin with. (If Rich required his large consumption to survive, we might conclude otherwise, but in that case we might also say that the original distribution, reflecting differential needs, was not unfair.) According to the UE definition, Rich is exploited he receives goods embodying less labor than he expended. Even with an equal division of the capital stock, this might be the case, due to the differences

<sup>5</sup> Personal correspondence, October 10, 1987

<sup>6</sup> See my 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?' 58-9, for my original discussion of this example.

in preferences between Rich and Poor. Would we want to say, in that situation, that (formerly) Rich is exploited by (formerly) Poor? I postpone discussion of this point.

Jeffrey Reiman launches an attack against the PR definition in favor of a definition of exploitation as the provision of forced, unpaid labor.<sup>7</sup> I have replied in detail to this attack elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> My main points are these. Deciding that certain labor is 'unpaid' presupposes a way of deciding how much labor has been unfairly transferred. There are cases when there is unequal exchange of labor, but without a labor market each producer works only for himself, and then trades commodities at prices that clear markets. The 'unequal exchange' consists in the fact that some agents end up with a consumption bundle embodying less labor than they expended, and others consume a bundle embodying more labor than they expended. There is no labor market, no institution for paying labor, and so speaking of unpaid labor is, so to speak, an anachronism. (What meaning is there to 'unpaid labor' before a labor market has come into existence?) But exploitation in the Marxian sense seems to occur. Second, although I agree that in the standard case of capitalism with a proletariat the workers are forced to sell their labor power, I do not think such forcing is sufficient or necessary for exploitation: not sufficient, because the kind of forcing that property relations induces is not exploitative unless the original distribution of property was unfair: not necessary, because economic actors can be exploited even when they have viable alternatives to the exploitative relationship.<sup>9</sup>

7 'Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16 (1987), 3-41

8 'What is Exploitation? Reply to Jeffrey Reiman,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989), 90-7

9 Here is an example. Andrea has a big machine, and Bob a small one; I postulate this unequal distribution of the capital stock to be unjust. Bob could produce his subsistence needs on his small machine, but Andrea offers to hire him, to work her machine, at a wage that permits him to earn his subsistence needs, and by expending less labor than he would require were he to use his machine. Her profits from hiring Bob finance her consumption as well. Thus Bob is not forced to work for Andrea, but chooses to, and she lives off his labor. I consider Bob to be exploited; but this verdict depends upon the injustice of the initial distribution.

Shelly Kagan and Charles Taylor raise another issue.<sup>10</sup> What if the members of S, who own no alienable assets, are gaining by virtue of the skills of the members of S', who also own the alienable assets, so that if S were to withdraw with its per capita share of the assets, its members would be worse off than before? A proletariat kept in abject poverty and illiteracy would be an example. In my view, this is not a case of purely capitalist exploitation, for the exploited lack not only alienable means of production but skills as well. The problem here is not with the use of counterfactuals in the PR definition as such, but with the withdrawal criterion, which fails to isolate that part of the exploitation that is capitalist. An alternative would be to substitute for the PR definition the following: *S is exploited and S' exploiting if, with an egalitarian redistribution of the alienable assets in society, S would be better off and S' worse off.*<sup>11</sup> After the redistribution, S' and S continue to trade with each other, so that S' can still gain from the unskilled labor of S, and S can gain from the skills of S', but the members of S will be better off than they were under the prior distribution of the alienable assets. What S suffers in the new arrangement I have called, perhaps unadvisedly, socialist exploitation.<sup>12</sup>

There are other reasons to criticize the PR definition that have to do with economies of scale in production. If there are significant scale economies, then we will never conclude that an individual is exploited in a large society, for a single person would almost always be worse off if he withdrew with his per capita share of the assets. This problem is also taken care of by substituting the redistribution condition of the previous paragraph for the withdrawal criterion of the PR definition. When there are more than two groups with differentiated relationships to the means of production, the with-

10 With Kagan, personal correspondence, August 13, 1984; with Taylor, a conversation, some years ago.

11 In my *Free to Lose: An Introduction to Marxist Economic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988), I used this definition of exploitation, in part because of its simplicity.

12 See *GTEC*, ch. 8.

drawal criterion does not work well. Consider the case of the peasantry, the proletariat, and the capitalists. Let  $S$  be the peasantry, and suppose they trade with their complement, but do not work for them. We conclude that  $S'$  exploits and  $S$  is exploited. But perhaps this does not jibe with common sense, in the case when the proletariat is suffering just as much as the peasantry. In this case, the redistribution condition improves matters, for both the proletariat and the peasants gain by the redistribution of capital, while the capitalists lose.

The redistribution criterion, however, has its own problems. Some persons, whom we view as living a harmless life, may lose from a redistribution of society's capital stock by virtue of changes in relative prices that will follow. They were not taking unfair advantage of others, but would be called exploiters by the redistributive criterion. If the rate of interest falls with the redistribution of capital, were all those who held savings deposits before exploiters? These problems, however, are not necessarily due to the criterion for exploitation. They also indicate that in a society with complex economic interactions it is not easy to tell when one person is taking unfair advantage of another. Does a consumer of artichokes in New York take unfair advantage of a Mexican worker who harvests them in Salinas at starvation wages?

Our intuitions about exploitation work best when all economic actors are assumed to have the same preferences for bundles of work and consumption goods. In the models of *GTEC*, I assumed all agents had identical preferences; the reason for this was to focus on the distribution of productive assets as the essential difference between people. Suppose we allow people to have different preferences. Imagine an economy with three goods: corn, labor, and land. Labor applied to land produces corn. Agents have preferences (in general, different) over the bundles of corn and labor that they enjoy. Suppose that, because the arable land is relatively scarce, there are decreasing returns to labor in the production of corn. Imagine that there is a firm that operates the farm: it hires labor to produce corn, and sells corn to the workers. How should the shares of ownership in the firm be distributed to the workers so that at the equilibrium there is no exploitation of any worker by another? (There are no bosses in this picture.) Alternatively, one might take the viewpoint that

the firm should be publicly owned. But, for my purposes, this is just a semantic difference. If the firm is publicly owned, the question becomes, what allocation of labor and corn among the population will be free of exploitation? The first proposal might be to give each worker an equal share of the firm. (This is what the egalitarian distribution of productive assets recommends.) With different preferences, the ensuing equilibrium will involve some people consuming an amount of corn that embodies more labor than they expended, and others vice versa.<sup>13</sup> At the extreme, some agents may dislike work so much that they will not work at all in equilibrium, and will consume only the corn which they receive as their per capita share of the firm's profits. Surely, they live off the labor of others, although, trivially, they would not lose from a per capita redistribution of the productive assets. Do we think that they are exploiters? According to the property relations definition, they are not, but as I said, my intuitions are not firm in cases where preferences differ.

There is an alternative approach to defining exploitation when agents' preferences differ. In the corn economy just described, we could look for an allocation of labor and corn in which corn allotments are proportional to labor expended across the population. There are many such allocations, but it turns out there is an (essentially unique) allocation of this sort that is also Pareto optimal. Such an allocation always exists, regardless of the profile of preferences, so long as preferences are of the usual (quasi-concave) sort. Joaquim Silvestre and I propose this allocation as one that could be viewed as implementing public ownership of the farm technology.<sup>14</sup> In it, corn is distributed in proportion to labor expended, and one might say that this feature is the essential one for the absence of exploitation. This is the (unique) Pareto optimal allocation at which, accord-

<sup>13</sup> I now take up the issue, postponed above, of whether (formerly) Poor exploits (formerly) Rich.

<sup>14</sup> J. Roemer and J. Silvestre, 'Public Ownership: Three Proposals for Resource Allocation,' Dept. of Economics Working Paper No. 307 (University of California, Davis 1989); see also my 'On Public Ownership,' Dept. of Economics Working Paper No. 317 (University of California, Davis 1988).

ing to the UE definition, there is no exploitation. If agents have identical preferences (and skills) and if each receives an equal share of the profits, then corn received will be proportional to labor expended in equilibrium; however, when preferences differ, these two criteria give rise to different allocations. It is noteworthy that the proportional allocation that I've discussed coincides with an equilibrium in the farm economy in which each agent receives a share of the firm's profits equal to *the share of his labor in total labor expended*. While the egalitarian distribution of the firm's profits might be justified by a view that each *citizen* should have an equal property right in the society's alienable productive assets, the proportional approach is recommended by a (perhaps Lockean?) view that one's property right in society's alienable assets is established by the amount of *labor* one performs. I can see no persuasive argument for adopting one of these characterizations of exploitation as the unique 'correct' one.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, I propose as *a* definition of exploitation, in a situation where neither S nor S' enjoy or suffer consumption externalities by virtue of the consumption or behavior of the other, that S is exploited and S' is exploiting if and only if:

(A) the members of S would gain, and the members of S' would lose, by virtue of a redistribution of alienable assets so that each owned his per capita share, *or* the PR definition (clauses [1]-[2]); *and*

(B) S' gains by virtue of the labor of S.

Neither these two definitions, nor any one, will correctly diagnose exploitation precisely in the cases that we think it should. In

<sup>15</sup> Marxists might object to the distribution of output in proportion to labor performed, because some workers are more able or skilled than others. In this paper, I am discussing only what in *GTEC* I called capitalist exploitation, the inequality that results from a person's lack of access to 'his fair share' of society's *alienable* means of production. The issue in question here is whether 'fair share' means an equal per capita share, or a share equal to the fraction of social labor that he performs.

particular, when labor is homogeneous across people, there may be good reason to define exploitation as a situation in which labor expended by agents is not proportional to the value of goods received.<sup>16</sup> As Robert Aumann has argued in another context, a good tool should not be discarded if it fails to do all jobs well.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of the property relations approach is to provide an *economic* characterization of exploitation and to locate the source of exploitation in an unjust distribution of ownership of alienable assets, rather than in the nature of an institution that mediates the relation between exploited and exploiter, be it the labor market, the production line, or the price system. It is my firm intention to defend this view. What distribution of society's alienable assets is just, *if* we postulate that the distribution of inalienable productive assets (skills and talents) in persons is just; what G.A. Cohen calls self-ownership, however, is a deep question, and the approaches that I have taken towards resolving it here are only first approximations that are intuitively plausible in simple cases. On these important details, I am much less firm.

16 The proportional allocation discussed above can be defined and shown to exist in more complicated economies, where there are many produced goods and different kinds and skills of labor. See Roemer and Silvestre, 'Public Ownership.'

17 In non-cooperative game theory, there are some 26 proposals for the equilibrium concept. No concept performs well in all games, but for every game, there is a concept that performs well. Robert Aumann uses the tool analogy in 'What is Game Theory Trying To Accomplish?' in K. Arrow and S. Honkapohya, eds. *Frontiers of Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1985).



## John Roemer's Economic Philosophy and the Perils of Formalism

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John Roemer's recent work uses the mathematics of Social Choice Theory to examine the structure of socialist ideals. One striking conclusion is that the social ownership of the means of production entails the strict equalization of 'utility.'<sup>1</sup> The conclusion is surprising. While of course opposing many existing inequalities, socialists (as opposed to their critics) have not traditionally understood socialism to require strict equalization. Marx, for example, is scathing in his criticism of levelling, which he sees as a form of 'crude' communism.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is both exposition and critique. By way of exposition, I show with less than full mathematical rigor what several of Roemer's axioms of social ownership mean and why they entail the equality of utility.

1 John E. Roemer, *Free to Lose: an Introduction to Marxist Economic Philosophy* (Boston: Harvard University Press 1988), ch. 10 and 'Resources Equality Implies Welfare Equality,' *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (November 1986) 751-84

2 Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism,' *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton 1978), 81-4

By way of critique, I argue that on each of several ways of understanding Roemer's ambiguous term 'utility' (utility as pleasure, as level of need satisfaction and as monetary income), Roemer's valid mathematical result cannot be given a plausible philosophical or political-economic interpretation. The purported connection between social ownership and strict equality of utility fails. Socialists should continue to avoid the quagmire labelled 'equal utility.'

Roemer's discussion of socialist ideals is novel and unconventional, not the least in its acceptance of principles from contemporary microeconomics that might seem incompatible with socialist ideals. For example, a microeconomist assumes that one's utility increases as the amount of labor decreases. This does not appear so obvious to a socialist who looks forward to the day when 'labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want.'<sup>3</sup> However, my aim in this paper is not to examine the assumptions of mainstream economics, but to challenge Roemer's unusual result.

### I Exposition: Roemer's Axiomatic Socialism

What I shall call Roemer's 'Social Ownership Theorem' shows that four axioms that claim to be necessary conditions for the social ownership of the means of production jointly require the strict equalization of utility.<sup>4</sup> The four principles from which Roemer derives the equalization of utility are:

1. Pareto Optimality,
2. Limited Self-Ownership,
3. Protection of the Less-Productive, and
4. Technological Monotonicity.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Program,' *Marx-Engels Reader*, 531

<sup>4</sup>*Free to Lose*, Chapter 10. My presentation uses less formal notation than does Roemer's. The less formal mode requires changes in wording and sometimes terminology.

Roemer conceives of an economy in terms of the quantity and quality of available labor, available resources and the production technology. The four principles are understood as restrictions on distribution rules that assign both work and consumption to each individual. Symbolic notation will be useful at times. I use the letter 'R' to refer to distribution rules and the letter 'E' to refer to economic environments.

Among the many possible rules that delegate work and consumption allotments are the following.

Each person works when he wants and receives what he produces.

Each person works 8 hours and receives his per capita share of the total product.

Production is organized around workers' cooperatives, and the workers democratically control both hours and distribution.

Nobody works and available goods are distributed equally.

Everybody works 10 hours and the winner of a lottery receives the total product.

A specific level of production is achieved with work-consumption assignments adjusted to equalize everyone's utility.

The strongest assigns work and consumption to maximize his personal utility.

Roemer's goal is to find principles that narrow the vast range of possible distribution rules to rules that are compatible with the socialist ideal of the social ownership of the means of production.

The first principle is a ubiquitous requirement in microeconomics; it is a weak background assumption.

Pareto Optimality: No one's utility could be improved without diminishing another's.

The terminology is sometimes misleading for the uninitiated. The Pareto condition does not identify a unique, 'optimal' point; rather, it prohibits certain clearly undesirable situations, that is, distributions in which one or more persons could gain without anyone's losing. It might be labelled 'Avoidance of the Pareto Sub-Optimal.' The principle is apolitical; a just society would not block increases in utility that came without any cost to anyone.

Roemer's second principle is more substantive.

Limited Self-Ownership: The more productive receive at least as much utility as the less productive.<sup>5</sup>

The principle's name reflects the limited right that the principle confers on ownership of what one produces. Those who contribute more to total production should not receive less utility than those who are not so capable. An important consequence of Limited Self-Ownership is that equally productive workers must have the same utility. In other words, only differences in productivity justify differences in reward. Note that the broad principle is compatible with the narrower and more demanding principle advocated by many defenders of capitalism: each should receive exactly his marginal productivity.

The third condition on labor-consumption assignments is also substantive.

Protection of the Less-Productive: The less-productive should not suffer by virtue of the more-productive's ability. That is, each worker should derive at least as much utility according to the distribution rule R in the environment E as in the environment E\* where no agent is more productive than him and the production technology is the same.

<sup>5</sup> Roemer talks of 'skill' rather than 'productivity,' but his terminology raises the objection that a 'skilled' person may be unproductive (unmotivated, alienated, etc.). Most people think that it is productivity, not skill alone, that merits reward.

From a socialist point of view, a desirable consequence of Protection of the Less-Productive is that the more productive should never receive more than their additional contribution to total productivity. Socialists often accuse capitalism of permitting capitalists to receive more than their contribution.

The most demanding of the four principles is the requirement that socialist distribution rules satisfy:

Technological Monotonicity: Let  $E^*$  be an environment that differs from  $E$  only in that the production technology has improved (at least is no worse); that is, for the same inputs, at least as much is produced. Then each agent should be at least as well off in terms of utility in  $E^*$  as in  $E$  according to distribution rule  $R$ .

Technological Monotonicity prohibits all losses in utility related to an improved technology: everyone must benefit. This captures an important ideal. When an improved technology makes certain jobs obsolete, a just and humane society does not permit the workers to suffer unduly; reassignments, retraining, and unemployment insurance ensure that progress does not come at the expense of the few.

Having specified four conditions on distribution, Roemer argues that they entail the strict equalization of utility. An example will illustrate how this surprising result is derived. I examine in detail why one vision of socialism, sometimes termed 'economic democracy,' fails to satisfy Roemer's principles. John Stuart Mill succinctly stated the basic idea behind economic democracy:

. . . the form of association, however, which if mankind continues to improve, must be expected in the end to predominate, is not that which can exist between a capitalist as chief, and work-people without a voice in the management, but the association of the laborers themselves on terms of equality, collectively owning the capital with which they carry on their operations and working under managers elected and removable by themselves.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, J.M. Robson, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1965), 775

At the microeconomic level, an economic democracy contains no private capitalists or firms and the employee-owners democratically approve the distribution of earnings (that is, investment, wages, bonuses, etc.). At the macroeconomic level, the system requires democratic coordination of the infrastructure and of investment.<sup>7</sup>

Imagine that an employee-owned, democratically managed factory requires an eight-hour day and pays a uniform wage except to several highly skilled and productive machinists who receive a bonus in recognition of their contribution.<sup>8</sup> I believe that such a distribution rule is compatible with socialist ideals in general and the social ownership of the means of production in particular. Of course, it is not the only permissible distribution of income, but socialists do not commit themselves to a unique way of distributing income.

Roemer objects to the distribution. It is not strictly egalitarian. What is the basis for this objection? The bonus is unacceptable because it violates Technological Monotonicity. This can be seen as follows. Suppose a computerized lathe were invented that (i) made the machinist's skills obsolete, (ii) increased total production, but (iii) did not increase total production enough to move everyone to the level previously enjoyed by the machinists. While most employees would benefit from the new technology, the machinists would lose at least a small amount. In the imagined, 'deskilled' world, everyone would receive the same income because there would no longer be the differences in productivity that according to Limited Self-Ownership permit differences in distribution. Technological Monotonicity prohibits even potential losses; therefore, the bonus for the machinists is unacceptable in the actual world because it would be unjustified in the 'deskilled' world.

Of course technology need not develop in the way imagined. The point is that Technological Monotonicity prohibits even the mere possibility of a potential loss. One might suggest that if the imagined

<sup>7</sup> Drew Christie, 'Recent Calls for Economic Democracy,' *Ethics* 95 (October 1984) 112-28

<sup>8</sup> For purposes of this example, I assume that an employee's level of utility and his wage are the same.

technology developed, the machinists should be 'pensioned off' at their old income; but this would violate Limited Self-Ownership which requires that differences be justified in terms of *current* levels of relative productivity.

## II Critique of the Social Ownership Theorem

A central difficulty in evaluating the significance of Roemer's mathematical result is the obscurity of the term 'utility.' Roemer is cavalier in his discussion of 'utility,' suggesting without further elaboration that it can be read either subjectively or objectively.

. . . one need not interpret the utility functions in this paper as reflecting the choices that people make; they need not, that is, be representations of subjective preferences. Instead, they could be thought of as functions that relate the resources people consume to their degree of needs satisfaction or of capacity realization.<sup>9</sup>

True, mathematically all Roemer needs is a function, called 'utility,' that takes on larger values with more consumption and smaller values with more labor. However, if we are to give the mathematical result any philosophical significance we must decide whether we are talking about subjective utility, objective satisfaction of needs, or monetary income. I believe that the argument implicit in the Social Ownership Theorem is unsound or irrelevant on each understanding of 'utility.' On different understandings, different premises become most problematic.

*1. Revealed preferences and ordinal utility.* One understanding of 'utility' that Roemer does *not* have in mind is that employed in contemporary microeconomics. Modern microeconomics begins with the assumption that comparisons of utility levels among persons are impossible. Roemer explicitly breaks with the conventions of modern economics.<sup>10</sup> If 'utility' is equable, it must be comparable. Roemer's

<sup>9</sup> Roemer, 'Resources Equality Implies Welfare Equality,' 755

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

`utility' cannot and does not mean what most contemporary economists mean.

Roemer's heresy is refreshing. Others, for example, Amartya Sen, are also dissatisfied with incomparable, ordinal utility.<sup>11</sup> However, it is not enough to reject the mainstream; one must go on to say what one means. I now examine three possible understandings of Roemer's term, `utility.'

2. *Utility as Pleasure.* If utility is understood as pleasure, Roemer's principles are false. Concerning Protection of the Less-Productive, why should equally productive persons be equally happy? How could this be arranged and why would one bother? Concerning Technological Monotonicity, it is absurd to think that the adoption of a new production technology should not reduce anyone's pleasure or happiness. Some people become attached to particular ways of doing things.

It is important to note that three of the principles Limited Self-Ownership, Protection of the Less-Productive and Technological Monotonicity connect productivity with `utility' rather than, for example, with share of production. This linking of productivity and `utility' is substantive and controversial. If `utility' means pleasure, then Limited Self-Ownership is virtually unsatisfiable; no reasonable assignment of work and consumption will ensure that all productive workers are happier than all unproductive workers. A principle linking utility qua pleasure or happiness with productivity and distribution appears to commit a category mistake. There are of course other interpretations of the term `utility.'

3. *Utility as need satisfaction.* The best-known principle of socialist distribution is, `From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.'<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Roemer thinks the machinery of utility functions can interpret Marx's broad goal. However, the term `need' is notoriously ambiguous.

11 Amartya Sen, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1987), 30 ff.

12 Marx, `Critique of the Gotha Program,' *Marx-Engels Reader*, 531



First consider a narrow understanding of 'needs,' call them basic needs; for example, nourishment, shelter, clothing, and medical care. An important feature of basic needs is that they are satisfiable. More consumption and less labor do not satisfy needs beyond a certain point. Thus, Roemer's 'utility functions' do not apply.

I believe one can make a strong case for meeting everyone in society's basic needs. If resources are adequate, such a principle is hardly controversial, though there is of course controversy about when it is satisfied in practice. The principle of equal satisfaction of basic needs is fundamental; no derivation from different levels of productivity or from the introduction of new technologies could strengthen its support.

Understood more broadly, needs are not closely enough linked with consumption and labor time to satisfy the requirements of Roemer's 'utility function.' Does self-development increase with increasing consumption? with minimizing even meaningful work?

Furthermore, on any sufficiently clear, expansive notion of needs, the four principles would become more implausible than they are by construing utility as pleasure. Friendship is a human need. Should equally productive persons have their needs for friendship satisfied equally? Sex is a human need. Should the Sexual Protection Agency do a Sexual Impact Statement before the introduction of a new technology?

The machinery of utility functions has no direct application to the concept of needs. An explanatory, mathematical model of human needs awaits development.

*4. Utility as income.* The key principle, Technological Monotonicity, bears a superficial resemblance to important themes in the socialist tradition. For example, one irrationality of capitalism is that technological improvements sometimes take away workers' livelihoods. Similarly, America's capitalist approach to medical care results in the world's best technology but only a so-so level of health care. Socialists condemn capitalism for such uneven development and for making technological progress such a mixed blessing.

But Technological Monotonicity is only loosely related to these concerns. The utopian nature of the principle stands out if utility is interpreted as income. Technological Monotonicity demands that

*no one* should *ever* lose when production technology improves in a very broad sense of 'improve.' An overly simple restatement of the Social Ownership Theorem serves to highlight the key idea: inequalities in utility based on greater productivity are not permitted since those who benefit from them could suffer a loss if a new technology eliminated the justification for the differential and *all potential losses* are forbidden by Technological Monotonicity.

Such a sweeping, utopian principle is not plausible and it is not a necessary condition for the social ownership of the means of production. Consider our case above of an economic democracy in which the employees of workers' cooperatives democratically control the means of production. It is quite possible that the worker-owners at an adding-machine firm will suffer moderate losses from the introduction of computers by another firm. Nuclear engineers may not benefit from improvements in solar energy. Trotsky didn't think 'permanent revolution' would make everyone happy all the time. Gorbachev realizes that perestroika involves losses for some.

These difficulties with Roemer's result go beyond ambiguities in the term 'utility.' The most powerful of the four principles, Technological Monotonicity, requires consideration of unexpected and irrelevant possibilities. Technological Monotonicity is so demanding because it applies to *all* losses (even those by the very well-off) and invites comparison with *all* improved technologies (even those that are physically impossible or practically unrealizable). Roemer asks us to consider all technologies that are logically possible. Mere logical possibility is enough to undermine actual differentials.

Should the possibility of someone's replacement by a machine mean that their current wage is wrong? I find much more plausible the hypotheticals that John Rawls's 'difference principle' asks us to consider in assessing the justice of a distribution. Rawls constrains his hypotheticals: could the *existing* system of production be run to improve the lot of the worst-off members of society? By contrast, Roemer asks, Is there any logically possible technology that is more productive and more egalitarian. Rawls asks a difficult empirical question. The answer to Roemer's question is, on logical grounds alone, 'Yes, of course more productive and egalitarian societies are logically possible.'

Under certain circumstances, losses in income resulting from technological change are justified. Only a utopian socialist commits himself to avoiding all losses at all times.

One final objection to Roemer's four principles of social ownership. They fail to distinguish a person's performance from his capability. Superior *performance* merits reward. Limited *capacity* merits protection. Among unproductive employees, one must distinguish the incapacitated from the lazy. By lumping these two groups together, Roemer avoids a central issue in any political economy: incentives and motivation. By avoiding the issue of incentives and motivation, Roemer avoids real world problems and he ignores Rawls's powerful theory of distribution.

### III Are Markets and Democratic Management Compatible with Socialism?

In his recent work in Social Choice Theory, Roemer's method is to take a central concept in political economy e.g., social ownership of the means of production and derive strong conclusions from mathematically tractable axioms that claim to be necessary conditions for the concept's implementation. Let me suggest one reason that this method is highly problematic.

The concepts discussed by Roemer contain within them broad suggestions about possible socialist strategies; they are not precise, well-defined goals. The concept 'social ownership of the means of production,' like the concepts 'equal treatment' and 'free speech,' is a fluid concept that is in the process of taking form through praxis. It is *prima facie* implausible that the concept could be made rigorous through axioms concerned with distribution alone, without reference to history, social experimentation, democracy, or procedural fairness.

More specifically, a central question for socialism today is the extent to which market mechanisms and forms of workplace democracy are compatible with or required by 'social ownership of the means of production.' Roemer maintains that his Social Ownership Theorem bears on this question. He appeals to the theorem in oppo-

sing 'syndicalism' and 'a market economy based on equal division of the external resources among the population.'<sup>13</sup>

Roemer is surely right in noting that unequal outcomes result from combining even perfectly functioning markets with equal initial endowments.<sup>14</sup> By itself, this simple observation hardly constitutes a refutation of attempts, now widespread throughout the socialist world, to combine limited markets and socialist principles. Yes, of course inequalities arise in even highly regulated markets. Further issues abound. Are these 'market inequalities' worse than those in actually existing socialism? Is Gorbachev's recent proposal to lease farm land for 50 years to families or small groups a retreat from socialism or is it a promising, socialist development?<sup>15</sup> Can restricted market mechanisms be productive enough and sufficiently egalitarian to breathe new life into the world socialist movement? These questions will be settled by praxis, not the a priori principles of Social Choice Theory.

#### IV Conclusion

John Roemer's unusual claim that the social ownership of the means of production requires the strict equalization of utility is unjustified. Mathematics requires careful interpretation. On each of the interpretations that Roemer suggests of the expression 'utility function,' either the premises of the argument are implausible or the associated 'utility function' is not mathematically appropriate. Furthermore, his argument requires sweeping axioms about all logically possible worlds. Finally, Roemer does not address the issue of motivation and incentives.

<sup>13</sup> John E. Roemer, *Value, Exploitation and Class* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers 1986), 87-8

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Keller, 'Gorbachev Urges Freeing of Farms from Collectives,' *New York Times* (14 Oct. 1988) A1,6

The argument is unsound. While social ownership of the means of production is a familiar goal, the strict equalization of utility, which Roemer claims to derive, is a target with little appeal. Strict equalization of utility raises the specter of a grey, uniform world that socialists are at pains to avoid a world without freedom, creativity and diversity. Socialists realize that a fair, classless, thoroughly democratic and prosperous society will, like all other societies, see wide divergences in the elements of various ideas of 'utility,' whether one defines it in terms of pleasure, happiness, self-fulfillment, satisfaction, or achievement. The strict equalization of utility has not and should not be on the Left's Agenda.

Strict equality of utility shows up repeatedly in Roemer's recent work. He says little about social experimentation and goals such as the democratic control of production, meaningful work, a classless society, the minimization of socially necessary labor time and general prosperity. I hope that Analytical Marxists do not follow Roemer's lead in underemphasizing praxis, democracy, meaningful work, and markets; and in overemphasizing 'utility' and distribution.

## On the Exploitation of Cotton, Corn and Labor

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There is no more intriguing or provocative argument in the Marxian corpus; it is the theoretical and rhetorical heart of *Capital*; not surprisingly, it is the locus of endless controversy: capitalist profit is possible, Marx argues, only because the capitalist is able to find on the market a unique commodity that possesses 'the specific use-value . . . of being *a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself*.'<sup>1</sup> This commodity is labor power, the *capacity* to work, which, Marx insists, must be sharply distinguished from the *activity* of laboring, since it is precisely this distinction that lays bare capitalism's essence, revealing it to be exploitation.

The mathematical Marxism that began to develop in the early 1970s at first seemed to vindicate Marx's analysis. Morishima proved the 'fundamental theorem of Marxian analysis': for quite general models, profits are positive if and only if the rate of exploitation is also positive.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, profit is possible if and only if workers contribute more labor during the production period than is required

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers 1967), 193. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>2</sup> Michio Morishima, *Marx's Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1973), ch. 5. Cf. also John Roemer, *Analytical Foundations of Marxian Economic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981), ch. 2.4.

to produce the products they consume. However, the mathematical formalism that established this result had an unexpected consequence. It was soon realized that an argument paralleling the proof of the Fundamental Theorem could be constructed for *any* basic commodity (a 'basic' commodity being one that enters directly or indirectly into the production of all other commodities). Analogous 'fundamental theorems' could be proven: profit is possible if and only if corn is exploited, if and only if steel is exploited, if and only if petroleum is exploited. In each case there is more  $x$  produced during the production period than is consumed, directly and indirectly, in producing that  $x$ .<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most common Marxist response to this argument has been to ignore it, which is not surprising, given the intimidating nature of the proof. Those who have not ignored it have generally distanced themselves from Marx's original formulation. Some claim that Marx's basic insights do not depend on a labor theory of value.<sup>4</sup> Some adduce reasons for being interested in the labor values of commodities that are independent of Marx's theory. John Roemer, for example, suggests that labor is more appropriate than corn (or any other basic commodity) as a measure of value because it is more evenly distributed throughout society, and hence 'embodied labor' correlates more directly with real wealth than does 'embodied corn' or any other 'embodied' basic commodity.<sup>5</sup>

Such responses seem to me inadequate. They do one or both of the following. On the one hand, they fail to appreciate just how

3 A number of writers have proposed such proofs, among them Robert Paul Wolff in his 'A Critique and Reinterpretation of Marx's Labor Theory of Value,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (1981) 89-120 and again in his *Understanding Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984), 205-6; also John Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1982), Appendix to chapter 7.

4 Cf. Geoff Hodgson, 'A Theory of Exploitation Without the Labor Theory of Value,' *Science and Society* 44 (Fall 1980) 257-73. Also see G.A. Cohen, 'More on Exploitation and the Labor Theory of Value,' *Inquiry* 26 (1983) 309-31.

5 John Roemer, 'New Directions in Marxian Theory of Exploitation and Class,' in John Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), 100-1

damaging the corn-exploitation argument really is if it is sound. On the other hand, they grant that the argument *is* sound. Roemer, for example, concedes, 'Marx was completely wrong about one thing. Labor power as a commodity is not unique in its magical property of producing more value than it embodies. Indeed, in an economy capable of producing a surplus any commodity has this magical property. . . . There is absolutely nothing special about labor power in this regard.'<sup>6</sup> It is Roemer, I submit, who is wrong. In what follows I shall attempt to establish two propositions. (1) If the corn-exploitation analysis that is commonly given is correct, then it is extremely detrimental to the claim that capitalism is morally perverse. (2) The analysis is not correct. Specifically, it does not support the conclusion that 'there is nothing special about labor power . . . in producing more value than it embodies.'

I

A significant impediment to appreciating the significance of the corn-exploitation analysis is the formal, mathematical nature of the argument, invoking as it does Perron-Frobenius theorems and the like. The essential point, however, can be made more simply by mimicking Marx's own reasoning. Let us recall the structure of his argument as it unfolds in that crucial section of Volume I of *Capital*, 'The Production of Surplus Value.'<sup>7</sup> It will be useful to what follows to set out the argument somewhat more formally than does Marx.

We recall that at this stage of his analysis Marx is assuming what is often designated the 'labor theory of value'; that is to say, he presupposes that in the case under consideration the prices of all commodities are proportional to the socially necessary labor that has entered directly and indirectly into their production.<sup>8</sup> Specifically,

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 100

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, 186-98. The quotations that follow are taken from these pages.

<sup>8</sup> To call the price-value proportionality assertion the 'labor theory of value' is in fact misleading, since Marx does not employ it as a *theory* but as a simplify-

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he assumes the constant of proportionality to be 2, i.e., that a commodity selling for  $x$  shillings embodies  $2x$  hours of (socially necessary direct and indirect) labor. Marx looks at one capitalist and one worker engaged in the enterprise of turning cotton into yarn. He begins with the technical conditions of production. With the prevailing technology and normal levels of skill and labor intensity,

(TL) 10lbs. cotton + equipment depreciation + 6 hrs. labor  $\Rightarrow$  10lbs. yarn

Marx then specifies the monetary conditions. The capitalist can buy cotton for 1s per pound. He calculates equipment depreciation to be 2s (when used for 6 hours). The going wage is 3s. This information gives us his costs. To determine the selling price of yarn (and hence the capitalist's profit), the value equation must be constructed. The 'labor theory of value' is invoked for the first time. 10lbs. cotton = 10s = 20 hours; 2s depreciation represents 4 hours. Hence, the value equation:

(VL) 20 hrs. + 4 hrs. + 6 hrs. = 30 hrs.

Appealing to the 'labor theory of value' again, we conclude that yarn will sell for 15s. Thus we can write the monetary relations:

(ML) 10s + 2s + 3s  $\Rightarrow$  15s

There is a problem here, to which Marx gleefully calls our attention: 'Our capitalist stares in astonishment. The value of the product is exactly equal to the value of the capital advanced. The value so advanced has not expanded, no surplus-value has been created, and consequently money has not been converted into capital' (190).

There ensues an indirect dialogue between Marx and the capitalist, Marx quoting Martin Luther against the capitalist's claim to a right

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ing assumption. More will be said about this below. In the interim it will be useful to keep in view both the common designation and its problematic nature, so I will set off 'labor theory of value' with quotes when the term signifies the assumption that prices and labor values are proportional.

to a profit. But after a brief period of discomfiture, the capitalist 'reassumes his usual mien,' declaring that he will leave 'this and all like subterfuges and juggling tricks to professors of Political Economy, who are paid for it. He himself is a practical man, and though he does not always consider what he says outside his business, yet in his business he knows what he is about' (193).

His instinct directs him to a key feature of the original transaction. The going wage is 3s, indicating that the labor value of labor power is 6 hrs., which is to say, the goods that wage will purchase took 6 hrs. to produce. But this fact in no way prevents the worker from working more than six hours. The working day, the capitalist observes, is twelve hours. Hence the relevant relations become:

$(T^*_L) 20 \text{ lbs. cotton} + \text{depreciation} + 12 \text{ hrs.} \rightarrow 20 \text{ lbs. yarn}$

$(V^*_L) 40 \text{ hrs.} + 8 \text{ hrs.} + 12 \text{ hrs.} = 60 \text{ hrs.}$

$(M^*_L) 20s + 4s + 3s \rightarrow 30s$

( $T^*_L$  is  $T_L$  doubled.  $V^*_L$  is  $V_L$  doubled. The left side of  $M^*_L$  represents costs, which have all doubled except the wage. The right side of  $M^*_L$  is derived from  $V^*_L$ .)

'The trick has at last succeeded; money has been converted into capital. Every condition of the problem is satisfied, while the laws that regulate the exchange of commodities have been in no way violated' (194).

What Marx appears to have shown is that profit is possible (under conditions of competitive equilibrium) only because there exists on the market a unique commodity (labor power), the consumption (exercise) of which produces more value than is embodied in it. The superficially egalitarian exchange between capitalist and worker masks an inequality that violates a basic ethical norm: equals should exchange for equals. In the words of Martin Luther that Marx quotes, 'Whoever takes more or better than he gives, that is usury and is not service but wrong done to his neighbor' (192).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> As is well known, there exists a large controversy as to whether or not Marx's argument is intended to be a moral argument. This controversy is not rele-

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Critics of Marx have been quick to discern what seems to be a crucial false premise. Marx's analysis presupposes the 'labor theory of value.' It presupposes that prices are proportional to embodied labor. But this presupposition is in no way realistic. It can easily be shown that even in a stylized model of perfect competition, equilibrium prices, and homogeneous labor, prices will not be proportional to labor values (when profit is positive) *unless* each industry has the same degree of capital intensiveness the same 'organic composition of capital' where 'organic composition of capital' is the ratio of the capital laid out for raw materials and set aside for depreciation to the capital paid out in wages. Since this ratio may be presumed to vary widely in most economies, even under conditions of competitive equilibrium, the 'labor theory of value' will not generally hold.<sup>10</sup>

As a response to Marx, this is too facile. It is clear that Marx himself, even while composing *Capital I*, was fully aware that prices would be proportional to values only in the accidental case of equal organic composition of capital.<sup>11</sup> So whatever Marx was doing in his demonstration of exploitation, he was not as is often alleged taking over uncritically the prevailing, though erroneous, theory of his day. It is more sensible (and fairer to Marx) to regard the premise that prices are proportional to labor values as merely a simplify-

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vant to the concern of this paper, since, whatever Marx's overt intentions or theoretical commitments, the argument under consideration can be read as a moral argument and often is. It is with that reading that I am concerned.

<sup>10</sup> The basic idea is this. Surplus value is generated by workers. If wages and the length of the working day are equal across industries, the more workers employed by an enterprise, the more surplus value created. Thus a labor-intensive enterprise produces more surplus value per unit capital than does a capital-intensive enterprise. Hence, if prices are proportional to labor values, the labor-intensive enterprise will show a higher rate of profit than a capital-intensive enterprise, thus violating the equilibrium assumption that the rate of profit be the same in all enterprises. This contradiction can be avoided *only if* prices cease to be proportional to labor values. See Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 133, for a succinct formal proof.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wolff, *Understanding Marx*, 90 ff.

ing assumption. Though this assumption does not hold in general (simplifying assumptions never do), the implicit claim is that the basic conclusion does not depend in an essential way on this assumption. Marx may be presumed to be arguing thus: if capitalism is transparently exploitative when the equal organic composition of capital obtains, then it must be exploitative in general, for surely the exploitative nature of an economic system cannot depend on so accidental a feature as the organic composition of capital.

There is nothing peculiar about this form of argument. Most arguments that purport to draw conclusions about the world from stylized, simplified models have this structure. Simplifying assumptions are invoked in the formal proofs which is why they are labelled 'assumptions' but they are presumed to be inessential which is why they are merely 'simplifying.'

In light of the corn-exploitation analysis, however, it would seem that a far more damaging criticism might be made. The *inessential* nature of the labor-value assumption can be called into question. To see how, consider Marx's original example, but now let us assume a *cotton-theory of value*. Suppose it so happens that each industry exhibits an equal cotton-organic composition of capital, i.e., in each industry the proportion of capital laid out for *cotton* relative to other inputs is the same. In this case market forces will compel prices to reflect embodied cotton, just as they compel prices to reflect embodied labor when an equal (labor) organic composition of capital obtains.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, this is not a realistic assumption, but

12 That the equal organic composition of capital assumption together with the homogeneous labor and equilibrium assumptions require that prices be proportional to labor values can be seen as follows. Suppose two commodities, say a bushel of corn and a ton of steel, sell at the same price. Since market forces equalize the rate of profit in all industries, the costs of production must have been the same for both corn and steel. Since both industries have the same organic composition of capital, each must have made the same outlay for wages and the same outlay for raw materials. (For simplicity, we will ignore equipment depreciation.) The same wage outlay, given the assumption of a single wage rate, implies that exactly the same amount of *direct* labor was expended on each commodity.

To see that the same is true for *indirect* labor, we look at the raw materials that went into producing the corn and steel, and regard them as commodities

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neither is the labor-theory assumption. If the 'labor theory of value' is a legitimate simplifying assumption, then the 'cotton-theory of value' should have the same status.

Let us assume as before that the constant of proportionality is 2, and let us maintain unchanged the technical relation:

(TC) 20 lbs. cotton + depreciation + 12 hrs.  $\Rightarrow$  20 lbs. yarn

Following Marx, we move to monetary considerations, and assume as before that one can purchase 12 hours of labor for 3s, and that equipment depreciation is 4s. Invoking the 'cotton-theory of value,' we construct the value equation:

(VC) 20 lb. + 8 lb. + 6 lb. = 34 lb.

This tells us the selling price of yarn will be 17s, and so our monetary relation is:

(MC) cost of 20 lb. cotton + 4s + 3s  $\Rightarrow$  17s

From MC it is evident that profit is possible if and only if the cost of twenty pounds of cotton is less than 10s. *But this will be true if and only if the quantity of 'past' cotton ('dead' cotton) embodied in the 20 lbs. of 'living' cotton is less than 20 lbs.* That is to say, if we add to the

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produced in the preceding period. By exactly the same reasoning as before, we conclude that the amount of direct labor expended in that period to produce the raw materials that went into a bushel of corn was the same as the direct labor expended in that period to produce the raw materials that went into a ton of steel. Since we can continue the reduction indefinitely, looking at the direct labor and raw materials that went into producing the raw materials that went into the raw materials, etc., always concluding that the same amount of direct labor went into the predecessors of steel as the predecessors of corn, it follows that the total amount of labor, direct and indirect, must have been the same for both corn and steel.

The same argument can be made, mutatis mutandis, to show that when an equal cotton-organic composition of capital prevails, equal prices entail equal embodiments of direct and indirect cotton.

cotton directly involved in producing a pound of cotton the cotton values of the other inputs, the total will be less than one. Thus the 'fundamental theorem' for cotton.

Does this mean that cotton is exploited? The quick response is 'no, not in an ethically relevant sense, since cotton is a thing, not a person.' But this retort misses the essential point. Strictly speaking, it is not the commodity labor-power that is exploited either, but the *owner* of that commodity, the worker. So the relevant question is whether the owner of cotton, the original supplier, is exploited in his exchange with the capitalist.

Well, consider: if a profit has been made, the cotton dealer received less than 10s for his product. Suppose he received 5s. This 5s, by hypothesis, embodies 10 lbs. of cotton. So the cotton dealer can confront the capitalist: 'I gave you 20 lbs. of cotton, but I received in return a sum of money representing only 10 lbs. I have been cheated. Just as the worker contributed 12 hours of labor and received a wage embodying only 6 hours, I have contributed 20 lbs. of cotton, and received payment embodying only 10 lbs.'

Is it not plain that either both the cotton dealer and the worker have been exploited, or neither have? In either case, since the cotton dealer may be presumed to be a capitalist himself, we cannot maintain that capitalist profit depends on the exploitation of workers and not of other capitalists. Marx's fundamental argument collapses.

Or does it? To pursue this question more deeply, we must confront the formal analysis that suggested corn and cotton exploitation in the first place. For if the formal analysis is non-problematic, then the argument just given is sound.

## II

The conceptual innovation introduced by the mathematical Marxists is disaggregated input-output analysis. One can avoid making assumptions about prices being proportional to values (labor *or* cotton) if the economy is conceived of as a self-contained, self-reproducing mechanism producing  $n$  commodities. One can use linear algebraic techniques to compute directly the labor values of

commodities. One can then compare the labor value of a worker's wage to the number of hours she is required to work.<sup>13</sup> Let me emphasize this, for the point is often unappreciated: mathematical Marxism *drops* the simplifying assumption that prices are proportional to values. That is to say, it *drops* the 'labor theory of value.' As one might expect, the analysis becomes more complex when a simplifying assumption is eliminated.

To illustrate the logic of the procedure, let us consider a simple, two-commodity corn and steel model. The analysis begins with a specification of the technical coefficients  $[a_{ij}]$  and  $[l_i]$ ,  $i, j = 1, 2$ , where  $a_{11}$ ,  $a_{12}$ , and  $l_1$  are the quantities of corn, steel and labor respectively, required to produce a bushel of corn, and  $a_{21}$ ,  $a_{22}$ , and  $l_2$  are the quantities of corn, steel and labor required to produce a ton of steel. This information suffices for the computation of the labor values of corn and steel. If  $x$  and  $y$  are the respective quantities of labor directly and indirectly required to produce a bushel of corn and a ton of steel (i.e., if  $x$  and  $y$  are the labor values of corn and steel respectively), then the following two equations must hold:

$$(*) \quad a_{11}x + a_{12}y + l_1 = x$$

$$a_{21}x + a_{22}y + l_2 = y$$

This system of two linear equations in two unknowns is readily solved.

If we wish to compute the labor value of labor power, we must add a further specification. We must specify a worker's consumption. For simplicity, let us assume that all workers consume (during a production period)  $b_1$  bushels of corn and  $b_2$  tons of steel. In this case, the labor value of labor power is  $b_1x + b_2y$ . To determine whether or not workers are exploited, we need one additional piece of information. We need to know how many days a worker is required to work during a production period.<sup>14</sup> If we let this num-

13 One can also calculate equilibrium prices, and investigate the conditions under which prices will be proportional to labor values, but that is a separate matter.

14 Since I am using corn and steel, it's natural to think of the production period as a year, and the units of labor as person-days. In Marx's example, the produc-

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ber be  $k$ , the Fundamental Theorem asserts that capitalist profit is possible if and only if  $b_1x + b_2y < k$ .

Now, suppose we repeat the steps in the above analysis, but switch the roles of labor and corn. This idea, original with the mathematical Marxists, is strongly suggested by the formalism of the analysis.

Since a worker requires a consumption bundle  $(b_1, b_2)$ , we shall regard labor as well as steel as produced commodities, and allow corn to be the numeraire. We can let  $w$  and  $z$  be the corn values of steel and labor respectively, and compute them by solving:

$$(**) a_{21} + a_{22}w + 1z = w$$

$$b_1 + b_2w = kz$$

So long as corn is a 'basic' commodity, this set of equations will have a unique solution.

The corn-value of corn, i.e., the quantity of corn embodied in a bushel of corn, can now be calculated. It is simply  $a_{11} + a_{12}w + 1z$ . The Fundamental Theorem of this system asserts that capitalist profit is possible if and only if  $a_{11} + a_{12}w + 1z < 1$ ; that is, if and only if corn is 'exploited.' The conclusion usually drawn is some version of Roemer's: 'Marx was completely wrong about one thing. Labor power as a commodity is not unique in its magical property of producing more value than it embodies . . . !'

### III

I contend that there is a basic flaw in this analysis that vitiates entirely its critical thrust. Compare (\*) with (\*\*). The former, which determine the labor values of corn and steel, are *technical* equations. At a given stage in the development of productive forces, a certain

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

tion period is one day, and the units of labor person-hours. Thus in our analysis, requiring more days of labor during a production period corresponds formally to lengthening the working day in Marx's model.



amount of corn, steel and labor are required for a given output. In the Marxian analysis a *social* factor (worker consumption) is then introduced. This, of course, is not wholly independent of technical considerations. Workers must consume at least enough to survive and no more than the system can maximally produce. But within these limits which are quite wide in most capitalist societies considerations other than technical must operate to specify this variable.

At least as technically indeterminate is the variable  $k$ . Workers must work long enough to reproduce the products they consume, but how much longer than that is limited only by the physical need for sufficient rest to insure the reproduction of labor power.<sup>15</sup>

In the system (\*\*), quite unlike (\*), social and technical conditions are not distinguished. The social variables  $b_1$  and  $k$  appear in the equations that determine corn-values. The corn-values of neither steel nor labor, let alone corn, can be calculated from technical conditions alone. The 'exploitation' of corn is thus a *social*, not a *technical*, phenomenon, and one, moreover, that depends on how long workers work relative to the *labor-value* of their consumption.

To see this more clearly, consider the effect of varying  $k$  while holding technical conditions and worker consumption constant. If we reduce  $k$  from a given level down to the minimum value required for workers to reproduce their own consumption (including replacements for machinery depreciation and raw materials), the degree

<sup>15</sup> The distinction drawn here between technical and social conditions may be regarded as the analogue in Marx's economic theory of the famous distinction in his historical materialism between forces and relations of production. In neither case is distinction meant to imply independence. I noted that both worker consumption and the length of the working day are constrained by technical conditions. Similarly, as Marx himself has pointed out, a society's choice of technology is determined in part by social conditions. (For example, choices of technology might be markedly different in societies of comparable development depending on how much voice the direct producers have in determining the choices and on how easy it is for decision makers to shift negative externality costs onto others.) Despite the interconnection of the technical and the social, the distinction is important, quite as important for Marx's theory of exploitation as the forces/relations distinction is for his theory of history.

of worker exploitation drops to zero. How much  $k$  can be reduced to achieve this effect is precisely what is measured by the difference between the labor-value of labor power ( $b_1x + b_2y$ ) and the labor output  $k$ .<sup>16</sup> But as the number of days workers are required to work declines, so too does the rate of *corn*-exploitation, it too reaching zero when the workers work only long enough to reproduce their consumption. Conversely, if capitalist power is able to increase  $k$  without compensating workers with more consumption, then workers and also corn are more intensely exploited.<sup>17</sup>

Let us consider this matter from another angle. In Marx's argument the move from  $(T_L, V_L, M_L)$  to  $T^*_L, V^*_L, M^*_L$  reveals in dramatic fashion the exploitation of the worker. What does the analogous move from  $(T_C, V_C, M_C)$  reveal? Suppose in the  $M_C$  equation the cost of cotton were 10s, so that 'our capitalist stares in astonishment. The value of the product is exactly equal to the value of the capital advanced.' What can be done? What is the analogue of our capitalist's earlier insistence that the worker work longer than would be required if she merely had to replace the labor embodied in the goods her wage will buy? The answer is by no means obvious if we stay within the framework within which the problem is posed, i.e., the 'cotton theory of value.' But from the perspective

16 If such a reduction were to occur over time, industries would not all decline proportionally, since capitalist consumption need not have the same structure as worker consumption. The adjustment process would entail some shifting of the workforce, but in the end each worker would work only  $b_1x + b_2y$  days per year.

17 It is easy to prove that in the two-sector model corn exploitation varies directly with  $k$ . If we differentiate (\*\*\*) with respect to  $k$  and solve, we get  $dw/dk = 12z/[12b^2 - k(1-a^2)]$  and  $dz/dk = z(1-a^2)/[12b^2 - k(1-a^2)]$ . Consider the denominator  $12b^2 - k(1-a^2)$ . The quantity  $b^2$  represents the quantity of steel one worker will consume during a production period, while  $k(1-a^2)/12$  represents the net output of one worker in the steel industry during that period. Clearly, if there is to be any surplus in the economy, the latter quantity must be larger than the former, which implies that  $dw/dk$  and  $dz/dk$  are both negative. But if  $w$  and  $z$  both vary inversely with  $k$ , so does the corn-value of corn,  $a_1w + a_2z$ . Hence, if the corn-value of corn decreases when  $k$  increases, the degree of corn exploitation increases, and vice-versa.

of Section II the answer is clear. If both technology and worker consumption remain fixed, there is no *analogous* move for the capitalist to make; he must make the *same* move. He must insist that the worker work longer than is required to replace the labor embodied in the goods her wage will buy. This (when done by all capitalists as must be assumed if the system is to be in equilibrium) will produce a positive rate of labor exploitation, a positive rate of profit, and hence also a positive rate of 'cotton exploitation.' The cotton-value of cotton will become less than one.<sup>18</sup>

We must conclude that the exploitation of labor explains the 'exploitation' of cotton or corn. Better, we should conclude that 'exploitation' is a misleading misnomer when applied in this context to commodities other than labor power. Let me not be unclear. I am not contending that 'exploit' in the non-normative sense of 'using effectively for a particular end' should never be applied to such commodities. But I am contending that 'exploitation of x' is inappropriate as a description of the general situation in which the x-value of a unit of x is less than one.<sup>19</sup>

Nor is it appropriate to assert, simply because the x-value of x is less than one, that x has 'produced more value than it embodies.' The equation  $b_1x + b_2y < k$  can be fairly interpreted as revealing

18 There are two other developments that would allow for our capitalist to make a profit, though each has been excluded by hypothesis. If workers' real wages could be reduced without reducing the length of the working day, the equilibrium profit rate would become positive. It would also become positive if a new technology were introduced in a basic-goods industry that reduced the labor-value of a unit output. In each of these cases the correlation with exploitation is evident. In either case, the worker would be compelled to work longer than is necessary to replace the goods her wages will buy. In both cases the cotton-value of cotton would drop to less than one.

19 Even when x is labor-power, 'exploitation' does not follow simply from the fact that more labor extracted from that commodity than is embodied in it. As Marx makes clear, non-democratic compulsion is implicated in this state of affairs: in the historical process that transformed labor-power into a commodity in the first place; in the maintenance of property relations that restrict workers access to means of production; in the mechanisms of supervision that insure a 'fair' day's work for a wage.

that workers contribute more labor to society during a production period than society contributes to them. The exercise of their labor-power produces more value than is embodied in the products they consume. The equation  $a_1l + a_2w + l_1z < 1$  admits of no analogous interpretation. The equation states that the amount of corn that went into producing a bushel of corn including that which was consumed by the direct producers is less than a bushel. What the equation entails (but does not show explicitly) is that this is so because workers work longer than they would have to if they were to merely reproduce their own consumption.

The feature that distinguishes labor power from all other input commodities is the fact that *technical conditions* do not determine the mass of use-values (days of labor) that the capitalist receives when he purchases a unit of the commodity (a worker for the production period). Given a specified technology, when a bushel of corn is purchased as an input for a particular industry, the quantity of other inputs and the quantity of output is determined. When a unit of labor power is purchased (e.g., a worker for the production period), the quantity of other inputs required and the quantity of output remains indeterminate, a 'circumstance [that] is, without doubt, a piece of good luck for the buyer.'<sup>20</sup>

#### IV

I have argued that one should not speak of the 'exploitation' of corn or of cotton when referring to a state of affairs that bears a certain formal resemblance to the exploitation of workers. But what about the exploitation of the corn or cotton *owner*? Recall our disgruntled cotton dealer, who claims to have been exploited because he contributed to society 20 lbs. of cotton, and yet received in return the equivalent of only 10 lbs.

The above analysis clarifies this case and resolves the difficulty. The analysis demonstrates that the discrepancy between what the

cotton dealer 'contributes' and what he receives is due to the fact concealed when the cotton theory of value is assumed that workers work longer hours than would be necessary were the economy geared to simply reproducing their consumption. If workers were able to reduce the length of the working day to that minimum, the discrepancy between actual cotton and 'embodied' cotton would vanish.

So as to remove any lingering doubts, it is worth considering once again our cotton case. Our cotton dealer complains because he has exchanged 20 lbs. of 'living' cotton for 10 lbs. of 'embodied' cotton. Let us look more closely at the 'embodiments' of this 'embodied' cotton. If we assume our cotton dealer is a capitalist, then his enterprise must have earned the same rate of profit and had the same cotton-organic composition of capital as the yarn industry,  $5/12$  and  $7/5$  respectively. Thus his investment of the preceding period, which resulted in 20 lbs. of cotton, must have been 3.5s (which expanded to 5s), and it must have been apportioned 1.5s to purchase cotton and 2s to purchase other inputs. Let us assume, for simplicity, that the only other input was labor. In this case, since we know both the price of cotton and the wage rate, we can reconstruct the technical relation: 6 lbs. cotton + 8 hrs. labor  $\rightarrow$  20 lbs. cotton. Thus we see that 8 hours of labor produced a net output of 14 lbs. of cotton for which the worker received 2s = 4 lbs. of cotton.

We now grasp the 'secret' of the cotton-value discrepancy. The cotton dealer has received a sum for his 20 lbs. of cotton that 'embodies' only 10 lbs. But *part* of what the cotton capitalist perceives as 'embodied' cotton (in this case 4 of the 10 pounds) is *a worker* who, by working, transformed 6 lbs. of cotton into 20. The capitalist gained control over this worker by advancing her 4 lbs. of 'embodied' cotton as a wage, for which she returned to the capitalist a net 14 lbs. of actual cotton. Therein lies the discrepancy between 'dead' and 'living' cotton. There has indeed been exploitation but *not* of the cotton dealer.

By way of conclusion, let me stress that even at the level of formal analysis the commodity labor-power is decidedly distinct from all other commodities. Whereas the production coefficients  $a_{ij}$  and  $l_i$  may be presumed to be technical coefficients, the consumption

coefficients  $b_i$  and the length of the working day may not be.<sup>21</sup> When the formal analysis ignores the distinction between technical and social determination, the source of capitalist profit is obscured. One is then tempted to say with Elster that 'the central fact underlying these [fundamental] theorems is that profit [is] possible only because man can tap external sources of raw materials and energy.'<sup>22</sup> This is wrong. To be sure, there must be a certain fruitfulness in nature for the human race to survive. But the conditions under which a portion of the difference between what we are capable of producing and what we need for survival becomes transformed into capitalist profit are not those technical conditions associated with the beneficence of nature, but those social conditions associated with the historical emergence of a most peculiar commodity, one that is 'a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself.'<sup>23</sup>

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21 Of course, at the *purely* formal level, that of the mathematical symbolism, one cannot distinguish the  $a_{ij}$ 's, say, from the  $b_i$ 's. But the moment an economic interpretation is proposed the technical/social distinction becomes intelligible.

22 Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, 141

23 My thanks to Robert Paul Wolff, Richard Schmitt, Julius Sensat, Drew Christie and Paul Wendt for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

## An Alternative to 'Distributive' Marxism: Further Thoughts on Roemer, Cohen and Exploitation\*

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I Introduction: 'Social' Marxism vs. 'Distributive' Marxism

G.A. Cohen and John Roemer, two of the most influential of the 'Analytic Marxists,' have argued convincingly that the Marxian concept of *exploitation* must include *injustice* as part of its definition. 'Exploitation' is more like 'murder' which includes injustice in its very meaning, than like 'killing' which describes a fact which is often unjust but need not be. 'Forced extraction of unpaid or surplus labor,' then, is not sufficient for exploitation. The extraction must be unjust to be exploitative. Otherwise we would have to call it exploitation if people were forced to labor without pay as just punishment, or if people selected by lottery were drafted to fight a defensive war and provided no more than subsistence for their trouble, or if initiators of an unjust war were forced to labor to repair the damages they had caused.

Naturally, we could stipulate that exploitation is a technical descriptive term, meaning only the extraction of unpaid labor or the

\* I am grateful to G.A. Cohen for his generous and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

like, with no whiff of moral judgment. But this is an invitation to misunderstanding. The term 'exploitation' is simply too hot for such a use. Even if we say that we are using it in the cool way it is used with respect to natural resources, we suggest something more than a neutral description, because using people as if they were merely natural resources (that is, with no concern for their needs or wishes) is already heavily freighted with connotations of injustice. The wisest course, then, is to accept that 'exploitation' is a normative term that includes injustice in its very meaning. I didn't fully understand this when I wrote 'Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen,'<sup>1</sup> so this essay amends that (see especially Section II, below). Nonetheless, I think the basic thrust of that essay its critique of attempts to treat exploitation as primarily a distributive matter remains correct, and I shall try to show that in this essay.

Though their starting point is correct, Roemer and Cohen end up with a kind of 'distributive' Marxism that I think is neither warranted by their arguments nor true to the spirit of Marxian theory. What I am calling 'distributive' Marxism is comprised of three elements (Roemer is on record as believing all three; Cohen believes the first two): (1) The injustice in exploitation is ultimately a distributive injustice; it is the manifestation of an unjust distribution of assets. (2) Force is not essential to exploitation; it can occur where people have acceptable alternatives from which to choose. (3) Exploitation need not occur in production; it can occur in exchange, say between people who trade as equivalents products that required different amounts of labor-time. There is a link though short of entailment between the three elements: taking force out of exploitation and exploitation out of production supports the treatment of exploitation as a distributive matter by eliminating those features that would mark it as a distinctive social relation, that is, a social relation characterized by the subjugation of producers by nonproducers.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Reiman, 'Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 16, 1 (Winter 1987) 3-41



In defending a 'social' Marxism against the distributive Marxism of Roemer and Cohen, I shall be arguing for a view of exploitation that sees it first as a matter of the social relation just indicated. Corresponding to the three elements of distributive Marxism, 'social' Marxism holds: (1) The injustice in exploitation is ultimately a social injustice; it is constituted by an unjust social relation, namely, the subjugation of producers by nonproducers. (2) Force is essential to exploitation of the Marxian sort (there may be other forms of exploitation that can occur without force). (3) Exploitation (of the Marxian variety) occurs only in production, and as something built into the ongoing production system rather than as an occasional aberration. Before proceeding, I shall sketch briefly the picture that results from these three elements, by commenting on each in order:

(1) That the injustice in exploitation is ultimately a social injustice means that it is measured against a social relation that is taken as ideal. I call this social relation, the 'ideal of equal sovereignty,' and it holds roughly that individuals should have equal and maximum power over their own destinies, and equal and minimum power over others' destinies. I call this a *social* ideal to distinguish it from an ideal of justice in the distribution of property, one that takes a certain distribution of assets as the ultimate injustice in exploitation. Note that I am using both 'social' and 'distributive' in restricted senses. The ideal of equal sovereignty could be understood as an ideal distribution of power, and the ideal property distribution is, after all, social in the sense that it represents a social practice, is backed up with social force, and so on. By 'distributive,' I refer strictly to distribution of things or property. By 'social,' I mean to point to the fact that it is a particular power relationship between people that is at issue in the injustice of exploitation, rather than a particular distribution of things among people. Further, since I am speaking of what the injustice in exploitation is ultimately, 'social' Marxism is compatible with the view that exploitation is due to unjust distribution of property *as long as the distribution of property is held to be unjust because it causes a violation of the ideal of equal sovereignty*. In these terms, my disagreement with Cohen and Roemer is not that the direction they have taken is wrong, but that they haven't taken it far enough.

(2) I contend that there is a general sense of exploitation that is broadly equivalent to any unreciprocal (and unjust) advantage taken

of another person and that there is a special Marxian sense. I claim that one distinguishing element of the Marxian sense is that it necessarily includes force. One reason for keeping force in the Marxian sense is that force is a distinctive feature of all three modes of production that Marx calls exploitative classical slavery, feudal serfdom, and capitalist wage-labor.

(3) By holding that Marxian exploitation occurs in production and systematically, I mean to emphasize that it is workers' labor and not merely their products that are subject to the power of the nonproducers, and that this relationship is built into the ongoing functioning of the production system. By speaking of power over the workers' labor rather than their products, I am not referring to the nonproducers' actual dominion (sometimes called 'supervision') over the worker in the workplace. I mean rather to suggest that merely stealing the products of someone's prior labor is not enough to count as exploitation of the Marxian sort. Exploitation can occur by means of forcing workers (who work without supervision) to give up some of their product to nonproducers as in the case of a serf who must give his lord some quantity of grain on a regular basis. But this must happen as part of an ongoing system, such that the worker can be described *at the time of his working* as being forced to work for the nonproducers. This is what I understand by Marxian exploitation occurring 'only in production and systematically.' One reason for including this in the Marxian sense of exploitation is that it, too, is a distinctive feature of slavery, serfdom and wage-labor.<sup>2</sup> Note, further, that as a systematic feature of production, Marxian exploitation is of a class by a class, affecting individual members of classes in differing degrees. This accords with the fact that Marx refers to the rate of exploitation as equivalent to the ratio of surplus value to the value of labor-power, while recognizing that actual wages will vary above and below the value of labor-power.

<sup>2</sup> In response to an early draft of this paper, G.A. Cohen has pointed out to me that Marx calls a serf exploited who must pay rent in kind to his feudal lord, though he works to produce the in-kind payment not under the control or supervision of the lord (personal communication, August 8, 1988).

As with the elements of distributive Marxism, the three elements of social Marxism are also linked: by including force in exploitation and restricting exploitation to the system of production, we emphasize that, in exploitation of the Marxian variety, the producer's labor his very body-in-action is systematically subject to the power of the nonproducer, and thus we focus on a distinctive and ongoing human social relation. Social Marxism comports with the fact that all three modes of production which Marxism calls exploitative classical slavery, feudal serfdom, and capitalist wage-labor are characterized both by force and by systematic ongoing power of nonproducers over the labor, and not just the products, of the producers. Moreover, it is in line with Marx's repeated attempts to show that what appear to be relations between things, or between people and things, are best understood as relations between people and that these in turn are best understood as relations between classes rather than relations between individuals. For these reasons, it seems to me that if I could show even that 'social' Marxism is as plausible as 'distributive' Marxism, the former would be a more attractive choice for Marxists than the latter.

Accordingly, I shall devote most of this essay to arguing that a plausible social interpretation of Marxism and of Marxian exploitation exists. In Section II, 'A Marxian Conception of *Social* Justice,' I present the ideal of *social* justice that I call 'the ideal of equal sovereignty,' which accounts for the injustice in exploitation understood as a social relation. I shall suggest how this ideal provides grounds for analyzing economic systems in light of a moral version of the labor theory of value which I call 'the labor theory of *moral* value,' and I shall show how the ideal renders appropriate the inclusion of force in the Marxian concept of exploitation and the restriction of exploitation to relations of production. In the course of this discussion, I shall say something about where the notion of ideology fits in, and I shall comment on Cohen's objections to basing the charge of exploitation on the labor theory of (economic) value. In Section III, 'Roemer and Cohen on Exploitation and Force,' I shall show that the arguments of Roemer and Cohen against the necessity of including force in the Marxian concept of exploitation do not preclude this inclusion. We shall see that the ideal of equal sovereignty provides grounds for holding that private ownership of means

of production is an injustice. Distributive qualms about capitalism turn out to be valid, but neither primary nor necessary for exploitation.

Sections II and III, then, carry the main weight of my argument. They show that a plausible social interpretation of Marxism and Marxian exploitation is available, for those who want it. In Section IV, 'Social Marxism and Socialists' Mistakes,' I go on to offer some positive arguments for keeping force in the definition of the Marxian concept of exploitation and for thinking of that exploitation as a feature of production. I contend that the elimination of force from the definition leaves exploitation insufficiently distinguishable from voluntary sharing (thus blunting the unfairness that Roemer and Cohen agree is necessary to exploitation); and, that the expansion of exploitation beyond the production setting leaves exploitation insufficiently distinguishable from other forms of injustice, such as theft or swindling (thus undermining the specificity of the Marxian charge). I close by presenting an alternative to the explanation of the mistakes of contemporary socialist planners that Roemer offers in his reply to my work.

## II A Marxian Conception of Social Justice

Both Roemer and Cohen contend that exploitation depends for its injustice on the injustice of the distribution of property which is its background. In extracting more labor-time from the worker than he gives the worker back, the capitalist exploits the worker because this unequal exchange of labor is made possible by the capitalist's *unjust* ownership of means of production. Roemer goes so far as to defend what he calls the 'property relations' definition of exploitation. The latest version of this definition is to be found in Roemer's 'Second Thoughts on Property Relations and Exploitation' (in the present volume); but I am more concerned with the argument for it, which is roughly the following:

Suppose that Arthur owns a machine and Betty owns nothing but the muscles in her back. As a result, Arthur is able (as the outcome of a free bargain) to get Betty to work for him and pay her a wage out of what he gets by selling the products she made on

his machine, while keeping a profit for himself. The result is an unequal labor exchange. Betty gets back from Arthur wages representing less labor-time than she worked for Arthur because Arthur keeps some of the products of that labor-time as profit. Since Betty's wage represents her own labor-time, she gets no labor-time from Arthur. Accordingly, Betty gives more labor-time to Arthur than she gets from him. But this in itself is not sufficient to say that Betty is exploited. If Arthur rightly owns his machine, then he gives something to Betty (use of his machine) in return for the excess labor-time she gives him, and there seems to be no exploitation. If, however, Arthur's ownership is unjust, then he has benefited at Betty's expense because of his possession of an unfair advantage and that seems clearly to be exploitative.

The general point here is that if people voluntarily agree (in the normal sense of these terms) to exchange unequal amounts of labor, this need not imply anything morally wrong, and thus it cannot bear the weight of the charge of exploitation (understood normatively). And if they voluntarily agree to exchange unequal amounts of labor because one has greater productive assets *that he justly owns* (say, because he has accumulated them by painful sacrifices and savings that others could have undertaken but didn't), there is still nothing morally wrong and thus still nothing that can bear the weight. If, however, people voluntarily bargain to exchange unequal amounts of labor because one has greater productive assets *that he is not justly entitled to*, then he takes unfair advantage of the other in a way that supports the charge of exploitation. And this point is not only Roemer's. G.A. Cohen agrees that exploitation is a normative term that depends on the pre-existence of an unjust distribution of productive assets.<sup>3</sup> Then, to say that capitalism is exploitative, we shall need a theory of distributive justice according to which private ownership of the means of production by a minority of mem-

<sup>3</sup> 'If it is morally all right that capitalists do and workers do not own means of production, then capitalist profit is not the fruit of exploitation. . . . The question of exploitation therefore resolves itself into the question of the moral status of capitalist private property' (G.A. Cohen, 'More on Exploitation and the Labour Theory of Value,' *Inquiry* 26, 3 [1983], 316).

bers of society is unjust. This in turn has led Cohen and others on an illuminating but (so far) inconclusive search for answers to questions about whether or when people can be said to own themselves and/or the natural world outside.<sup>4</sup>

In the remainder of this section, I shall argue that it is at least as plausible to base the injustice of exploitation on a conception of *social* justice as on a conception of distributive justice. By a 'conception of *social* justice,' I mean one that takes some relationship between human beings as its ideal and judges social, political and economic arrangements in light of their contribution to or obstruction of the realization of that ideal. I shall not argue that the ideal I put forth here was in fact Marx's, though I think it was. It is too late in the day for attempts to 'prove' what was in the master's mind by appeal to scriptural sources. More important is that this ideal is compatible with Marxian theory. Indeed, I think that it is more compatible with Marxian theory than the distributivism of Roemer and Cohen, that it brings together many diverse aspects of Marxism in a simple way, and I hope that it will resonate with the moral intuitions that brought many to Marxism in the first place.

The ideal I have in mind derives from what Kant called 'the universal law of justice: act externally in such a way that the free use of your will is compatible with the freedom of everyone according to a universal law.'<sup>5</sup> This law places human freedom atop the hierarchy of moral values. To turn this into a conception of *social* justice, we express it as an ideal relationship between human beings, namely, that individuals should stand to one another as *equal sovereigns*. I take this to signify two things: (1) that every adult should be as little subject to the power of others as is feasible (in light of the fact

4 See Cohen's 'Self-Ownership, World-Ownership, and Equality,' in F. Lucash, ed., *Justice and Equality Here and Now* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986), 103-35; and 'Self-Ownership, World-Ownership, and Equality, Part II,' in E. Paul et al., eds., *Marxism and Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell 1986), 77-96. See also, Hillel Steiner, 'The Natural Right to the Means of Production,' *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977) 41-9.

5 Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, J. Ladd, trans. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1965), 35

that there are some things to be achieved by acting as a group that are so valuable as to justify some exercise of power over individuals); and (2) that no adult should have more power over others than they have over him (except where voluntarily delegated and effectively controlled by those subject to it). This ideal is socially *egalitarian*, in aiming to equalize relations of power (not distributively egalitarian, however, since it doesn't directly insist on equal distribution of goods or productive assets); *liberal*, in trying to minimize power over others (not libertarian, however, since it doesn't aim or claim to eliminate such power); and *democratic*, in trying to make power over others as far as possible subject to control by those others (not purely majoritarian, however, in that it would limit the scope of the democratic majority's power over any adult).

Marxists will understandably suspect that this conception of social justice is incomplete. Surely something must be said about the distribution of things (goods or productive assets); and place must be found for other characteristic Marxian concerns, such as the elimination of alienation of individuals from each other, the replacement of stultifying drudge-work with work that provides greater possibility of creativity and self-actualization, and so on. I cannot here respond in detail to such suspicions, but two points are worth noting:

First of all, the conception of *social* justice here defended is not indifferent to the distribution of things; it judges distributions by how they contribute to or block the realization of the ideal of equal sovereignty. Second, the ideal of equal sovereignty is not put forth as a complete moral ideal. It is the keystone of a conception of justice, that is, a theory of what people are entitled to by right, entitled to require of their fellows, even to force from their fellows. With respect to the other features of a full Marxian ideal—elimination of alienation, flowering of human sociality and creativity, and maybe even broadly equal distribution of things—social Marxism takes seriously the optimistic beliefs about human nature that Marxists tend to hold: It assumes that, once people were no longer subject to the disproportionate power of others and once they were no longer forced to serve others or in need of rationalizing (or disguising) the fact that others were forced to serve them, people would freely and naturally act in ways that were unalienated, social, creative, and dis-

tributively egalitarian. This, by the way, seems to me to represent the part that is true in the view of those who think that the Marxian ideal is 'beyond justice.'<sup>6</sup>

If we take Marxism as moved by the ideal of equal sovereignty, we can say that Marx's crucial discovery about capitalism was that it contained a new, and in some ways, invisible form of unequal power over people: private ownership of means of production, which Marx held to be coercive even when it did not seem so. Capitalism, he wrote, is a system of 'forced labour no matter how much it may seem to result from free contractual agreement.'<sup>7</sup> On my view, then, Marx was after all an Enlightenment liberal who differed from other liberals *not in their commitment to individual human freedom, but in their notion of what constituted a threat to that freedom*. As Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, 'Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; *all that it does* is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation.'<sup>8</sup>

Along with feudal serfdom and classical slavery, Marx saw capitalism as a system of forced labor. What distinguishes the three is the mechanism by means of which the force operates. In slavery and feudalism it is essentially overt direct violence, while in capitalism, by contrast, the 'dull compulsion of economic relations' enforces the extraction of labor and '[d]irect force, outside economic conditions is used only . . . exceptionally' (C, I, 737; and C, III, 791-2). Since serfs owned their own means of production (having traditional rights to land on the manor, and possessing rudimentary tools of their own), they could only be gotten to work for the lord (without pay) by direct force. Since workers in capitalism do not own means of produc-

6 See, for example, Robert C. Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (New York: Norton 1970), esp. Ch. 2; and Allen E. Buchanan, *Marx and Justice: The Radical Critique of Liberalism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield 1982), esp. Ch. 4.

7 Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers 1967), vol. III, 819. Hereafter, references to *Capital* will be cited in the text as 'C' followed by the volume number and the page number.

8 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1967), 99; emphasis mine.



tion, they can be forced in a different way. Because access to means of production is access to the means of producing a living at all, those who own means of production have enormous leverage over those who do not. Those who do not must work for those who do in order to make a living (that is, to go on living) at all.

Moreover, the nonowners must offer something to the owners to make it worth the latter's while to hire them. Since the nonowners have nothing to offer but their labor, they must labor some for the owners for no other compensation than that of being allowed to work at all. Marx writes: 'Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production' (C, I, 235). Simply by owning means of production, one has the power to get some of the laborer's product without giving him any of one's own labor for it in return. And, with private ownership of means of production secured, all this can happen as the outcome of a free agreement, since it is then clearly in the worker's best interest to offer the additional labor voluntarily in exchange for the chance to earn a living. Thus, the wage-worker 'is compelled to sell himself of his own free will' (C, I, 766).

Here is the novelty of capitalism. Overt violence is needed only to protect private ownership. Once that is secure, no more violence is needed to force the worker to work for the capitalist on the latter's terms. The very structure of property ownership itself supplies the force by putting the worker in a position in which he has no real choice but to sell himself of his own free will.<sup>9</sup> And, once the structure of property ownership becomes so much a part of the social landscape that it is taken for granted, the force is not seen at all. All that remains is the vivid picture of workers freely agreeing to work for capitalists. And I think that what Marx called ideology is, in capitalism, little more than the tendency of the force built into the structure of property relations to become invisible.

<sup>9</sup> I develop the notion of 'structural force' in 'Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism,' 11-18 (see n. 1, above).

Against the backdrop of the ideal of equal sovereignty, this tendency gives just what we expect from ideology: It covers over the way the existing system undermines the ideal human social relationship. And it does it without requiring that ideology be simply a pack of lies. Ideology deceives us, not in the way that false propaganda does, but in the way that the five blindmen are deceived about the elephant: Each describes accurately enough the part that he touches and goes astray when he assumes that the rest is more of the same and takes that part for the whole. The contractual agreement between worker and capitalist is (in a valid enough sense) free (no violence from either party is allowed). Capitalist ideology results when this situation is generalized so that all social relations in capitalism appear as the outcome of free agreements. Often enough, ideology is not untruth, but partial truth, in both senses of 'partial.'<sup>10</sup>

Consider now how a moral version of the labor theory of value functions in this account. Assume that Marx is moved above all by the ideal of equal human sovereignty and that he sees that a society can violate this ideal by means of agreements that are, for all intents and purposes, voluntary. How shall we determine whether such violation is occurring? We cannot simply look, since what we see will be free agreements in which people seem to be exercising their sovereignty. We cannot simply ask the participants, since they will likely experience the terms of their employment as the result of their uncoerced consent. (When one points out to American workers that though they claim they are free they spend most of their waking life taking orders, they almost invariably respond by saying that no one forced them to take their jobs which is quite literally true.) It seems that a promising strategy for getting beneath these surface experiences would start by trying to determine the proportions in which people end up working for each other as a result of

<sup>10</sup> On ideology in Marxian theory, see my 'The Marxian Critique of Criminal Justice,' *Criminal Justice Ethics* 6, 1 (Winter/Spring 1987), 30-50. Note that there, as well as here, I mean by ideology, the basic and global ideology that capitalism seems naturally to carry with it. I am not therefore referring to those specific belief-systems (e.g., racism or religious otherworldliness) that may historically accompany capitalism and lend their support to its preservation.

their apparently free agreements. This is what looking at an economic system through the moral version of the labor theory of value does.

With the moral version of the labor theory of value, we resolve all products in the economy into the actual labor-time that went into them. When we do this, any good produced by one person and owned by another becomes an amount of the first person's labor-time put at the disposal of the second, and economic distributions are seen as systems of the proportions in which people work for one another.<sup>11</sup>

Not only does this outflank problems about the labor theory as a theory of price formation, it answers those who think that the selection by Marx of labor as *the* source of value (and particularly as the single input that produces more value than its own value) is dubious. Labor-time is appropriate for the simple reason that time and energy are all one has to realize one's own purposes. If we are worried that a seemingly free economic system is violating the ideal of equal sovereignty, then it is above all important that we determine how much of people's time and energy is directly subject to their own purposes and how much of it is harnessed to the service of the purposes of others. Labor-time may not be the correct measure of market value. But, given the theory of social justice here presented, it is the correct way to measure the *moral* value of an economic system and the political-legal system that supports it. Hence, 'the labor theory of *moral* value.'

With the labor theory understood in these terms, it is not limited to capitalism, not limited to economic systems in which production goes on for market value. Any economic system can be viewed as a system of proportions in which people work for one another. When we turn to capitalism, we find that, since capitalists come to own all the products produced in a given day by the whole social labor force, and since only part of the labor force is engaged in producing the goods that workers buy back from capitalists with their wages,

<sup>11</sup> I develop this approach to assessing distributive justice in 'The Labor Theory of the Difference Principle,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, 2 (Spring 1983), 133-59.

it is clear that the class of workers gives more labor-time to the class of capitalists than it gets from them. And this is so even if the criticisms of the labor theory as an economic theory that is, as a theory of what determines the value that produced things have on the market are correct.

Moreover, in view of the ideal of equal sovereignty, we can see why an unequal exchange of labor-time is morally suspect. It is surely plausible that a society of equally sovereign people would be one in which people were working for others in an amount equal to that in which others were working for them. At very least, deviations from equal labor exchanges would require special explanation, while equal exchanges would already be satisfactorily justified by the ideal of equal sovereignty. This accounts for the distributive ideal that Marx attributes to 'the first stage of communism' (what is later identified as socialism), namely, that each worker receives products that took others the same amount of labor-time as he gave in contributing to the social product.<sup>12</sup>

With the labor theory of *moral* value revealing the unequal exchange of labor, and with the ideal of equal sovereignty suggesting that this is morally suspect, we have come part (but only part) of the way to an account of the basis of the normative sense of exploitation. Before proceeding, however, we must address Cohen's objections to using the labor theory of (economic) value as the foundation for the charge of exploitation. Cohen rightly distinguishes a 'popular' understanding of the labor theory from the 'strict' conception. In the popular understanding, the value of things is thought to represent the actual labor that went into them. Then, when capitalists realize surplus value that is, when they receive in the mar-

12 Karl Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Program,' in R. Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton 1978), 530. Actually, Marx holds that the worker will receive back for his labor an amount of goods produced by an equal amount of labor *after deductions* for general costs of administration, public goods (e.g., schools, hospitals), and funds for those unable to work have been made (ibid., 529-30). Since we can think of these deductions as purchasing goods or insurance for everyone, they can be taken as an indirect return to individuals of labor equal to what they contribute, and thus not altering the basic distributive principle of equal labor exchange.

ket the value of the objects produced by their workers, for which their workers have been paid in wage-goods that represent less actual labor than those objects the capitalists can be said (more-or less literally) to have appropriated the actual unpaid labor of workers, and thus to have exploited them. But the popular version is not the real theory, because, among other reasons, Marx recognized that on the popular account, the same good would have greater value the longer it took to make, and thus inefficient labor would produce more value than efficient which is not the case on the market, where the purchaser will not pay one producer more for what he can get from another for less. Hence, what the purchaser will pay is determined, not by the actual labor-time that went into the product, but by the amount of labor-time required on average in the society to produce such goods when they reach the market. This, then, is what the strict version of the labor theory holds. The problem, however, is that on the strict version, value no longer represents actual labor. It represents 'counterfactual labor,' that amount that *would* be socially necessary to produce the good when it comes to market. Thus the appropriation of surplus value is no longer the appropriation of the worker's actual unpaid labor. And then the strict version of the theory seems not to support the charge of exploitation.

I want to make two points about this argument. First, and most important for our purposes, is that even if Cohen's objection is valid it does not undermine the possibility of using what I have called the labor theory of *moral* value as a basis for the charge of exploitation. This is because the moral version of the labor theory says nothing about what determines market value, and because it shares with the 'popular' version of the labor theory of (economic) value reference to *actual* labor-time. It asks that we look at the goods in an economic system in terms of the amount of labor-time that actually went into them as a step toward reaching a judgment about how well or poorly that system is achieving the ideal of equal sovereignty. If one complains that this means that inefficient and slow workers will be more exploited than efficient and speedy ones, the theory takes comfort in the fact that competition tends to press all workers in the direction of the most efficient and thus to eliminate in fact the disparities in exploitation.

My second point takes off from this last remark. Although as a philosopher I feel guilty in saying it, it seems to me that Cohen's objection results from his being too much of a stickler for conceptual clarity. He fails to appreciate the significance of the fact that the actual operation of a capitalist society will keep actual labor-time close enough to socially necessary labor-time (at least in macro terms, that is, in terms of the actual labor-time performed by the whole working class and appropriated by the whole capitalist class which is what is necessary for exploitation as a relation between classes) to support the claim that appropriation of the latter is in fact, though not in concept appropriation of the former. Cohen is aware of the fact that actual and socially necessary labor-time will tend to coincide, but I think he misses its significance. He maintains that even if the two coincide, value is not created by actual past labor but by something else, 'counterfactual' present labor. And thus appropriation of value does not imply appropriation of actual labor. My response is, yes, it doesn't imply it conceptually; but it needn't imply it conceptually it is it, factually. The empirical likelihood of the coincidence of actual and socially-necessary labor-time implies that appropriation of a product measured in terms of the latter will in fact be appropriation of about that much of the former. And that supports the charge of exploitation.

Consider the following roughly analogous situation. Suppose one holds the view that a college diploma rewards students' hard work and talent. Call this the 'popular doctrine.' The popular doctrine is embarrassed by the fact that the college bylaws state that diplomas will be awarded on the basis of test and course grades received from instructors. Call this the 'strict doctrine.' Since it is possible to do hard work with considerable talent and not get the requisite grades, and possible to get the grades though one is lazy and untalented, the strict doctrine is conceptually distinct from the popular one. One might even say that the strict doctrine amounts to the claim that it is not actual work and talent that diplomas reward, but the 'counterfactual work and talent' that *would* have been worth the grades actually received. Does it follow then that the popular doctrine is false?

It seems to me that the proper answer is that the popular doctrine is oversimplified as a description of the process that leads from students' work to their diplomas. But it is nonetheless basically true

that such diplomas reward hard work and talent. It is not true conceptually, but empirically. That is, there exist mechanisms from instructors' integrity to student grievance boards that ensure a general matching of grades with work and talent. And this seems to me to apply to the popular version of the labor theory. Here too, the popular version is oversimplified as a description of the process that leads from labor to value it makes it seem as if each worker pours his quantum of value into a pot that is owned by some capitalist. But it is nonetheless basically true that value represents actual labor, that is, that appropriating objects of value amounts to appropriating roughly that much actual labor-time.<sup>13</sup> It's not true conceptually, but empirically. There exist mechanisms primarily competition that drives relatively slow and inefficient producers out of business that ensure a general matching of value and actual labor. Thus, it seems to me that the labor theory of *economic* value can support the charge of exploitation, even in the face of Cohen's attempt to conceptually clarify it to death. This much noted, I return to consider the implications of the labor theory of *moral* value.

I said above that the labor exchange revealed as unequal by the labor theory of *moral* value and identified as morally suspect by the ideal of equal sovereignty gets us only part of the way to the nor-

<sup>13</sup> It should be obvious that I am assuming here that the only objection to the labor theory of (economic) value is Cohen's objection that it is irrelevant to the charge of exploitation. There are numerous other objections to the theory as an economic theory per se, which I here sidestep primarily by offering instead a labor theory of *moral* value. Cohen, by the way, proposes that the charge of exploitation can rest on the notion that the worker produces *what has* value, without having to hold that the worker produces value itself in proportion to his labor-time. Then, the evident fact that the capitalist appropriates some of the value of the thing the producer has produced and gives the worker less than the value of that thing will combined with the claim that the capitalist's ownership of means of production is unjust support the charge that the worker is exploited. But this seems to me false. If the worker creates what has value, but not the value, it still remains possible that the capitalist's story is true: that the worker is paid the fair value of his work, which happens to be less than the value of the thing he produces. Then it seems that the worker is not taken advantage of even if the capitalist's ownership itself is unjust. A thief who sells me stolen goods (not stolen from me) at a fair price doesn't exploit me.

mative charge of exploitation. Force also is needed. The insistence on force follows from the ideal of equal sovereignty. Since people might freely choose to work for others for more time than those others worked for them (because they are generous or because the others have greater talents or resources), unequal exchange of labor-time might yet be compatible with (indeed an expression of) equal sovereignty. This would at least, presumptively not be the case if people were *forced* to give up more labor-time to others than they got back and that, of course, is what Marx claims about capitalism. Workers are forced because the alternative to the unequal labor exchange is no work, and then no food and no life. 'Your labor or your life!' amounts to an exercise of force no less than 'Your money or your life!' does. This, incidently, enables us to see the advance that the final stage of communism represents for Marx over the first stage. Since the first stage requires that workers get labor-time equal to what they give, it eliminates the unequal labor exchange but not the force. Workers still must work in order to live at the normal standard. The second stage characterized by the famous 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' effectively eliminates the force by cutting the tie between what one gives and what one gets.

Against this account, however, it might be objected that, whatever may have been the case when Marx wrote, people now can probably survive (albeit minimally) on welfare or private charity without working.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that no one is forced to work, and that those who do work do so because they want a higher standard of living than the dole affords. If people are working to get things they want rather than as an alternative to starvation, this is argu-

14 Another objection that might be raised is one that Cohen argues for in 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom,' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, 1 (Winter 1983) 3-33; and 'Are Workers Forced to Sell Their Labor Power?' *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 14, 1 (Winter 1985) 99-105. In these articles, Cohen contends that, as individuals, workers in modern capitalist societies are not forced to sell their labor power since they have the possibility of starting small businesses of their own. I will not take up this objection here since I have already dealt with it in 'Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism' (see n. 1, above).



ably a free choice. This is no easy problem for Marxists, but I think it can be answered along the following lines. Marx, it will be recalled, reached the notion that workers are forced to give more labor-time than they get by comparing the amount of time that workers work with the amount of time it takes to produce the value of labor-power (the goods that can be purchased with a more-or-less average wage). Marx tended to think that this value would be subject to downward pressure, but he did not think that it was equivalent to a mere physical subsistence level. He believed that the value of labor-power had a 'moral' element, representing the prevailing attitudes about a normal standard of living and reflecting the historical situation under which the labor force in a given nation had been formed.<sup>15</sup> Now it seems to me that life below this normal standard of living is sufficiently miserable (even if 'only' subjectively) that to be faced with the alternatives 'do X or live below the normal standard' is to be forced to do X. Then, since welfare and charity are (generally intentionally) set below the normal standard of living, their existence doesn't change the fact that workers are forced to work as the price of living at the normal standard, even if this force is gentler than that which was used in Marx's own time and before.<sup>16</sup>

15 'On the other hand, the number and extent of [the worker's] so-called necessary wants, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilization of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed. In contradistinction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element' (C, I, 171).

16 It might be asked what would be the case if workers were all guaranteed the normal standard of living whether or not they worked, and they continued working for capitalists in order to obtain the things they wanted above the normal standard. Note, first, that this condition is unlikely: Since the normal standard is historical, it has a kind of ratchet quality such that one year's luxury becomes the next year's necessity. The very forces that shape the value of labor power historically work to keep it pretty close to what capitalism is generally able to offer workers. If, however, the condition described did obtain, we might still describe the workers as exploited in the general sense, though no longer in the specific Marxian sense.

Consider now the argument of the distributive Marxists: *If*, the argument runs, capitalists justly own their property, then the capitalists will be offering the workers something that the capitalists have a right to withhold from the workers. Worker and capitalist, then, each offer something they own to the other. It happens that what the worker owns is extra labor and what the capitalist owns is means of production; but as long as each rightly owns what he owns, the trade is fair and not to be thought of as forced. From this it seems to follow that, even if we are agreed that workers give up more labor-time than they get back, we cannot determine whether this is forced *until we first determine the justice of what each owns prior to their agreement*. It is this argument that transforms the Marxian critique of exploitation into a matter of distributive injustice.

Against this argument, the true strength of the ideal of equal sovereignty shows itself. Given the primacy of this ideal, we ask first whether a given system of property leads to violation of equal sovereignty in order subsequently to determine if that system of property is just. We ask whether force is occurring as a step toward determining the justice of ownership. We start from a position of neutrality toward all systems of ownership, and compare systems by whether they force people to work more for others than others work for them. To determine this, we view the system in light of the labor theory of *moral* value, and we take force as existing whenever people must do something, like it or not, to earn enough to live at the normal standard of living. Accordingly, we focus on the relations of production.

If we find that some system works to force unpaid labor (meaning labor that is not requited with at least an equal amount of labor) from some for the benefit of others in production, then it is *presumptively* exploitative. It is *presumptively* exploitative because exploitation includes injustice in its definition, and thus is not occurring when there is no injustice. Forcing unpaid labor from some for the benefit of others is *presumptively* unjust, because it is *presumptively* in violation of the ideal of equal sovereignty. However, as the cases I sketched in the opening paragraph of this essay suggest, some forcing of unpaid labor can be just. If, for example, we understood the ideal of equal sovereignty to licence actions needed to protect societies in which it was achieved, or needed to punish people who vio-

lated it, or needed to repair the damages violators or invaders caused, then it could be just to force unpaid labor toward these ends. And then doing so would not count as exploitation. Without such a showing of justice, however, forced extraction of unpaid labor is exploitation. And, capitalism, since it causes such exploitation, is to that extent unjust as well.

I say that capitalism is 'to that extent unjust' rather than calling it 'flat out unjust,' because I think the question of the overall justice of a social order, such as capitalism, is still more complex than the discussion here suggests, for at least three reasons: First of all, one cannot simply judge the justice of capitalism in light of its economic system without also looking at its other features, for example, the political system that characterizes it. It is possible that violations of the ideal of equal sovereignty in the economic realm are conjoined with enhancement of that ideal in people's personal and political lives, such that all told a given capitalist society realizes the ideal of equal sovereignty better than other possible alternatives. Whether or not this is true of capitalism, its possibility must be considered before rendering judgment on the overall justice of capitalism.

Second, the issue of what alternatives are possible is a tricky one. Marxists sometimes seem to be criticizing capitalism in terms of a socialist or communist alternative they take to be possible now, and sometimes they seem to be criticizing it in light of a socialist or communist alternative that will one day be possible. Marx's criticisms of the utopian socialists show that he believed that socialism only becomes really possible at a certain point in history. If that is true, then, at any point prior to that one, capitalism may be the closest approximation to a just society that is actually possible. Moreover, as Allen Buchanan has pointed out,<sup>17</sup> Marxism has no theory that shows that a socialism that is truly better than say the best available capitalist system is really feasible, and existing socialist states offer little consolation. Here too, capitalism with all its flaws might turn out to be the best that humans can do, and this would modify our judgments about capitalism's overall justice.

17 Allen E. Buchanan, 'Marx, Morality, and History: An Assessment of Recent Analytical Work on Marx,' *Ethics* 98, 1 (October 1987) 118-19

Third, I think that the ideal of equal sovereignty must include in addition to the social relationship of equal maximum power over self and equal minimum power over others the goal of maximizing human power over nature, since this is a condition of making equal sovereignty effective. On Marx's own testimony for example, in the *Communist Manifesto* capitalism is quite prodigious in this regard. But, while capitalism's ability to subdue nature is a proven quantity, socialism's is an open question. And here too considering how much of the technology currently being used in the socialist world was invented in the capitalist world existing socialist nations do not occasion optimism. If we think of the ideal of equal (effective) sovereignty as requiring the maximum possible power over nature combined with the maximum possible achievement of the social relationship of equal sovereignty, then it remains possible that capitalism with its exploitation comes closer to realizing the full (effective) ideal than socialism. And this too must affect our judgments about capitalism's overall justice.<sup>18</sup>

With these admittedly sketchy remarks before us, we can turn to consideration of the views of Roemer and Cohen on exploitation.

<sup>18</sup> I believe that the upshot of considering these varying qualifications on straight application of the ideal of equal sovereignty is that the justice of whole social systems must be tested in light of something like the 'difference principle,' such that a social system is just to the degree to which allocates the social conditions of effective sovereignty either equally, or unequally only so far as this increases the sovereignty of the worst-off persons. I argue for this view in *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press forthcoming 1990). In 'The Labor Theory of the Difference Principle' (see n. 11, above), I try to show how the difference principle interpreted as distributing labor-time can account for the preference for the socialist and the communist standards of distributive justice, given appropriate empirical conditions. Rather than get mired in the details of these arguments in the present paper, however, here I have made my case simply in terms of the social relationship of equal sovereignty and tacked the qualifications on at the end.

### III Roemer and Cohen on Exploitation and Force

In this section, I shall show that Roemer's and Cohen's examples do not prove that force is not a necessary condition of Marxian exploitation, and that they do not prove that such exploitation depends ultimately on distributive injustice. In the following section, I shall take up the positive lessons that can be drawn from the failure of these examples.

In an earlier article, I argued that Roemer's 'property relations' definition of exploitation was excessively distributivist in that it omitted reference to force.<sup>19</sup> In that article I defended the following definition of the Marxian concept of exploitation: 'A society is exploitative when its social structure is organized so that unpaid labor is systematically forced out of one class and put at the disposal of another.' (I would now amend this to read: '. . . unpaid labor is *unjustly and* systematically forced. . . .') Roemer has responded at length in an unpublished manuscript,<sup>20</sup> and briefly in 'Second Thoughts on Property Relations and Exploitation' (in the present volume), arguing that force is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of exploitation. And Cohen has argued the same point in his 'Review of Allen Wood's *Karl Marx*.'<sup>21</sup> In this section, I shall respond first to Roemer's argument (primarily as found in 'Second Thoughts . . .,' but referring where necessary to the more extended discussion in the unpublished work). Then, I shall take up Cohen's argument.

One issue can be easily gotten out of the way. Roemer claims that it is wrong to use 'unpaid labor' in a definition of exploitation since exploitation is not limited to societies that have labor markets. With 'no labor market, no institution for paying labor . . . speaking of unpaid labor is, so to speak, an anachronism.' And he asks rhetorical-

<sup>19</sup> See n. 1, above.

<sup>20</sup> A revised version of this manuscript has since been published: John Roemer, 'What Is Exploitation? Reply to Jeffrey Reiman,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18, 1 (Winter 1989) 90-7

<sup>21</sup> G.A. Cohen, 'Review of Allen Wood's *Karl Marx*,' *Mind* 92, 367 (July 1983) 440-5

ly, 'What meaning is there to "unpaid labor" before a labor market has come into existence?' But this is not the problem that Roemer suggests it is. We don't need to have labor markets to speak meaningfully of unpaid labor. At most, what would be needed would be the practice of paying for anything. With that, we could recognize unpaid labor, even if labor had never been paid for. Is there anyone out there who doesn't know what it means to say that the air he or she is breathing is not paid for (even though no air market yet exists) or, for that matter, that the labor that built the pyramids was unpaid (even though labor markets as we know them did not yet exist)?

To support the claim that force is not a necessary condition of exploitation, Roemer offers the following example: 'Andrea has a big machine, and Bob a small one; I [Roemer] postulate this unequal distribution of the capital stock to be unjust. Bob could produce his subsistence needs on his small machine, but Andrea offers to hire him, to work her machine, at a wage that permits him to earn his subsistence needs, and by expending less labor than he would require were he to use his machine. Her profits from hiring Bob finance her consumption as well. Thus Bob is not forced to work for Andrea, but chooses to, and she lives off his labor. I [Roemer] consider Bob to be exploited; but this verdict depends on the injustice of the initial distribution.' Since Bob could subsist without working for Andrea, he is not forced, and yet Roemer takes him to be exploited. I shall assume that Roemer's judgment would not be altered if 'subsistence' were replaced with 'life at the normal standard of living.' As long as Bob could live this way either by working his own machine or by working for Andrea, I would have to say he is not forced, and thus not exploited in the Marxian sense.

This example appears to require me to choose between saying that Bob is exploited and denying it. But that is not so. I can respond to Roemer's example by saying that I agree that Bob is exploited, but believe that he is not exploited *in the Marxian sense*, since that requires force. Roemer allows the distinction between 'exploitation' *tout court* and 'exploitation in the Marxian sense,' since he uses the latter phrase (in the present volume) and uses the phrase 'an agent is Marxian-exploited' (in the unpublished manuscript). He doesn't recognize that this distinction makes hash of his preferred argument

strategy, which amounts to constructing unusual (generally two-party) examples (of the Andrea-and-Bob sort) and judging whether it seems intuitively right to call them examples of exploitation. Once the distinction between exploitation in general and a more specific Marxian strain is allowed, we cannot be sure whether our intuitions are picking up the former or the latter. (By the way, what's all this reliance on intuitions doing here in the first place? Surely, of all people, Marxists should suspect their intuitions of having been largely shaped to fit the ideological needs of the economic systems in which they have grown up. This suggests a rather cynical interpretation of the distributive drift of analytic Marxism, which I will not pursue.)

The distinction between a general sense of exploitation and a specific Marxian sense allows us to retain the notion that force is a necessary condition of Marxian exploitation, while granting that *some* examples of unforced exchanges are exploitative in the more general sense. In fact, this seems as it should be. Marx was a social theorist, not a moralist. He wasn't after a definition of exploitation that covered both what capitalists do to proletarians *and*, say, what sexist males do to their girlfriends. And Roemer grants that 'in the standard case of capitalism with a proletariat the workers are forced to sell their labor power.' Since force is equally present in the other two cases that Marx was concerned with feudal serfdom and classical slavery there seems plenty of good reason to keep force as a necessary condition in *the Marxian concept of exploitation*.

Roemer contends, further, that force that is, forced extraction of unpaid or surplus labor is not sufficient for exploitation since 'the kind of forcing that property relations induces is not exploitative unless the original distribution of property was unfair.' And in the unpublished manuscript he states that '[w]e require knowledge of the justice of property relations to pass judgment on whether the forcing is bad.' Note how ambiguous the first of these claims is in light of the distinction discussed above. Leaving this aside, consider the second statement, which I take to be the heart of the first. It is surely true that we cannot say that forcing is bad without *some* conception of justice; but, as I tried to suggest in Section I, above, this need not be a theory of the justice of property distribution. Given the conception of *social* justice that I sketched out, we can say that such forcing is always bad, or at least, always prima facie bad, since

it runs against the ideal of equal sovereignty. Then, we can go on to argue that the property relations that give rise to this forcing are bad (at least *prima facie*) because they give rise to it. And if unequal distributions of productive assets do that, we will have an argument for why they are unjust, and not have to postulate it, as Roemer does in the Andrea and Bob example and elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> But it will be because the property relations cause an unjust social relation that they are deemed unjust, not vice versa.

Cohen also uses examples to prove that force is not a necessary condition of exploitation, and that forced extraction of unpaid labor is not a sufficient condition of it. I shall take these up in order. Cohen writes: 'To see that it is not a necessary condition consider a rich capitalist, *A*, who, for whatever reason, voluntarily works for another capitalist, *B*, at a wage which is such that, were *A* a worker, he would count as exploited. On my [Cohen's] view, and also Marx's, *A*, though not forced to work for *B*, or for anyone else, is exploited by *B*.'<sup>23</sup>

I don't think that this example works for Cohen at all. First, and least important, Cohen provides no textual support for his assertion here that Marx's view would coincide with his own. This aside, since Cohen understands exploitation normatively, he must show us the unfairness that *B* visits on *A* in this example and I don't see how he can. Remember that Cohen agrees with Roemer that exploitation only occurs where the exploiter owns something that he is not justly entitled to own. Does assuming that *B* has no right to his capital imply that the terms on which *A* works for him are unfair *to A*? After all, *A* also owns capital unjustly. Thus *B*'s unjust ownership is no injustice *to A*. but since '*B* exploits *A*' entails '*B* is unjust *to A*,' if *B* is not unjust *to A*, then *B* doesn't exploit *A*.

This last point suggests that Cohen has fallen prey to a vagueness in his own conception of the relationship between exploitation

22 '... Roemer appears simply to define stipulatively as "exploitive" any system in which property is not distributed equally. . .' (Buchanan, 'Marx, Morality, and History,' 129).

23 Cohen, 'Review,' 444



and distributive justice. That conception holds that exploitation occurs when the putative exploiter owns property to which he is not justly entitled. But Cohen's example shows that that is not enough. At very least the putative exploiter must own property unjustly in a way that is *unjust to* the putative exploitee. When a capitalist uses unjustly owned means of production as leverage to get surplus labor out of a worker who owns nothing, this gives us exploitation (in the general or the Marxian sense) *because the capitalist's ownership is an injustice to the worker*. Because the capitalist owns something that the worker ought to be able to own (or own the equivalent of), we can say that in appropriating part of the value created by the worker the capitalist treats the worker unfairly. The injustice of his ownership to the worker carries over and becomes the unfairness of his exploitation of the worker. But this doesn't work when the putative exploitee is another capitalist, temporarily and voluntarily slumming in the factory. Then the employer's property even if unjust is not unjust to his new employee, and consequently the terms of their agreement carry no unfairness to that employee. Thus Cohen has not given us an example of exploitation without force.

To prove that forced extraction of unpaid labor is not sufficient for exploitation, Cohen asks us to imagine 'involuntarily unemployed adults with plenty of children to feed who force earners to make modest payments to them, by threatening violence in the streets, or, more fancifully, under a constitution which confers legislative power in welfare matters to unemployed people.'<sup>24</sup> Cohen is confident that his readers not being 'right-wing fanatics' will agree that these unemployed people are not exploiters even though they are forcing the earners to work for them without pay (or other reciprocation). This is presumably because anyone who is not a right-wing fanatic will see that the unemployed are justly entitled to the payments they are forcing. And that is taken to prove that forced extraction of unpaid labor is not sufficient for exploitation unless it reflects a background distributive injustice.

24 Ibid., 445

I don't believe that this example succeeds, for two reasons. Not being a right-wing fanatic, I am prepared to grant that Cohen's unemployed are justly entitled to the payments they are forcing. And since I concede the point that just extraction of unpaid labor is not exploitation, I agree that the unemployed forcers are not exploiters in this case, *if what they were doing was ever potentially exploitation*. That it is not clear that it ever was, is the first reason why I think this example doesn't work. The point is that Cohen doesn't say whether the example is of one-time or ongoing forcing of payments. If we assume that the unemployed in the example were not justly entitled to their payments (suppose they could work but are shirkers), their forcing the employed to make payments to them once (or even once in a while) would be robbery, not exploitation certainly not exploitation in the Marxian sense. To maintain the specificity of the Marxian charge of exploitation, I have insisted that it must include not only forced unpaid labor, but that forced unpaid labor must be part of an ongoing system, such that the workers could be accurately described *at the time of working* as being forced to work for those who get their unpaid labor. It is this that distinguishes 'exploiting workers' from 'robbing the products of their work.' Robbery is, to be sure, a kind of unjust taking from people. But exploitation, at least for Marxists, is a special way of taking unjustly, and failing to distinguish it sharply from other forms like robbery is a serious mistake something like not distinguishing rape from 'theft of services.'

The second reason that I don't think Cohen's example succeeds is the following. I grant that, if Cohen's example were modified so that the unemployed were systematically forcing the employed to work for them (and not merely robbing the employed), as long as the unemployed were still justly entitled to get their payments from the employed, the case would not count as exploitation. But this does not prove that exploitation depends ultimately on distributive injustice. On my view, the unemployed might be justly entitled to those payments (and thus to use force to get them) in order to realize the ideal of equal sovereignty, that is, as a matter of *social* justice. (It is recognition that such exercises of power might be just that led me earlier to characterize the ideal of equal sovereignty as liberal rather than libertarian.) If an ideal of social justice justifies the

unemployed here and acquits them of the charge of exploitation, then Cohen's example does not prove that it is necessarily *distributive* injustice that is required for exploitation.

Neither Roemer's nor Cohen's examples prove that exploitation must be a distributive injustice or that force is not rightly a necessary condition of exploitation in the Marxian sense. This much completes the main part of my argument: A viable alternative to the distributivism of Roemer and Cohen exists for those who want it.

### III Social Marxism and Socialists' Mistakes

In this final section, I try to draw from the lessons of Cohen's and Roemer's examples a positive argument for the wisdom of including force in the Marxian concept of exploitation and for restricting exploitation to relations of production (which I take to include the requirement that it be ongoing and systematic). I close by considering a suggestion of Roemer's about the mistakes of contemporary socialist theorists, and set alongside it the view of those mistakes that follows from social Marxism.

Cohen's first example failed because his employing capitalist, *B*, did no injustice to his working capitalist, *A*, even though *B* did own his capital unjustly. Roemer's Andrea-and-Bob example doesn't fail in this way because Andrea is able to get a profit from Bob's work because she owns more than her (stipulated just) equal share of assets, and this (since it reduces Bob's share to below what he is entitled to) is unjust to Bob (or, equivalently, Bob has a just claim on some of the excess above equal shares that Andrea owns). But note that Bob obtains a benefit from working Andrea's large machine that he cannot obtain otherwise. He can earn his subsistence on her machine in less time than it would take him to produce it on his small machine.

Altering these examples is instructive. Suppose that Cohen's *A* was forced to work for *B*, say, at gunpoint, or because his own capital was temporarily so tied up that he had no other way to eat. Then, I think that we could clearly say that *B* is unjust to *A*, and exploits him. On the other hand, suppose there were no gain to Bob from working Andrea's machine over working his own. And grant that

Andrea's ownership is not only unjust, but unjust to Bob. Now, if he simply chooses to work for Andrea when he could have worked for himself for the same reward, how shall we say that Bob is exploited rather than generous? After all, even crooks can be the objects of voluntary generosity.

Cohen's example (before altering it to include force) shows that unequal labor exchange flowing to one who owns property unjustly is not sufficient to prove exploitation, unless the unjust ownership is unjust to the one who gives up extra labor. Roemer's example (altered) shows that even unjust ownership that is unjust to the one who gives up extra labor isn't enough for exploitation unless he at least works to obtain benefits from the unjust owner that he could not otherwise obtain. This in turn implies that Cohen would not get exploitation out of his example even if he could stipulate that *B*'s ownership is unjust to *A*. If there is nothing that *A* wants that he can only get by working for *B*, then his working for *B* and giving *B* some of the product will also be indistinguishable from his (*A*'s) being generous.

Altering Cohen's example shows that one way to get exploitation out of his unaltered example is by adding force. And this suggests as well that one way we can get exploitation out of Roemer's example (altered to eliminate the benefit to Bob) is by adding force there too. If Andrea forces Bob to work on her machine (either at gunpoint, or, say, because his own machine has broken down) for the same time it would take him to produce his subsistence on his own machine, then she exploits Bob.

The upshot of all this mental experimentation is that where there isn't *either force or at least some benefit held out to the worker that he cannot otherwise obtain*, there isn't exploitation, even when ownership is unjust, even when it is unjust *to the worker*. What then of the case in which there is a benefit to the worker that he cannot otherwise obtain, as in Roemer's example prior to alteration or Cohen's example altered (in a different way) to include that *A* loves the view from *B*'s factory and works for him for a chance to see it?<sup>25</sup> It seems to

<sup>25</sup> Personal communication, August 8, 1988

me that in both these cases, if we have exploitation, we do because the exploiter is able to exercise a kind of leverage over the exploitee by virtue of a benefit desired by the exploitee and controlled by the exploiter.

Exploitation must include either force or such leverage. And, leverage is at least *like* force, or maybe even a weak form of force. Moreover, since there is no hesitation in calling Roemer's Bob or Cohen's *A* exploited if they are forced to work, any hesitation in calling them exploited when the benefits to them are used as leverage to get them to work seems to reflect whatever distance such leverage is from full-fledged force. This strongly suggests that in the Marxian concept of exploitation, at least, force has an appropriate role: Force serves the purpose of keeping the point of the concept sharp, and defends it against hesitations of the sort just mentioned. Moreover, this gives us a way of explicating the relationship between the Marxian sense of exploitation that includes force and the general sense that does not: That leverage works *like* force suggests that the Marxian concept captures the *core* meaning of exploitation, while the more general sense covers cases that approximate the core in one degree or another.

Turn now to Cohen's second example, the unemployed forcing payments from the employed. One reason that Cohen's second example failed was because his unemployed adults did not clearly force the earners to work for them, they forced them to give up some of the products of their prior labor. Accordingly, Cohen's example could not distinguish exploitation from robbery. Cohen has suggested that systematic recurrent (as opposed to one-time) robbery is a form of exploitation.<sup>26</sup> But why isn't one-time robbery enough? Why must it be systematic and recurrent? It seems to me that what 'systematic and recurrent' add is precisely the ability to characterize the victim *at the time he is working* as 'being forced to work for the robber,' rather than merely being forced to part with his possessions. Workers who are once pickpocketed in the street are not thereby exploited, but workers who must regularly pay protection to rack-

26 Ibid.

eteers are exploited because *when they work* they are being forced to work for those racketeers. I take this strongly to suggest that in the Marxian concept of exploitation, at least, restriction to the relations of production is appropriate. It serves to keep the boundaries of the concept distinct from other forms of unjust taking such as occasional robbery.

The ideal of equal sovereignty along with the distinction between general and Marxian exploitation allow us to retain the notion that force is a necessary condition of Marxian exploitation and that forced extraction of unpaid or surplus labor in violation of the ideal is a sufficient condition of it. And the need to keep the unjust taking in the concept sharp and distinct from other forms of unjust taking argues in favor of including force in the concept and restricting the concept to (ongoing, systematic) relations of production.

Roemer closes his unpublished manuscript by claiming that his chief reason for critiquing the conception of exploitation that I urged against his is that he thinks mine represents the same *misconception* under which contemporary socialist planners also labor. Writes Roemer, 'Socialist planners have, I think, unfortunately shied away from using markets, because of an incorrect belief that class relations among private agents are necessarily the mark of exploitation. I think these socialist theorists hold a conception of exploitation that is, essentially, Reiman's.' Now, I find it hard to imagine that contemporary socialist theorists have introduced their various versions of command economics (with their prohibitions against strikes and independent unions) out of squeamishness over imposing forced servitude on the working class. However, rather than arguing against Roemer's assertion here, I shall simply suggest the view of the error of socialist planners that emerges in light of the 'social' Marxism that I have been proposing as an alternative to Roemer's distributivism.

On my view, socialist planners have failed to appreciate the depth of the commitment to individual sovereignty that is the moral heart of Marxism. As such, they have underestimated a danger that as Marxists they should have been more than normally sensitive to, namely, the danger of allowing ownership of the means of production to be concentrated in the hands of a unified political body. Thus, I think they should have instituted markets and other means of

decentralizing economic power *even if these are exploitative* because they are necessary at least for the foreseeable future to prevent even greater violations of the ideal of equal sovereignty. What's more, in the light of the ideal of equal sovereignty, it becomes clear that socialist nations have failed *in Marxian terms* by not providing adequate institutional protection of individual liberty against government and effective democratic control of government. In fact, I think that Marxists have been generally unable to see that liberalism ranks alongside of technology, among capitalism's lasting contributions to humanity. Had they seen this, they would have recognized that the rejection of liberalism by Marxists is social Luddism.

## Should Anyone Be Interested In Exploitation?\*

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### I Introduction

This paper argues that exploitation is a central and non-redundant concept in a Marxian understanding of capitalism. This finding runs counter to John Roemer's conclusion in his critical reexamination of exploitation.<sup>1</sup> For a static setting with perfectly competitive markets, Roemer shows that exploitation is a property of agents which derives from unequal wealth endowments, that is, from differential ownership of productive assets (DOPA), not a social relation between capitalists and workers. Further, he shows that DOPA suffices in this setting to generate core phenomena in Marxian theory

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Roemer, 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14 (1985) 30-65



accumulation, domination, alienation, and inequality with no reference to an independent notion of exploitation. Roemer concludes that DOPA is the central analytical category in Marxian theory, and exploitation a redundant, indeed incorrect, concept therein. A direct implication is that distributive justice should be Marxism's central ethical concern. The basis for Roemer's sweeping conclusion is that his model is *general*, incorporating no special institutional assumptions and abstracting from any impediments to market equilibria. That is, his conclusion rests on an ahistorical, timeless economic model.

We reject these conclusions. DOPA can fully explain exploitation only under a narrow conception of the character of exploitation, domination, and alienation in capitalist production. This narrow conception rests on underlying assumptions about workers' choice sets and about the technological and contractual basis of production which are unwarranted for capitalism as a whole. Specifically, exploitation can be defined assuming either forced *or* unforced surplus labor, and either a fixed *or* variable relationship between labor and labor-power.<sup>2</sup> Roemer assumes labor is unforced and the labor/labor-power distinction analytically inconsequential. But alternative underlying assumptions yield a broader conception of exploitation not reducible to DOPA and reverse his conclusion that exploitation is superfluous. This, in turn, leads to a different understanding of the interrelations among exploitation, DOPA, domination, and alienation. Further, under these alternative assumptions capitalist market processes cannot plausibly be envisioned using Roemer's long-run stationary equilibrium model.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'forced' is used herein as in Elster's work. In *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 1985) 211-12 Elster defines 'force' as implying the presence of constraints that leave no room for choice; coercion is a stronger condition requiring the presence of an intentional agent. Elster states (214-15) that the most reasonable way of interpreting Marx's claim that the worker is forced to sell his labor power is to say that although 'the worker can survive without selling his labor power, he can do so only under conditions so bad that the only acceptable course of action is to sell his labor power.' Thus, the worker is forced to sell his labor power when '(i) the offered wage rate is above the alternative and (ii) the alternative is below some critical level.'

In effect, Roemer has conflated conclusions that follow from his assumption set with conclusions appropriate for capitalism as a whole. The perceived redundancy of exploitation in Marxism derives from a controversial perspective concerning the scope of worker choice and the nature of production. Roemer's allegation that it is an incorrect analytical category results from an ahistorical theoretical schema in which DOPA enters as a *deus ex machina* and not as an organic link in capitalism's emergence and development. Restoring the autonomy of exploitation through an enriched conception of production suggests a broader substantive and ethical focus for Marxian theory than Roemer presents. In this broader analysis, production relations cannot be ignored in favor of property relations; both are required to conceptualize economic relations. And while the unjust results of hiring and production processes are attributable primarily to DOPA, not to exploitation, an autonomous notion of exploitation raises a second ethical concern: the crucial ethical aspect of exploitation is its impact on liberty and human development. Inquiry into DOPA, then, does not preclude interest in exploitation; instead, exploitation and DOPA are mutually reinforcing in any social formation.

We proceed as follows. Section II summarizes Roemer's conception of exploitation. Section III clarifies why this view is narrow by elaborating its assumptions. Section IV examines the broader approach found in Marx's writings. Section V shows how alternative assumptions, notably about worker choice and production, lead to different relationships among exploitation, alienation, domination, and DOPA. Section VI argues that competing views of exploitation depend on contending readings of history and of the role of history in theory construction. Section VII concludes by comparing briefly the ethical basis of the Marxian perspective under Roemerian and non-Roemerian conceptions of exploitation.

## II Roemer's Approach to Exploitation

Roemer's conception of exploitation has evolved rapidly in the 1980s. In a major 1981 work, Roemer accepted both exploitation as a significant concept in Marxian theory and a labor theory of exploita-

tion (though not of exchange).<sup>3</sup> He moved a step away from this position in 1982. In his 'general theory,' exploitation remains center stage, but is now rooted expressly in DOPA. The labor theory of exploitation is relegated to the relatively minor task of providing linkages with Marxian theories of class struggle and historical materialism.<sup>4</sup> Although either a surplus labor or a DOPA approach may be used to describe the outcome of exploitation, the latter is superior because of its generality: it allows for such anomalies as the possibility that asset-rich workers may exploit capitalists.<sup>5</sup> In his recent work, however, Roemer has turned to the view that exploitation is superfluous in Marxian discourse.<sup>6</sup> We focus on this last stage in his thinking.

Roemer's surprising conclusion derives from his definitions of central terms in Marxian discourse. Roemer defines exploitation in his 1985 paper as an 'unequal exchange of labor for goods.' Exploiters 'command with their income more labor embodied in goods than the labor they performed' (and vice versa for the exploited). Unlike his earlier formulations, this definition omits any reference to surplus labor or to production relations. Instead, exploitation emerges in the 'pattern of the redistribution of labor' as individual agents exchange 'their current productive labor for social labor congealed in goods received.' Thus, exploitation is a relationship not between (exploiting) capital and (exploited) labor, but between 'a person and society,' measured by the reciprocal transfer of an individual's labor to society and society's labor to an individual, 'as embodied in goods the person claims.'<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *Analytical Foundations of Marxian Economic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press 1981), ch. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *General Theory of Exploitation and Class* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1982)

<sup>5</sup> 'Property Relations versus Surplus Value in Marxian Exploitation,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 11, 4 (Fall 1982) 281-313

<sup>6</sup> 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?'

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-1; 36

Drawing on dictionary definitions, Roemer further differentiates between two senses of the term 'exploit': (1) 'to turn a natural resource to account, to utilize'; (2) 'to make use of meanly or unjustly for one's own advantage or profit.'

Meaning (1) underlies the traditional positive Marxian claim that exploitation of labor in production is the source of profits and hence accumulation. Meaning (2) is the foundation for the normative claim that exploitation is the 'measure and consequence' of (or at least implies) the alienation and domination of labor by capitalists and inequality in the ownership of productive assets.<sup>8</sup>

Having rejected exploitation as the foundation of profits and accumulation earlier, Roemer focuses in his 1985 paper on the relationships among exploitation and inequality, domination, and alienation. According to Roemer, DOPA causes inequality in income and consumption: asset rich (poor) individuals receive more (less) social labor embodied in goods than the current productive labor they provide. In short, the rich exploit the poor. Roemer considers this hypothesis the very epitome of Marxian thought. Thus, the link between inequality and exploitation is the 'most compelling reason' for interest in the latter.<sup>9</sup>

Now under *some* (although not *all*) assumptions, exploitation is, indeed, 'essentially equivalent' to 'inequality in distribution of initial assets.' Thus, in the (special) case where the rich are capitalist employers and the poor are workers, the (rich) capitalists may be said to exploit the (poor) workers. In this event, the test for capitalist exploitation is whether a 'coalition of agents,' if it withdrew from the capitalist system 'with its per capita share of society's alienable assets,' would increase its income. The characterization of capitalist exploitation encompassing DOPA relative to an egalitarian distribution of the means of production 'captures precisely what Marxists mean by exploitation in terms of surplus-value transfer.'<sup>10</sup> Anyone

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>10</sup> Roemer, 'Exploitation, Class and Property Relations,' in *After Marx*, Terence Ball and James Farr, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984), 203-4

who is Marxian-exploited in terms of surplus value transfer is capitalist-exploited, in the sense that income could be increased by withdrawing per capita alienable assets. Conversely, anyone who is capitalist-exploited is Marxian-exploited. Thus, although the causal process at work runs from DOPA to inequality in income, the equivalence of the results of Marxian exploitation with those of DOPA in this special case makes it possible to use the exploitation theory as a rough proxy.

But Marxian exploitation theory, Roemer contends, exhibits several major deficiencies. First, even when the results from DOPA and surplus value transfer are equivalent, the Marxian mode of argument is at best redundant and innocuous. To say that '(poor) workers are exploited by (rich) capitalists' adds no information to the statement that DOPA causes inequality if (as Roemer supposes) there are no other means, in perfectly competitive, full employment equilibrium, to generate unequal economic outcomes for individuals than DOPA. Next, DOPA is superior to the traditional surplus-value interpretation because it 'makes clear the ethical imperative when one speaks of exploitation,' namely, that 'initial inequality in the wealth of agents is unjust.'<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, Roemer argues that DOPA is superior to the Marxian exploitation concept because it yields different results under certain conditions; so Marxian exploitation is not a 'significant index of inequality in initial assets.' For example, suppose that individuals have identical preference orderings, but the labor supply function is wealth-elastic. Then an asset-rich individual will want to work harder than an asset-poor individual. In an extreme case, the rich individual may still want to work even after fully utilizing his extensive assets, while the poor individual may not work enough to fully utilize even his small stock of assets. In this event, the rich individual will work for the poor one. The perspective of the 'unequal exchange of labor,' describes the (poor) employer as exploiting the (rich) worker. But the perspective of the 'distributional consequences of an unjust inequality in the distribution of productive assets and resources,' al-

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 204; Roemer, 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?' 52

lows the intuitively more attractive conclusion that the rich (who happen to have a high propensity to work) exploit the poor (who happen to have a low propensity to work).<sup>12</sup>

Roemer similarly rejects domination and alienation as grounds for retaining the category of exploitation. Roemer distinguishes two types of domination: the enforcement of private property in the means of production, and domination in production, that is, autocratic and hierarchical work structures. Following Roemer, we designate these two instances as domination<sub>1</sub> (*D1*) and domination<sub>2</sub> (*D2*). *D1* involves two forms of enforcement: one, the protection of property through police powers; second, the use of extramarket means to affect the market values of services and assets (examples are government regulation of wages, public education, 'thin' credit markets).

Because *D1* entails the protection and enhancement of private property, it collapses into DOPA. *D1* implies exploitation, but this is a reason for interest in *D1*, and hence DOPA, not exploitation. Exploitation typically implies the police-powers sense of *D1*, but only insofar as this maintains inequality in DOPA. And while exploitation may in practice imply *D1* in the sense of extra-market means of enhancing property value, such instances constitute departures from perfect competition and hence from pure capitalism.

*D2*, or hierarchical and undemocratic processes in the workplace, is not similarly reducible to DOPA. But it also raises problems, for Roemer, as a defense of Marxian interest in exploitation. First, the preeminent moral objection to *D2* namely, dehumanization and stultification of human development potential is independent of exploitation. *D2* presumably elicits profits *beyond* those attributable to DOPA *per se* and thereby implies exploitation. But, again, this is reason for concern with *D2* in its own right, not exploitation. Precisely because *D2* is largely independent of DOPA, exploitation does not necessarily imply *D2*. Financial and landed capitalists, for example, may exploit sharecroppers and borrowers without *D2*.<sup>13</sup> So

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 54, 65

<sup>13</sup> Roemer claims that a kind of exploitation may occur even in a simple subsistence exchange economy populated by independent proprietors (hence no *D2*)

(footnote continued on next page)

like extra-market powers under  $D1$ ,  $D2$  is a second-order phenomenon derived from imperfections in making and enforcing contracts. It is extraneous to Marx's goal of showing 'the economic viability of capitalism in the absence of cheating: and that means that contracts are well-defined and observed by all.'<sup>14</sup> In short, a model consistent with Marx's intent must be perfectly competitive. Moreover, the paramount focus in a Marxian critique must be DOPA. Subduing the despotism of the boss is an important, but subsidiary, goal. Overturning DOPA is the primary Marxist socialist aspiration.

Alienation is also dismissed as a rationale for interest in exploitation. To be a separate argument, Roemer insists, alienation must be clearly differentiated from domination and DOPA. In his 1985 article, he defines alienation as producing for the market, selling goods made with one's labor 'to an anonymous final recipient on a market.'<sup>15</sup> He distinguishes between alienation in general, just defined, and 'differential alienation,' wherein 'some people alienate more labor than they receive from others, and some alienate less. . . .'<sup>16</sup>

Roemer briefly speculates about possible moral objections to alienation in general (for example, producing for market exchange prostitutes the human spirit). But he states that production for market exchange has been 'liberating' for many people, and often has been undertaken 'willingly.' This leaves differential alienation; as Roemer has defined it, this term is an alternative way of expressing exploitation. His conclusions follow directly. There are two cases

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

holding unequal amounts of financial assets: those with above (below) average financial holdings will work less (more) than average to attain subsistence, in effect transferring surplus labor from poor to rich proprietors without creating a surplus product or a labor market (Ibid., 43-4).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 44

<sup>15</sup> 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?' 47. This definition constitutes a shift from his prior work. Prior to 1985, Roemer identified alienation with hierarchical and autocratic work processes, that is, with  $D2$ ; Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, 104-5; 'Exploitation, Class, and Property Relations,' 197-9.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 47-8

of interest. If all individuals have identical preferences and identical endowments of productive assets, then production for the market yields general alienation, but not differential alienation or exploitation, because each 'would receive back as much social labor embodied in goods as he alienated.'<sup>17</sup> In a variant of this case, suppose endowments are initially equal, but preferences differ. Now, to accommodate differential preferences, production for the market yields differential alienation. However, this differential alienation allows no moral objection 'if it arises from preferences which we accept as well-formed and not like handicaps.'<sup>18</sup> As a corollary, if alienation is not morally objectionable, it is not a viable rationale for studying exploitation. If, conversely, agents begin with unequal endowments, inequality is the result, including exploitation and differential alienation. But in this event, the evil is DOPA, not alienation.

### III Underlying Assumptions

Roemer's central conclusions are that DOPA is the sole fundamental Marxian analytical category and that *D2* can be dismissed as inessential. These twin notions, which make production in its essence a technical relation, rest on two primitive assumptions entailed in his definitions: one concerning the scope of individual choice (and hence autonomy) in capitalism and a second concerning production processes.

In Roemer's view of individual choice, any 'worker's' sale (or purchase) of labor power results from utility maximization. Identically endowed agents may, given different preferences, opt to sell labor power, to buy it, or to withhold their own labor power from the market without buying any other agent's. The key is that the agent's choice is unforced (see footnote 2): withholding labor power is a relevant and rational option for all agents. This guarantees the em-

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 51



pirical relevance of the technical conception of production. If *some* production processes are characterized by the indeterminate productivity inherent in  $D2$ , the presence of technically determined production processes will drive forcible extraction in the former industries to a minimum. If *all* production processes are characterized by indeterminacy and forcible extraction, workers' exit option their ability to opt out as workers in capitalist production will reduce forcible extraction to a uniform level.

In turn, a technical or effectively technical conception of production allows narrow and technical conceptions of alienation and exploitation. Because the nature of production is effectively technical, alienated labor in the sense of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (or of Part I of *Capital*) is irrelevant.<sup>19</sup> Further, because no person can be made to carry out any act without consent, exploitation is just a state or accounting calculation, and *not* a social relation between capitalists and workers. The terms of any relation between two agents are spelled out contractually extraneous or extra-economic exploitation is possible only in disequilibrium.

The importance of these two assumptions for Roemer's conclusion about the irrelevance of exploitation is readily seen in his familiar factory/farm parable.<sup>20</sup> In this parable, agents have identical, finite preferences for a composite output good. Two fixed-coefficient technologies can produce this good; the more efficient technology (the 'factory') requires scarce capital, while any agent can operate the less efficient technology (the 'farm') with no start-up capital. Roemer then shows that when agents are unequally endowed with the scarce capital good (so there is DOPA), 'exploitation' results: agents who own the scarce capital good obtain some of the net product of the (non-privileged) agents they hire. DOPA also implies alienation: the prior existence of DOPA leads to Pareto-improving

19 As I.I. Rubin has observed, social and not technical relations are the appropriate realm of social theory; that which is invariant to social forms cannot explain purely social phenomena. See Rubin, *Essays in the Labor Theory of Value* (Detroit: Black and Red Press 1972).

20 See, for example, Roemer (1985), 34-6.

market exchanges in which those contracting for farm labor (because of a small endowment of capital) necessarily alienate at least some of the net product of their labor.

There are several noteworthy aspects of this scenario. First,  $D2$  (and alienation in the  $D2$  sense) is absent. There is no reason to suppose the 'exploited' agents working in the factory are coerced; indeed, no coercion would be required, because these agents are better off in utility terms than the non-exploited agents working the farm. Complete contracts preclude any differentiation between labor and labor power and thereby any coercive extraction of additional surplus labor time through  $D2$ . Second, with  $D2$  precluded, alienation is restricted to the sale of products embodying one's labor. Consequently, alienation is a universal phenomenon. Because all workers have the option of undominated labor on the farm and because alienation exists on both farm and factory, domination (in the weak sense of  $D1$ ) and alienation are freely chosen. Third,  $D1$  operates exclusively through market processes, which are perfectly competitive. Thus, on the one hand, all forms of extra-market power (other than DOPA), including collective/societal bargains over the length of the working day, are excluded. On the other, market processes work perfectly, and full employment equilibrium is assured. Hence, exploitation is not necessarily the result of a labor market; it results as well when well-endowed agents rent out their financial capital on credit markets. With  $D2$ , extra-market aspects of  $D1$ , and unemployment all excluded, and alienation rendered irrelevant to individual choice by its universalization, DOPA thus remains as the sole source of exploitation.

The redundancy of exploitation in this intentionally simple scenario implies that more involved models guarantee the same result. The appearance of nonreductive simplicity, however, is misleading. Roemer's conclusion that  $D2$  is absent rests on (1) the presence of the farm and (2) the assumption of a determinate ex ante relationship between labor and labor power. The first assumption guarantees that the intensity of the production process is compensated by an additional increment (decrement) of net output which just offsets the disutility (utility) of a more (less) distasteful work process than on the farm. The second assumption guarantees that the deal struck between capital owner and laborer results in delivery of

agreed-upon levels of net output. Jointly, these assumptions make the production process analytically peripheral.

In effect, the existence of the farm assures that labor is not forced, and the assumption about production implies that markets are complete. Roemer's conclusion about exploitation hinges on these features.<sup>21</sup> Without the farm, the unemployed would bid down the factory wage to the subsistence level. And even then no 'equilibrium' exists, since poor agents unable to find work will starve. And if effort per unit of labor in production were indeterminate ex ante, the threat of starvation would allow capital owners to forcibly extract extraordinary effort from workers. Under such circumstances, exploitation must be defined differently. Denote exploitation under unforced conditions with ex ante determinate labor/labor power relations, Roemer's case, as  $E1$ . Then observed exploitation exceeds  $E1$  when forced labor or incomplete markets lead to additional exploitation,  $E2$ . This  $E2$  results from  $D2$ ; so letting  $f$  be an increasing function, we can write  $E2 = f(D2)$ , where  $f' > 0$ . So in general, exploitation equals  $E1 + E2$ , or  $E1 + f(D2)$ ; Roemer has identified the special case in which exploitation equals  $E1$ .

The existence of surplus labor not transferred pursuant to unforced market transactions would make Roemer's scenario incomplete.  $E2$  derives from a relation, not from a state (from DOPA). Thus, information about agent preferences, technology, and endowment struc-

21 The result that labor is unforced is not always established in Roemer's work by assuming that workers can go to a 'farm.' However, his formal models invariably incorporate an assumption which has the same effect. For example, he builds up a model on page 113 of the *General Theory of Exploitation and Class* as follows: 'An agent can engage in three types of economic activity: he can sell his labor power, he can hire the labor power of others, or he can *work for himself*' (emphasis added). The last phrase brings in the farm. In his formal models, this assumption provides the continuity and interiority necessary for deriving the existence of an equilibrium. All of Roemer's formal models of exploitation take the form of equilibria of this kind, which preclude unemployment. That unemployment (one aspect of forced labor) is a peripheral concern is illustrated by the fact that it is mentioned only once in the index to his 1982 opus, and is omitted from the index to his 1981 book.

ture would no longer suffice to characterize equilibrium outcomes. It would be necessary to incorporate assumptions about information structures, conflict in production, etc., to ascertain the extent of  $D2$  and hence the magnitude of exploitation. Moreover, when  $E2 > O$ , alienation must be defined in the broader ( $D2$ ) sense, not in the technical sense found in Roemer's work. In addition, an understanding of property relations alone would no longer be sufficient for drawing ethical conclusions. For injustice would be intertwined with assaults on liberty.

#### IV Marx's Category of Exploitation

We have observed that Roemer's narrow conception of exploitation rests on particular definitions and assumptions. Roemer is perfectly aware of this: so no simple error of omission is involved. Instead, he claims that the benefits of a DOPA-based conception outweigh those of a broader one which allows for forced labor and unemployment, *ex ante* indeterminate labor/labor power relations, and collective and class struggle. Before further assessing this claim, we first consider Roemer's secondary claim that his concepts of alienation, domination, and exploitation closely adhere to those of Marx.

As noted earlier, Roemer defends his rejection of domination (and alienation based on  $D2$ ) as a basis for interest in exploitation by drawing explicitly on Marx's authority; he claims that Marx sought to derive his conclusions in a context of fair exchanges and no 'cheating,' requirements which Roemer associates with pure capitalism operating under perfectly competitive conditions.<sup>22</sup> Roemer claims the mantle of Marx's authority in this interpretation, but does not cite Marx's works. Examination of the textual evidence, however, reveals significant differences in both methodology and content. Roemer's exposition of exploitation presupposes what has been called 'methodological individualism.' According to this view, collective entities or activities are invariably reducible to the actions of

<sup>22</sup> 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?' 41, 44

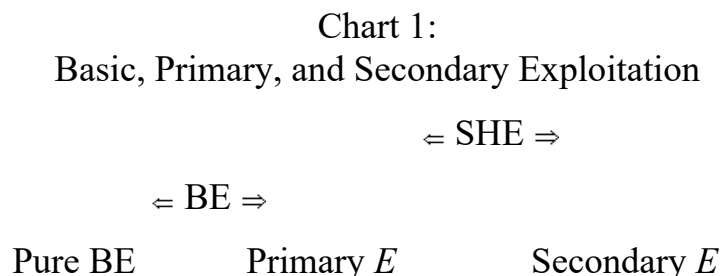
their individual units (such as individual demanders and suppliers in Walrasian economics). By contrast, Marx's view of exploitation is rooted in a theory of social class (notably capitalists versus workers) and collective entities such as class are not entirely reducible to the actions of individual agents.

Substantively, on the crucial issue of the primary versus secondary nature of *E1* and *E2*, Marx's approach is the opposite of Roemer's. A synopsis of Marx's category of exploitation is shown in Chart 1. Marx occasionally uses the term exploitation to denote efficacious use of resources in production, as in definition (1) cited by Roemer (p. 337, above). Marx assigns no pride of place to labor in *this* meaning of exploitation, as shown by his discussions of the 'exploitation' of nature and machines as well as labor.<sup>23</sup> The bourgeois economist, he states, is apparently unable to distinguish between the human and social process of 'exploitation of the workman by the machine' under capitalist control and the technical and natural process of the 'exploitation of the machine by the workman.'<sup>24</sup> Marx gives no name to this latter, non-social type of exploitation. In Chart 1, it is called 'basic exploitation' (hereafter BE), because it is operative in all soci-

23 Karl Marx, *Wage Labor and Capital*, in John E. Elliott, *Marx and Engels on Economics, Politics, and Society* (Santa Monica: Scott Foresman 1975), 89. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. III (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1963), 49; *Capital*, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers 1967), 605; *Capital*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1967), 795; *Grundrisse* (New York: Random House 1973), 700

24 'Basic' exploitation, in turn, takes two forms in Marx's exposition. Under primitive communism, use of resources is sufficiently productive to reproduce society at a subsistence level, but not high enough to generate surplus labor and a surplus product above that level. Under other, progressive, societies, including a future communism, use of resources is sufficiently productive to generate surplus labor and surplus product. It is the social and human conditions surrounding the generation and distribution of surplus labor and surplus product, however, and not the surplus-creating capabilities associated with the product use of resources per se, which is 'basic' to such progressive societies. See Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International Publishers 1970), 13; Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Program,' in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers 1974), 322-4.

eties, including primitive classless societies and Marx's vision of the future post-capitalist society, whereas exploitation beyond this 'basic' form (to be designated momentarily as social/human exploitation) is examined in Marx's argument in the context of class-structured societies, such as slavery, feudalism, and capitalism.<sup>25</sup>



Marx also uses the term exploitation in a human and social sense, the 'social/human exploitation' (SHE) in Chart 1. Although we should not expect dictionaries to precisely record the meaning which Marx assigns to words, the definition of exploitation in the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language as, *inter alia*, a regime of 'mastery or advantage,' provides a working approximation. Marx discusses social relations of 'mastery or advantage' in two kinds of circumstances. In one, BE and SHE commingle. Marx calls this 'primary exploitation taking place in the production process itself' (PE). In effect, Marx posits mastery over and advantage of a working class by a capitalist class through productive use of resources. A less familiar, but significant use of the term exploitation posits mastery or advantage without productive use, that is, as a purely distributive phenomenon. Marx calls this 'secondary exploitation' (SE).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 443

<sup>26</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol III, 609

Under capitalism, the industrial capitalist engages in primary exploitation on the basis of a class monopoly over the physical means of production and a regime of alienated labor and domination both inside and outside the enterprise. When successful, such primary exploitation yields its 'golden fruits': surplus values which are translated into profits through competition. Secondary exploitation, based purely on property ownership and facilitated by markets for credit and land, is conducted by the financial and landed capitalist; in effect, rentier capitalists extract a portion of society's total surplus value as interest and rent. The relationships among these different kinds of exploitation are shown in Chart 1.

Comparing this approach to exploitation with Roemer's conception, Roemer and Marx present opposing views on what is primary. What is primary for Marx is secondary for Roemer, and vice versa. Prima facie, Roemer's secondary claim that his argument is consistent with, indeed 'precisely captures' the preeminent theme in Marx's original project, is plainly discordant with the textual evidence.<sup>27</sup>

27 In Roemer's model, the possibility that asset-rich workers may exploit asset-poor capitalists is presented as rendering Marx's alternative formulation that is, that capitalists exploit workers redundant and/or wrong. We shall return to these claims in Section VI. But note here that because Roemer's definitions and assumptions concerning exploitation differ significantly from Marx's, it is not possible to move directly from Roemer's categories to a critique of Marx. For Marx, labor, as manual and mental effort and energy, is integral-along with land, raw materials, and other forces of production-to efficacious use of resources in production (BE). But because labor is the active human element in (SHE), primarily in and through production (PE) and secondarily through asset ownership per se (SE). Corn or oil, for example, being non-human, can enter into BE, but not SHE. Capitalists, although human, are not (except for managerial labor), according to Marx, 'direct producers.' Therefore, although capitalists might be said to be open to subjection to a form of SHE based purely on respective wealth positions (that is, SE), they could not be subject to that form of SHE that proceeded through efficacious use of resources (PE). Thus, we may surmise (or speculate) that if a resurrected Marx agreed to use corn or some other commodity as a 'value numeraire,' he, too, would conclude that corn could be (BE) 'exploited.' But, contra Roemer, he would not therefore be impelled to withdraw the 'claim to be interested in labor's exploitation only because labor is exploited in the first [BE] sense' in

*(footnote continued on next page)*

In fact, Roemer's argument concerning Marx is primarily inferential rather than textual. To achieve Marx's aspiration of a modeling of capitalist economy unencumbered by 'swindling and cheating,' Roemer claims, perfect competition is necessary. But differentiation between labor and labor power, unemployment, and control over length of the working day or wages by extra-market power, are excluded by definition from this kind of equilibrium, although not from robust but less than 'perfect' competitive equilibria. So for Roemer, Marx's lengthy discussions of these subjects, notably in Volume I of *Capital*, are simply inconsistent with Marx's own (inferential) assumption. But even if Marx's rich textual arguments are ignored, Roemer's claim is highly tenuous, for it imports into Marx's dynamic and historical system the narrow methodology of Walrasian general equilibrium.<sup>28</sup>

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

favor of the revised claim that labor, unlike corn, oil, et cetera, is exploited 'in the second [SHE, SE] sense' (Roemer, 38), because Marx, armed with careful distinctions among BE, SE, and PE, makes no such claim and has no need of such a revised claim.

<sup>28</sup> Walrasian general equilibrium is a paradigm within economics in the sense of Imre Lakatos. Its central idea is to examine how autonomous agents with given resources, tastes and technologies, can achieve mutually consistent and socially optimal outcomes via competitive markets. By socially optimal is meant maximum feasible levels of consumption. Production in this paradigm is understood as an instantaneous process: inputs used in production are converted without any time delay into the outputs which the given technology makes feasible. This allows the economist to abstract from any disutilities associated with the actual process of production itself. In effect, the Walrasian paradigm treats production as exchange with nature. Each agent formulates supply and demand behaviors for all goods based on their relative prices. Equilibrium then exists for that vector of relative prices obtains at which the quantities of each input and output good supplied and demanded are exactly equal. There is assumed to be a coordination mechanism (the 'auctioneer') which varies the vector of relative prices until some vector is found for which demand supply are equal in all markets. Agents participating in this equilibrium need know only the price vector in making their decisions. The Walrasian equilibrium concept has received wide currency in economics because of its formal elegance and simplicity, but its viability as an explanation of observed economic behavior has been questioned. *Within* the logic of this paradigm, equilibrium is contingent on a set of stability conditions for demand and supply equations.

*(footnote continued on next page)*



Walrasian general equilibrium shows how competitive market processes can consistently coordinate individual choices under extremely restrictive assumptions about both individuals and markets. Individual choices are formed under the assumption that tastes, technologies, and resource endowments are all given ex ante. All forms of social power are extirpated by definition from market competition; underlying this competition is utility maximizing behavior which is undifferentiated in terms of social class or history. This methodological foundation underlies Roemer's conclusion that 'Labor can be just as exploited if it hires capital as if it is hired by capital. The key question is the wealth position of the laborer and not which market is used.'<sup>29</sup>

In Marx's dynamic argument, by contrast, tastes, technologies, and endowments are subject to change because of domination within production. Consequently, it would be highly speculative to consider the exploitation which remains after a Walrasian equilibrium eliminates all domination based on extra-market power: for even temporary domination creates new opportunities for exploitation and for new social powers which thereby re-create both  $D1$  and  $D2$ . Second, according to Marx, capitalist institutions profoundly affect the motivations which undergird competition. Because exchange values dominate under capitalism and capitalist industrialists dominate production and labor processes, a 'boundless thirst for surplus-labor arises from the nature of the production process itself.' Because exploitation takes the 'value form,' capital's 'blind unrestrainable passion,' its 'vampire-like' thirst and 'werewolf hunger' for surplus labor

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

Critics *outside* this paradigm take issue with the notion that technology, tastes and endowments are given and independent of the socioeconomic processes which the theory purports to explain; these 'givens' can instead be regarded as contextually defined, evolving interactively with other social phenomena. A succinct and definitive exposition of Walrasian equilibrium theory is contained in Gerard Debreu, *The Theory of Value* (New York: Wiley 1959). A sympathetic discussion of the methodological bases of this paradigm is found in E. Roy Weintraub, *Microfoundations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980).

<sup>29</sup> Roemer, *A General Theory of Exploitation and Class*, 196

is translated into a 'mania' for surplus value and a 'boundless greed after riches.'<sup>30</sup> These motivations generate powerful pressures for the expansion of domination, as capitalists use the state to increase the length of the working day (*D1*) and carry out various measures increasing the intensity of labor (*D2*). Third, Marx's own category of competition is impregnated with social class and historical content. The most important kind of competition, for Marx, is competition over who will hold wealth and power in society and who will not. Once that historically initial division is established, competition is shaped by capitalist power and works within its framework.<sup>31</sup> If capitalism's competition were truly 'perfect,' would this not entail perfect class mobility, that is, fluid transformation of workers into capitalists or independent proprietors? Lastly, the notion of an explicitly full-employment equilibrium is at odds with Marx's theory of the industrial reserve army and the role of unemployment in keeping the 'pretensions [of labor] in check.'<sup>32</sup> In short, Roemer's Walrasian notion of competition pales against Marx's dynamic and historical perspective.

Marx's conception of alienation is also broader than that of Roemer. For Marx, alienation contains two interwoven aspects. One is the idea of dispossession: a separation or cleavage from control over nature and productive activity, a sale in the special sense of selling one's soul or birthright. The second is the idea of being confronted by an alien or hostile power beyond one's control. The two are interconnected because separation or dispossession are presupposed in the notion of an alien power.<sup>33</sup>

The roots of alienation lie deep in the institutional structure of capitalism, in its relations of market exchange and property. Private property and market exchange separate alienate people from the bonding relationships of friendship, love, and community and cre-

30 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 152-3, 233, 235, 264-5

31 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 649-52

32 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 639

33 David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (New York: Harper 1970), 169

ate an alien state power or public realm distinguished from private activities. Market economy itself becomes a dominating `inhuman power [which] rules over everything.'<sup>34</sup> Quantities and values of commodities in the exchange process `rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.'<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, for Marx, alienation and domination are interwoven under capitalist property relations. This is illustrated in Chart 2, where each dimension of alienated labor has a corollary element of capitalist domination. Thus, the alienation of workers from ownership and control over means of production and subsistence is accompanied by capitalist ownership and control. This, for Marx, is `the real foundation, in fact, and the starting point of capitalist production.'<sup>36</sup> Indeed, in the case of `secondary exploitation,' it is a sufficient cause of exploitation by financial and landed capital. Given this basic property relation, economic circumstance impel workers to engage in the sale or `alienation of labor-power.'<sup>37</sup> The corollary is the purchase of labor power by industrial employers, the first step in capitalist *D2* processes and the foundation for *E2*.<sup>38</sup>

Precisely because of the powerful forces for capitalist domination (both *D1* and *D2*), Marx argues that alienation of labor power in-

<sup>34</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In Tom Bottomore, *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1964), 163

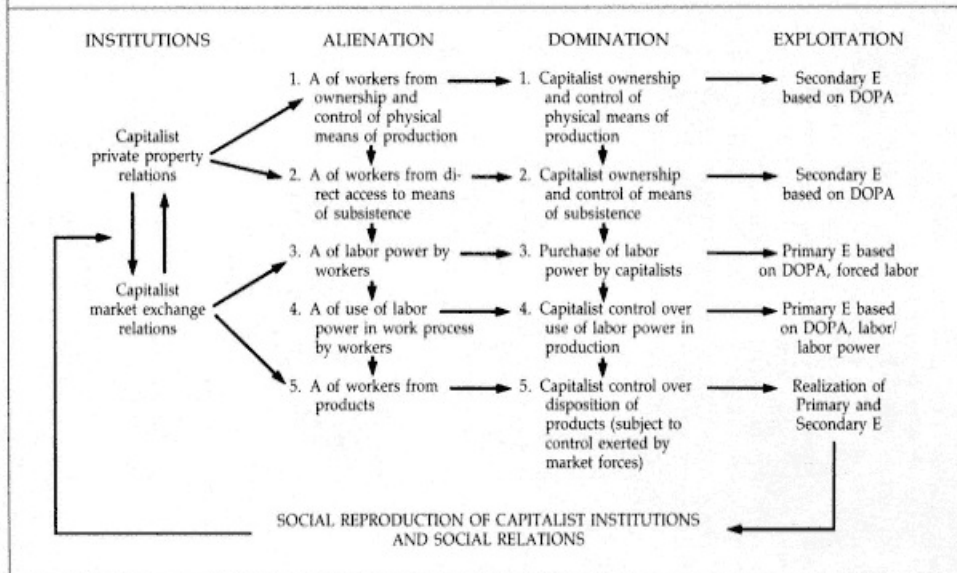
<sup>35</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 75

<sup>36</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 570

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>38</sup> Although grounded in DOPA and the economic necessity for most workers to sell labor power `voluntarily,' the de facto servitude of labor under capitalist domination, according to Marx, rests on additional factors, namely, `a working-class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that [capitalist] mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature,' a despotic capitalist organization of production which `breaks down all resistance,' the constant creation of an industrial reserve army which keeps wages `in a rut that corresponds with the wants of capital,' and the `dull compulsion of economic relations [which] completes the subjection of the labourer to the capitalist' (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 737).

**Chart 2: Interwoven Connections among Capitalist Institutions, Alienation, Domination, and Exploitation**



volves not merely its sale, but also surrender of control over its use in production. The laborer, Marx observes, 'works under the control of the capitalist to whom his labour belongs.' Consequently, the work process falls under the domination of the capitalist, the product becomes his 'property,'<sup>39</sup> workers experience alienation both from the work process and from the products they have made,<sup>40</sup> and the regime of capitalist 'mastery and advantage' is extended,<sup>41</sup> thereby creating further opportunities for exploitation.

Marx thus insists on the non-redundancy of the categories of DOPA, alienation, domination, and exploitation, and on their mutual causation in practice. Although capitalist property relations are the 'means by which labor is alienated,' they are also the 'product, the necessary result, of alienated labour.'<sup>42</sup> Marx also conceptual-

39 Ibid., 184-6. Elsewhere, Marx makes clear, however, that the capitalist's dominion is imperfect. Workers fight back, and capitalists must impose supervisory costs to reduce shirking (ibid., 330-2).

40 This last alienation overlaps, but is not identical with, Roemer's notion of alienation as the sale of products embodying one's labor. The two coincide only under a simple exchange economy of independent proprietors who labor to produce products for market exchange. Under capitalism, capitalists, no less than workers, sell products to anonymous purchasers and operate under the domination of alien market exchange processes beyond their control. But workers are subject to an additional alienation: disposition of their products are under the domination of capitalist employers. Thus, capitalists and workers are both dominated and alienated by market exchange processes; but the capitalist class through alienation confirms 'its own power' and experiences a 'semblance of human existence.' The working class feels 'annihilated' by alienation and experiences through it its 'powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence' (Marx-Engels, *The Holy Family*. Marx-Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 [New York: International 1975]).

41 If the worker is related to the product of his labor as an alien, powerful object, then 'an alien, hostile, powerful and independent man is the lord of this object.' If work activity is alienated and unfree, then 'it is under the domination, coercion, and yoke, of another man, namely, 'the capitalist (or whatever one likes to call the lord of labour)' (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 130-1).

42 Ibid., 131

izes an interactive relationship between DOPA, on the one hand, and domination and exploitation, on the other: 'The capitalist system presupposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realize their labour. As soon as capitalist production is on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but produces it on a continually extending scale.'<sup>43</sup> Capitalism reproduces itself in the process of producing and distributing products. At the end of the production cycle, the worker produces products in the form of capital, 'an alien power that dominates and exploits him,' while the capitalist 'produces' labor power itself, separated from the products needed for its sustenance. 'This incessant reproduction is the sine qua non of capitalist production.'<sup>44</sup>

Marx's conception of property, alienation, domination, and exploitation as non-redundant and interactive leads to a significantly different view about the role of DOPA in these social relations than Roemer suggests. First, Marx's view diverges substantially from Roemer's argument that because causation runs from DOPA (and possibly *D2*) to exploitation, DOPA does, indeed, cause domination and exploitation. But *D2* and *E2*, precisely because they elicit productive use of resources through social/human mastery, generate even greater levels and concentrations of property. Thus *D2* and *E2* serve as causes, not merely as effects, of DOPA. Second, the interactive aspect of these relations in Marx's view indicates a chasm between his powerful presupposition of capitalists' class monopoly over the instruments of production and subsistence and Roemer's conception of DOPA. For Marx, the difference between a mildly unequal DOPA and the extreme DOPA associated with capitalists' class position is clearly qualitative, not quantitative. Consider a relatively egalitarian simple-exchange economy. For Roemer, (slightly richer) peasant A exploits (slightly poorer) peasant B because A's more capital-intensive production method permits higher income, given labor; or smaller labor, given subsistence income. Roemer sees

<sup>43</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 712

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 571

exploitation in this exchange, without the necessity of a capital/labor relation. By contrast, Marx typically refrains from designating simple exchanges as exploitative, because the mild inequalities in wealth, income, and labor in such an economy differ qualitatively from those under capitalism. If peasant A accumulates and B does not, A's gain is not 'at the expense of the other'; in this setting, poverty is unconnected to the social relation between exchangers 'as such,' a matter of one's 'own free will.'<sup>45</sup> Moreover, it is doubtful that mild differences in DOPA could establish capitalist relations of exploitation. For Marx, capitalism's historical genesis required a 'primitive accumulation' sufficient to create a large working class, bereft of property and dependent on capitalist authority for its livelihood (see section VI). Thus, Marx's case cannot be subsumed as a special variant of Roemer's more general argument.

<sup>45</sup> Marx pointedly summarizes his view of the subsidiary position of distribution in his 1875 critical remarks on the Gotha Program. Here, he states that 'it was in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called distribution and put the principal stress on it.' Distribution of the means of consumption, he continues, 'is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves.' But that distribution 'is a feature of the mode of production itself.' Under the capitalist mode of production, the conditions of production are concentrated as a class monopoly 'in the hands of non-workers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal conditions of production, of labour power' (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* [New York: International Publishers 1974], 325). Because of this bi-polar class distribution of property, the wage-worker is permitted to live 'only in so far as he works for a certain time gratis for the capitalist (and hence also for the latter's co-consumers of surplus value).' Through its domination and exploitation, the 'whole capitalist system of production turns on the increase of this gratis labour by extending the working day or by developing the productivity' or intensity of labor. 'Consequently, the system of wage labour is a system of slavery and indeed of a slavery which becomes more severe in proportion as the social productive forces of labour develop, whether the worker receives better or worse payment' (ibid., 329).

## V Categories of Exploitation

Similarities between Roemer's analyses and Marx's system should not be ignored. Certainly, Marx was interested in the distribution of income in a subsidiary way, and unequal wealth (DOPA) is strategic for Marx, no less than Roemer, in explaining inequality in income as well as exploitation and domination.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Roemer insightfully explicates the effects of pure DOPA under special assumptions wherein capitalist class monopoly is merely a 'special case.' The previous section has shown that Roemer's general claim of essential continuity with Marx's project is belied by textual evidence; this section argues that Roemer's conception of exploitation only partially reflects the scope of a full Marxian understanding of this term.

Roemer's conception of exploitation follows from his assumptions that labor is unforced and labor productivity can be predetermined contractually in labor or credit markets. These assumptions, in effect, presuppose a perfectly competitive capitalism equivalent to a Walrasian general equilibrium. But exploitation theory is scarcely bound by the methodological imperatives of Walrasian economics. Alternative assumptions, which are integral to a comprehensive analysis of capitalism, introduce 'imperfections' into the Walrasian ideal *and* imply different types of exploitation, according to which exploitation, alienation, and domination interact. We conclude that exploitation is not redundant and that Marxists (indeed, anyone interested in social wealth and power) should be interested in exploitation. Chart 3 summarizes principal alternative assumptions. The diverse characterizations of exploitation which result are described using terminology associated with both Marxian and non-Marxian discourse.

Chart 3 sorts vertically according to the constraints on the sale of labor power. In Marxian terms, the forced sale of labor power means that because of the absence of interclass mobility, workers have no reasonable and effective alternative to selling their labor power, even if they are not tied to any one employer; to be proletar-

<sup>46</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 247



ian is to be dependent on *some* capitalist *somewhere* for employment.<sup>47</sup> Note that a forced sale of labor power in Marxian terms does not require positive unemployment what *generates* its 'forced' aspect is more fundamentally lack of ownership of means of production

47 The concept of the forced sale of labor power is discussed at length in G.A. Cohen, 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (1983) 3-33.

Chart 3:  
Categories of Exploitation

	Labor/labor power fixed	Labor/labor power variable
		Marxian: extraction of labor, intra- enterprise <i>D2</i>
Unforced sale of labor power	E1 (Roemer's case)	Non-Marxian analogue: Neoclassical incomplete markets (shirking)
	(1, 1)	(1, 2)
	Marxian: benign capitalism	
Forced sale of labor power	Non-Marxian analogue: Keynesian unemployment	<i>E2</i> ( 'Forcible' extraction)
	(2,1)	(2,2)

than hunger. At the same time, unemployment undoubtedly heightens the extent of this `force': the existence of rationing makes a successful sale more urgent. And since a positive rate of unemployment is a systemic feature of capitalism in the Marxian conception, unemployment can be considered a characteristic of the chart's second row. This serves as an entry point for a non-Marxian analogue: the second row embodies Keynesian unemployment, in the sense of an economic equilibrium in which all agents seeking employment cannot find it.<sup>48</sup>

The horizontal dimension of Chart 3 sorts according to characteristics of the production process. If the labor to be performed per unit of labor power hired is contracted for in advance, then the labor/labor power ration is fixed and labor contracts `complete.' In the alternative case, the labor associated with any quantum of labor power is not pre-specified, either because of a failure to fully detail the tasks of the agent hired or because productivity depends on an effort component of work which is inherently impossible to predetermine.<sup>49</sup> Three aspects of column 2 should be noted. First, in the Marxian view of column 2, an element of force enters into the labor process regardless of whether there is positive unemployment. Some force in the form of intra-enterprise *D2* is irreducibly involved in resolving the indeterminacy characterizing labor processes, even if it takes mild forms such as schedule and goal setting. However, the

48 The first and second rows of this box can also be interpreted in utility-theoretic terms. If agents who do sell their labor power maximize utility, and if other agents can maximize utility while withholding their labor power from the labor market, then the sale of labor power is unforced. Conversely, forced sales of labor power occur when at least some agents can only maximize utility by selling their labor power, but the number of jobs is less than the number of such agents.

49 Insightful discussions of the emerging economic literature on the operation of markets under incomplete information are contained in Joseph E. Stiglitz, `The Causes and Consequences of the Dependence of Quality on Price,' *Journal of Economic Literature* 25 (1987) 1-48; George Akerlof, *An Economic Theorist's Book of Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984); and Norman Strong and Martin Walker, *Information and Capital Markets* (London: Basil Blackwell 1987).

*degree* of force that characterizes these labor processes is not pre-given by technology: it is socially determined. Second, as with the equilibrium unemployment in the second row of Chart 3, however, market forces' inability to generate a Walrasian equilibrium does not mean competition ceases to operate. To the contrary, firms undertake a variety of competitive strategies—monitoring, incentive creation, short contract renewal horizons, etc.—to limit and compensate for incomplete information. Third, although *D2* is used strategically to generate ex post levels of labor extraction which favor capitalists, ex ante indeterminacy remains. The most important source of such indeterminacy is unanticipated changes in market relations (output demands, input supplies) and intra-enterprise capital/labor relations (intensified worker disaffection, strikes). In the language of Keynes and Knight, this indeterminacy is rooted in genuine *uncertainty*. From the perspective of Marx, the ever-present possibility of crisis makes uncertainty endemic in market relations, while labor's unique position as the active, purposeful agent in production intensifies uncertainty within the labor process itself.<sup>50</sup>

As with the second row of Graph 3, its second column—the case of variable labor/labor power—also has a non-Marxian analogue. In the Neoclassical interpretation of this case, the source of market failure is not an external cause (such as fixed wages or insufficient demand as in the Keynesian case), but the *inherent* indeterminacy of the process in question. Markets are incomplete in that every outcome of such processes is not available for purchase as a distinct commodity. In this event, market forces are altered substantially; for example, these situations entail 'the repeal of the law of the single price.'<sup>51</sup> Stiglitz and others have noted that markets character-

<sup>50</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1936); Frank Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1921); Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1969), 504-7; *Capital*, Vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers 1967), Parts 3-5. This paragraph draws on the insightful discussion of Geoffrey M. Hodgson, 'Production versus Allocation in Economic Theory or Marx after Keynes and Knight' (Newcastle upon Tyne unpublished 1988).

<sup>51</sup> Stiglitz, 7

ized by incomplete information normally equilibrate at levels characterized by excess supply. In the labor market, this implies equilibrium unemployment an outcome in cell (2,2). A critical distinction between a Marxian and non-Marxian understanding of column 2 is that the latter discounts (while the former emphasizes) the role of force in coping with labor/labor power indeterminacy. Neoclassical treatments of incomplete-markets situations either regard them as made inevitable by underlying technology, or as remediable through appropriate contract redesign. The use of force (in the sense of  $D2$ ) in decision-making under conditions of labor/labor power indeterminacy is not anticipated in this perspective.<sup>52</sup>

In Chart 3, Roemer's case interpreting exploitation as the unforced but unequal exchange of labor based on DOPA is just one possibility (cell [1,1]). The type of exploitation that occurs in this cell,  $E1$ , is present throughout the matrix. However, the remaining cells embody richer implications about both the nature of exploitation and its relationship with domination, alienation, and DOPA.<sup>53</sup>

The case emphasized by Marx is cell (2,2). Workers in this cell lack sufficient capital to maximize utility (or even, perhaps, to survive) without finding work; when they are hired, the presence of

<sup>52</sup> The result in some Neoclassical models that unemployment occurs in equilibrium does not mean they implicitly recognize intra-enterprise force ( $D2$ ). For one thing, Neoclassical economists tend not to think of indeterminate labor processes as resolved through use of force. For example, Akerlof discusses gift-giving between employers and employees and the use of social custom as means of resolving this indeterminacy. Further, as discussed above,  $D2$  is not implied by the existence of unemployment alone. In a Neoclassical setting, agents denied employment (or credit) in one market characterized by incomplete information may have other options akin to Roemer's farm; so the forced aspect of labor power sale may be absent. Conversely, even if  $D2$  is one possible means of resolving this indeterminacy, positive unemployment is not necessary as a condition of its existence.

<sup>53</sup> There is no reason to believe that the existence of one non-empty cell implies that all other cells must be empty; thus, we discuss the other three cells as alignments that may occur simultaneously (even in societies in which some production occurs under conditions enumerated in cell [1,1]).

unemployed agents ready to take their place makes the variable linkage between labor and labor power a spur that encourages vigorous effort. The conjunction of unemployed agents and variable productivity adds a second element of force: workers here have no reasonable choice but to submit to capital owners' domination, which is rooted in these owners' strategic control of the instruments of surplus product creation. In effect, workers' fear of being released into unemployment allows capital owners to resolve the indeterminacy in productivity in their own favor.<sup>54</sup>

As suggested in our discussion of the farm, exploitation in cell (2,2) encompasses both  $E1$  and  $E2 = f(D2)$ . DOPA *does* determine whether any agent will be subject to exploitation or unemployment in this cell; DOPA determines both who this cell's capital owners are, and which agents within sufficient capital to be owners in cell (2,2) have sufficient mobility to avoid the forced sale of their labor power. However, DOPA does not determine the extent of exploitation for production processes in this cell: actual exploitation depends on the length of the working day (affected by  $D1$ ), the extent of unemployment,  $D2$  (which depends in turn on the threat posed by unemployment), the degree to which productivity is technically determined, etc. Fundamentally, exploitation here is a social relation.

An immediate objection is that this broader notion of exploitation is incompatible with what Roemer considers the defining characteristic of capitalism, its inner competitive nature. But competition operates here even though markets are incomplete and workers' choices are constrained. Indeed, the lack of feasible alternatives keeps workers queued up in labor markets even when these markets don't clear: the 'forced' nature of labor in (2,2) keeps *competitive* forces alive even when *market* forces consistently malfunction. So markets work: but their workings must be supplemented by non-market processes to achieve definite social outcomes.

<sup>54</sup> This can be accomplished, as Bowles and Gintis have argued, in a number of ways through paying those hired a wage higher than the market clearing wage, through maintaining low benefit levels for the unemployed, etc. See Bowles and Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books 1986), 76-9.

More broadly, how can *E2* and free adherence to the rules of the game coexist? Since market incompleteness implies that many economic transactions are not prespecified, why should workers put up with production processes biased toward the reproduction of the means of their own oppression? Ironically, *E2* is reproduced across periods because property ownership entails a broader prerogative than Roemer anticipates in his conception of DOPA. That is, ownership doesn't confer on owners the mere ability to buy other agents' labor time when concentrated and centralized as a class monopoly; it empowers employers to redefine terms of the employment relation, constrained only by extramarket resistance. The sale of labor power then means not merely the sale of the workers' property as a commodity, but also the extension of control over its use. This has two consequences, as Marx observed: (1) the product belongs to the capitalist, not the worker; and (2) the work process is dominated by the capitalist. So capitalists use DOPA, which encompasses more social power than Roemer admits, to resolve an indeterminacy in market outcomes which Roemer ignores; and this resolution generates a degree of domination and alienation more profound than Roemer has acknowledged.<sup>55</sup>

Cell (2,2) gives rise not only to non-Roemerian domination, but to a dual form of alienation precluded by cell (1,1). There is, first, alienation experienced by workers who are subject to *D2*; second, alienation experienced by those who are unemployed. The first alienation emerges, as Marx wrote, because the worker comes to view his own labor as a thing standing opposed to his true nature; the second emerges when the unemployed worker is not only separated

<sup>55</sup> It is worth emphasizing at this juncture that the 'separation' between an existing capitalism and an ideal fully competitive capitalism is impossible when production is permeated with indeterminacy. Note that the analysis of an idealized capitalism requires that the Walrasian conceptions of production and competition (discussed in n. 28) are relatively accurate depictions of their real-world analogues. Ex ante indeterminate production processes sever the simple connection which is assumed to exist between inputs and outputs in the Walrasian conception of economic processes.

from employment, but is confronted by an alien society which denies him social validation and sustenance.

The two remaining cells illustrate conjunctures that have received substantial attention both inside and outside Marxian discourse. Cell (2,1) represents a case in which hiring and production processes are transparent, but the sale of labor power is forced. If Marx's labor/labor power distinction is abstracted from,  $E2$  may still be said to exist, based on two elements. One is a collective/societal bargain between labor and capital which establishes the length of the working day. The other is the constraint placed by unemployment on money wage bargains reached between capital and labor. Given a sufficiently long working day and an industrial reserve army checking labor's pretensions, a value difference between output price and input costs emerges. In this event, workers are still exploited, but  $E2$  is rooted in the intersection between the domains of production and the labor market (for the wage bargain) and production and politics (for the length of working day bargain).<sup>56</sup>

If the length of the working day is fixed, unemployment may still operate as a source of  $E2$ . Insofar as non-Marxian theory recognizes unemployment, it may contain thereby an analogue to Marxian exploitation theory. In Keynesian unemployment theory, for example, insufficient aggregate demand (or downward rigid money wages) may result in an equilibrium which leaves some workers unemployed. As long as capitalists' gains are not eliminated through what Marx called crises of `realization,'<sup>57</sup>  $E2$  may be reaped as well as generated.

<sup>56</sup> Thus, the forces identified in cell (2,1) provide both a significant source of  $E2$  and are integral to Marx's own case (2,2). Indeed, to restrict  $E2$  to the differentiation between labor and labor power, as in cell (1,2), would unnecessarily `commit Marx to the totally unacceptable conclusion that in a benign capitalism, in which workers labor only for the time and with the intensity agreed upon when the wage contract is struck, there would be no profit and no exploitation!' (Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Marx: A Reconstruction and Critique of Capital* [Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984], 178).

<sup>57</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, 244

Cell (1,2), by contrast, abstracts from the forced sale of labor power and focuses on the production process as inherently indeterminate. This indeterminacy is manifested notably in labor contracts, which typically do *not* specify the amount or intensity of labor services to be performed. Bowles and Gintis, among others, have developed Marxian-type modelings of this circumstance (their models also allow for unemployment and, when fully elaborated, thus belong in cell [2,2] of Chart 3). Bowles and Gintis argue that labor contracts are indeterminate because of the inseparability of human beings from labor services, the complexity of large-scale production, and the irreducibly social character of production. In exchange for a wage, *ex ante*, the worker submits (but does no more than submit) to the political authority of the capitalist or his agents for a particular period of time. The labor exchange is then 'contested.' *Ex post* results depend on the employers' success in extracting actual labor effort and energy from labor power, that is, on intra-enterprise *D2*. This, in turn, requires monitoring and incentive systems. Monitoring entails costly supervisory personnel and equipment. Incentive systems are stratagems to enhance worker responsiveness to capitalists' commands; these include heightening the threat of job loss by offering better terms than the worker's next best opportunity.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, even with full employment, a working day fixed in length, and some limited ability to transfer from employee to independent proprietor status, significant intra-enterprise *D2* (and *E2* can still be used to extract work from workers.

<sup>58</sup> Bowles, 'The Production Process in a Competitive Economy: Walrasian, Neo-Hobbesian, and Marxian Models,' *American Economic Review* 75, 1 (1985), 16-36; Bowles and Gintis, 'Structure and Practice in the Labor Theory of Value,' *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12, 4 (Winter 1981), 1-16; 'Contested Exchange: Political Economy and Modern Economic Theory,' *American Economic Review* 78, 2 (May 1988) 145-50. Also see James Devine and Michael Reich, 'The Microeconomics of Conflict and Hierarchy in Capitalist Production,' *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12, 4 (Winter 1981) 27-45. We hasten to add that these authors all view positive unemployment as a systemic feature of capitalism, and as such view the economy's position as cell (2,2), not cell (1,2). We have discussed these authors' work in the context of this cell because they emphasize the importance of the use of force *within* the labor process in their characterizations of capitalist production.



The relationships among exploitation, domination, alienation, and DOPA in cells (2,1) and (1,2) are intermediate between the polar extremes of cells (1,1) and (2,2). In cell (1,1), exploitation is restricted to pure DOPA, domination to a component of  $D1$ , and alienation to production for market exchange. In the case of the forced sale of labor power (2,1), capitalist superiority in the struggle over the length of the working day ( $D1$ ) coupled with recurrent unemployment and barriers to inter-class mobility imply  $E2 > 0$  and a broader form of alienation, both among employed and unemployed workers, despite the absence of intra-enterprise  $D2$ . In (1,2), the labor-extraction relation is inherently indeterminate, suggesting a powerful role for the use of intra-enterprise  $D2$  to resolve this indeterminacy in capital owners' favor. However, because the sale of labor power is unforced (workers have a greater exit option), its extent may be minor compared to (2,2). In this case,  $E2 > 0$  and exploitation is greater than that due purely to DOPA. A form and degree of alienation not implicit in pure DOPA also occurs.

Marx's distinction between primary and secondary exploitation can be used to summarize the possible interrelations among exploitation, domination, and DOPA in this (2 x 2) depiction of varying labor market and production conditions. For Marx, secondary exploitation arises purely from privileges accorded property ownership—the landlord's collection of rent, the rentier's collection of interest, etc. This exploitation is due solely to DOPA; it is clearly present in every cell of Chart 3. Primary exploitation, however, encompasses both secondary exploitation *and* phenomena—forced labor and  $D2$ —excluded by definition from cell (1,1). Which cell is most important is an empirical matter; but clearly the domain of exploitation cannot be predefined as excluding primary exploitation without substantially altering the vision of Marx.

## VI The Economy Outside History

Roemer's case for restricting inquiry about exploitation to DOPA can now be understood as an argument for restricting attention to cell (1,1). This abstraction is a useful heuristic for studying the effects of DOPA *per se*: Roemer's approach yields the useful analytical con-

clusion that domination is not necessary to exploitation; pure DOPA is sufficient. Beyond this, however, the abstraction loses in social and historical relevance what it gains in logical and analytical rigor. Roemer's model of capitalism requires that we be able to meaningfully distinguish between an 'observed' reality, in which social imperfections appear, and an unobserved, 'perfectly competitive' reality in which social processes are automatic, in their essence technical, and fully consonant with coordination through a price-auction system.

Roemer's reliance on pure DOPA abstracts from aspects of exploitation labor/labor power and forced sale of labor power that elicit broad mutual relationships among alienation, domination, and exploitation. Plainly, such a restricted theory leads to conclusions which, on the basis of textual evidence from Marx's classic works, are distinctly un-Marxian. If market imperfections are responsible for any phenomenon being in row 2, and natural or technological imperfections for any phenomenon being in column 2, then according to Roemer's theory the causes of *E2* are to be found not in capitalism itself, but in other causes unrelated to capitalism's existence.

This poses a dilemma. If we remain bound to Walrasian methodology, elements of alienation, domination, and exploitation other than pure DOPA must be perceived as mere imperfections. If instead we focus on these imperfections, then they not capitalism can be said to generate alienation, domination, and exploitation. But if the commitment to Walrasian methodology is withdrawn, a framework encompassing market competition can be constructed in which these previously excluded ingredients are transformed from 'imperfections' to phenomena which are crucial in the study and description of capitalism.<sup>59</sup>

59 An analogue is found in John Maynard Keynes' theory of effective demand and employment, in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1936). Keynes wanted to show that, 'even taking the assumption of neo-classical analysis [the atomistically competitive firm], he could produce non-neoclassical results' (Victoria Chick, *Macroeconomics After Keynes: A Reconsideration of the General Theory* [Cambridge: MIT Press 1983], 25). Yet

(footnote continued on next page)

Those not already committed to Walrasian general equilibrium theory might be more open to persuasion if the empirical credentials of that theory were stronger. For example, empirical studies showing that capitalist systems do converge in practice to long-run full-employment equilibria, would strengthen the basis for belief in a pure DOPA explication of exploitation. But we do not have that basis. Capitalism operates within a historical setting in which unemployment and disequilibrium are powerful. The question of what happens in a rarified state like (1,1) is interesting, but it is not the only interesting thing.

Moreover, the conclusion that monopoly and other market imperfections are the root causes of exploitation in real-world capitalism is unpersuasive in any event. That  $E2$  does not exist without these 'imperfections' implies nothing about cause and effect. That is, the capital/labor relation (and other institutional elements of capitalism) has led to unemployment, not merely vice versa. As for technological 'imperfections,' competitive forces are vigorously at work throughout Chart 3; and some economic processes in the second column, relying on the differentiation of labor and labor power, are *inherently* indeterminate ex ante even in a robustly competitive capitalism.<sup>60</sup>

In restricting economic processes to cell (1,1), Roemer supposes that perfect competition is integral to the capitalist system. This implies that workers under capitalism make broad and meaningful choices. But from the perspective of capitalism in practice, this view seems misplaced. It takes us outside of history, and distills as the

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

he rejected certain aspects of 'perfection' in the workings of market forces especially certainty and perfect foresight which he considered so discordant with capitalist reality as to seriously distort the theoretical argument. See John E. Elliott, 'Keynes on the Efficacy of Wage Cuts as Anti-Depressionary Strategy' (*Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*, Warren J. Samuels, ed. [Greenwich, CT: JAI Press 1988], vol. 6).

<sup>60</sup> Consider the following thought experiment. For any economic process in the second column (such as bank credit decisions), ask the question: if someone could make money by solving the indeterminacy, would that indeterminacy have occurred in the first place?

essence of capitalism a system of economic relations under idealized conditions. In Marx's works, by contrast, capitalism is set down in historical context. Marx begins with 'primitive accumulation,' that is, the accumulation which establishes 'the fundamental conditions of capitalist production.' On the one hand, merchants' profits, usury, and the slave trade, inter alia, provide the bases for a small minority to become capitalist employers. On the other, most independent producers are transformed through enclosures and other coercive measures into 'free labourers,' in the 'double sense' that they are both free from slavery and feudal restraint and 'unencumbered' by ownership of physical means of production. Consequently, they become sellers of labor power because they have no effective alternative. The human 'advance' accompanying the 'transformation of feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation' was not the supersession of the servitude of the laborer, but 'a change of form of this servitude.'<sup>61</sup> Thus, from the very beginning, domination is interwoven with DOPA, alienation has a broader meaning than mere sale of products embodying one's labor to anonymous purchasers, and exploitation includes  $E2 > O$ .

Once capitalism 'is on its own legs,' it continues to evolve in history, in Marx's narrative. DOPA remains of foundational importance. First, a 'certain minimum amount of capital' is needed to 'convert a small master into a capitalist, and thus formally to establish capitalist production.' Second, a larger minimum capital is needed to conduct large-scale enterprises and to combine large numbers of workers into an integrated whole working under the authority of the capitalist employer according to his aim and plan. Thus, the capitalist's 'command on the field of production' becomes as 'indispensable' as that of a general 'on the field of battle' and  $D2$  emerges from DOPA: 'It is not because he is a leader of industry that a man is a capitalist; on the contrary, he is a leader of industry because he is a capitalist.'<sup>62</sup> But forced labor and intra-enterprise domination and their associated alienation and resulting  $E2$  cont-

<sup>61</sup> Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, 714-15

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 342

inue, indeed expand, although now with changes. With growing association and attendant organization and solidarity, workers turn to political class struggles over the length of the working day. Resulting factory legislation reduces capitalists' ability to squeeze `absolute' surplus labor from workers and encourages increasing attention to the enhancement of `relative' surplus labor, through division of labor, economies of scale, mechanization, and technological change. These forces, however, open up new avenues for  $D2$  and increase the likelihood of unemployment. In addition, expanding scale of production, banks' proclivity to favor large, established enterprises, and bankruptcy of increasing numbers of small businesses and farm proprietors in recurrent crises and accompanying depressions make it easier for capitalists and more difficult for workers to exit from their class and wealth positions.<sup>63</sup> Thus, opportunities for  $E2 > 0$  through the considerations underlying both column 2 and row 2 of Chart 3 increase.

The point here is not whether Marx's explication is historically correct, but that Marx's richly textured theory of exploitation is rooted in historical context and placed within an historical narrative. Because this is so, limiting the scope of exploitation theory to conform to an ahistorical conception of a `perfectly competitive' capitalism is unlikely to persuade those not committed to the methodological underpinnings of such a theory.

<sup>63</sup> The option of moving from factory to farm becomes increasingly difficult for an ever-larger fraction of the labor force, and thus is at best a transient element in the historical evolution of capitalism. The reproduction of wage laborer as wage laborer (under conditions of unemployment), which Marx considers `that indispensable requisite' for `the social dependence of the labourer on the capitalist' is thus increasingly secured. If, on the other hand, such acceptable alternatives as small landed or artisan proprietorships are readily available to workers (as in the appropriation of public lands by settlers in a `free colony'), the `constant transformation' of wage-labourers into independent proprietors creates substantial impediments to the regular reproduction of wage labor. Moreover, the exit of large numbers of workers from the capitalist sector reacts `perversely' on the operation of the labor market: `Not only does the degree of exploitation of the wage-labourer remain indecently low. The wage-labourer loses into the bargain, along with the relation of dependence, also the sentiment of dependence on the abstemious capitalist' (ibid., 768-70).

From Marx's historical perspective, there is thus no logical redundancy in saying 'the capitalists exploit the workers' and 'the rich exploit the poor' when capitalists (workers) are invariably rich (poor) because the first expression is more encompassing than the second. That is, the rich, presumed here to be financial and industrial capitalists, do exploit the poor, who are often workers but may be small business or farm proprietors. This is  $E1$ , based on pure DOPA. But the industrial capitalists also exploit workers through domination extending beyond pure DOPA. This is  $E2$ , based on  $D2$  and its allied alienation. The expression 'capitalists exploit workers' thus includes, but also supplements, the statement 'the rich exploit the poor,' and is therefore not redundant.

Turning to the question of logical error, in principle there is no logical difficulty in positing that in an exchange between asset-rich workers and asset-poor capitalists, the workers would presumably take advantage of their superior DOPA to secure the lion's share of output; that is, the rich (workers) might be said to engage in secondary exploitation (SE) Marx presumably would call it 'oppression' or 'expropriation' of the poor (capitalists), based on pure DOPA. At the same time, the (poor) capitalists would be struggling to yield primary exploitation (PE) from the (rich) workers, basing this exploitation on (small) endowments of productive assets, supplemented by whatever domination could be mustered under such unfortuitous circumstances. In short, rich workers perhaps might be said to engage in SE of poor capitalists, but never in PE which, for Marx, must invariably run in the opposite direction.

In Marx's historically dynamic view, however, this situation is untenable. 'Rich workers' even with wealth elastic labor supply are presumably in process of becoming capitalists. As such, most would be unlikely to forego emerging opportunities to increase their wealth and power by employing and exploiting labor founded on their new DOPA but extended by intra-enterprise  $D2$ . Many 'poor capitalists' are presumably in the process of becoming workers. Their reductions in wealth decrease their capabilities (in the form of  $D1 + D2$ ) to employ and thereby exploit labor, while their decreased exploitation further intensifies their impoverishment, leading eventually to bankruptcy, exit from capitalist status, and descent into the working class. Although an occasional Bob Hope may generate a high

income based on a combination of secondary exploitation/DOPA and a heavy work schedule with a relatively asset-poor movie studio, a society in which the poor are typically capitalists and the rich are typically workers is simply not capitalism as Marx envisions it.

## VII Ethical Implications of Alternative Views on Exploitation

Although space limitations preclude thorough examination of ethical issues, the following comments at least indicate the main contours of the argument. Roemer makes the broad ethical implications of his interpretation of exploitation very clear. As noted earlier, the 'ethical imperative' of exploitation according to Roemer is the injustice of the initial unequal distribution. Capitalism 'is unjust (or ethically *exploitative*) because of sharply unequal ownership of the means of production.' This, he adds, is the 'most consistent Marxian ethical position.' When exploitation accounts are constructed in the 'proper way,' that is, to show that the rich exploit the poor, then 'exploitation theory [is] attractive,' though redundant. When alternative views are postulated, for example, that capitalists exploit workers, then exploitation theory is (often) wrong as well as redundant and 'no foundation remains for [its] justification.'<sup>64</sup>

Within its own framework, this mode of argument leaves many interesting issues for further discussion, which should at least be noted in passing.<sup>65</sup> For example, what are the bases for the alleged injustice in the initial distribution of wealth? Specifically, is it DOPA in itself, 'sharply unequal' DOPA, the improper mode of acquisition of DOPA (as in Marx's 'primitive accumulation'), or all of these?

<sup>64</sup> Roemer, 'Should Marxists Be Interested in Exploitation?' 33,59

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, G.A. Cohen, 'Freedom, Justice, and Capitalism,' *New Left Review* 126 (1981) 3-16; Jon Elster, 'Exploitation, Freedom and Justice,' *Nomos* 26 (1983) 277-304; Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, 216-33.

Are inequalities in economic outcomes, such as in income or consumption, unjust in their own right apart from being based on unjust initial DOPAs (as, for example, in the case of differences in luck or major illness or accident among otherwise equal wealth holders)? Would a 'clean' accumulation of financial assets by some workers (that is, one based exclusively on differential preferences concerning saving versus consumption rather than by force or fraud) be just? Would subsequent receipt of interest income based on such newly-created DOPAs and/or employment of other workers by such newly emerging capitalists generate injustice? If so, would such injustice be equal to or less than that associated with interest and profit income of well established capitalists, whose DOPAs in any current period rest essentially on the  $E1$  of the relatively recent past and only trivially, if at all, on some historical process of transfer from worker to capitalist status through saving-and-investment? What has happened to exploitation as a result of the expanding phenomenon of investment of workers' retirement funds?

What is significant here, however, is the necessarily limited framework, and therefore ethical implications, of Roemer's conception of exploitation. If exploitation is defined, for all practical purposes, to exclude alienation and domination (and dynamic feedbacks from exploitation to alienation and domination), that is, if exploitation equals  $E1$ , or what Marx called 'secondary exploitation,' then distributive justice is indeed the dominant, perhaps only, ethical issue left to discuss. And if one's paramount interest in ethical argument is distributive justice, then Roemer's description of exploitation as a phenomenon whereby the rich exploit the poor no doubt seems eminently reasonable.

But if, as for example in Marx's classic works, exploitation is understood in a broader and more comprehensive way, then the horizons of ethical implications are also broadened. Specifically, suppose (1) exploitation is understood as being interwoven with alienation and domination, so that exploitation includes what Marx called 'primary' as well as 'secondary' forms, (2) social/human exploitation is regarded as interactive with exploitation in the sense of productive use of resources, (3) capitalists typically are richer and more powerful than workers, and (4) dynamic feedbacks are recognized from the exploitation of today to the alienation and domination (and



thereby exploitation) of tomorrow. Under these circumstances, the ethical implications of exploitation theory are broadened substantially. First, consideration of social justice as an ethical category now cannot properly be restricted to inequalities in wealth and income, but must also consider such issues as inequalities in power, authority, and productive relations. Second, such matters as liberty, community, democracy, and self-actualization and realization become at least co-equally significant to the theme of distributive justice.<sup>66</sup> Turning the argument around, if one's paramount interests in ethical debate lie in the broader domain of these additional moral criteria (including their interrelations with justice), then exploitation remains a central and non-redundant category both in Marxian thinking in particular and in the study of contemporary society in general, and it seems eminently reasonable to characterize exploitation as a social relation between capital and labor as much as, if not more than, an accounting of rich and poor.

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<sup>66</sup> See John E. Elliott, 'Justice and Freedom in Marx's Moral Critique of Capitalism,' Warren J. Samuels, ed., *Research in The History of Economic Thought and Methodology* (Greenwich: JAI Press 1987), Vol. 5, 1-49, and sources cited therein.

## Exploitation and Equality: Labour Power as a Non-Commodity

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I

The theory of surplus value contrasts 'pay for labour power' (for proletarians) and 'pay for labour services' (for independent, self-employed 'professionals').<sup>1</sup> Unlike labour services (living labour, living labour, i.e., work itself) but like all commodities, labour power has a specific *economic value* (it contains a specific amount of embodied labour) and it exchanges at this value.<sup>2</sup> Unlike that of other commodities, the consumption of labour power results in the creation

1 This work's motivation stems from a belief that not all problems with Marx's views on justice are problems concerning justice *in itself*; some are rooted in the surplus value theory. Numbers in brackets are to Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage 1977; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976).

2 'We began with the assumption that labour power is bought and sold at its value' (340).  
'... both buyer and seller ... of labour power ... contract as free persons ... and they exchange equivalent for equivalent' (280).  
'... the purchase of labour power ... conforms to the laws of commodity exchange' (729).

of more value than the commodity itself contains.<sup>3</sup> Surplus value arises from the gap between the labour needed to sustain a day's work, to keep the worker going for a day, and the labour performed in that same time. By the labour theory of value,<sup>4</sup> the amount of labour needed to sustain a day's work (necessary labour) confers one value on the means of subsistence the worker requires, and thereby on the labour power the worker sells to her employer, whereas the day's work itself (necessary *and* surplus labour) confers another larger value on the product marketed by the employer.

Marxian economic value is embodied labour but in what sense does *labour power* embody labour? (The capacity for labour is not, like automobiles, literally manufactured.)<sup>5</sup> How is the value of labour

3 'What was really decisive for [the capitalist] was the specific use value which [labour power] possesses of being a source not only of value, *but of more value than it has itself*' (301, italics mine).

4 Much criticism of surplus value takes issue with the labour theory of value. I do not. But it will I think be evident that surplus value theory as here developed depends on what G.A. Cohen calls the 'popular doctrine' of the labour theory of value, as opposed to the 'strict doctrine'; see his excellent 'The Labour Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 8, 4 (Summer 1979).

5 The capacity for labour (at any rate, the capacity for untrained labour, to which for Marx all labour power can be 'reduced') is no more a product of labour than is the human body itself. Rather, it is a gift of nature, much like the powers of sight and hearing and the capacity for locomotion (all of which it might be supposed to include). Marx asks:

how does this strange phenomenon arise, that we find on the market a set of buyers, possessed of land, machinery, raw material and the means of subsistence, all of them save land in its crude state *products of labour*, and on the other hand a set of sellers who have nothing to sell except their labour power, *their working arms and brains*? ('Wages, Price and Profit' in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works* [New York: International Publishers 1985], Vol. 20, 128).

Apart from the seeming obviousness of the point that 'working arms and brains' are not products of labour, Marx here explicitly contrasts labour power with products of labour.

power determined? Marx's answer to this question is well known.<sup>6</sup> Marx appears to gloss 'the value of labour power' as the value of the *means of subsistence*; correlatively, he glosses the 'production' of labour power as the *maintenance* of that power, or what comes to the same thing as the production and consumption of the means of subsistence themselves. In effect, Marx's talk of the 'production' of labour power and of its 'value' seem to be mere *façons de parler* for the production and value of the means of subsistence. Yet there are reasons for thinking that this cannot be correct, and that in particular talk of the *value* of labour power cannot be a mere *façon de parler* for the value of the means of subsistence. The denial of a distinct economic value to labour power is not, I think, consistent with key features of the theory of surplus value.

Prior to grasping Marx's view, students often incline to a theory of capitalists' profit as resulting from *unequal exchanges* in the marketplace. One version of this view is what may be called the 'consumer exploitation' theory, to the effect that profit is a surcharge on the production cost of commodities, imposed by capitalists at the purchaser's expense. Marx rejects views of this kind, quoting with approval a contemporary economist who writes 'The idea of profits being paid by the consumers is, assuredly, very absurd. Who are the consumers?' (264, n.15). Unequal exchanges involving consumers or as Marx also argues, any other group are not the key to understanding profit. Profit creation must be consistent with

6 The value of labour power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this specific article. In so far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average social labour objectified in it. Labour power exists only as a capacity of the living individual. Its production consequently presupposes his existence. Given the existence of the individual, the production of labour power consists in his reproduction of himself or his maintenance. For his maintenance he requires a certain quantity of the means of subsistence. Therefore the labour time necessary for the production of labour power is the same as that necessary for the production of those means of subsistence; *in other words the value of labour power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner.* (274, my italics)

the posit that whenever commodities are exchanged, this is because ('at a first approximation') they embody equal quantities of labour:

To explain the general nature of profits, you must start from the theorem that, on an average, commodities are sold at their real values, and that profits are derived from selling them at their values. . . If you cannot explain profit upon this supposition, you cannot explain it at all.<sup>7</sup>

So though Marx says that profit derives from the exploitation by capital of labour, this must be based, ironically, on the same principle of equal exchange as is applicable to the buying and selling of commodities in general. His theory of capitalist exploitation holds that whatever might go on *outside* of the market relation between capital and labour, the capitalist's exchange-relation with the worker *in and of itself* exemplifies the kind of equality which Marx supposes to be characteristic of all exchanges of commodities. Profit-making involves no cheating or sharp practice, but is predicated on the exchange of value-equivalents.<sup>8</sup> It is of the essence of the theory of surplus value that it sets itself to resolve the seemingly paradoxical question, how exploitation is possible in conditions of equal, 'fair' exchange.

It may seem that for Marx the creation of surplus value requires simply that there be a difference between the value added to capital by workers' labour, and the value of means of subsistence workers receive from capital. But such an account omits what is at the ironic heart of Marx's project the thought that the exploitation by capital of labour takes place precisely in a framework of *exchange of equivalents* between the two. If there is to be such exchange, labour

<sup>7</sup> *Wages, Price and Profit*, 128

<sup>8</sup> 'The money-owner . . . must buy his commodities at their value, sell them at their value, and yet at the end of the process withdraw more value from circulation than he threw into it . . . these are the conditions of the problem. Hic Rhodus, hic salta!' (269). Marx makes it clear, in a footnote to this statement, that he does not suppose price to correspond with value in the real world, but that surplus value must be possible even if, counterfactually, that correspondence is supposed to obtain.

power must have an economic value of its own, distinct from that of the means of subsistence for which it is exchanged. Exploitation takes place on the basis of a reciprocal arrangement in which the capitalist provides the worker with money or means of subsistence, the worker provides the capitalist with labour power, and the value of the labour power which the worker gives up is equivalent to the value of the money or the means of subsistence which she receives. In other words, it is crucial to the theory of surplus value that labour power *itself* has economic value, and not *merely* that there should be labour necessary to maintain it. Surplus value extracted by capitalists from workers is surplus *to* the exchange value of labour power itself.

## II

It cannot then be supposed that 'the value of labour power' is a mere façon de parler for the value of the means of subsistence. Means of subsistence along with their embodied labour time or economic value are not what workers transfer *to* capitalists: they are in effect received *by* workers *from* capitalists, in exchange for labour power with its distinct but equivalent value. Yet how can a distinct value be ascribed to labour power, if it is not itself a product of labour, if its value is just that of 'the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner'? The answer is perhaps that what has economic value need not be a 'direct' product of labour. Marx's view, adapted from Ricardo, is that as means of production (themselves direct products of labour) are used up and undergo depreciation, they 'transmit' their lost value to the product. (Whether this is viewed as a mere accounting device, or as Marx seems to regard it, in a 'realistic' or 'metaphysical' way, seems at first sight to be of little consequence.)

Analogously, labour power might be supposed to acquire its economic value indirectly, from those directly produced economically valuable substances which serve to renew the worker's powers when consumed. This, it seems, is Marx's view. In discussing F. Wayland's *Elements of Political Economy*, Marx excerpts the following remark: 'The various kinds of food, clothing and shelter necessary for the existence and comfort of the human being are also

changed, they are consumed from time to time, and their value reappears in that new vigour imparted to his body and mind, forming fresh capital, to be employed again in the work of production.' Marx approves the general idea, but is concerned to remark a certain confusion which he sees Wayland as having made:

. . . what re-appears in the new vigour is not the bread's price, but its body-building substance. What, on the other hand, re-appears in the value of that vigour is not the means of subsistence but their value. (316, n.7)

The value of the 'new vigour' (Marx uses Wayland's term as an equivalent for 'renewed labour power') is a function of the value of the consumed means of subsistence, and the 'production' of labour power is a biological, not an intentional labour-involving process. The upshot is that the exchange of labour power for means of subsistence is such that in any given period, the worker surrenders a specific quantity of labour power, incorporating a value which is *numerically* identical with that of the previous period's consumed means of subsistence, for a quantity of means of subsistence whose value is *quantitatively* identical with (equivalent to) that of the existing labour power, alias already consumed means of subsistence. It is thus possible to posit a real economic exchange of equal values between capitalist and worker, an exchange of numerically distinct but quantitatively equivalent values.

Now it is a curious fact that the value of labour power is not, like that of all other elements in the production process, transferred to the product as the commodity is consumed, but seemingly just 'evaporates' or is itself 'consumed':

As regards the means of production . . . There is . . . no consumption of their value . . . It is rather preserved . . . because the use value in which it originally existed vanishes . . . into another use value. Hence the value of the means of production re-appears in the value of the product, but it is not strictly speaking reproduced in that value. . . *It is otherwise with the subjective factor of the labour process, with labour power. . . While labour . . . is in motion, it is creating . . . a new value . . . this new value only replaces the money advanced by the capitalist in purchasing of labour power. . . With regard to the money spent, the new value appears merely as a reproduction. Nevertheless, it is a real reproduction, and not, as in the case of the value of the means of production, simply an apparent one.* The replacement of one value by another is here brought about by the creation of new value. (315-16, italics mine)

The implication is that though labour power, is supposed to have a value (that of the consumed means of subsistence) this value does *not* 'reappear in the value of the product' as labour power is consumed, but disappears in the labour process along with that quantity of labour power. Marx gives no special emphasis to the point, but given the fundamental distinction between necessary and surplus labour time, the assumption that the value of consumed means of subsistence does not re-emerge in the product, via the consumption of labour power, is one he is bound to make.<sup>9</sup>

'Necessary labour time' is defined as 'the portion of the working day during which this reproduction (of the value of labour power) takes place' (325). It is the time required for the worker to produce a value equivalent to the value of the means of subsistence (alias the value of labour power) which disappears as labour power is consumed. And if that quantity of value were *not* supposed to disappear during the consumption of labour power, but were supposed instead to be transferred to the product, then the whole conceptual scheme of necessary labour time, surplus labour time and surplus value would be undermined. In one respect, this is almost self-evident. If the value of labour power were not used up, no *reproduction* of that value would be necessary, and by Marx's definition (which is an *economic* or value-based definition) there could be *no such thing* as necessary labour time, hence no such thing as surplus labour time. (At the same time, plainly, the *technical* necessity of necessary labour would be unaffected.) Consequently, use value and exchange value would come radically 'unstuck.' Consider an economy in a steady state (the state which Marx calls 'simple' as against 'extended' reproduction). Here existing quantities of use values, means of consumption and production, are replaced but not expanded. Other things being equal, the value of such a totality of com-

<sup>9</sup> The only person to notice this 'non-transfer' seems to be R.P. Wolff in his *Understanding Marx* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984) 104, n.20. Relegating it to a footnote, Wolff does not seem to think the point important and casually recommends what I shall argue would be theoretically disastrous that Marx *ought* to regard the value of labour power as transmitted to the product.



modities must remain constant. If, however, it were supposed that labour power transferred its value to the product, then the theory would be forced to posit a continuous inflation in the quantity of exchange value.

In the standard Marxian model, the production of commodities is subdivided into the production of means of production and the production of means of consumption, and the latter in turn into the production of means of subsistence for the working class and of consumption goods for the capitalist class. According to Marx, means of production always transfer their value to the product; and if the value of labour power were also supposed to be transferred to the product, then the means of subsistence for the working class would themselves, via that labour power, transfer their value to the product. The only instance in which value would now ever *disappear* or exit from the circuit, would be in the individual consumption of the members of the capitalist class. In this case, if in terms of *use-values* the economy were supposed to be in a steady state, the existing quantities of means of consumption and production being replaced but not expanded, then in *exchange value*-terms there would be steady economic expansion (not mere price inflation), which is absurd. Use value and exchange value would indeed part company.

### III

The requirement that the value of the means of subsistence not be recycled, via labour power, does not of itself imply that this value must disappear in the consumption of *labour power* rather than in the prior consumption of the means of subsistence *themselves*. It is not clear why (apart from introducing in a question-begging way the assumption that the exchange between labour and capital is an exchange of equivalents) it should be supposed that this value evaporates indirectly in consumption of labour power, and not immediately in consumption of means of subsistence. To the extent that it can be discerned, Marx's reasoning appears confused. It seems, in the above quotation from 315-16, to rest on the undefended idea that insofar as 'labour power in action' adds *new* value to the

product, and in *this* respect is to be distinguished from means of production, it follows that it is *also* to be distinguished from means of production with regard to the transfer of *existing* value. Marx seems to think it obvious that the fact that the use of a certain commodity is *value-creating*, as opposed to *merely* value-transferring, is not compatible with its being value-transferring *at all* (the suggestion is made without argument). It goes without saying that this is not the case.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, there are positive reasons within the Marxian scheme for thinking that the value of the means of subsistence disappears in their consumption, and not in the consumption of labour power. Marx distinguishes between productive and individual consumption,<sup>11</sup> and the distinction suggests either (a) that labour power receives no transferred value from the means of subsistence, or (b) that if it does, it must itself transfer this value in turn. Since we know that (b) results in paradox, the distinction dictates alternative (a). Contrasting individual consumption and productive consumption, Marx quotes approvingly from the work of the political economist S.P. Newman: 'Productive Consumption: where the consumption of a commodity is a part of the process of production. . . In these instances there is no consumption of value' (315, n.6). By this account, the consumption of labour power would count as productive con-

10 So far as accounting for the magnitude of value of the total finished product (or the surplus product) goes, it makes no difference whether labour power is supposed to embody the value of the already consumed means of subsistence or to be valueless. Capitalists are obliged to provide money for workers' means of subsistence; whether this money is regarded as representing 'the value of labour power' is immaterial. Whether what capitalists get has value or not is irrelevant so far as they are concerned if any value it may have cannot be transmitted to the product.

11 The worker's consumption is of two kinds. While producing he consumes the means of production with his labour, and converts them into products with a higher value than that of the capital advanced. This is his productive consumption. It is at the same time consumption of his labour power by the capitalist who bought it. On the other hand the worker uses the money paid to him for his labour power to buy the means of subsistence; this is his individual consumption. The worker's productive consumption and his individual consumption are therefore totally distinct. (717)

sumption. It would seem then that if labour power is supposed to have a value, then Marx should be committed also to supposing that this value is transferred to the product. Labour power is not only a commodity which is, like all commodities, consumed; it is par excellence 'a commodity whose consumption is part of the process of production,' whose consumption 'confers upon the product a higher value than that of the capital advanced' (Marx's definition of productive consumption). And in productive consumption, Marx quotes Newman as saying, value is not consumed but transferred to the product. Why then should labour power be exempted? It might be said that it is only the *means of production* (as opposed to labour power) whose value is transferred; but apart from the fact that some independent justification for this restriction would be called for, it is worth noting that Marx himself sometimes counts labour power as means of production.<sup>12</sup> It seems that if labour power has a value, and if Marx does (as he appears to) endorse the view of Newman which he quotes, then consistency would require that the value of labour power be supposed to be transmitted to the product.

Is there then any non-arbitrary way to block the implication of value-transfer from means of subsistence through labour power to finished product without thereby denying the initial value-transfer from means of subsistence to labour power? The question concerns the nature of any criterion implicit in Marx for distinguishing between those cases (within the sphere of production) in which value is transferred from one thing to another and those in which it is not. In chapter 8 of *Capital*, at least two distinct criteria of value transfer are suggested.

(i) A criterion of 'physical transfer' is implied by the following remarks:

As regards the means of production . . . there is in fact no consumption of their value, and it would therefore be inaccurate to say that it is reproduced. It is rather preserved . . . *because the use-value in which it originally existed . . . vanish-*

<sup>12</sup> He writes e.g. that 'the individual consumption of the working class is . . . the production and reproduction of the capitalist's most indispensable means of production: the worker' (717-18).

*es . . . into some other use-value.* Hence the value of the means of production reappears in the value of the product. (315-16, italics mine)

The reason why means of production do not lose their value, at the same time as they lose their use value, is that they lose in the labour process the *original form* of their use value only to assume in the product the *form* of a new use value. (310, italics mine)

But (a) the second formulation seems not to rule out labour power, and (b) the criterion is too narrow in general. (a) There is talk of a transformation of use value as the basis for the transmission of value. In the case of labour power, its use value is *labour*, and this is in fact transformed from being work activity, 'living labour,' into being a 'piece' of work, 'dead labour' embodied in a product. (b) Both quotations suggest 'transformations in the form of matter,' after the fashion of Aristotle's metaphysics, as the basis for the transmission of exchange value. But it seems plain that this is too narrow a criterion for the transmission of value. It works for raw materials, which do in some fairly intelligible sense 'vanish into' the product, but not for instruments of labour, still less for buildings and the like, whose depreciated value must nonetheless be imputed to the finished product, though there is no intelligible sense in which those items are 'transformed.' At best, they get 'used up' and disappear. ('At best,' since the capitalist's buildings may depreciate at a faster rate if nothing at all is going on in them.)

(ii) It might be argued that all 'vanish into the product' above means is 'vanish, and are necessary conditions of the existence of the product.' If so, then criterion (i) is a misleadingly expressed version of a second criterion which does not face the objection of being too narrow. Marx writes

Suppose that in spinning cotton, the waste for every 115 lbs. used amounts to 15 lbs., which is converted, not into yarn, but into "devil's dust." Now, although this 15 lbs. of cotton never becomes a constituent element of the yarn, yet . . . its value is . . . transferred to the value of the yarn. The destruction of this cotton is . . . a necessary condition for the production of the yarn. And *because it is a necessary condition, and for no other reason*, the value of that cotton is transferred to the product. (313, italics mine. In the Penguin edition a sentence is missing from the text)

Here it is said to be a sufficient condition of the value of x being transferred to y that the consumption of x (which does have value) is a necessary condition of the production of y. This, however, is too broad. Since the consumption of housing and food by the proletariat, is a necessary condition of the production of commodities, then on this criterion the value of the housing and food must be transferred to the produced commodities, so that exchange value must inflate continuously even if use value is static. The criterion is therefore unacceptable.

Marx fails to provide a criterion which, on the assumption that they both have value, distinguishes labour power from means of production with regard to the transmission or nontransmission of this value. On the one hand he provides no justification for supposing that the value which is initially that of the means of subsistence, unlike that of the means of production, only vanishes once it has 'entered' labour power. On the other hand, there are general features of his theory which make it attractive to suppose that the point at which this value, originally the value of the means of subsistence, vanishes is precisely in consumption of the means of subsistence. Thus Marx endorses the view that in productive consumption, 'there is no consumption of value,' and it seems clearly implicit in this remark, that in individual consumption there *is* consumption of value. In other words, the value of the means of subsistence should be supposed to disappear directly in individual consumption, not indirectly in productive consumption, and labour power should thus be supposed to have no value. Furthermore, Marx seems to think that labour is an essential component in the transmission of value:

. . . labour, because it is directed to a specific purpose, preserves and transfers to the product the value of the means of production. (316)

Yet individual consumption of the means of subsistence is precisely not a labour process: eating something does not in general add value to it, and so ought not to involve any transfer of the value of that substance to the 'product' labour power.

## IV

It is time to take stock. What is called 'the value of labour power' is a function of the value of those economically valuable items (i.e. commodities) which sustain it. This much is said by Marx. Labour power has no other economic value of its own; its value is not anything distinct from the value of those sustaining commodities. If then that value is not somehow *actually transmitted* from them to the person of the worker, there can be no subsequent *equal exchange* of valuable items between labour and capital. And there are good theoretical reasons to suppose that the value in question *cannot* be transmitted to the person of the worker, but must disappear in individual consumption. The best that can be said for Marx's view that labour power is valuable, even though it does not pass on this value, is that it is an arbitrary contrivance whose *raison d'être* is the ironic but unmotivated posit of equal exchange between capital and labour.

What in general is the *point* of ascribing economic value to an item? The idea is surely that this value figures as an independent variable in an *explanation* of the quantity of something else for which the item can be exchanged. Yet the attribution of value to labour power plays no such role: it is a mere secondary 'manifestation' of the value of that for which it is exchanged. There is only one independent variable here, the value of the means of subsistence. What capitalists give workers is determined not by the value of what workers have to offer in exchange, but by the value of what workers need (or effectively demand) to sustain them in the manner to which they are accustomed. For capitalists, whether that value is transmitted to workers' labour power or not is beside the point. The significance of the fact that an item bought by capitalists has a certain exchange value is that this value enters into the fixing of the value of the finished product. If the capitalist must pay for something whose value does not enter into the value of the product, then it is for him a matter of indifference whether it has any value or not. In the case of labour power, he is of course compensated for his 'loss' by the fact that new value is added to the product, and this new value more than cancels out that 'loss.'

On a more coherent, integrated reading of the texts, the expression 'the value of labour power' would in fact function as a mere

façon de parler for the value of the means of subsistence, and the talk of equal exchange would degenerate into the harmless truism that the worker is paid the value of the means of subsistence. On such an account, the price the capitalist pays corresponds not to any distinct 'value of labour power,' but directly to that of the means of subsistence; in return, he gets the right to use the worker's labour power. But the capitalist does not (contractually) pay *for* the worker's means of subsistence; what he pays *for* is the right to use the worker's powers. Nevertheless, what the price he pays *actually reflects* is the value of the means of subsistence effectively demanded by the worker, i.e. the *amount* he is paid is determined by the value of the means of subsistence. 'What the capitalist pays' then has two aspects what he formally pays *for* is the (right to use the) worker's labour power, while what materially he pays is the value of the means of subsistence. That someone is paid 'for' an item they offer for sale does not necessarily mean that it has an economic value (consider, e.g., virgin land). There is a crucial distinction between what the capitalist 'buys' or what he pays for the right to use (labour power) and those valuable items, the means of subsistence, which the money received corresponds to.

The upshot is that *either* the principle of equal exchange (hence the theory of surplus value) is to be rejected, *or* it is to be regarded as purely ad hoc, resting on an arbitrary stipulation. Interpreting Marx in the most coherent, least arbitrary way, there turns out to be no economic exchange. The deal is one in which formally the benefit is to the worker (who receives valuable commodities in return for something which is economically valueless), but materially to the capitalist (whose benefits exceed his costs). Marx's remarks about equality which are no doubt *intended* as ironic are in reality misleading and confused. On the most coherent reading of his work, the 'equality' in question is neither genuine nor merely apparent, but a theoretical mistake. Marx's distinction between necessary and surplus labour which in the context of his theory of capitalism becomes the basis of his theory of surplus value requires that either in reality or in effect, labour power lacks economic value. But since the concept of surplus value is predicated on the attribution of value to labour power, the theory of surplus value (as against some purified Marxian theory of capitalist exploi-

tation, from which the problem feature has been removed) undermines or deconstructs itself.

Two final points: (i) It seems that Marx cannot both maintain that the exchange of labour power is fair or equal, and also deny that the recipient has *the right to use it*, and so to appropriate the product, as the thesis of exploitation requires. Rejecting equal exchange resolves this basic paradox. (ii) Rather than paradoxically thinking of the exchange between labour and capital as equal, exploitation notwithstanding, this 'exchange' is better compared with the relation between the owner of an automobile (the worker) who cannot afford to run it herself and the owner of a gas station (the capitalist) to whom she finds herself obliged to rent it, 'in return' for having her tank filled up each time it has been emptied.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Thanks in particular to Arthur Ripstein for his valued comments on an ancestor of the present paper, and to Bob Ware for good suggestions in his capacity as editor.



# IV HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND IDEOLOGY

## Marxism, Materialism and Historical Progress\*

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*Relations of personal dependence. . .are the first social forms. . .Personal independence founded on dependence on objects is the second great form. . .Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals, and on their subordination to their communal, social productivity as their social wealth is the third stage. The second stage creates the conditions for the third.1*

### I Introduction

The theory of historical materialism is the core commitment of Marx's social theory. More than his views on markets, philosophical methods, the state and social institutions, it is this theory which sets Marx's views apart from alternative traditions in political philosophy. Marx believes that there is a *tendency* for societies to make moral and material progress. The point of Marx's theory of historical materialism is to offer a theory of the mechanisms which produce this ten-

\* I would like to thank Joshua Cohen, John Dupré, Andrew Levine, Jean Roberts and Christopher Waters for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1 K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, M. Nicolaus, trans. (New York: Vintage 1973), 158

gency. However, in Marx's own formulation, the precise nature of these mechanisms remains obscure. In *The German Ideology*, Marx emphasizes the growth of human productive powers as the fundamental cause of historical change and progress: social forms (e.g., feudalism, capitalism) change in order to adapt to the requirements of further productive development. By contrast, in *The Communist Manifesto* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx emphasizes the desires and interests of classes as fundamental to explaining social change. Here, it is class struggles (aimed at ending specific conditions of oppression) which determine not only when an old social form will be replaced by a new one, but also the nature of the new social form itself. Marx never specifies the connection between these two explanations of historical change, between the development of human productive powers and class struggles. In particular, Marx is not explicit as to whether there are two distinct mechanisms at work in the production of historical progress, or only one.

Recently, the theory of historical materialism has been substantially clarified by analytically trained philosophers. In *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, G.A. Cohen defends a 'technological' interpretation of historical materialism in which the growth of human productive power provides the primary impetus for historical change and 'social forms rise and fall as they enable or impede that growth.'<sup>2</sup> Cohen ascribes class struggles a secondary, dependent status in historical materialist explanations: 'Marx holds that a class gains and possesses power *because* it marches in step with the productive forces.'<sup>3</sup>

Cohen's clarification of historical materialism raises some interesting points about the underlying assumptions of Marx's theory, as well as presenting a rigorous formulation of the theory's basic categories, such as force of production. But Cohen's central claim about the possibility of explaining social development solely in terms of material, technological causes is, I believe, mistaken. Other causes

<sup>2</sup> G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978), x

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, 160; my emphasis

in particular, ethical causes must be appealed to in the explanation of the actual course of social development. In other words, a theory of history which explains social change simply as an adaptation to expanding productive powers is inadequate. Furthermore, ethical causes are implicit in Marx's own account of historical change. In this paper, I will critically assess the adequacy of Cohen's theory as an interpretation of historical materialism and propose an alternative interpretation.

In addition, I believe my interpretation of historical materialism will help to resolve a paradox concerning Marx's conception of morality. The respective merits of capitalism and communism are at the center of debates in developing countries. But the social critic who looks to Marx for explicit arguments about the injustice of capitalist institutions must be disappointed. Marx is an unrelenting critic of morality. He argues that concepts of right and justice are 'outdated verbal rubbish'; and he explicitly refuses to condemn capitalism as unjust. Marx's criticism of morality is paradoxical because according to his own social theory communism is *better* than capitalism, yet his rejection of a moral standpoint appears to leave us powerless to say how it is better.

The controversies about Marx's theory of history and his ethical views have unfolded in isolation from one another. But Marx's justification of communism is related to his theory of history. Marx conceives of history as creating the conditions for the achievement of freedom in social life, communism. He doesn't simply posit communism as an ideal; rather, he aims to specify the mechanisms responsible for the realization of the ideal. I will argue that Marx's explanation of why history produces the conditions for communism requires the postulation of an explanatory role for certain values, including the value of freedom. It is because freedom is objectively good for human beings that history moves in the way that it does: human beings can recognize their interest in freedom, and this recognition leads them to change their social relations in ways which expand their freedom.<sup>4</sup> With respect to Marx's theory of history, the

<sup>4</sup> The identification of what is good with what is in human interests is controversial. In particular, someone might argue that there are things which are in

*(footnote continued on next page)*

fact that communism expands human freedom is a significant part of the explanation of why it eventually occurs. With respect to his ethical views, Marx believes that communism is better than capitalism *because* its institutions allow for greater freedom than capitalist institutions: communism allows for the harmonization of the free development of the powers of each person with the free development of the powers of all. Marx denies, however, that freedom is best secured through a *moral* theory (see below, section VI).

Historical materialism, on my interpretation, involves two theses: (1) that social forms change in response to expanding human productive powers, and (2) that there is a learning process in history through which social agents become aware of their interests in certain values (such as freedom) and use that awareness to constitute their practices and institutions. The specific structure of history is explained both by the adaptation to new technology and the learning about human interests. Furthermore, I will argue that these two theses require separate mechanisms for their explanation. Material technological changes cannot explain the expansion of freedom in social life, and progress in social freedom cannot be reduced to progress in productive development.<sup>5</sup> Marx's writings sometimes suggest that such reduction is possible. But anyone interested in constructing a plausible defense of historical materialism should not accept these suggestions.<sup>6</sup>

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

human interests and are not good. I am not assuming that all interests are good, only the interests the agent would have if she formed her interests under certain 'ideal conditions.' For a discussion of different ways of defining interests see R. Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Marx's explicit lack of clarity about the relationship between material and moral progress is a point emphasized by J. Habermas in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press 1971), esp. ch. 2 and 3.

<sup>6</sup> We need not reject, however, Marx's incisive observation that material progress is a necessary condition for moral progress.

## II Historical Progress

The theory of historical materialism seeks to explain historical progress. One aspect of historical progress is the broad convergence of societies on institutions and practices which are justified from a moral point of view.<sup>7</sup> A fundamental issue between Marxism and alternative political philosophies concerns whether or not the changes which represent moral progress can be *explained* using evaluative categories. It is sometimes said that these changes are simply the product of anomalous and/or lucky circumstances. Rawls, for example, attributes them to the historically contingent development of the principle of toleration in the wake of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>8</sup> It is generally assumed that our moral and social theories are only tenuously connected, that there is no systematic link between what is good and what is historically efficacious.

Marx, however, needs to explain this convergence because it is crucial to his argument that history tends, eventually, to generate the conditions for communism. In particular, Marx must explain the following changes,<sup>9</sup> which are the basis of his prediction that capitalism will be replaced by communism:

(1) The growth of human productive powers. History is marked, according to Marx, by a continuous expansion in the forces of production roughly, anything (e.g., machinery, skills, and technology) which contributes to the productivity of the labor process. One indicator of this expansion is the amount of surplus produced

<sup>7</sup> For elaborations of the idea of moral progress in history, see Peter Railton, 'Moral Realism,' *Philosophical Review* 95, 2 (1986); Jurgen Habermas, 'Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures,' in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, T. McCarthy trans. (Boston: Beacon Press 1979); G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, H.B. Nesbit, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975).

<sup>8</sup> J. Rawls, 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus,' *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 7, 1 (1987)

<sup>9</sup> Railton offers a similiar list of moral improvements.

over and above what a society requires to reproduce itself at a given level.<sup>10</sup> Throughout history, the amount of surplus product has increased.

- (2) An increasing equality of basic social conditions, as evidenced in the decline of aristocratic and caste societies and the disappearance of slavery.
- (3) Changes in the type of respect/recognition that is given to social agents. For example, while slaves were treated as mere instruments of production, on par with natural objects, workers in capitalist societies are accorded rights and, often, full political citizenship. Marx regards these changes as especially significant:

The worker's recognition of the product as his own, and the judgement that his separation from the conditions of his realization is improper forcibly imposed is an enormous advance in awareness, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave's awareness that he cannot be the property of another, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production.<sup>11</sup>

- (4) The growing incorporation of individuals into public political life:

The state abolishes, after its fashion, the distinctions established by birth, social rank, education, occupation and non-political distinctions; when it proclaims, without regard to these distinctions, that every member of society is an *equal* partner in popular sovereignty.<sup>12</sup>

- (5) The location of the source of moral authority in men and women themselves, as opposed to natural law and divine sanctions:

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, 61

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 463

<sup>12</sup> Marx, 'On the Jewish Question,' in R. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton 1978), 33

All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations of his kind.<sup>13</sup>

While recent work on historical materialism, particularly that undertaken by Cohen, has given priority to the changes exemplified in (1), especially to the growth of the division of labor, the changes characterized in (2), (3), (4) and (5) are also historically significant and essential to the aim of Marx's project. These changes are part of the basis of Marx's argument that communism and not some despotic but efficient alternative is the endpoint of historical development:

Communism is not for us a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.<sup>14</sup>

This claim must be taken seriously if Marx's contribution to social theory is to be assessed. The aim of historical materialism is to provide an account of the mechanisms which produce this 'real movement' and which lead, ultimately, to communism; to a society in which we achieve both technical mastery over nature and 'practical' mastery over ourselves and the conditions of our social association.

### III Cohen's Version of Historical Materialism

The issue that concerns us here is whether or not the historical changes depicted above in (1)-(5) can be accounted for in materialist terms alone. One of the merits of Cohen's work is its recogni-

<sup>13</sup> Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto,' in *The Marx-Engels Reader* (hereafter *MER*), 476

<sup>14</sup> Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *MER*, 162



tion that the explanation of these changes, and not some new and obscure principle of method, is Marx's central project. Marx attempted to provide a theory which explains the real causal structure of history, and it is this theory which Cohen intends to clarify.

In Cohen's version of historical materialism, the forces of production are the prime factors determining social change and are primary over other factors such as the type of social relations a society has, its laws, and its morality. Cohen calls this thesis the primacy thesis and he draws it out of a famous summary Marx wrote of his views in 1859:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of the development of the productive forces. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. . . From forms of the development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.<sup>15</sup>

But in Marx's formulation the primacy thesis is subject to a serious and potentially devastating criticism. On the one hand, the 1859 summary indicates that the relations of production are causally dependent upon they are brought into correspondence with the forces of production. This is consistent with the explanatory primacy of the productive forces. Yet, the 1859 summary also indicates that the forces of production are themselves causally dependent upon the relations of production since at a certain stage the relations are said to 'fetter' the forces. 'Fettering' indicates that whether or not the productive forces actually develop depends on the production relations. As Cohen puts it, 'If high technology rules out slavery, then slavery rules out high technology.'<sup>16</sup> And, if the constraint of the relations and forces is mutual, how can one of them have explanatory primacy?

The major innovations in Cohen's interpretation of historical materialism are introduced in response to this critical objection.

<sup>15</sup> Marx, *MER*, 4

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, 158

Cohen argues that there is a form of causal explanation that can support the primacy thesis and which is consistent with the above summary by Marx, namely, functional explanation. Functional explanations explain something by its propensity to produce certain consequences. Functional explanations are explanations in which the *explanandum* is functional for something. Cohen argues that a particular set of production relations obtains precisely *because* of the impact of these relations on the productive forces:

The forces would not develop as they do were the relations different, but that is *why* the relations are not different because relations of the given kind suit the development of the productive forces.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the existence of a particular set of social relations is functionally explained by the effect of those relations on productive development. It is a dispositional fact about a situation, namely, that if production relations of a certain type were to obtain, then they would maximally develop the productive forces, which explains why they obtain. Cohen's defense of the primacy thesis is associated with another thesis he advances, which he calls the Development Thesis, a thesis which attempts to portray this dispositional fact. The Development Thesis is formulated as D1: the productive forces tend to develop throughout history.

Cohen emphasizes that the defense of D1 must not rely on any facts about social structures. That is, the tendency for productive growth must be asocially explained. For if the tendency of material growth to occur prevails only when there are favorable social relations of production, then the objection raised above about mutual constraint would stand. It would be circular to invoke a tendency to material progress in an explanation of why particular social relations obtain, if those social relations were themselves a part of the explanation for material progress.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>18</sup> G. Cohen and W. Kymlicka, 'Human Nature and Social Change in the Marxist Conception of History,' *Journal of Philosophy* 85, 4 (1988)

I will not comment here on the issue of whether or not Cohen's defense of D1 on purely materialist grounds succeeds. This should not be taken, however, as an endorsement of Cohen's defense of that thesis.<sup>19</sup> If Cohen's defense of D1 does not succeed, then his functional solution to the problem of mutual constraint will be irrelevant. Without an asocial tendency for material development, Cohen's functionalist argument would fail to resolve this problem; we would be left with mutual causation without primacy. In what follows, I will assume that the argument for D1 does succeed and assess the theory's overall adequacy as an interpretation and defense of historical materialism. My claim is that even if D1 is true, material causes alone cannot suffice to explain historical progress. If D1 is true, Cohen's argument has plausibility as an explanation of material progress, but even so it is inadequate as an account of the historical changes characterized in (2)-(5) above. Therefore, Cohen's argument fails as an explanation of the direction of social evolution taken as a whole. In particular, Cohen cannot explain why Marx predicts that communism will be the endpoint of a 'real historical movement.'

#### IV Criticisms

There are two problems with Cohen's attempt to explain historical progress in material terms alone.

*1. Diverse Paths.* The first problem concerns the possibility of 'functionally equivalent' social relations sets of social relations which are co-optimal for productive development. According to Cohen, social relations change when and because the further development of the productive forces requires that they do so. In other words, the requirements of production dictate the nature of the new social

<sup>19</sup> For criticisms of the Development Thesis see A. Levine and E. Wright, 'Rationality and Class Struggle,' *New Left Review* 123 (Sept/Oct 1980); J. Cohen, review of *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, *Journal of Philosophy* 79, 5 (1982).

relations. The first problem arises if there is more than one way of maximally developing the productive forces. If so, then material factors alone might not explain the general direction of history.

There has been some controversy as to whether or not Marx held a unilinear view of history in which there is one *unique* path of historical development, a sequence of states through which every society must travel. While many of Marx's writings suggest his commitment to a linear view of history, in which successive social forms rank higher than their predecessors with respect to productive development, on the issue of unilinearity he is less clear. In the Preface to *Capital* he writes,

Intrinsically it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that result from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with an iron necessity to inevitable results. The country that is most developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.<sup>20</sup>

Jon Elster reads this passage as 'unambiguously' endorsing a unique path of universal development.<sup>21</sup> But the context of the passage makes it clear that Marx is referring only to countries which are more or less capitalist. In particular, Marx is encouraging Germans to look to England for a model of their own future development. This leaves open the possibility of diverse paths of development for noncapitalist societies.

In several places, as Elster in fact notes, Marx explicitly considers the possibility of alternative paths of development. During the 1870s, for example, Russian socialists posed to Marx the question of whether or not Russia could bypass capitalism and base socialist development directly on the existing peasant communes. In letters and drafts

<sup>20</sup> K. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, B. Fowkes, trans. (New York: Vintage Books 1977), 90-1

<sup>21</sup> J. Elster, 'Historical Materialism and Economic Backwardness' in T. Ball and J. Farr, eds., *After Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984), 44. Elster does not, however, believe that Marx unambiguously held a unilinear theory of history. Cf. 43ff.

of letters to these Russian socialists, Marx decided that since the Russian communes were based on territory rather than kinship, and included elements of social ownership (as opposed to the small scale, independent peasant production characteristic of Western European feudalism), they were less susceptible to dissolution than earlier forms of communal property. Because of their adaptability, Marx believed that the communes might become the starting point for a socialist transformation of Russia. On the basis of a given level of material development, Marx argued that Russia could develop either capitalist or socialist relations of production. Nowhere in his drafts to the Russians does Marx indicate that the Russian path of socialist development would be sub-optimal with respect to capitalist productive development. On the contrary, he writes that Russia could 'incorporate the positive achievements of the capitalist system without having to pass under its harsh tribute.'<sup>22</sup> Not only could Russia industrialize under relations which were the functional equivalents of capitalist relations with respect to productive growth, but she could do so under conditions which were significantly freer and more humane.

Unfortunately, however, this example does not offer unambiguous support for the possibility of varied developmental paths. Marx qualified his comments to the Russian socialists by indicating that should Russia become isolated from the capitalist world, she would be unable to obtain the benefits of its advanced technology and would then be forced to undergo all of the stages of capitalist development. Without intervention from the capitalist world, the Russian commune would ultimately disappear and Russia would fall to the 'natural laws' of capitalist economic development. Marx is, at best, cautiously optimistic about the possibility of Russian advancement on the basis of the communes.

A less ambiguous example of Marx's commitment to the existence of alternative paths of development can be found in the *Grundrisse*. Here, Marx discusses three distinct routes out of the primitive life

<sup>22</sup> T. Shanin, ed., *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1983), 111

of communal nomadic tribes: (1) the Asiatic mode of production; (2) the Ancient mode of production; and (3) the Germanic mode of production. These three social forms coexist historically, and Marx nowhere indicates that these three forms can be ranked according to the levels of surplus they produce.

Nonetheless, he presents these three modes *as if* they were successive stages of development.<sup>23</sup> Marx's presentation suggests that he is ordering these social forms according to a distinct developmental logic, not of expanding production but of increasing social freedom. The Asiatic mode is characterized by direct communal property, where an individual cannot own property in separation from the community. There is no individual property, only individual possession, i.e., there is individual possession of land which is owned by the state. There is no personal freedom, no separation of the individual from his social conditions: 'The fundamental principle of the Asiatic form is that the individual does not become independent of the community.'<sup>24</sup> The Ancient mode, by contrast, allows for individual ownership, which is a pre-condition for membership in the community: only property owners can be citizens. In this mode, there is also direct appropriation of the labor of one part of society by another in the form of slavery. Finally, in the Germanic mode, communal property and individual property coexist. Individual property, however, predominates based on the separate household.

In this sequence, each social form is depicted as a distinct stage in the development of social freedom. In the Asiatic mode, none are free; in the Ancient mode, only the non-slave citizens are free; in the Germanic mode, all are (somewhat) free, circumscribed by their narrow localistic relations based on tradition.<sup>25</sup>

23 In the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx explicitly refers to 'the Asiatic, the Ancient. . .' as a sequence of progressive epochs. Cf. *MER*, 5.

24 Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, E. Hobsbawm, ed. (New York: International Publishers 1965), 83

25 For an analogous view of historical development, cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover 1956), 18ff.

Marx's own writings suggest, therefore, the possibility of alternative paths of development or, at least, of alternative social forms on a given level of material development. These suggestions, of course, might arguably be peripheral to the thrust of Marx's historical theory. But, independently of 'Marxological' considerations, what is the argument against the possibility of functionally equivalent social relations? There is no sustained argument in *Karl Marx's Theory of History* on behalf of the claim that there are no historically possible functionally equivalent social relations. And if there are such functionally equivalent relations, why should the fact that social relations of a given type are optimal for productive development be sufficient to bring them into being, when other social relations of a different type with similar productive potentials remain mere possibilities?

In *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, Cohen attempts to defend functional explanations against standard philosophical criticisms, such as those raised by Hempel in *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*. Hempel argued that the possibility of functional equivalents shows that functional explanations cannot be genuinely explanatory. As Cohen puts the Hempelian objection: 'Why should the rain dance's potential suffice for its actualization, when other ceremonies with similar potentials are not actualized?'<sup>26</sup> In response to this type of objection, Cohen suggests two ways that his theory might accommodate the threat posed by functional equivalents. His first response suggests that in the case of functionally equivalent social relations there may be independent reasons why the alternative social relations do not obtain. The alternative social relations might be optimal only under certain conditions. It might be, for example, that social relations are optimal only if they are 'part of the traditional repertoire'<sup>27</sup> of the predecessor society. (This is, at any rate, what he says about the rain dance.) So, Cohen might argue that given the absence of anything like the Russian commune, socialist relations of production were not in fact optimal for earlier English industrialization.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen, 274

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 275

Socialist, communal relations were not 'part of the traditional repertoire' of English society.

Cohen's second response to the objection about functional equivalents is to argue that 'every explanation fails to account for innumerable properties of the *explanandum* phenomenon.'<sup>28</sup> This is a familiar line of defense. It is a truism that theoretical models are simple, reality is complex. Every model provides only an incomplete account of the causal factors that influence the system it describes. Perhaps historical materialism cannot show which particular functionally equivalent set of social relations obtains, but it can show why *some* functionally equivalent set must obtain.

These two responses to the objection about functional equivalents are, of course, only sketches, and each requires considerable elaboration. Nevertheless, the sketches highlight the inadequacy of Cohen's theory with respect to a basic feature of Marx's theory of history the tendency for societies to make moral progress towards communism. Marx believes that history has a direction; it produces the conditions for communism. But the conditions for communism include the ability of individuals to enact democratic social arrangements as well as high levels of productivity. Given the existence of functionally equivalent social relations at distinct stages in the development of the productive forces, Cohen cannot explain even if we grant his point about the additional conditions required for optimality why the social relations of successive societies display this direction towards communism, and not some very productive and very non-democratic social form.

This is important because Cohen's view claims to be a reconstruction of Marx's, and Marx thought that his theory provided grounds for making a prediction about future historical development. Cohen's theory must therefore set out to do what Marx intended or provide an explicit argument about why Marx was wrong. In fact, Cohen believes that communism is the endpoint of historical evolution, but his theory is inconclusive as to why this must be so.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 276



Cohen does, however, have a possible response available to the 'functional equivalents' criticism which is consistent with some of Marx's own writings. As I indicated above, Marx is not explicit about the relationship between material and moral progress, and he characterizes this relationship in diverse and inconsistent ways. In an interesting passage in *Capital*, Marx suggests that how much people produce is not only related to the level of the development of the forces of production, but also to the types of incentives they are offered to produce. Cohen might thus argue that free labor is more productive than slave labor not only because of differences in technology, but also because the free laborer can identify with his work and assume responsibility for it; he therefore works harder, bringing more of 'himself' to his work. However, the free laborer can conceive of his work as an extension of himself only *because* he is free; he does not work simply out of fear or coercion. The relationship of the free laborer to his work, then, is part of the explanation for why free labor is more productive than slave labor. Social relations which allow for greater freedom are *necessary* for productive growth.<sup>29</sup> In other words, there is a necessary connection between 'objective' changes in production and ideological changes in consciousness, between technological developments and learning about human interests.

Conceivably then, Cohen could argue that *all* the available functionally equivalent social relations for productive growth also represent progress from the moral point of view.<sup>30</sup> This is, of course, a very strong claim, stronger than anything defended explicitly by Cohen or Marx. In fact, even if it were true, Cohen lacks an account of how productive requirements work to generate historical actors who are not only aware of how to make innovative technical advances, but also know how to reorganize their relations with others

<sup>29</sup> See Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 1031 for an argument along these lines. See also Cohen: 'Expansion of freedom is *dictated* by the productive forces when their further development is impossible without it, but the expansion can be no greater than what their current level *permits*' (204).

<sup>30</sup> I owe this point to Paul Horwich.

in such a way that institutionalizes greater social freedom. How do individuals begin to learn about the social changes required for further productive development?

2. *Functions Without Workers.* The second problem with Cohen's materialist explanation of social evolution is that it fails to capture the central role which Marx gives to classes in the explanation of social change. Cohen denies that his account of historical materialism removes classes from the center of historical change, arguing that the coincidence between the interests of a particular class and the interests of humanity at large is part of the explanation of why that class is successful. Class struggle is an important part of the answer to the question 'how does the fact that a new structure would benefit the productive forces explain its actualization.'<sup>31</sup> Rather than constituting a separate causal mechanism producing historical change, Cohen argues that class victories are *explained* by the conduciveness of the rule of a given class to further productive expansion.

But, it is not clear why, in Cohen's version of historical materialism, classes should be privileged agents in the explanation of historical change.<sup>32</sup> There is no reason in principle why other non-class agents (for example, the state or managerial bureaucrats and planners) could not serve as the vehicles of social transformation. Consider the following example given by Cohen as an interpretation of Marx's explanation of the limitation of the working day. Cohen argues that this limitation was necessary to protect the interests of the capitalist class as a whole. Individual capitalists, acting to maximize their profits, continually extended the working day. Eventually, they reached a point where they risked the physical health of their workers. By endangering the ability of the working class to

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, 285

<sup>32</sup> Marx defines classes by their relationship to the means of production, their objective position in the network of ownership relations. For example, workers do not own the means of production and must sell their ability to labor (their 'labor-power') to survive.

reproduce itself, individual capitalists threatened their collective interest in the survival of capitalism. In order to enforce this collective interest, the state intervened:

The capitalist state, legislator of the Factory Acts, is then the eye of the otherwise blind capitalist, the stabilizer of a system that capitalist activity itself endangers. The needs of the system cannot be attended to by dispersed entrepreneurs severally driven to maximize individual profit.<sup>33</sup>

The capitalist state, according to this interpretation, acts to overcome what would otherwise take the form of a prisoners' dilemma. In a prisoners' dilemma everyone acts in his or her own rational interest, but because of the lack of cooperation, the aggregate outcome is not collectively rational. The collectively rational outcome of a limited working day is not available to individual capitalists, each pursuing his own interest in maximizing profit. Thus, the limitation of the working day is explained in terms of its effect on the continuance of capitalism; it is functionally explained.

I want to make two comments one specific and one general with respect to Cohen's example of the shortening of the working day.

First, there is an alternative interpretation of Marx's explanation for the shortening of the working day, which is more compatible with Marx's emphasis on classes as central to the explanation of social change. While Marx does state that the results of limiting the length of the working day were beneficial for capitalism, he actually *explains* this limit as the product of an alliance between the working class and a fraction of the capitalist class. Briefly, capitalist manufacturers needed the support of the British workers to repeal the Corn Laws, which favored agricultural capitalists. In exchange for working class support, they promised to enact the Ten Hours Bill, establishing a ten hour working day as the norm in certain key industries.<sup>34</sup> Marx's explanation of the shortened work-

<sup>33</sup> Cohen, 295

<sup>34</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, 393

ing day is not actually presented as a functional explanation, despite appearances.

Second, Marx's explanations of social changes *characteristically* appeal to classes and their interests. While Marx does not deny that certain changes are functional for productive development, he never thinks this fact is a sufficient explanation of these changes. Instead, he offers a theory of causes. Functional explanations are insufficient because, as I noted above, there can be multiple ways of realizing functions: there are many things which are presumably beneficial for capitalism, but what actually happens depends on specific historical developments. Marx's general argument about historical change goes roughly as follows. Within every social form (prior to communism) there is a dominant social class (e.g., feudal lords, capitalists) which directly or indirectly appropriates the surplus product. The activities of this dominant class simultaneously reproduce the given social form and expand the forces of production. But, at a certain point, the expanding forces of production can no longer be accommodated within the prevailing property relations. This leads to a crisis. However, there is also a non-dominant social class, a class which does not exercise control over the social surplus, which learns that some of its own interests require transformation of existing property relations. It responds to the crisis by revolution.<sup>35</sup> Every class divided society thus contains the agent of its own destruction.

Cohen maintains that historical materialist explanations can be explanatory even in the absence of a known mechanism. That is, while there must be a mechanism which supports a functional explanation (e.g., as the mechanism of natural selection supports functional explanation in biology), an explanation can explain even when the mechanism cannot yet be specified.<sup>36</sup> Marxists cannot yet provide a full account of the mechanism through which the Develop-

<sup>35</sup> My claim is that the social order which is brought about reflects not only the material interests of the non-dominant class, but its interests in freedom.

<sup>36</sup> G.A. Cohen, 'Functional Explanation, Consequence Explanation and Marxism,' *Inquiry* 25 (1982) 27-56

ment Thesis operates, but according to Cohen that does not mean that historical materialism cannot now be considered an explanatory theory. I agree with Cohen's general view about explanation, but in the absence of a specific mechanism, why should we think that classes play a key part in the explanation of social change?

Perhaps Cohen might argue that classes have a central role in social change because they tend to be better at solving their collective action problems than other social groups. So, while it might be the case that any number of social groups have an interest in bringing about a specific social change (e.g., promoting the further expansion of the productive forces) most of these groups will be incapable of acting on that interest because of the familiar problems of coordination and cooperation. The circumstance of non-dominant classes, however, render their cooperation more likely. The interdependency and uncertainty imposed by material scarcity `tend to make [what would otherwise be] prisoner's dilemmas occur in indefinitely long series, and it is well known that such seriality facilitates their solution.'<sup>37</sup> Classes are more likely to achieve cooperation than non-class groups and this is *why* the productive forces are most likely to be developed through classes as opposed to states or status groups.

This is an interesting suggestion, but it faces two major problems. First, the fact that non-dominant classes are more likely to cooperate than non-class groups, does not mean that the former will *in fact* cooperate. There are iterative games without cooperative solutions. Whether or not individuals will cooperate depends on their preferences and their beliefs (including their expectations). But beliefs and preferences might not be conducive to cooperation, and therefore they might not change. Sometimes, change requires `political entrepreneurs' who will modify the environment, such as through the introduction of new beliefs. Thus, the political entrepreneur might convince individuals to contribute to an end by persuading them that their contributions are important enough to make a difference. In the absence of such entrepreneurs, it is not inevitable for cooperation and progress to occur.

37 Cohen and Kymlicka, 187

Second, Cohen's theory says nothing about the connection between the results of working class cooperation and the end it aims at. There is no necessary reason why working class cooperation should generate communism. Cooperation might yield diverse results, particularly once the non-working class members of society are taken into account. The results of cooperation are always dependent on the relative positions of the cooperators. For example, once we take differential economic power within the working class into account, it might be rational for the worst-off members of the working class to cooperate with the more privileged members on terms that in more egalitarian circumstances they would refuse. The 'evolution' of cooperation, through iterated attempts by workers to reach an agreement, is too weak a mechanism to capture the historical convergence of social practices and institutions towards communism. The appeal to a non-direct, non-intentional mechanism does not fill the gap in Cohen's argument about why history moves to communism.

## V Explanatory Values

Cohen's theory is not able to map its mechanism of historical development the growth of the productive forces to the endpoint of that development communism. This is a significant problem because Marx's central theoretical ambition was to explain why communism was not an ideal, but the product of a 'real historical movement,' to demonstrate that history itself leads to the realization of freedom in social life.

There is a great deal of textual evidence for the view that Cohen ascribes to Marx. However, there is sufficient lack of clarity in Marx's formulations of historical materialism to support an alternative interpretation, based on a number of Marx's texts, which posits a role for values in the explanation of history's structure and direction. This alternative interpretation, which I will sketch below, has the decided advantage of connecting up Marx's view of the end of history with its process. Moreover, it builds on Cohen's own interpretation. To the mechanism which produces material development, it adds an intentional mechanism which produces increased social freedom.

This second mechanism operates through classes, particularly through the recognition by the non-dominant classes of their interest in freedom.

In section II, I quoted a passage from the *Grundrisse* which claimed that the worker's and the slave's 'advances in awareness' make their respective social forms unable to prevail. In this passage, Marx explicitly refers to changes in consciousness as causally significant; they are the 'knell' to the doom of an oppressive social form. He also refers to these changes in consciousness as 'advances,' implying that they are improvements, and not simply alterations. This passage suggests that workers and slaves learn more about the nature of their fundamental interests. Texts like the *Grundrisse* give a Marxian support for the use of ethical values in the explanation of historical progress.

I think that we can more accurately fulfil the ambitions of historical materialism if we interpret Marx as a value realist. A value realist believes that values exist independently of our beliefs about them. The existence of values doesn't depend on our beliefs about those values, in the same sense that the existence of photons is independent of our beliefs about their existence. Values, like photons, are things about which we can 'get it wrong.'

In order to support its prediction that history produces the conditions for communism, historical materialism must rely on value realism, a doctrine which is implicit in Marx. There are strands of argument in Marx's writings which suggest that social actors recognize that certain social changes are in their fundamental interests, and act to promote these changes. Value realism is consistent with these suggestions, but it is not logically entailed by them. In fact, value realism is inconsistent with some of Marx's explicit pronouncements, such as his insistence that he has abandoned any appeal to 'philosophy,' and based his theory only on facts 'which any child knows.'<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, value realism must be an important piece of Marx's theory, if it is to achieve the task which he set

<sup>38</sup> Marx, 'Letter to Kugelmann,' cited in M. Lippi, *Value and Naturalism in Marx* (London: New Left Books 1976), 29

for it. Without some mechanism through which human beings learn about their fundamental interests and about the social constraints which prevent their realization, there is no connection between the process of history and its endpoint.

Historical materialism, therefore, requires an additional mechanism to the one that expands productive power. I suggest that value realism gives us a plausible second mechanism. The mechanism I have in mind operates as follows: freedom is an objective value for human beings; human beings have the capacity to recognize the value of freedom; they do in fact increasingly recognize its value, and their recognition motivates them to act in such a way that freedom is expanded in social life. Historical progress, then, results both from a causal mechanism which expands the productive forces, and from an intentional mechanism through which agents act on what they recognize as objectively valuable. And it is through class struggles that the oppressed social classes learn more about the conditions which limit their freedom and the possible ways of overcoming these conditions.

While the historically efficacious values are objective, i.e., like photons their nature is independent of our beliefs about them, values and photons are 'objective' in a different sense. The objective values are dependent on facts about human beings. This is a point Marx emphasizes in his discussions of alienation. Alienation is a condition which Marx sees as objectively bad for human beings, contrary to human interests. To be alienated is to be, in part, unable to express certain essential characteristics of one's species nature. The existence of alienation depends, then, on facts about human beings, their biology, and their environment, facts about what is good for them, and about how the way they interact with nature and each other affects those goods. Photons are not dependent on us in the same manner. They would exist even if human biology were different. At the same time, values are explanatory about our beliefs about what is good for us in the same way that the existence of photons is explanatory of our beliefs about photons. We believe that photons exist because there are photons; we believe that freedom is good because it is good.

Value realism is controversial. Gilbert Harman has argued that there is no reason to appeal to the reality of values in the explana-



tion of moral beliefs. There is no plausible causal connection between our belief that something is wrong and the fact that it is wrong: 'there does not seem to be any way in which the actual rightness or wrongness of a given action can have any affect on your perceptual apparatus.'<sup>39</sup> If I want to explain why I believe that killing is wrong, I do not need to refer to some alleged moral fact; all I need to appeal to is my general (subjective) moral beliefs, together with the non-moral properties of the act itself.

I agree with Harman that in the debate between moral realists and anti-realists, there is no knock-down argument for either side. Everything that the moral realist explains on the basis of objective moral values, the anti-realist sceptic can explain in some other way. Consider one of Harman's examples, in which two seventeen year old boys pour gasoline on a cat for no reason other than the sheer pleasure of watching the cat die horribly. The moral realist explains our belief that the seventeen year old boys did something wrong by the fact that what they did *was* wrong. The moral sceptic explains our moral belief without resorting to any objective moral reality. She argues that our belief that the act was wrong is explained by our upbringing, which leads us to think that acts of deliberate cruelty are wrong.

In this example, the appeal to objective values seems to do no work in the explanation of moral beliefs. But I think that in the explanations of historical *changes* in moral beliefs and practices, values can serve some explanatory function. Consider the value realist's explanation of the historical convergence on institutions and practices which represent moral progress. According to this explanation, the fact that slavery was wrong is a significant cause of its decline. The fact that slavery was wrong is part of the explanation for why slave societies were unstable, and for why the societies which replaced them were more stable. That certain social arrangements are wrong is part of the explanation for why there is a tendency in such societies for unrest and instability and for some people (in particular, the people who are wronged) to come to recognize these

<sup>39</sup> G. Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press 1977), 8

arrangements as wrong and change them in a way which brings about greater social freedom.<sup>40</sup>

Notice that the anti-realist sceptic is now put in the position of coming up with a better explanation for the decline of slave and caste societies and the convergence of social institutions on practices and institutions justified from the moral point of view. The 'accident' theory of moral progress is not *prima facie* a better explanation. And, as we have seen, this historical convergence cannot be explained by appeal to materialist causes alone.

There is, however, a troublesome problem for the strategy of defending value realism through historical example. If value realism is really to defeat the anti-realist sceptic, it must be historically plausible. Without a historically plausible account of 'moral learning' Marxism fails to counter alternative forms of social criticism. There are several difficulties which must be addressed:

1. There is a discrepancy between individual and collective rationality. Although a certain value might be in everyone's interest, it might never be realized because it is not in anyone's individual interest to contribute to the effort required to bring it about. The 'pay-off schedule' of each individual might be that of a free-rider. Some argument about the motivation of historical actors, i.e., some view about moral psychology, is required to show why this does not tend to be the case.

2. Classes have diverse and conflicting ends. And while it may be the case that all human beings have an 'objective' interest in freedom, the specific interests of some social classes will be in maintaining their power, even at the expense of their (unrecognized) interest in freedom. Furthermore, freedom is not the only thing objectively valuable for human beings. Some argument must be presented as to why those classes who recognize their interest in freedom are able to prevail over other classes, and why freedom dominates over other objective values.

<sup>40</sup> For similar accounts, see P. Railton; and see N. Sturgeon, 'Moral Explanations,' in D. Copp and D. Zimmerman, eds., *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld 1984).

3. Finally, the 'learning' mechanism, through which individuals become aware of their true interests, has to be given further specification. How is it that human beings learn, not only that slavery is not in their interests, but also that it is possible to rearrange social institutions in such a way that secures greater social freedom?

## VI Moral Values

Let us turn to Marx's criticisms of morality. How can the view that Marx was a value realist a person who holds that the fact that communism is good for human beings is a significant part of the explanation of why communism emerges be reconciled with his rejection of morality? It might be thought that if value realism is indeed part of Marx's theory of history, then he is hopelessly inconsistent. His historical theory appeals to the very values he rejects in his explicit pronouncements on morality.

This inconsistency would indeed be a serious problem, but I believe that it is only apparent. Of course, Marx was a prolific and unsystematic writer and says different things in different places so no interpretation is likely to accord with everything Marx says. Nonetheless, I think that there is a plausible way of understanding Marx's rejection of morality, which does not vitiate his value realism.

Many commentators, among them Robert Tucker, Allen Wood and Richard Miller, argue that Marx was hostile to any and all the orizing about moral values. Allen Wood goes so far as to argue that Marx was an 'immoralist.'<sup>41</sup> This view seems to me to be wrong. Rather, I think that Marx anticipated a current thesis about morality, which does not entail immoralism. The thesis is that the moral point of view requires us to abstract from any consideration of our interests, and such abstraction is the wrong way of thinking about how to live a good human life.<sup>42</sup> Kantian moral philosophy is com-

41 A. Wood, 'Marx's Immoralism,' in B. Chavance, ed., *Marx en Perspective* (Paris: Editions de l' Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1985)

42 This is an argument made by, among others, Bernard Williams in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981).

monly (although in my view, mistakenly) criticized for precisely this reason. To say with Kant that reason can be a determining ground of the will is to say that principles can and should be chosen *because* they are approved of by reason, not because they satisfy our desires and interests. On this interpretation, the central categories of Kantian philosophy are rights, duties and obligations, and not interests.<sup>43</sup> But critics assert that this is a flawed way of thinking about how we should live our lives. Instead of abstracting from our interests, as they contend Kantian morality requires us to do, we should think in terms of our real interests.

Marx shares this criticism, but I think that it is wrong to infer that this makes him an immoralist. Consider Kant's third formulation of the categorical imperative, the moral requirement of treating people as ends and not as means only. While Marx has a different answer than Kant about the reasons for treating people in this way, he surely agrees that this is how people should be treated. This requirement of treating people as ends underlies much of Marx's criticism of capitalism.<sup>44</sup> What Marx rejects is the idea that the way to secure the treatment of people as ends is through moral categories such as 'rights' and 'justice.'

Marx views the moral standpoint, as represented by Kant, as a defective mode of consciousness. Morality arises in conditions in which individuals with conflicting interests and confronted with scarcity must appeal to some abstract, neutral ordering principle to

43 Kant draws an important distinction between taking an interest in and acting from interest: 'The first expression signifies *practical* interest in the action; the second *pathological* interest in the object of the action. The first indicates only dependence of the will on principles of reason itself; the second its dependence on principles of reason at the service of inclination that is to say, where reason merely supplies a practical rule for meeting the need of inclination' (I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, H.J. Paton, trans. [New York: Harper and Row 1964], 38).

44 Wil Kymlicka makes this point in 'Marxism and the Critique of Justice,' unpublished MS. Kymlicka argues that according to Marx capitalism fails to treat people as ends both in its relations of production and in its relations of exchange.

rank their competing claims. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx condemns the 'common forms' of moral consciousness, as characteristic of class societies, where a collective good is in reality impossible:

Whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by the other. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite all the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain *common forms*, or *general ideas*, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonism.<sup>45</sup>

Communist society, as Marx conceives it, is a society beyond rights and justice. Under communism, when classes have been ended and scarcity transcended, individuals will not need to represent human requirements to themselves through the categories of an abstract moral theory. They will simply treat each other as ends, with dignity and respect. Of course, Marx has a view about what is good for human beings and this is a crucial part of any moral theory. But he does not think that what is good for human beings is best comprehended through an abstract formal theory like Kant's. My hypothesis is that for Marx, the values which are operative in history are not moral values, at least as these are understood by Kantian moral theory.

There is no doubt that Marx regards abstract moral reasoning as partly distorting human understanding. Is morality, then, simply an ideology, an instrument of class domination, nothing more than 'outdated verbal rubbish' as Marx claims about the concepts of justice and rights? And, if morality is a distorted form of self-understanding, why do human beings represent their interests in this way? Why don't individuals relate to their interests directly, instead of viewing them from the standpoint of morality?

Marx never directly answers these questions, but he does comment extensively on the parallel issue of religion as a distorted form of consciousness. Marx's analysis bears strong affinities to the view of religion put forward by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche argues that religion is a rationalization on the part of the

<sup>45</sup> K. Marx, 'The Communist Manifesto' in *MER*, 489

poor for the unequal distribution of fortunes. He argues that religion's positive valuation of brotherliness and mercy really stems from weakness and envy. The man professing religious beliefs is a sick individual, malicious to himself and others. Nietzsche's genealogy reveals the evil root of religion.

Nietzsche recognizes, however, that religion has a positive aspect: it is an expression of a 'will to power' on the part of the weak. Despite its self-destructiveness, religion gives to its adherents an aim: 'a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life . . . is and remains a *will*.'<sup>46</sup>

Marx also believes that religion has a positive aspect, a root which is not evil: 'Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself.'<sup>47</sup> Marx is much more sympathetic to religion's content than Nietzsche. Religion's appeal is not envy but the appeal of each person's self-affirmation. At the same time, this self-affirmation, as religion, is misdirected, projected onto a metaphysical being beyond man and nature. Religion is a form of 'false consciousness,' producing illusions about man's true nature. But the cause of religion is not false consciousness: 'Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress.'<sup>48</sup>

Religion originates in the misery of real conditions. It gives expression to a social life which really is alienated, empty, and degraded. For Marx, religion not only expresses real misery but is also a protest against it. To the miserable conditions of human life it counterposes a realm in which human beings will be respected and affirmed. The problem with religion is not its aspirations but the *form* in which it expresses them: it projects the human good beyond the sensible world. Nevertheless, the religious protest is a 'sign' of true human interests; it indicates a human desire for a world in which each will

46 F. Nietzsche, cited in A. Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press 1987)

47 K. Marx, Introduction to *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1972), 131-2

48 Ibid., 131

be affirmed and respected. Moreover, it arises under material and social conditions in which such affirmation is practically impossible.

I propose that Marx's analysis of morality is analogous to his analysis of religion. The existence of any moral system at all is itself a 'sign' of the fact that human beings recognize their mutual interest in certain values. Just as, through religion, human beings grasp their interest in an unalienated life; through their particular social morality, they represent their aspiration to be free, to be treated as ends.

Yet although individuals aspire to this treatment, their material and social conditions, 'as these are directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past,'<sup>49</sup> prevent them from realizing their aspirations. Instead, individuals find themselves polarized into classes, and each must win the allegiance of the others:

For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is *compelled* merely to carry out its aims to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the universally valid ones.<sup>50</sup>

But once people begin to make moral arguments to support their claims, however initially cynical their reasons, those arguments have entailments: positive morality gives rise to critical morality. When individuals see that the justification of an institution actually favors a particular interest, the moral force of the justification is lost. Once we begin to justify institutions from a more or less impersonal standpoint, the possibility arises for sustained and extended criticism.<sup>51</sup> Marx writes, 'Every ruling class achieves its hegemony *on a broader* basis than that of the ruling class previously' (my emphasis).<sup>52</sup> On

<sup>49</sup> K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers 1969), 15

<sup>50</sup> K. Marx, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers 1973), 65-6

<sup>51</sup> For discussion, see Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (New York: ME Sharpe 1978), chs. 1, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *The German Ideology*, 65-6

this interpretation, Marx is holding that morality, like religion, contains a partial truth. Specific social moralities are an imperfect, but partly accurate account, of the truth about values. Insofar as morality represents a human aspiration for a society in which each can freely develop, each moral system contains the basis for its own supersession when it becomes apparent that it does not live up to its claims.

Marx is rightly critical of the hypocrisy which sometimes characterizes the moral systems of class societies. But, as I indicated, he wishes to go further and criticize the moral standpoint itself. Much has been written on both the unpersuasiveness of Marx's objections to the concepts of justice and rights,<sup>53</sup> and of his stated intention to abandon moral criticism. Indeed, it is difficult to fully grasp in what way Marx sees the moral standpoint as defective. As I indicated, I think his criticism anticipates some current anti-Kantian arguments, but Marx surely would have rejected the current 'communitarian' alternatives to Kantianism. Marx's goal was to liberate individuals from the pre-existing 'yardsticks' of traditional community values and expectations, so that each could choose his or her own plan of life, in a community in which each person would be treated as an end.<sup>54</sup>

We can, in fact, reject Marx's goal of transcending the moral standpoint, without undercutting historical materialism. There may be no good reason to think of the values which are historically efficacious as 'non-moral' values; but that does not mean that there are no historically efficacious values. We cannot, however, reject an explanatory role for values if we are to defend historical materialism.

The above interpretation of the objective values as non-moral values does allow us to resolve the paradox posed by Marx's simultaneous rejection of morality and endorsement of communism as better than capitalism. For Marx, moral systems give a partial, but distorted, representation of the objective values. Throughout history, these moral systems get better at approximating the objective

53 Cf. Steven Lukes, *Marx and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987).

54 See Wil Kymlicka, 'Marxism and the Critique of Justice' for an elaboration of this point.



values. Ultimately, under communism, individuals will not represent human requirements through a moral theory, they will simply treat each other as ends. Marx advocates communism because its basic structure institutionalizes the conditions required for the objective values, in particular, for the 'free development of all.'

To conclude, I have argued that historical materialism relies on a mechanism which links up the fact that communism is good with the fact that it, eventually, occurs. Marx's views about values, contrary to much recent Marxist theorizing, lie at the center of his historical theory. Values play an important role in Marx's explanation of historical progress. There are significant problems about the historical plausibility of this view. But there is no alternative for defending historical materialism: material/technological changes cannot, by themselves, explain history's general structure and direction. I have criticized Cohen's interpretation of historical materialism for being too materialist and for not fully explaining the non-material aspects of historical progress. Much of the responsibility for this problem originates with Marx, who focused his theory too narrowly on the sphere of material production. Historical materialism requires a second mechanism, in addition to the one which explains the expansion of human productive power to support its contention that communism is not an ideal, but the endpoint of a real historical process. The question is whether or not we can develop an account of this mechanism which is consistent with the historical evidence. I believe that without such a mechanism, Marx's most distinctive and important challenge to alternative traditions of social criticism fails.

## Ruling Ideas

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*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.*

Marx

In a volume entitled *Analytical Marxism*, John Roemer portrays analytical Marxists as 'largely inspired by Marxian questions, which they pursue with contemporary tools of logic, mathematics, and model building.' Eschewing dogmatism, analytical Marxists raise foundational questions that conventional Marxism often overlooks and are committed to the necessity for abstraction in seeking answers to them.<sup>1</sup> One such foundational question is raised by Jon Elster in a companion volume, *Making Sense of Marx*.<sup>2</sup> His question is the subject of this essay. Elster writes:

1 See John Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), 1-2, part of the series 'Studies in Marxism and Social Theory' that Roemer edits with G.A. Cohen and Jon Elster. Although Roemer's definition is broad, he and his fellow editors can claim the right, if anyone can, to say what counts as analytical Marxism. On the other hand, the fact that there are more analysts than Marxists in the most recent addition to their series raises an interesting question about what sort of intellectual current, if any, the label 'analytical Marxism' is supposed to identify. See Michael Taylor, ed., *Rationality and Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988).

2 Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985), 473

How does a ruling class make sure that the theoretically dominant ideas correspond, at least minimally, to its own "material interest and social position"? The question is not how a class selects its ideologists, but how the chosen ideologists come to acquire intellectual hegemony by virtue of the economic power of the class. Why should the ruling ideas be the ideas of the ruling class?

Elster himself discusses this question for only a paragraph before turning to other topics, but he sees no satisfactory way for Marxists to explain why the ruling ideas should be the ideas of the ruling class. In fact, he takes 'the lack of an answer to this question' to be 'the basic flaw in the Marxist theory of ideologies.'

Elster's position becomes clearer in the context of his book, a guiding theme of which is that Marx was under the sway of a teleological view of history and that all too frequently he and subsequent Marxists have been guilty of proffering crude and lazy functional pseudo-explanations of various social phenomena. Would-be functional explainers often simply point to the real or alleged benefits (to society or the ruling class) of a given behavior, practice, or institution in order to explain its occurrence without identifying any mechanism linking those benefits to the explanandum. But, in general, some such mechanism must be identified if woolly thinking is to be avoided.

This explains why Elster puts his question the way he does and why he takes it to have such force. He evidently perceives conventional Marxism as maintaining that the ideas of the ruling class prevail because their doing so benefits the ruling class. It is to this lame but unstated contention that Elster is replying when he writes that

we are left with the question of the *mechanism* whereby a ruling class is able to selectively favour certain theoretical views at the expense of others. . . . No micro-foundations are provided [by Marxist theory] to explain why the ideas that correspond to the outlook of the ruling class should gain disproportionate acceptance among intellectuals.<sup>3</sup>

3 Ibid.

Elster believes that his question is devastating for the Marxist theory of ideology because he thinks that Marxists can only respond to it with a vague functional gesture.

Now, Marxists do take the dominance of ruling-class ideas for granted. They doubt the sociological (although not logical) possibility of a society in which the ideas of another class are dominant or in which the intellectual world is so pluralistic that no single set of ideas regarding what is a natural, legitimate, or a just social order holds sway. Settled social existence itself requires some rough consensus among most individuals regarding the desirability or necessity of their social arrangements. Where class society is involved, this consensus will be far from universal, but there will still be widespread even if passive, conditional, or partial acceptance of the legitimacy of the prevailing order by those outside the ruling class (which itself will believe in the validity of its own rule). Otherwise, a minority ruling class would not be able to sustain its exploitative order for very long.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, one can plausibly hypothesize that it is a necessary condition a functional prerequisite of a stable class society that the ideas that govern it are, at least to the above extent, the ideas of the ruling class.

This does not, however, explain why those ideas dominate. The presence of oxygen in the air is a necessary condition of human existence; without it, life as we know it could not exist. But the fact of human existence does not explain the presence of oxygen. Thus, Marxists need to answer Elster's question, and in what follows, I take some steps toward doing so. In addressing Elster's question, I shall like Elster be taking a number of basic Marxist concepts and tenets for granted, even though some of these are vague and many of them controversial. In particular, I am not seeking to

<sup>4</sup> Abstractly considered, the subordinate classes might acquiesce in the status quo anyway out of fear, laziness, habit, or want of faith in the feasibility of reform or of an alternative socioeconomic order. They might perceive the costs of changing existing arrangements to be too high, or the free-rider problem might thwart collective action. Although important enough in their own right, in the complete absence of belief in the legitimacy of the prevailing order none of these considerations would guarantee much in the way of long-term stability.

demonstrate that ruling-class ideas do rule but, rather, to clarify how, given the assumption that they do, Marxist theory could begin to explain this fact.<sup>5</sup>

## I Classes and Ideas

Before discussing possible Marxist responses to Elster's question, the question itself needs to be refined and clarified. Elster himself phrases his question in different ways, but three of his formulations implicitly embody assumptions that should be discarded. First, asking how ruling classes 'make sure' that their ideas are dominant frames the question with a misleading metaphor. It makes the process whereby ruling-class ideas come to prevail sound more self-conscious, more intentional, than it is apt to be. The ruling class is likely to take for granted the validity, indeed obviousness, of its own ideas. There is little reason to suppose that, as a general rule, the ruling class as a whole or individual members of it set out to secure the dominance of their outlook. And even when the rulers can aptly be described as 'making sure' that their ideas prevail, they need not themselves understand that this is what they are doing.

Second, Elster writes that Marxism supposes that the ideas of the ruling class 'gain disproportionate acceptance among intellectuals,' but this formulation gives the proposition too academic a cast. What matters for Marxism is not which ideas are endorsed by the leading minds of the time, but which ideas gain wide social acceptance. Marxists should be careful, I think, not to equate what is socially dominant with what intellectuals accept; nor should they confuse the claim that certain ideas are dominant because they are endorsed by the intellectuals with the different, and more Marxist, proposition that intellectuals typically accept the dominant ideas of their time. Focusing attention on the role of intellectuals risks exaggerat-

<sup>5</sup> I should add that although I use Elster to help focus my discussion, it is Elster's problem, rather than Elster, that is my subject. In fact, in seeking to answer Elster's question, I have been helped by his rich and suggestive book, and I suspect that he would not disagree with everything that I have to say.

ing their importance, and it distracts one from other ways in which ruling-class ideas can come to dominate society.

Finally, in discussing 'the question of the mechanism whereby' ruling-class views prevail, one should not assume at the outset, as Elster appears to, that only one mechanism is involved. In a given society, more than one process is likely to be at work, with several different mechanisms, each promoting the dominance of ruling-class ideas. These might work independently, or collectively they might be mutually reinforcing, working together to surmount reverse tendencies. In the economic realm, *Capital* gives us a dynamic picture of the capitalist mode of production as buffeted by opposed forces. Even where a clear developmental tendency characterizes that mode of production, various processes contribute to it and reinforce it. The underpinning for the claim that ruling-class ideas rule is unlikely to be simpler or more unilinear than this.

Furthermore, in different historical periods and in different social formations within the same period, the relevant mechanisms may well be different. Certain basic doctrines of historical materialism are intended to hold across time and place; that the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class is one of these. But this does not mean that those ideas come to rule in exactly the same way or for exactly the same reasons in all societies. The more finely grained the account one seeks, the greater the differences will loom.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> If, however, the mechanisms in different societies were totally heterogeneous, then the historical materialist theorem that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas would lose its claim to lawfulness. It would still be a truth that, in each of the types of socioeconomic system that have marked human history, the ruling ideas have been those of the ruling class. And it could also be the case that, with regard to each of these types, social-scientific laws of a historically delimited sort guarantee that the ideas of its ruling class are the dominant ones. But if the mechanisms making the ruling class's ideas the ruling ones were radically different in each type of society, then while it would be a true trans-historical generalization that ruling-class ideas prevail, this would not be a lawlike statement capable of supporting counterfactuals.

Thus, while the mechanisms may differ in different societies, historical materialism anticipates that at a certain level of abstraction there will be similarities and parallels between them. The particular processes at work in a given type of system might thus be seen as species of genera that also charac-

*(footnote continued on next page)*

Leaving Elster aside, how then should our explanandum be understood? Clearly, to say that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas means that the former tend to dominate the thought world of the society in which they occur. Ideas can be understood broadly here as including a range of mental entities: beliefs, values, attitudes, prejudices, and assumptions, both implicit and explicit. 'To dominate the thought world' implies that these ideas are more widely shared, more deeply ingrained, more coherently and fully elaborated, and carry greater authority and conviction in popular consciousness than other, rival ideas. Marxists need not suppose, however, that these ideas form a consistent system that is easily identified and labelled. The ruling class can be said to have a typical world view, and that world view to predominate, even if explicitly delineating it is difficult and even if tensions, conflicts, and contradictions permeate it.

The qualification 'tend to' is a reminder that Marxism does not claim that the hegemony of ruling-class ideas is ever complete, or completely secure. Those ideas are dominant but only relative to other class perspectives. They have no monopoly over thought; alternative outlooks and rival values subsist. Historical materialism itself insists on this because different classes, in virtue of the different socioeconomic locations they occupy, create for themselves 'an entire superstructure of different and distinctly formed sentiments,

*(footnote continued from previous page)*

terize other socioeconomic systems. At the generic level, then, historical materialism would identify various mechanisms as underwriting the hegemony of ruling-class ideas, but it could allow the relative explanatory balance of these mechanisms, as well as the specific forms they take, to be a function of the particular mode of production in question. This balance and these forms might also vary further in light of the historically specific features of the actual social formation in which that mode of production operates. And even if a historically unique process was involved in explaining why in a given society ruling-class ideas prevail, that is, a process unrelated to those in any other type of society, trans-historical lawfulness could still be preserved if the sorts of mechanism at work in other societies would have accounted for the dominance of ruling-class ideas in that society, had those mechanisms not been preempted (in the same direction, as it were) by the process unique to that particular society.

illusions, modes of thought and views of life.<sup>7</sup> In transitional periods, an ascending class challenges the ruling ideology, and a new outlook gradually gains precedence. But even in non-transitional periods, ruling-class ideas face constant, if often only implicit, subversion from the ideas of other classes.

Not every member of the ruling class must hold every ruling class idea. It must be the case, however, that most members of the class share the ideas we call ruling-class ideas; otherwise, we lose the sense of those ideas being *of* a class. If we could thus imagine mapping the set of ideas of each individual member of the ruling class, and superimposing those sets, then there would be a central overlapping area that would constitute the ideas of that class. Instead of a hard and fast delineation, one would presumably find a core subset of ideas, shared by the vast majority of the class, that then shades out in different directions to less pervasive beliefs.

An important, if vague, tenet of Marxism is that the ideas of a class reflect its distinctive socioeconomic location. This does not imply that those ideas must have been initially generated by members of that class. But it does suggest, not just that most members of the class happen to have those ideas, but also that those ideas are typical of members of that class and that this is so in virtue of the socioeconomic position those individuals share. This excludes beliefs for example, that spring follows winter which the members of a class have, but not as a result of their class position. A yet stronger contention would be that the ideas of a class must be distinctive of it, but this is too restrictive. Often, to be sure, the ideas shared by members of a class, and which might plausibly be seen as reflecting their class position, will be distinctive of that class. But I don't see why this should be true as a general proposition or, what is a different issue, why historical materialism should have to suppose it true.

Marxism understands the ideas of the ruling class to, as Elster puts it, 'correspond, at least minimally, to its own "material interest

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11 (New York: International Publishers 1979), 128



and social position." But material interest and social position can in principle diverge. An idea might, objectively speaking, promote the material interest of the ruling class even if the members of that class repudiate it. A class may not always see clearly where its true interest lies. But if the class repudiates it, then the idea cannot meaningfully be described as corresponding to its social position.

Conversely, an idea might reflect in a satisfactorily materialist way the socioeconomic position of the ruling class without its in any way furthering the material interest of that class. Acceptance of the idea by other classes would not serve to reinforce or strengthen their rulers' socioeconomic sovereignty. If an idea is widely held within, and typical of, the ruling class, it would seem appropriate to label it an idea of the ruling class. Nevertheless, I shall take the explanandum statement that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas to refer only to ideas that both reflect the social position, and answer to the material interest, of the ruling class. What matters is not any ruling-class crotchet, but rather those ideas that are fundamental to its world view in the sense of legitimizing the existing social order.

This limitation of scope enables us to avoid a potential pitfall. As we have seen, Marxism endorses the materialist doctrine that classes develop distinctive outlooks; yet it also holds that ruling-class ideas dominate those of other classes. How can it maintain both claims? How can it square distinct world views with domination? The scope limitation helps solve this problem. The ruling ideas may be those of the ruling class without its world view preempting in all dimensions the consciousness of subaltern classes. Those classes can still have distinctive beliefs, sentiments, and values all corresponding to their variegated material circumstances even when they acquiesce to a significant extent in their rulers' conception of the legitimacy of the social order. This accords with the Marxist teaching that the views of subordinate classes generally remain inchoate; only when a class is in a position to challenge its rulers politically, does it become conscious of itself and begin to articulate a more general and consistent rival world view.

## II The Means of Mental Production (1)

*The Germany Ideology* suggests an important Marxist explanation of why the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. The ruling class controls the means of material production and consequently, Marx writes, 'the means of mental production' as well, with the result 'that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to' the ruling class and its ideas.<sup>8</sup> Marx does not clarify what he has in mind by 'the means of mental production,' but I construe the phrase broadly, as embracing the major institutions that educate and indoctrinate young people, acquire and transfer knowledge, and articulate and mold popular opinion, as well as the physical resources those institutions utilize. Even granting the assumption that there is a ruling class controlling the means of production, Marx's thumbnail explanation involves two steps, each of which needs to be examined. First, why does economic dominance lead to control of the means of mental production? Second, how does this control result in the ruling ideas being those of the ruling class? I begin with the first set of issues; in section III I discuss the second.

Economic dominance often leads to control of the means of mental production simply because their ownership can be a source of profit, and the economically dominant are in a position to acquire such assets.<sup>9</sup> This will not be the case in pre-capitalist societies, of course, both because of the restricted role of the market and because of their less developed means of mental production. In those societies, literacy and formal education are limited; only classes or groups with sufficient leisure are in a position to occupy themselves, ac-

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers 1976), 59

<sup>9</sup> In the United States, for instance, a small number of enormously large corporations owns the mass media and the organs of popular culture. For some figures, see Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*, 5th ed. (New York: St. Martin's 1988), 156-8, and Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon 1988), 4-14.

tively and self-consciously, with the development, elaboration, and communication of ideas in a systematic way. Because material circumstances sharply restrict the number and class background of potential knowledge workers, economic dominance thus results in a predominantly ruling-class involvement with the means of mental production.

Furthermore, in both capitalist and pre-capitalist societies, economic dominance brings with it political power, which is an additional source of ruling-class influence over the major institutions affecting the formation of belief and the shaping of values. Political power gives the ruling class the capacity to oversee the means of mental production, regardless of juridical ownership, and self-interest will incline them to exercise this capacity, that is, to monitor, influence, or control the world of ideas. In some modes of production, like advanced capitalism, the ruling class will have a strong economic interest in promoting (certain types of) education and research. And in all societies, ruling classes will have an interest in guaranteeing that the ideas that dominate popular consciousness are, at a minimum, compatible with continuation of the existing order.

The self-interest of the ruling class in these two cases is simply the sum of the individual interests that make it up. The per capita costs to its members of furthering these two interests, but especially the second one, will be outweighed on average by the probable benefits. And since the ruling class holds state power, no free rider problem thwarts the attainment of these collective goods: the state can simply hire the necessary censors, educational officials, and cultural guardians.

Neither the ruling class nor its state need actively manage the means of mental production or involve itself intimately in the world of ideas. The crucial point is only that a ruling class will not tolerate the spread of ideas that would subvert the legitimacy of its rule. Readers in advanced capitalist democracies are likely to forget the extent to which throughout history the governing classes and their institutions have employed coercion against ideas judged hostile or potentially subversive. No fancy mechanism is required to explain this fact. Perceived self-interest along with an all-too-common human dislike of, and lack of tolerance for, alien thoughts and al-

ternative outlooks will suffice. Nor is the underlying principle mistaken: ideas can be dangerous. Repudiation of the divine right of kings can be a greater threat to the monarch than the storming of his castle.

In capitalist democracies, the power of the state nakedly to suppress awkward ideas has weakened.<sup>10</sup> But the state still supervises education, supports research it deems appropriate, roots out subversive doctrines, propagandizes the population, and restricts deviant behavior. Scholars debate how far the 'relative autonomy' of the state from the capitalist class extends, but even if the state is viewed as an independent player in a game-theoretic struggle, its rational strategy will almost surely involve carrying out these elementary tasks in a way that satisfies the basic interests of business.<sup>11</sup>

Outside of the state, members of the ruling class today, both individually and through corporations, support financially private universities and institutes, think tanks, and journals of opinion, just as earlier ruling classes supported individual artists and scholars. Because ruling-class individuals have the means to do this, which the members of other classes lack, philanthropy is another factor linking economic dominance with preponderant ruling-class influence over the means of mental production. (On the other hand, explaining this philanthropy is not so easy, because a market system does not compel individuals or corporations to become philanthropists, nor does it give them reason to direct their philanthropy more toward self-consciously ideological purposes than toward support of the arts, say, or eleemosynary organizations.)

<sup>10</sup> Marxists typically see this as a result of various popular struggles, but it may also reflect the interest of the wealthy and privileged in defending certain personal freedoms from state encroachment.

<sup>11</sup> The privileged position of business and the myriad ways in which its interests and expectations shape public politics and circumscribe state policy are staples of non-Marxist political science. See, for instance, Charles E. Lindblom, *Politics and Markets* (New York: Basic Books 1977).

### III The Means of Mental Production (2)

The factors just surveyed show why economic dominance can be expected to result both directly and through the state apparatus in preponderant ruling-class control of, or influence over, the means of mental production. This leads to the second question distinguished above: how does this control lead to the ascendancy of ruling-class ideas?

In pre-capitalist societies, the means of mental production are not extensive and access to the world of abstract thought is extremely restricted. Given this, the dominance of ruling-class ideas results straightforwardly from the ruling class's privileged position. The only alternative to the world of ruling-class ideas is the folk culture of the working orders, and it is necessarily inchoate and unsystematic. Given the above structural limitations, it cannot begin to rival the world of ideas created by members of the ruling class or of institutions (like the church) that depend on that class. On the other hand, the machinery for disseminating the ideas of the ruling class among the lower orders is not well developed: literacy is rare, for one thing, so that folk ways of thinking can survive and even prosper within a world of thought, the basic pillars of which are constructed by the ruling class. Folk ways of thinking may deviate from that of the rulers; but, being less well developed and articulated, and lacking the same institutional support, they are unlikely to be able to challenge effectively the basic tenets of ruling-class thought. And such antiruling-class ideas as do arise will be suppressed.

Difficulties for Marx's explanatory thesis arise mainly in connection with democratic polities where there is at least formal freedom for antiruling-class ideas and where elementary literacy is widespread. Where freedom of speech exists, ruling-class ideas must compete with other ideas. But this is not to say the terms of competition are fair because the main institutions of opinion formation and knowledge transference support one side.

Schools get children when they are young. One should perhaps not exaggerate the significance of the precise curricular content they are taught or the ability of children to retain it. But they do absorb general attitudes and values, like patriotism, competitive individualism, and a class-free view of society, into which ruling-class ideas

can sink their roots even in later years. At higher academic levels, the situation is, of course, different. But the world of scholarship and research depends on the publication of ideas, the production of journals, the funding of graduate programs, the financing of research, the construction of new buildings, the hiring of academics, and the subsidizing of chairs. All this requires money, and money, whether state, corporate, or individual, is not invested equally in all plausible research areas.

Outside of the educational system, corporations, government agencies, and various interest groups all spend fortunes in self-conscious efforts to mold public opinion in ways that suit them. The modern world is awash in propaganda. While these 'public relations' messages may differ, none of the loud and persistent ones are hostile to the prevailing order. Advertising in particular, although not self-consciously ideological, reinforces values and beliefs supportive of the status quo. This brings us to the crucial role the mass media play in contemporary capitalist society in establishing and maintaining the hegemony of ruling-class ideas.

The owners of the media are in business to make money, which requires a product they can sell both to the public and to advertisers. In the abstract, it might seem that both they and their advertisers should be indifferent to the ideological content of the media products in question, assuming that audience demographics are otherwise the same. But advertisers have a wide choice of economically plausible sponsorships, and they will not wish to invest in those that conflict with the company's self-image or political philosophy.

The media have a strong incentive to avoid antagonizing both potential sponsors and those in our society who are powerful and influential. And in any case, the mass media are themselves economic giants, resembling other capitalist conglomerates in their management, organizational structures, corporate culture, and business interests. Their social outlook easily seeps into their products. While owners of the media probably have little or no economic incentive to engage in overt propaganda, they also have no reason at all to guard against the implicit reproduction of their own values and social assumptions, especially when these harmonize with the perspective of the ruling class generally. The reproduction of those values and assumptions can be seen simply as a side-effect of cor-

porate control of the media (and of the various market, political, and technical or professional factors that shape the environment in which the media operate).<sup>12</sup> This point is worth stressing. Rulingclass control of the media and of the means of mental production in general can lead to its ideas dominating the thought world without anyone intending or even foreseeing that this happens.<sup>13</sup>

This is not to deny that a ruling class can consciously seek control over the means of mental production and intentionally exercise that control in its own interests, just as corporations, government, and other groups organize and propagandize on behalf of their sectional interests. A ruling class need not, of course, perceive what it is doing in exactly these terms; it may not, for example, equate its suppression of heresy with the ideological maintenance of the existing social order. It can, nonetheless, sometimes be accurately described as purposely intervening in the realm of ideas in order to prop up the world view it favors.

Collective action can realize intentionally aimed at goals, and there can be conscious action to defend the ruling ideology. But too great an emphasis on this makes history in general, and the history of ideas in particular, sound more conspiratorial than it actually is, and Marxists should avoid this. Intentional, purposeful intervention in the ideological order seems most plausible where ideas that openly challenge or subvert the existing order are at stake: no ruling group happily tolerates such notions. And it does not take much to suppose that its members can identify, and fear, such threats. But this accounts only for the dominance of the minimal core of the ruling class's world view: namely, that the existing order is legitimate and ought not to be overthrown. The dominance of that world view in more than this minimal sense is better seen as a side-effect of control of the means of mental production than as a consciously aimed at and realized target.

12 See Herman and Chomsky, Ch. 1.

13 Contrast Ralph Miliband's statement that 'whatever else the immense output of the mass media is intended to achieve, it is also *intended* to help prevent the development of class-consciousness in the working-class' (*Marxism and Politics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977], 50; emphasis altered).

#### IV Legitimizing the Social Order

So far we have surveyed one line of Marxist response to the question of why the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class: that response emphasizes ruling-class control of the means of mental production and the influence that the ruling class thus gains over popular consciousness. This accounts for the dominance of ruling-class ideas largely in external terms in terms of guns and dollars without regard to the message conveyed by those ideas. But that message also plays a role in explaining why the ideas of the ruling class prevail because it speaks to the need of both rulers and ruled for a system of ideas that justifies and legitimates the existing social order.

A ruling class invariably tells itself and others a story about the nature and justification of the social order. This story is, if you like, a legitimating myth, one that at least implicitly flatters the ruling class. The feudal doctrine of noble blood and the paternalistic ideology of plantation owners in the American South are examples of this. Members of the ruling class gravitate toward some version of this story because it enables them to interpret their reality in a psychologically comfortable way. Accepting the fact that their world is based on exploitation would be a painful one for ruling-class individuals. Living with a full appreciation of that truth and all its implications would not be easy.

Moreover, rulers are like other people in generalizing readily and falsely from their own situation, in having difficulty in understanding interactions from the perspective of others, and in failing to picture accurately and vividly the circumstances governing the lives of those outside their circle. In short, members of a privileged class see the world from their own vantage point. Since they are likely to find their social interactions with subordinates affirming, they will tend to project their satisfaction onto those subordinates, thus enhancing their sense of the legitimacy of the social order they dominate.

Given this bit of armchair psychology, we can reasonably expect a ruling class to evolve a world view that paints a flattering picture of itself and legitimates the status quo. But why should the story the ruling class tells captivate other classes? Why should those ideas



attract them? An important part of the answer is that members of subordinate classes have a need, similar to that of their rulers, to construct for themselves a world view that not only makes sense of the existing order, but that also to some extent rationalizes or justifies it, thus bringing them some peace of mind.

Cognitive dissonance is again at work: it is not easy to live with the knowledge that the social order is fundamentally and arbitrarily exploitative and that one and one's family are condemned to a life of toil on behalf of a class that can claim no justification for its privileges. Few, if any, subaltern classes have found themselves able to live with an unvarnished picture of their social predicament. They have, instead, constructed interpretations of reality that make it easier to bear, and in this respect they are far from being passive victims of ideas imposed upon them by their rulers.<sup>14</sup>

Marx's discussion of religion, which he famously describes as 'the opium of the people,' touches on this point. His meaning has often been misunderstood. He does not see religion as a narcotic foisted on the ruled by their rulers. As 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world,' and 'the spirit of spiritless conditions,' religion grows out of, and reflects, the material circumstances of the faithful.<sup>15</sup> The implications of the metaphor, however, distinguish it from the mechanism discussed in the previous paragraph. Understood as an opiate, religion represents an escape from this earthly vale of tears. Religion expresses, and offers consolation for, suffering, but it does not legitimate it. To long for a better world is not to justify the present one. On the other hand, Marx also describes religion as 'the general theory of [the present] world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in a popular form. . . its moral sanction.' He insists that 'man makes religion,' and religion is, in turn, his 'self-consciousness.'<sup>16</sup> This shifts the emphasis to a picture of religion not

14 Consider, for example, Veyne's discussion of the ancient Romans' belief in the divinity of their rulers. Paul Veyne, *Le Pain et le Cirque* (Paris: Le Seuil 1976), 310ff; Elster, 505.

15 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers 1975), 175

16 Ibid.

(just) as an opiate, but as part of the oppressed's effort to construct a legitimating picture of the social world.

This effort can buttress the ideological hegemony of the ruling class, but the existence of revolutionary periods implies that it does not invariably have that effect. In particular, according to Marxist theory, the proletariat is or, more precisely, comes to be an exception to the tendency for the oppressed to acquiesce in, or even themselves create, a legitimating interpretation of the very social order that subordinates them. Thanks to scientific socialism, the proletariat is the first class in history to have an accurate and objective understanding of its historical role. It sees its circumstances with a clear eye and acts accordingly. But the exception is only partial: scientific socialism explains why the present order had to be and promises the workers a better future. It makes social reality both more understandable and more bearable.

Deeper historical dynamics account for transitional and revolutionary periods, in general, and for the rise of the working class and the emergence of scientific socialism, in particular. In nonrevolutionary periods, the understanding that the subordinate classes construct of their world will take its premises for granted. But this does not imply that the legitimizing scheme they construct in order to make their world coherent and their lives meaningful will be the same as the scheme their rulers construct. This point is implicit in the fact, stressed by Marx, that classes build their world views on the basis of differing patterns of socioeconomic existence. Are there nonetheless reasons for supposing that the world view developed by the oppressed (in nonrevolutionary periods) will not only be congenial to the ruling class in the sense of legitimating the social order that is the basis of its rule, but will also overlap with that of the ruling class?

Every society inherits a historically shaped culture that limits the set of ideas that could feasibly come to dominate it. Furthermore, rulers and ruled necessarily inhabit, and interact within, the same social world, however class-divided it may be, so that their world outlooks must have certain points of contact, just as they themselves do. This is increasingly the case in the modern world with its developed means of mental production and its lack of formal social and cultural segregation. The subordinate classes under capitalism

are less likely than serfs under feudalism or peasant villagers under the Asiatic mode of production to create a world separate from that of their rulers. In addition, as the previous two sections argued, the ruling class's control over the means of mental production enables it to develop its ideas more fully, to spread them more pervasively, and to articulate them more persuasively than other classes. This further reduces the likely diversity of the rulers' and ruled's legitimizing schemes.

## V The Categories of Everyday Life

Ruling-class control over the means of mental production and the need of the ruled for a legitimating interpretation of the social order combine to provide the basis of a Marxist account of why the rulers' way of looking at the world comes to prevail. In addition, the content of the ruling class's ideas in particular, the way in which they correspond to the categories of everyday life assists in a distinct way in explaining the dominance of those ideas. Marx intimates this in a passage in *The German Ideology* where he writes: 'The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.'<sup>17</sup> This passage, though not fully perspicuous, is suggestive, and what it suggests is that ruling-class ideas owe their dominance in part to the fact that they reflect the governing social reality.

Marxist theory, of course, cannot grant that the ideas of the ruling class are an accurate reflection of reality. For one thing, those ideas cannot include the proposition that society is governed by an exploitative ruling class. As a sociological guide, the ideas of the rulers must be distorted and systematically misleading. But the above passage from Marx suggests, nevertheless, that the ideas of the ruling class prevail because they speak, in some way, to

<sup>17</sup> Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 59

the lived social reality of subordinate classes. The ruling class's system of ideas must connect with, and be ratified by, salient aspects of the experience of other members of society if it is to dominate popular consciousness. I sketch five related ways in which this can occur.

*1. The Naturalness of Everyday Life.* Most human beings throughout most of history have been preoccupied with the struggle for survival. Except in exceptional circumstances, they have tended to take their material circumstances for granted and to perceive their social world as representing a natural and inevitable order. They adapt to the world as they find it, accepting its routine and its rhythms, accommodating themselves to the 'silent compulsion of economic relations.'<sup>18</sup> Alternative, but materially feasible, forms of social existence are difficult for them to imagine. Obviously, this is an extremely one-sided picture, but if, as I think, it represents one reasonably prevalent human tendency, then one can see a psychological base into which an ideology legitimating the ruling order can sink roots.

This 'naturalness' is particularly striking in pre-capitalist class societies, in which you are who you are and have the privileges and obligations you do in virtue of where and to whom you were born. Tradition rules; the past legitimates. A serf is bound to this particular piece of land because of his parentage; custom ties a craftsman to the same trade as his father. Social facts present themselves as natural, and the status quo as self-justifying. Even under capitalism, a working class develops, 'which by. . . tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws.'<sup>19</sup> Habituated to the world they have inherited, workers see its ways as obvious, take its structures for granted, and experience it as natural.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ben Fowkes, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1976), 899

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

2. *The Personalization of Social Experience.* Individuals also tend to personalize their interpretation of experiences that are essentially socially structured. The difficulty of seeing one's individual experience in its broader context, of seeing its class character, facilitates the domination of ruling-class ideologies, which must of necessity play down class division or at least deny its exploitative character. The structural constraints on our conduct typically appear to us less causally significant in determining the course of our lives than our own choices or luck. One's class fate is personalized. Under capitalism, the worker sees the job he is free to quit, but not the 'invisible threads' that tie him to the capitalist class as a whole.<sup>20</sup> Unemployment or lack of success is the worker's own fault. Although the serf recognizes the class character of his socially immobile world this 'tangibly open secret'<sup>21</sup> his experience, too, is personalized: he is the son of John, that is why he works this land.

3. *Economic Illusions.* Marx thinks that capitalist economic relations structure our experience of them in a manner that gives rise to certain inevitable misconceptions. Key aspects of our socioeconomic relations appear to us in ways that belie the operation of the essential, underlying economic mechanisms, much as the apparent movement of the sun across the sky naturally sponsors the naive theory that it rotates around the earth. Commodities, money, and capital, for example, appear to possess, like fetishes, certain powers which they in fact lack. Common sense perceives wages as the price of labor, rather than the value of labor-power, which in any case appears to be just another commodity in the marketplace. The exchange between worker and capitalist looks fair and square to the superficial observer, with labor appearing as one of three eternal economic factors, alongside capital and land, each entitled to its just return.

These and a series of related illusions are familiar themes from *Capital*. Marx denies that conventional bourgeois political economy

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 719

<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publisher 1971), 792

and the ideological apologetics based on it impose an arbitrary and phony interpretation on economic facts that would otherwise speak for themselves. Rather, he maintains that they mislead simply by systematizing the naive or common-sense interpretation of everyday economic activities. If something like this is the case, then we can see how the outlook of the ruling class can claim a kind of legitimacy because it reflects the way in which social reality is actually experienced.

*4. The Generalization of Production Relations.* Economic reality under capitalism is complex; the illusions embedded in it are intricate, and their identification and unmasking are no simple task. Sophisticated theory is required. The texture of non-market systems offers nothing comparable. The two types of system, however, do bear comparison in one respect: the distinctive features of their production relations characterize their other social relations as well, thus obscuring the historically distinct character of the former. Under capitalism, the freedom to buy and sell labor-power appears as just one aspect of a more generalized freedom, one feature of an atomistic social world populated by independent individuals. The feudal world, by contrast, is characterized throughout by hierarchy and rank, by relations of dependence and personal subordination; here, too, generalization of the basic features of the dominant production relation helps conceal its socially specific character. I am not saying what explains this generalization but only that, if this is a typical feature of the social world, then it helps explain the dominance of ruling-class ideas.

*5. Superstructures Shape Our World.* According to Marx, superstructural practices and institutions answer to the needs of the economic structure, enabling a social formation to reproduce itself routinely and stably. Superstructural institutions also embody certain ideas, certain ways of looking at the social world, and in this manner they support the rule of ruling-class ideas. Particularly important today are the ways in which class power shapes the political arena and narrows the range of legitimate political discourse. The point worth stressing here, however, is not just that superstructural institutions propagate ideas favorable to the ruling class though Marxists take

that for granted. Rather, it is that the day-to-day operation of these superstructural institutions underpin certain ways of looking at the world because those ways of looking at the world, insofar as they are institutionally embedded, correspond to the way the world actually is.

Law provides a clear example. Marxists believe that in a capitalist society the law, however complex and even contradictory it may be, enshrines certain bourgeois assumptions, assumptions that are among the foundational principles of the existing order. What is important here is not the substance of this Marxist critique, which is familiar, but the fact that given the way the law actually does structure social interactions, its underlying principles have a certain validity to them. Legal ideology may distort, and it may stand in the way of any scientifically adequate sociology. But like conventional political economy, it reflects to a substantial degree the way the world works, albeit naively, simply because its principles are institutionalized in the social order itself. Mystified and mystifying as those principles and assumptions may be, they are not simply pie in the sky, but a reasonably accurate guide to a social world they themselves help to create. Corresponding to existing superstructural institutions, the ideas of the ruling class will thus reflect a definite social reality. And this provides another important basis for their social supremacy.

Considerations (1.) through (5.) buttress the Marxist account of why the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. Although somewhat heterogeneous, they point to a line of research namely, the way in which the ruling ideas of an epoch grow out of, and are underpinned by, the everyday experience of social reality that Marxists ought not to overlook. Some may complain, however, that these considerations explain, at best, how the dominant ideas of a class society come to be what they are. They do not explain why those ideas should be called the ideas *of* the ruling class. If people's immediate experience of social reality promotes and reinforces certain ways of looking at the world, then it does so both among the rulers and among the ruled. Why, then, credit the ruling class with the world view that results? If most members of the ruling class share those ideas, and particularly if they share them because their class position inclines them to do so, then those ideas are ideas of the

ruling class. But those ideas or so it seems are not distinctive of the ruling class; they are equally the ideas of the nonruling classes.

One possible reply to this objection is that the rulers embrace them more readily and uniformly than do the ruled. Because those ideas legitimate the social order, whose prime beneficiary is the ruling class, that class will find them particularly congenial and gravitate more strongly toward them. By contrast, while other classes can acquiesce in those same ideas, their acceptance of them will not, in general, be so unswerving, given the reality of their subordination. After all, the dominant perspective answers, not to their material interests, but to those of the ruling class. Various counterfactual tests might be sought to determine the extent to which the dominant ideas are more deeply engraved on the hearts of the rulers than the ruled. But there will always be aspects of the life experiences and material circumstances of the masses with the potential to undermine their adherence to a world view that so favors their rulers. In addition, ruling-class control over the means of mental production provides a further basis for saying that the dominant world view is more its than any other class's.

At this point, though, Marxists may wish to pause and to reconsider the importance of showing that the dominant ideas are the ideas of the ruling class if this is taken to mean more than that the dominant ideas are ones that the ruling class holds and that those ideas are congenial to, and supportive of, its class reign. If Marxism can explain why and how the ideas that prevail in a society typically favor the ruling class, then Marxism will have explained quite a bit.

## VI Conclusion

Elster's challenge does not pose the hurdle he thinks it does for Marxist theory. The Marxist responses to it that I have surveyed are different in character, but mutually supportive. Taken together, they go some way toward accounting for the dominance of ruling-class ideas. As far as I can tell, none of them is disreputably functional in character. If one is willing to grant (if only ex hypothesi) the cornerstones of a Marxist perspective, then that perspective appears to have the theoretical potential to explain why the ruling ideas are the ideas



of the ruling class. Insofar as Marxism does have any difficulties in explaining this, it is not because Elster's question highlights some special problem for the theory. Rather, it is due to problems Marxism faces elsewhere or more generally (for instance, in its delineation of classes).

The explanations I have given of why the ruling ideas are those of the dominant class are plausible, I think, not just as an exercise in Marxist theory, but also in their own right. But I have taken too much of the Marxist conceptual framework for granted, and ignored too many hard empirical questions, for me to claim to have established the truth of any of them. These Marxists explanatory accounts are, in any case, only sketches. They would have to be elaborated with much greater care and empirical precision, and in a variety of historical contexts, before Marxism could be said to have fully explained why 'the ideas of the ruling class are every epoch the ruling ideas.'<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> This essay is indebted to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation of West Germany for its financial support and to Carolyn M. Clark, G.A. Cohen, and Robert X. Ware for their helpful comments.

## Rationality and Alienation\*

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Two decades ago, problems of alienation and fetishism were the focus of most English speaking studies of Marx's philosophy. More recent work on Marx and Marxist themes has tended to avoid these questions in favor of discussions of explanation, exploitation, distributive justice and problems of class formation and co-ordination.<sup>1</sup> The latter set of problems seem more readily addressable, if not

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<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions to this pattern; there has plainly been a shift in emphasis, though. For example, Allen Wood's *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981) includes a discussion of alienation. G.A. Cohen discusses both commodity fetishism and capital fetishism in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978), and Jon Elster discusses alienation in his *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985). But neither Cohen nor Elster emphasizes Marx's deeper concern about alienation. Cohen is explicit that the doctrine of fetishism is not among the parts of Marx's theory he wishes to defend. Elster treats alienation as a problem about work being unrewarding, arguing that more challenging work would lead to failure for many, which wouldn't make people any happier. Each fails to focus on Marx's real criticism.

always more tractable, using contemporary tools drawn from the philosophy of science, as well as methods of decision theory, game theory, and welfare economics. But the change in emphasis has not been without costs; gains in clarity and rigor have come at the price of abandoning Marx's most fundamental criticism of capitalism as a way of life. I shall argue that it is no coincidence that the shift to 'rational choice' Marxism has had precisely that cost.

I begin by briefly outlining the assumptions of rational choice theory. I then consider, and reject, the obvious charge that it is essentially related to capitalist property relations and distributions. The real difficulty lies elsewhere. Rational choice models offer forms of explanation and justification that are appropriate in certain domains. But the attempt to generalize them to all of human action and interaction involves a number of confusions about human agency an attempt to make necessity out of virtue. Although that virtue has its place, it is not a virtue in general.

The criticisms of the 'bourgeois' model of rationality is a recurring theme from Marx's earliest to his mature works. In his early discussion of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*, Marx criticizes Mill's view that production is for the sake of consumption on the grounds that it thereby makes all of human activity instrumental.<sup>2</sup> In the first Volume of *Capital*, Marx describes the market as 'a very eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, equality, property, and Bentham. . . . Bentham, because each looks only to his own interest.'<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Marx criticizes Bentham for making 'the Modern petty bourgeois, especially the English petty bourgeois' his model of human nature.<sup>4</sup> In each case, Marx's criticism has two sides: in part, he criticizes Bentham's model for being false; at the same time, he criticizes it for being true of a debased world.

2 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*,' in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1975) 231

3 Karl Marx *Capital*, Vol. I, Ben Fowkes, trans. (London: Penguin and New Left Books 1976) 280

4 *Capital*, 759 n.

## I Rationality and Distribution

The theory of rational choice begins with some simple assumptions. It assumes that agents have preferences they hope to satisfy, typically, but not necessarily, for material goods. It also assumes that they will use the information available to them in selecting the course of action that will best satisfy those preferences, with a minimum expenditure of the means they have at their disposal. These commonplaces are rendered mathematically elegant by the plausible subsidiary assumptions that beliefs include probability assignments, and that desires come in degrees. So presented, it seems an indisputable piece of philosophical psychology, which any account of the human situation ignores at its peril. To be sure, it gains theoretical elegance by abstracting away from empirical detail, but in this it is no different from other sciences.

Despite their supposed generality, rational choice models have long been the exclusive property of defenders of private property and markets. From Adam Smith through the 19th century Mills and the development of marginalist analysis to von Mises, Hayek, and Milton Friedman, the appeal to individual instrumental rationality has almost always been done in the service of defending the naturalness or sovereignty of the market. They show the market is natural because it is the outcome of unconstrained human action; they are supposed to show that capitalist market relations are non-coercive because they can be represented as the outcome of individual rational choice.

Despite their pedigree, rational choice models are not solely suited to justifying capitalist social relations and forms of property. One benefit in recent Marxist interest in rational choice models has been the unmasking of claims about the justifying power of instrumental rationality. By using rational choice models to describe circumstances in which an egalitarian distribution would be the outcome of rational interaction, John Roemer has made both the value of rational choice models and their limitations clear. Informally, Roemer's argument is that if rational agents concerned to maximize their wealth and leisure relative to the constraint that none may be made worse off in relative terms by anyone else's abilities, the outcome of their interaction will be an equal distribu-

tion.<sup>5</sup> Roemer has also used rational choice models to illustrate the sensitivity of market outcomes to unequal initial endowments of property, thus revealing that no particular distribution is the natural outcome of rational interaction. But Roemer's work demonstrates a more important general point: if rational agents maximize, subject to constraints, on initial endowments and the costs they can impose on each other, they will arrive at an equilibrium in which the initial constraint and endowment schemes will emerge as 'natural,' or voluntary, principles of distributive justice.

At most, rational choice models allow for a perspicuous statement of differing conceptions of distributive justice, not because the content of rationality determines the scope of justice, but because they make explicit what sorts of costs competing conceptions of justice allow to be imposed on people.<sup>6</sup> The principles of rational choice function more or less as principles of logic do in theoretical argument: they preserve content without introducing any content of their own. As a result, rational choice cannot decide between competing conceptions of distribution. Political judgment retains primacy over it. The question remains, though, as to whether rational choice models provide the best way of articulating the alternatives.

The adaptability of rational choice theory to competing distributive schemes reveals another limitation: modern discussions of distributive justice assume that distribution is to take place in what Hume called 'the circumstances of justice' conditions of moderate scarcity in which people of roughly equal power take no direct interest in one another's interests. Rational choice theory is well suited to the study of such problems. But it is only useful subject to another assumption: the only interest that parties take in selecting social arrangements concerns the amount of scarce goods they receive, and their opportunities for using them.

<sup>5</sup> The most accessible version of this argument can be found in John Roemer, *Free to Lose* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1988) 160-71

<sup>6</sup> This liberation of rational choice theory helps clarify the status, and limit the pretensions of recent arguments in political philosophy. I discuss it more fully in 'Gauthier's Liberal Individual' forthcoming in *Dialogue*.

Marx is sometimes dismissive of questions of distribution, writing as though we can hope for a world in which scarcity is entirely overcome. In such a world, questions of the allocation of resources would presumably not arise. As a result, all activity would presumably be carried out for the sake of the rewards internal to it. If this is his view, it is unrealistic. Some unwanted and merely instrumental activity may well be inevitable.

But if Marx goes too far in one direction, rational choice theory goes too far in the other, supposing that politics, and life more generally, is always merely a question of allocating scarce resources. An example close to the heart of 'rational choice' Marxism makes this clear.

## II Rationality and Collective Action

The revolutionary changes Marx predicted have failed to materialize. Rational choice theory purports to have an explanation of this failure. Suppose that each worker believes that he or she will be better off in a socialist society than a capitalist one, how might they co-ordinate in order to seize power? Social change is treated as a public good that all have an interest in achieving. But as well as being a public good, it is also a step good, only realizable if more than some minimal number of people contribute to its realization. Contributions above that number will do almost nothing to consolidate its success, while contributions below the threshold will do nothing to bring it about. Thus each potential revolutionary faces a problem: to join involves certain costs, yet the probability of making a difference though one's action is low enough that *whatever* the desirability of success, the payoffs are sure to be small. Thus it is not rational to join in revolutionary action. Since all must reason in the same way, collective action is either impossible, or else it requires coercion by some outside agency.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The classic formulation of this as a problem for Marx is in Mancur Olsen, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1965) 105-6. Olsen's aside about Marx was brought to the forefront by Allen Buchanan's 'Revolutionary Motivation and Rationality,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, 1 (Fall 1979).

The assumptions needed to generate this problem of collective action seem both simple and general. If each person believes some public good to be in his or her interest, there is no guarantee that all will contribute to its realization.

Contributing to public goods always has costs, and individual contributors bear those costs privately. The good to be realized may or may not be more valuable to the agent than the cost of contributing to it. But either way, the agent must also consider whether his or her *particular* contribution will make a difference. If too few people contribute, the agent will have borne costs for no reward; if more than enough others contribute, there is no point in making a sacrifice, because the good will be realized anyway. Because everyone reasons in the same way, voluntary co-ordination is impossible. Pollution provides a classic example: as much as each person may benefit from clean air, the cost to each of installing and maintaining emission controls outweighs the difference in air quality that one cleaner car will make. Thus everyone continues to pollute, though all would be better off if they could find a way to stop.

Public goods problems need not depend on the selfishness of the parties creating them. Concern for others will not help because the problem is generated by the 'step' nature of the goods in question: whatever his or her ends, the rational agent will not contribute unless he or she is assured of making a difference. Nor does an interest in setting an example for others solve the problem. For the rational agent must consider whether the example will be effective in motivating others, and consider the likelihood of his or her particular example influencing enough others so that each can make a difference. Yet the rational agents who the example might influence are in the same situation in deciding whether to follow it. Similarly, considerations of size make solutions that are possible in some contexts unworkable. People may well co-operate when they suppose that others are likely to reciprocate. But an individual in a large group cannot suppose that large numbers of others will behave likewise *only* if he or she does.<sup>8</sup> One could only be sure a sufficient

<sup>8</sup> This last suggestion is considered by Michael Taylor in *The Possibility of Cooperation*. Taylor concedes this type of solution has two significant limitations.

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number were cooperating if the numbers were so large as to make one's own contribution irrelevant.

Several things are worth noticing about the way this problem has been set up. First of all, it is set up as a perfectly general structure of interaction. That generality has its price. It looks as though the same argument should show that co-ordination of large groups is always impossible. This makes the analysis somewhat suspect, as there are many cases of *apparent* co-ordination. Second, the argument supposes that agents must employ the same mode of reasoning that firms are supposed to in 'marginalist' analyses in neo-classical economics: in deciding how many units of some factor of production to use how many machines to buy, or how many workers to hire the rational firm will add units until it reaches the 'margin,' the point at which the cost of adding an additional unit is equal to the added value of the total product. The metaphor of 'margins' applies directly to problems of collective action. Each person is, or may as well be, the last. Any person in the middle of the crowd moves its edges out, thereby influencing the amount of difference each additional person makes, just as if he or she was that additional person. Third, the marginalist assumptions that generate the problem are the same set of assumptions that Marx condemned political economy for.

Rather than criticizing proposed rational choice accounts of successful collective action, I want to explore an alternative, non-marginalist way of looking at agency.<sup>9</sup> Once it is in place, the rea-

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First, it works best with repeated interactions, in which agents expect future benefits from cooperating in similar circumstances a feature which fails to apply to a single collective seizure of power, where the costs of participation in an unsuccessful attempt are likely to be enormous. Second, this type of solution is extraordinarily difficult to implement with large numbers of people, because of information requirements.

<sup>9</sup> In so doing, I do not mean to suggest that organizing for political change is a simple matter. If anything, rational choice treatments make the problem too simple; the real difficulties lie elsewhere. Marx put too great an emphasis on class as the specific locus of oppression, ignoring the roles of race and gender. Other factors are also plainly important. Among them I would include

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sons to suspect the alleged generality of rational-choice models will be clear.

I focus on two examples, one prominent in the literature, the other not. In each case, people collectively bring about results all desire without central coordination. While the costs of participation are lower than in the case of revolutionary politics, the numbers are comparably enormous, and thus the likelihood of any individual making a difference is comparably slim. Consider voting. Almost no elections are decided on the basis of a single vote. Thus each person does well to suppose that his or her vote does not make a difference to the outcome of an election. Thus it is irrational to vote. Yet people vote anyway. Indeed many people vote for candidates who are sure to win, and many (though fewer) vote for ones sure to lose. How is this possible? To be sure, the costs of voting are small, but since the apparent benefits are typically non-existent, even enduring a small cost is baffling.<sup>10</sup> The reasons for voting are not improved; by supposing that one will influence future elections, because rational voters in those elections will find themselves in exactly the same situation. One vote now changes nothing later.

Vegetarians concerned with the well-being of animals face a structurally similar problem. Many vegetarians claim to refrain from eating meat because they believe that killing animals for food is both wasteful of the world's food resources and unnecessarily cruel. As a result, each has an interest in reducing the use of animals for food. Avoiding personal consumption of meat seems an obvious strategy. Yet, because of the fixed costs in the meat raising business, and economies of scale in meat packing and restaurants, any individual's abstaining from eating meat is extremely unlikely to save the

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the use of naked force by those in power, as well as subtler factors including the role of religion and nationalism in shaping social commitments. Indeed, the power of both religion and nationalism as social forces this century point to a failure of rational choice; they too should face insuperable free-rider problems, as should all social movements that do not already control the coercive apparatus of a state.

<sup>10</sup> The costs of voting are not always low, as the recent 'no' vote in Chile reminds us.

life of even a single animal. A single vegetarian will have no impact on the price of meat, which, together with the costs of running a farm and marketing meat, determine how much each farmer produces. And even a small drop in price may not lead to a decrease in production, because (up to a certain point) fixed costs guarantee that each farm will do better to raise the same number of animals and sell them at a lower price. Why would anyone give up the convenience and (possible) culinary pleasures of eating meat in such circumstances? It looks as though nothing is to be gained, and thus that giving up meat is irrational and, carrying the parallel argument to its conclusion therefore impossible.

It may be that in each of these cases, the parties involved fail to recognize the structure of the situation and so fail to realize that their sacrifices make no difference. Yet in many cases (such as pollution), people have no difficulty reasoning in marginalist terms; what needs to be explained is why they seem to ignore structural considerations at other times.<sup>11</sup>

Something has plainly gone wrong in each of these examples. The rational choice model seems to generate the wrong predictions in each of the examples. By showing that something is irrational, it thereby shows it to be impossible. Many people vote, and many people avoid eating meat. And, to return to our central concern, people sometimes organize to bring about political change.

Non-marginalist accounts are in each case available. Many vegetarians are unwilling to be party to an unnecessarily cruel practice. Whether or not the particular actions make a difference, they at the very least stop such a vegetarian from benefiting from something regarded as unacceptable. Of course, one might regard such behavior as squeamish or self-indulgent. But as an *explanation* of behavior, it faces no special problems. The agent stands in some special relation to his or her own action, and standing in that relation is essential to its motivation. Something similar may be said of those

<sup>11</sup> A similar point applies to Elster's suggestion that people participate in collective action because they suppose that if they are, others must also be. The patently fallacious reasoning involved seems curiously specific in its application.

who vote for a losing party out of an unwillingness to acquiesce silently in the victor's success, or vote for a sure winner in order to endorse that victory. Even in closer races, the likelihood of making a difference increases, but remains negligible. The desire to participate in bringing about change is still important. In each of these cases, the agent does not think of him- or herself as 'at the margin' but as centrally involved in his or her own activity. In each case it is only in virtue of acting regardless of the consequences that it is possible to bring about those very consequences. It is only by treating one's own action as non-instrumental that one can act in such a way as to bring about the result that gives that action its instrumental value.<sup>12</sup>

Thomas Nagel has recently argued that the need to distinguish between what one does and what merely happens is central to the notions of agency and responsibility. Nagel concedes that this distinction is not always easy to maintain, because the consequences of an action typically depend on circumstances lying beyond the agent's control. Whether or not my character is put to the test by circumstance, and whether or not my action contributes to some collective goal, will depend on circumstances I can have no control over. But I must act anyway. To abandon what Nagel calls the 'internal' point of view is to abandon all conception of myself as an agent. To make my own activity merely an instrument in the service of the ends I seek is to make the fact that it is my *own* activity irrelevant.<sup>13</sup>

Although Nagel does not emphasize the social aspects of agency, the ability to think of myself as an agent is closely connected to my relation to others. Problems of collective action not only re-

12 In 'Rationality, Morality, and Collective Action' (*Ethics* 96 [October 1985], 153), Elster discusses the suggestion, which he attributes to Amos Tversky, that collective action problems are sometimes solved by people acting because they want to be a certain type of person. Unfortunately, in his book on Marx, Elster neglects this possibility, and fails to see its centrality to Marx's thought more generally.

13 See Thomas Nagel 'Moral Luck' in his *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979) 24-33.

quire that each individual treat others as either an instrument or obstacle in the pursuit of his or her own ends. They also require that each agent treat his or her own actions in the same way a resource to be allocated, mattering no more than any other causal influence. The latter is all but unavoidable once one has accepted the former. So long as one is merely predicting what will happen, one cannot predict that one's own participation will make any difference.

If, instead, one thinks of oneself as part of a whole able to act, and one's action as expressive of that membership, one can contribute to making a difference, even though one can predict that one person's absence would make no difference to that difference. I can distinguish between what *I* do and what happens by distinguishing what *we* do from what happens.

Of course, any general explanation of action involves some degree of idealization. Actual decisions about whether to participate in collective action may depend on social pressure, anger, and any number of other factors. To appeal to an agent's interest in being part of bringing about some collective good is no less realistic than appealing to a concern with consequences alone. Such an idealization helps to distinguish those cases, such as pollution, in which problems of collective action are severe because most agents are indifferent to their own contribution.

### III Rationality and Alienation

The alternative perspective on collective action requires each agent to regard his or her own activity as more than a resource to be allocated in pursuit of other ends. This idea of non-instrumental activity is central to Marx's thought. He emphasizes it both in his criticisms of capitalism and as a central ground for advocating socialism.

For Marx, activity is important both as an expression of the person whose activity it is and as a way of bringing about desirable consequences. To lack either aspect to express oneself without consequence, or merely consume a result without any special connection to it is to miss something essential. In his early manuscripts Marx argues that alienation is the central failing of capitalism. Marx focuses on four respects in which workers are alienated under

capitalism: they are alienated from their products, from the process of production, from their species being, and from each other. In discussing each form of alienation, he emphasizes the fact that labor has become a mere means to the worker's animal needs. In each case, Marx is criticizing the arbitrariness of production, not because products are not wanted, but because the activity of producing them is arbitrary from the point of view of those carrying it out.

Marx returns to this theme in his later work; in *Capital* he describes labor in capitalist production as 'abstract.'<sup>14</sup> Abstract activity contrasts with concrete activity in at least two senses. First, labor is abstract when it is interchangeable with other labor. This sort of abstraction lies at the heart of marginalist analyses of production, because each 'unit of labor' is assumed to be interchangeable with any other, and thus to be equivalent to the last unit added. The same theme is central to Marx's theory of value. He argues that skilled labor in capitalist production reduces to some multiple of unskilled labor. He is not making the implausible claim that the premium sometimes commanded by those with skill, experience, or training is solely a function of labor required to produce them. He is claiming that diverse sorts of labor are abstract and interchangeable because the only feature of skilled labor that is relevant to commodity production is its ability to increase profit by replacing a larger quantity of unskilled labor. Skilled labor reduces to unskilled through economic practice, not algebraic manipulation.<sup>15</sup> Marx does not say that labor is somehow inherently the measure of value; the question that political economy has 'never thought to ask' is 'why labor is measured by the value of its product'<sup>16</sup> not why products are measured by the value of the labor time contained in them.

14 In so doing, he also returns to an earlier terminology. Marx describes labor as abstract in his 1844 manuscript 'Wages of Labor' (*Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 237) and in *The German Ideology*, speaks of 'abstract individuals robbed of all real life-content' (*Collected Works*, Vol. 5, 87).

15 For further discussion, see Lucio Colletti 'Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International' in his *From Rousseau to Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review Press 1972) 78-82, and Arthur Ripstein and Peter King 'Did Marx Hold a Labor Theory of Value?' (unpublished).

16 *Capital*, Vol. I, 174

Second, labor is abstract when it is done for some other end, rather than to satisfy a concrete immediate need of the producer. This contrasts with the special case of concrete labor in which the person's activity is itself the need that needs to be satisfied. It also contrasts with the more ordinary case in which labor is both an expression of the worker and a way of bringing about some independently desirable effect.

The two senses of abstraction fit together via Marx's account of the bases on which labor is deployed in capitalist production: the worker's need to sell something in order to survive, and the capitalist's desire for profit. It is its usefulness to these ends, rather than the satisfaction of concrete needs of producers, that regulate labor.

Abstract activity does more than undermine agency. It also precludes certain kinds of goods. Marx characterizes labor as selfchange realized through changing the world. In realizing one goal I make it possible for myself to realize others. Marx's criticism of the literally crippling effects of 19th century mills and factories points to a more general criticism of the shape that change takes in purely instrumental activities. Not only are the workers abilities to participate in other activities curtailed; he or she becomes a more specialized tool rather than more able because the abilities are of no interest in themselves. In contrast, the sharpening of the writer's mind and blunting of other abilities that results from too many hours in the British Museum counts as growth because the powers are valuable to the person who acquires them. Because it makes growth possible, non-instrumental activity also makes it possible to grow even in the face of failure. Activities pursued merely for the sake of the consequences they bring have no value if those consequences are not realized. Sport provides a helpful example: the athlete who trains to play as much as to win can lose and still recognize that training as valuable.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> It is perhaps worth emphasizing the sense in which this is not simply a matter of feeling some particular way about that activity. It may manifest itself in feeling, just as desire may manifest itself in pining or longing, but it is at root practical rather than sensory. To stand in a special relation to one's own

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Marx offers two examples to make his account of concrete activity concrete. One is the artist, such as Milton, who is described as an unproductive laborer because he `produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It is *his* nature. . . . The literary proletarian of Leipzig, who fabricates books (for example compendia of economics) under the direction of his publisher is a *productive* laborer, for his product is from the outset subsumed under capital and comes into being only for the purpose of increasing that capital.<sup>18</sup> The other is the revolutionary proletariat engaged in the seizure of power.

The two models differ in important ways. Milton writes because he has no other choice, not out of material necessity, but because he feels compelled to express himself by writing *Paradise Lost*. The result is a great work of literature. The revolutionary worker, in contrast, seeks to participate in the realization of a collective goal, and in so doing realizes herself. To be sure, the two parts cannot be entirely separated. The worker's chances of actually contributing to her own emancipation through overthrowing the state are exceedingly slim unless she, and others, value their activity for its own sake. And unless Milton actually supposes that he will be able to create something, the attempt to express himself can never get started.

Neither of Marx's examples involves labor in any narrow sense. Despite his use of the word `labor' and his emphasis on the appropriation of nature, Marx's concern is with activity more generally. And the real target of his criticism is activity done for the sake of consumption, turning one's activity into a resource to be allocated in pursuit of other ends.<sup>19</sup>

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projects is above all to have them occupy a special place and in one's life that is (i) not abandoned at the first opportunity to pursue some other end; (ii) not entered into solely on the basis of its expected consequences.

<sup>18</sup>*Theories of Surplus Value*, Vol. 1, Emil Burns, trans. (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1963)

<sup>19</sup> As such the contrast is surely too stark. Marx describes the education of the senses as the task of the entire history of mankind. Enjoying art, or developing a sophisticated palate for wines and foods allow the individual to grow and thereby become better prepared for future consumption. In other cases, consumption precludes realization.

Still, Marx did suppose that concrete activity could be had through the appropriation of nature, not only at dusk, after the days work is done. As a result, the critique of alienation is also central to Marx's vision of socialism. Marx's view of socialism was more than a view about redistribution. His recurring emphasis on alienation is of a piece with his recurring emphasis on democratic control by the associated producers. Marx is critical of those conceptions of communism which emphasize the equalization of material well being rather than the overcoming of estrangement. Marx characterizes such views as 'crude Communism' or 'generalized property' precisely because they equalize the problem rather than eliminating it.<sup>20</sup> Communism is supposed to be more than an equalization of income and increase in leisure time because it is supposed to make productive activity concrete by allowing producers to control it.<sup>21</sup>

If Marxism is to offer something distinct from the redistributive schemes advocated by such liberals as Rawls and Dworkin, it is this vision of unalienated activity. Rational choice theory, with its emphasis on how ideally rational individuals would allocate resources, ignores Marx's view that the process through which concrete individuals manage their affairs is at least as important as its consequences.

#### IV Rationality and Agency

We are now in a position to focus more carefully on the feature of 'rational choice' that both generates its central problems and underlies Marx's opposition to it. It is the assumption that any action must be motivated, and thus explained, in terms of consequences that

<sup>20</sup> See the manuscript 'Private Property and Communism' in *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, 293-4.

<sup>21</sup> I obviously cannot give this important point the attention it deserves. For a discussion of the relation between socialism and democracy, see Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987).



could be realized apart from the action. All action is assimilated to the model of the employer deciding whether to add another employee or purchase additional machinery. That is, all action is conceived of as instrumental.

It is worth distinguishing this conception of instrumental rationality from the weaker notion of rationality that is often pointed to in support of the primacy of rational choice. A number of philosophers have argued that the interpretation of action in terms of beliefs and desires requires the attribution of rationality. Unless the agent uses the information contained in his or her beliefs in pursuit of his or her ends, the ascription of those beliefs and ends become problematic. As Donald Davidson has argued, behavior only counts as evidence for beliefs based on the assumption of rationality, just as length can only be measured on the assumption of rigidity.<sup>22</sup> On this conception, irrational behavior is random, because no pattern can be found in it. But of course this conception of rationality is such a weak constraint that it is compatible with all possible desires, including those that make explicit reference to the performance of the action. As such, it is in no way equivalent to any assumption about all action being rational in the narrower sense of allocating resources so as to bring about independent outcomes.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps every action must be explained in terms of some motivation of the agent whose action it is; it does not follow that every

<sup>22</sup> Donald Davidson, 'Psychology as Philosophy' in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980), 237

<sup>23</sup> A parallel point applies to questions concerning the scope of formal accounts of rationality. In *The Logic of Decision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1983), Richard Jeffrey claims that the model of rational choice he offers is perfectly general, and can be extended to any possible set of consistent motivations. Yet Jeffrey's own examples all focus on cases where an agent must choose between actions based on preferences over outcomes, and he does not consider agents directly concerned with their actions. It remains an open question whether, and how, the formal structure of the theory is supposed to carry over into cases in which the agent seeks to be a particular sort of person. Perhaps there is a way of generalizing rational choice theory; trouble is, 'rational choice Marxism' has confined itself to the extant outcome-based interpretation of rational choice.

action must be justified in terms of its expected consequences. To arrive at the latter claim, an ambiguity in the notion of instrumental rationality must be exploited. Reason may be instrumental in the sense of being unable to arbitrate between ends. It does not follow that all action is instrumental in the sense of being concerned with outcomes that are realizable apart from the actions.

Still, there is one sense on which standing in a special relation to some action is parasitic on attempting to bring about some result. For an action to be an expression of who I am, I must be trying to accomplish something. Mere self-expression is impossible; it must always take place through doing something. Thus the special relation I stand in to my own action is, as Jon Elster has put it, essentially a by-product.<sup>24</sup> I cannot realize myself through political activity unless I have some concrete concerns about the shape of society; I cannot grow through discussion unless there is something to talk about. Nor can I realize myself through work unless there is some external standard I can fail to satisfy. More generally, Elster supposes that I can only stand in a special relation to my own activity if what I am trying to do matters independently. If my relation to my own activity is a by-product in this sense, it cannot enter into the motivation or explanation of action; the action must be explained in terms of the goal it brings about, not the beneficial consequences it has.

Although the distinction between things that can and cannot be directly aimed at is real, its application to this point is surely spurious. The special relation I stand in to my action may be a by-product of acting to achieve some goal insofar as my pursuit of it is necessarily indirect; it is not a by-product insofar as it is impossible to pursue for its own sake. I can only have the intellectual challenge of chess if I play to win, but it doesn't follow that the desire to win is the only possible motivation for playing. Indeed, in games playing against a

<sup>24</sup> Jon Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983). Elster develops this point in 'Self Realization in Work and Politics' in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller Jr., Jeffrey Paul, and John Ahrens, eds., *Marxism and Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell 1986).

more skillful opponent offers greater rewards, precisely because winning is not the only thing that matters, though one must act as though it does in order to play at all. By the same token, writing or participating in politics requires trying to accomplish something, but its motivation may be the desire to see to it that I myself play a part in bringing about some good, or am not party to some wrong.<sup>25</sup>

Rational choice models can be genuinely illuminating for questions concerning the allocation of scarce goods and opportunities based on ends and constraints that are given in advance. That is why they work so well in making sense of market behavior. If the purpose of US Steel is to make money rather than to make steel, probable success in achieving that goal is the only way particular decisions can be justified (and recent failures to do either criticized). More generally, if decisions concerning the allocation of resources are to be justified to persons interested only in receiving as much as possible, instrumental rationality has a place. Thus it finds a plausible home in discussions of distribution.

Marx criticized the political economy of his day on two grounds. First, he criticized its explanatory failures, its hasty generalizations and incomplete grasp of the phenomena it sought to understand. But he also criticized its explanatory *successes*. Marx saw the success of its explanations as a sign of the extent to which activity has become abstract. Its very success reveals the failings of its object of study. Classical political economy is no longer the accepted model of capitalist reality, and Marx would surely grant the explanatory power of its neo-classical heir. But he would also question the basis of that power. The generalization of a model of choice appropriate in a domain of estrangement obscures the alternative vision that Marx has to offer. To make the English petty bourgeois the model of human nature is to ignore the possibility of a better life.

<sup>25</sup> Elster also objects that such motivations are self-indulgent. See his discussion of what he calls 'the moral fallacy of by-products' in *Sour Grapes*, Ch. 2, especially his criticisms of Hannah Arendt, and of E.P. Thompson's claim that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is justified as an exercise in democracy even if it is ultimately unsuccessful. I do not know if Elster would be similarly critical of the participants in the unsuccessful demonstrations for democracy in China.

## In Defence of Abundance\*

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Every single day, every newspaper in the world carries some further evidence as to how limited the Earth's resources are.<sup>1</sup> Every single day, therefore, we should grow more deeply convinced that the notion of abundance has become hopelessly irrelevant and can safely be shelved forever. Or so it seems. In the final section of this paper, I shall defend the opposite view: that growing awareness of the limits of our resources should make the notion of abundance, suitably (though still plausibly) defined, more and not less relevant

\* This is a much revised version of a paper discussed at the Universities of Amsterdam and Louvain-la-Neuve in May and November 1985. I am very grateful to Philippe Mongin, Alec Nove, Roald Ramer, Gérard Roland, Ian Steedman, Robert van der Veen and Bob Ware, for having helped me out of some of the confusions contained in earlier versions. Conversations with Hans Achterhuis, Ivan Illich, Riccardo Cappi and Marc Germain have drawn my attention to neglected dimensions, which I am sure I have not incorporated to anything like their satisfaction. I have been greatly exercised by a number of earlier treatments of these issues, especially by Tartarin (1981), Nove (1983, ch.1), Phelps (1985, ch.1) and Roland (1989, ch.1). It is because these have not left me fully satisfied that I felt I wanted to have a go at it myself. Without them, however, my job would have been far tougher, and the end result far rougher.

<sup>1</sup> So at least I feel confident enough to infer, on the basis of casual observation of an admittedly unrepresentative sample.

to our pursuits. Whether or not this defence turns out to be successful, I hope this paper will go some way towards clarifying this notoriously elusive notion, as well as its no less elusive and no less important antonym: scarcity.

### I Abundance in Eve's Orchard

Let us first focus on a highly simplified one-person economy; define, in that context, an intuitively adequate notion of abundance, and explore what it does and does not imply. The economy is called Eden. Its one member is called Eve. Eve's welfare is affected by only two factors in addition to the nature of her tastes. It increases with the amount of fruit she consumes up to a point where any further fruit consumption leaves her indifferent. And it decreases with the amount of time she spends picking fruit but only as from a certain threshold below which she is indifferent between doing more or less fruit picking. I shall call Eve's *satiation set* the set of combinations of fruit consumption and fruit picking which Eve weakly prefers to any other.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the amount Eve can consume is finite, and it is, moreover, dependent on the amount of time she spends picking fruit. Let us call Eve's *feasible set* the set of combinations of fruit consumption and fruit picking that are actually possible, given the location, yield and shape of the fruit trees, as well as Eve's picking skills. By definition, I submit, Eden is an *abundant* economy if Eve's satiation set and her feasible set intersect (see Figure 1). Abundance prevails, in other words, if and only if Eve can consume as much as she cares to consume without having to do anything she minds doing, however slightly.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> That is, combination C is in Eve's satiation set if, for any combination X, either Eve strictly prefers C to X, or she is indifferent between C and X. Note that satiation is not bliss and that, on some absolute scale of happiness, satiation may still leave Eve pretty miserable.

<sup>3</sup> This definition and much else in this section are largely inspired by Tartarin's (1981, 247-54) illuminating formal discussion. Phelps' (1987, 7) characterization of the 'economy of plenty' expresses a closely related notion, even though

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Let us briefly focus on some key features of this definition. First, note that abundance, thus defined, constitutes a *capacity*, a potential of the economy, which may or may not be actualized. An economy is here being characterized as the conjunction of its member's *tastes* which determine the shape of the satiation set and of its

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it makes abundance a matter of satiation, not just of potential satiation: 'Everyone would work to the point where working longer would not be enjoyable, so all available job satisfactions would be completely realized. And thanks to those efforts, the technology, and the plentifulness of natural and capital resources, everyone's desires for the outputs produced would also be completely satisfied.'

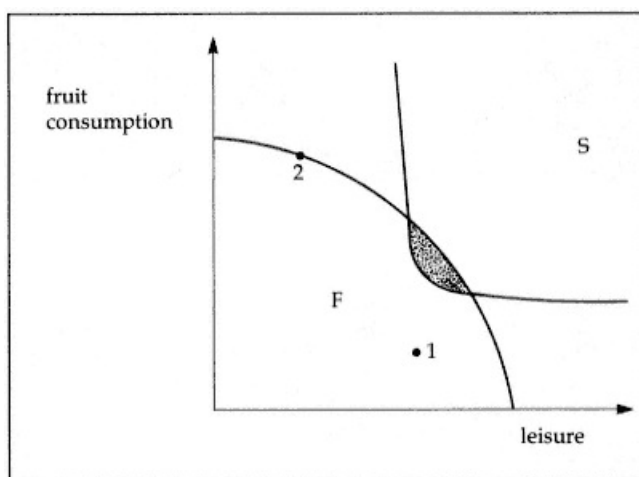


Figure 1  
Abundance in Eve's orchard

material and human *resources* which determine the shape of the feasible set. Suppose that tastes and resources on Eden are such that abundance can be said to obtain. It does not follow that Eve, its sole member, is satiated, i.e. consumes as much as she cares to consume while doing no work she minds doing. For all abundance means is that such satiation is *possible*. This potential may fail to be realized for two distinct types of reasons. First, Eve may make an inefficient use of available resources for example, she has overlooked a couple of magnificent trees, from which fruit is particularly easy to pick (point 1 in Figure 1). Second, though using resources efficiently, Eve may select a combination of leisure and consumption which does not optimally fit her preferences for example, God obliges her to spend 16 hours a day picking fruit (point 2 in Figure 1). Neither Eve's failure to find the magnificent trees nor God's cruel command prevents abundance from prevailing in Eden. For what abundance means is not that Eve is not short of anything she wants (whether fruit or leisure), but that it is *possible* for her not to suffer any such shortage. And the possibility of satiation only implies satiation under the further assumption of fully rational behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

It follows that abundance can be characterized as the negation of *scarcity*, understood as the impossibility for Eve to satisfy all her material wants while working no more than she fancies. But and this is the second feature I want to stress abundance remains consis-

4 It may be objected to both examples that they should be construed as illustrating the absence of abundance (as defined), rather than the coexistence of abundance and non-satiation. For since satiation, by definition, is preferred by Eve to any feasible alternative, and since abundance, by definition, implies that satiation is feasible, Eve's ending up with less than satiation must mean that abundance was not really present: in the first example, because Eve lacks the skill which would have enabled her to notice the magnificent trees (her actual feasible set is smaller than was assumed); in the second example, because Eve has a taste for not angering God (her actual satiation set is smaller than we thought). I trust, however, that the examples lend themselves to a more refined description which enables them to meet such objections, as long as those who raise these allow for the possibility of irrational behaviour, and hence for the possibility that what is both feasible and (unanimously) preferred may fail to materialize, even in a one-person world.

tent with 'scarcity' in two more demanding senses. (1) There can be abundance even if it is the case that, however hard Eve works, the fruit available for her to consume will always be in finite supply. Abundance, in other words, does not entail unlimited resources. (2) There can also be abundance even though it is the case that, without any work on her part, Eve cannot possibly get enough fruit to satisfy her wants, or even simply to survive. Abundance, in other words, does not entail the possibility of idleness.<sup>5</sup> As long as there is scarcity in this last sense, i.e. as long as the satiation of material wants requires that some work be done even work that one does not mind doing in the least<sup>6</sup> it remains as relevant as ever to allo-

<sup>5</sup> Of course, abundance entails both unlimited resources and the possibility of idleness in the special case in which Eve only reaches satiation with an *infinite* amount of fruit and *no* fruit picking whatever. But this is, precisely, no more than a special and most implausible case, even though it is one that is commonly assumed to obtain: see e.g. Debreu's (1959, 46) insatiability axiom, which states for each consumer that 'no matter what his consumption is there is another one which [he] prefers.' Gérard Roland has objected that although satiation is conceivable for some finite amount of any good or service, it is not conceivable for any finite amount of human time. Though people may not want to work a lesser proportion of a day or life of given length (there is satiation for leisure, in the sense that no further substitution of leisure for labour would yield any additional utility), they will always want (with the rare exception of suicidal cases) to have more time available to them (human time is radically scarce, its marginal utility, is almost never zero). I am not sure, however, that there is a fundamental difference here. For given how tired we are at the end of the day (or how decrepit we are likely to be at the end of our lives), most of us would not care for a bit of extra time, unless it came along with a matching dose of physical and mental rejuvenation. But in that case, where lies the difference with the consumption of goods? Would we not care indefinitely for more cake or more opera music if it came along with some physical or mental improvement that enabled us to digest the former or enjoy the latter? Satiation for leisure no less than for goods is always relative to one's personal features. (One implication is the fact [see n. 2] that satiation need not amount to bliss.)

<sup>6</sup> Work is standardly defined, and contrasted with leisure, in at least three distinct ways: (1) by reference to the utility of the activity's product, (2) by reference to the disutility of the activity itself, and (3) by reference to the payment

*(footnote continued on next page)*



cate correctly one's time and other resources. Abundance does not make economic calculation obsolete. Scarce means still need to be wisely allocated.<sup>7</sup>

Third, what is the relation between abundance and *gratuity*? for Eve, as her situation has been described so far, both goods she cares for have a price in the following sense. Assuming she makes an efficient use of available resources (i.e. her choice lies on the frontier of her feasible set), if she wants to take more leisure, she has to cut down on her fruit consumption. And if she wants to eat more fruit, she has to work more. Increased access to either good has an op-

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to which the activity gives rise. It is the first definition, which equates work and production (of goods or services), that has been used so far and will be used throughout this article. By definition, therefore, leisure is totally unproductive and idleness means that there is no production at all. By no means does it follow, of course, that one cannot be highly productive or make most useful things without toiling (i.e. while indulging in leisure according to the second definition) or while being 'off work' (i.e. indulging in leisure according to the third definition).

<sup>7</sup> See Tartarin (1981, 251-5), who points out that 'economic calculation could only disappear completely if all goods entering consumption were available without production in amounts that saturate wants.' The opposite view, which closely associates abundance and the end of economics is expressed, among many others, by Ernest Mandel (1969, 185), Alec Nove (1983, 5) and Edward Phelps (1985, 9). In Phelps' formulation, economics studies the economy of scarcity, i.e. situations where unfilled wants for the economy's goods press the economy to the limits of some of its resources, leaving wants still unfilled. The point is that even if all wants are filled and they can be, by definition, when abundance obtains economic calculation has been necessary (except under the far stronger condition spelled out in the quotation from Tartarin) to make sure that resources are so allocated that this result is indeed achieved. On the other hand, as pointed out to me by Philippe Mongin, Tartarin's condition, though sufficient, is not a necessary condition for the pointlessness of economic calculation. If the supply of goods entering consumption were insufficient for satiation but allowed for no trade off between them (which entails, in particular, the absence of production) think of fixed amounts of various types of manna there would no doubt be room for distributive decisions, but not for economic calculation. Scarcity, therefore, is neither necessary (Tartarin's point) nor sufficient (Mongin's point) for economic calculation to make sense.

portunity cost in terms of the other.<sup>8</sup> This follows, of course, from the downward shape of the curve which expresses production possibilities, itself in this case the reflection of the very fact that it makes sense to distinguish work and leisure. (Nothing would count as work if there was nothing Eve could do to increase the amount of some goods she cares for.) Of course, as long as she moves inside her satiation set, this opportunity cost, expressed as the quantity of the other good which has to be given up, is no real cost to Eve. For it follows from the definition of the satiation set that giving up this quantity does not make her welfare any lower than it would be if she did not have to give it up.

This brings us to a fourth and final remark, which concerns Marxists' central use of the concept of abundance, i.e. to the relation between abundance and *communism*. Let us define a communist society as a society which inscribes not just on its banners, but in its actual functioning, 'From each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs,' and interpret this formula, for the time being, as follows: people provide their labour spontaneously, for no pay, while all their material wants are satisfied, thanks to the free provision of all the goods they care for. What would communism look like in Eden? For communism to be realized, Eve's fruit picking must no longer give her access to increased fruit consumption (paid labour has been abolished), while, conversely, an increase in Eve's fruit consumption must no longer be paid for by the giving up of some of her leisure (gratuity now obtains). In other words, the trade off, or opportunity cost, described in the previous paragraph no longer applies to the economy's sole agent, even though it still holds, of course, for the economy as such. And yet, enough fruit gets picked for everyone's desire for fruit to be satiated.<sup>9</sup> Is com-

<sup>8</sup> Economists usually refer to this 'technical' opportunity cost as the rate of transformation of one good into another, and reserve the term 'opportunity cost' to the welfare opportunity cost to be introduced below.

<sup>9</sup> This agrees, for example, with Lenin's (1917, section V.4) canonic description of the higher stage of communism, where no norm of consumption is socially imposed and everyone just takes according to her/his needs.

munism, thus characterized, possible in abundant Eden? Not without some strengthening of the condition of abundance. For if Eve is told that she can choose to consume and (independently) to pick as much or as little fruit as she wishes, she can be relied upon to choose a point in her satiation set, but there is no guarantee that this point will also be in Eden's feasible set. Indeed, as inspection of Figure 1 readily shows, even if she were told to display some moderation by choosing first any level of consumption and next the highest level of fruit picking that would leave her satiated (or, conversely, by choosing first any amount of leisure and next the lowest level of consumption that would satiate her wants), there would still be no guarantee that her choice would be feasible.<sup>10</sup>

However, only a mild strengthening of abundance is required in order to make communism possible. For communism, as defined, can be implemented as follows. First, society chooses some level of consumption consistent with Eve's satiation (say,  $C^1$  in Figure 1). Next, Eve decides to do the maximum amount of fruit picking ( $L^1$  in Figure 1) that she does not mind doing (or to enjoy the minimum level of leisure that does not jeopardize her satiation), given the unconditionally promised level of consumption  $C^1$ . Eve is thus given her satiation bundle of fruit free of charge and supplies her work for no pay. Eden has turned communist. But this can only be guaranteed to be possible if in addition to abundance one assumes that Eve is willing to choose the lowest of the levels of leisure among which she is indifferent. If she did not, the lifting of the pressure

<sup>10</sup> This is the case because all abundance requires is that the satiation set should intersect the feasible set, not that it should be interior to it. If the latter were the case, i.e. if some feasible combination of leisure and consumption were such that no unfeasible combination would be at least as good as it, no social coordination would be required to select it. This is, however, a far stronger assumption than our condition of abundance, and one, therefore, which would be even more difficult to justify. (One can of course point out that Eve would get bored if she did not do some fruit picking and that the fruit she would thus pick would be at least as much as her stomach could cope with. But this still falls far short of what is needed to substantiate the stronger assumption: the fact that the satiation set does not contain the infinite point is a necessary but not sufficient condition for its being interior to the feasible set.)

(and guidance) of opportunity costs, as entailed by the very definition of communism, would constantly lead Eve to make choices incompatible with the constraints of production which (as we have seen) even an abundant society cannot ignore. Mildly strengthened along these lines,<sup>11</sup> abundance can thus also be characterized as the following dispositional property of the society concerned: abundance obtains in a society if and only if it is (economically) possible to introduce communism into it, i.e. to leave work unpaid and provide goods free of charge, without generating shortages.<sup>12</sup>

Put differently again, abundance is not just the potential to fully satisfy the demand for goods, for excess demand can always be removed through the price system, say by making Eve pay a sufficiently high price (in foregone leisure) for the fruit she wants. Nor is abundance just the potential to satisfy the demand for goods under conditions of ample leisure, for the latter may have nothing to do with satiation and simply reflect poor labour productivity, i.e. the fact that the price (in foregone leisure) to be paid for increased material satisfaction soon becomes prohibitive.<sup>13</sup> Abundance, as defined, is more than this. It is the potential to satisfy the demand for goods in the absence of any quid pro quo, i.e. the potential to simultaneously avoid shortages and dispense with prices.

11 Strictly speaking, all we need is a propensity to choose some satiating level of leisure in the feasible set, not the lowest among them. But it would be hard to provide this weaker assumption with a plausible rationale which would not also hold for the stronger one.

12 Along similar lines, Nove (1983, 15-17) defines abundance as a 'sufficiency to meet requirements at zero price.' Elster (1985, 231) too establishes a connection between abundance and communism: 'Abundance, in the sense of suppression of scarcity, means that all goods under communism would be free goods, that is that demand for all goods would be saturated. When everyone had taken from the common consumption stock, there would be something of each good left over.' But he imposes requirements which are too strict on two counts. First, what is required is that there should be enough, *not* more than enough, for the desire for each type of good (including leisure) to be satisfied. Second, abundance is a potential. It does not mean that the demand for all goods is saturated, but that it *could* be.

13 This point invalidates the inference commonly made, in the wake of Sahlins (1972), from stone-age leisure to stone-age abundance.

## II Many Goods, Many People

Most of what has been said so far generalizes easily when there is more than one good Eve cares for (in addition to her leisure). Suppose Eve does not only like to eat fruit, but also to drink water, which needs fetching from a well. Both the feasible set and the satiation set are now made up of four-dimensional points (combinations of amounts of fruit, water, fruit picking and water fetching), and abundance can again be defined by the existence of a non-empty intersection between these two sets.<sup>14</sup> Such abundance does not imply actual satiation, nor an unlimited supply of both fruit and water, nor the possibility of satiation without any picking or fetching, nor the absence of opportunity cost (more water, for example, means less fruit and/or less leisure). What it does imply is the possibility of communism, i.e. gratuity without shortage, providing some more specific guidance is given by society to its single agent than in the one-good case. Society must not just select amounts of fruit and water consistent with Eve's satiation and made available to her free of charge. It must also instruct Eve about which combinations of fruit picking and water fetching among those among which she is indifferent she should perform if society's production and consumption plans are to be consistent. Whatever the number of goods involved, abundance implies that demand for them can be met even at zero price. But the more numerous the goods whether final, intermediate or capital goods the more differentiated the required productive activities, and hence the more detailed the instructions society will have to make available to Eve.

Let us now return to the one-good orchard, while letting Adam in. Abundance, in this enlarged society, can be analogously defined as the existence of a non-empty intersection between the social feasi-

<sup>14</sup> Three-dimensional points, with leisure as the third good (in addition to fruit and water), would be insufficient, because different work activities may bear differently on people's welfare. Abundance may fail to obtain even though Eve does not mind working for a longer time than is required to produce her satiation bundle of water and fruit: for example, if she does not mind picking fruit all day long but hates fetching even one handful of water.

ble set and the social satiation set. But we must be very careful about how these two sets are defined. Neither the social feasible set nor the social satiation set can be viewed as sets of combinations of aggregate amounts of fruit and aggregate amounts of leisure. This is obvious enough for the satiation set. A given combination of total fruit and total leisure can lie inside or outside the satiation set depending of how fruit and leisure are distributed among Eve (who, say, loves eating apples) and Adam (who, say, loves picking them). That distribution matters is somewhat less obvious, but no less true, for the feasible set. First, Eve's and Adam's fruit-picking skills are not necessarily equal. When they differ, how total leisure is distributed between Eve and Adam obviously affects the total amount of fruit picked. Hence, whether a given combination of total fruit and total leisure is feasible, cannot be determined as long as the distribution of leisure is left unspecified. Second, how much fruit picking Adam and Eve are willing to do will generally depend on how much fruit each of them is entitled to consume. This is the case both because how good one is at picking fruit may depend on how well one eats, and because how keen one is to pick fruit may depend on how much fruit one expects to get (or to retain) as a reward for the picking one does. As a consequence of such efficiency considerations (in a broad sense that covers both capacity and incentive effects), whether a given combination of total fruit, Eve's leisure and Adam's leisure is feasible, cannot be determined as long as the distribution of fruit consumption is left unspecified.

It follows that both the social satiation set and the social feasible set must be defined as sets of pairs of combinations of fruit consumption and leisure (one combination for each individual), and abundance obtains if and only if there is at least one such pair that lies in both sets. Note that abundance, thus defined, may be attained when Adam joins Eve even if it could not be attained by both of them separately, indeed even if it could not be attained by either separately. This is due, *first*, to the possibility of redistribution constrained, but not abolished, by the efficiency considerations mentioned above. If abundance prevails for Eve, but not for Adam, when taken separately, it may prevail for both when they come together, even if their productivity is not enhanced by the change. Some of the fruit that (more productive or more austere) Eve does not mind

picking, may be available for redistribution to (clumsier or greedier) Adam, without such redistribution jeopardizing Eve's own satiation. *Second*, society's production possibilities may of course be affected by interaction between Eve and Adam. The effect on productivity may be negative (Adam now picks some of the most accessible fruit), but it may also be positive (Eve and Adam can now carry one another on their shoulders). In the former case, the social feasible set is strictly smaller than the set of pairs of individually feasible combinations. In the latter case, it is strictly larger, and may therefore include a pair of individually unaccessible combinations that lie in Eve's and Adam's respective satiation sets. *Finally*, interaction between Adam and Eve may also affect their preferences. As a result of coming together, they may become more difficult to satiate (chatting has become an attractive substitute to fruit picking) or easier to satiate (eating fruit, they realize, was a poor *Ersatz* for making love). In the former case, the social satiation set is strictly smaller than the set of pairs of individually satiating combinations. In the latter case, it is strictly larger, and may therefore include a pair of feasible but individually non-satiating combinations, thereby turning two separate scarcities into one joint abundance.

This concept of abundance for a two-person world can easily be extended to the general case of any number of people. Both the social feasible set and the social satiation set are then sets of  $n$ -tuples of fruit-leisure combinations. And abundance obtains if and only if there is at least one such  $n$ -tuple that belongs to both sets (bearing in mind the three caveats mentioned in the previous paragraph). A society has reached abundance, in other words, if and only if there exists a feasible allocation of fruit and leisure among its members, such that none of these prefers any other fruit-leisure combination to the one (s)he has under that allocation. This more general concept possesses properties closely analogous to those mentioned in the single-agent world. In particular, it does not imply that anyone is actually satiated, nor that fruit is available without limits, nor that material wants can be satisfied without anyone working, nor that an increase in one agent's consumption has no cost in terms of consumption possibilities for the others.

What requires closer analysis is the relation between communism and abundance. In this more crowded world, the possibility of com-

munism (which now becomes less of a misnomer) means that the social product — the fruit picked by all, whether alone or in cooperation — can be distributed free of charge, irrespective, that is, of each person's contribution to fruit picking, without this generating a shortage of fruit or requiring a compulsion to work. Here again, of course, abundance alone does not strictly guarantee the possibility of communism. For if each individual is left to choose any combination of (free) fruit consumption and (unpaid) fruit picking inside his/her satiation set, the odds are that shortages will set in. Even if society selects, for each individual, some level of consumption consistent with his/her satiation, and next asks him/her to work as much as is compatible with remaining satiated (the straight extension of the requirement that sufficed in the one-person case), there is still no guarantee that the end result will lie in the aggregate feasible set.

To make sure that enough will be produced for everyone to be satiated, one must not only ask people to keep to the lower frontier of their satiation set (they could not be satiated with less leisure and no more fruit or with less fruit and no more leisure), but also to select exactly that point of this frontier at which the surplus available for redistribution is maximized (or the deficit to be made up by redistribution minimized). At this point, their marginal productivity is equal to their marginal disutility from work (working any more would produce less fruit than what would be needed as a result to keep them satiated). And this they will have to be instructed to do, since no specific incentive will make them make such choices: working less than this would cost them nothing in terms of fruit consumption, and if they chose to work more, they could fully compensate this increased effort by consuming more. Thus, no great self-sacrifice is required of communist (wo)man. For abundance allows him/her to fully satisfy all his/her material wants, as well as all his/her taste for free time. In order for this potential to be actualized, however, some willingness to follow the planner's guidance will in general be indispensable. Not only will all agents have to give the planner adequate information about their tastes and productivity. But among the various combinations in their satiation set (all individually accessible to them, since they have no budget constraint, and all equivalent in their eyes, since they are all sufficient for sati-



ation), they will have to choose the one the planner directs them to choose.

This conclusion is of course even more true if we combine the two complications introduced in this section many goods and many people. All abundance means is that the set of n-tuples which satiate the n agents' preferences has a *common intersection* with the set of feasible n-tuples. (Each element of each n-tuple is itself an m-tuple of amounts of goods and activities that affect the agents' welfare.) It is only if abundance meant something far more demanding, namely *inclusion* of the former set in the latter, that compliance with the planner's instructions could be dispensed with. For then the agents' preference of less consumption to more and of more labour to less (as from a certain point) would keep the agents' decentralized choices within the feasible set. Abundance as here defined is sufficient for communism, not for decentralized communism.<sup>15</sup>

One final word on the relation between abundance on one side, *conflict* and *class* on the other. It is often said that conflict only makes sense on the background of scarcity, and that abundance, therefore, would put an end to all conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Under abundance, to use Tartarin's (1981, 248) telling formulation, the equilibrium is not just Pareto optimal it is impossible to make someone better off without making someone else worse off but also *Marx-optimal* it is impossible to make someone better off even by making someone else worse off. Moreover, in so far as classes are defined in terms of differential access to assets land, wealth, skills, jobs, etc. which affect people's incomes, or their income-leisure bundles, or their material welfare, it can also be said, it seems, that an abundant society is

15 The planning, assessment and information work required by centralized communism is then of course among the activities which, under abundance, it must be possible for people not to want to do any less of, while doing enough of them for all material wants to be satisfied.

16 See, for example, Nove (1983, 15): 'Abundance removes conflict over resource allocation, since by definition there is enough for everyone, and so there are no mutually exclusive choices, no opportunity is forgone, and therefore no opportunity cost;' and Phelps (1985, 7): 'Thus, an economy without scarcity would have no opposing conflicts, no bones of contention.'

bound to be a classless society: no one's material welfare could possibly go up as a result of a redistribution of assets, i.e. of a redistribution of whatever determines material welfare.

Let us not forget, however, that abundance is just a potential. It means that some allocation of resources (to various uses and various people) can generate the satiation of everyone's wants, but not that the way in which resources are allocated has no impact on the level and distribution of material welfare. Given that mismanagement, spiteful behaviour or random events may jeopardize their access to satiation, it can therefore be rational for individuals and groups to struggle over the control of resources even though abundance would seem to make this pointless. Furthermore, acute conflict and sharp class divisions (in a correspondingly broadened sense) can also persist under abundance because income or material welfare is not all that matters to people. Power, for example, may matter for its own sake. And even when everyone's material wants are actually satiated, people may still meaningfully fight over the distribution of power-conferring assets.<sup>17</sup> Finally, there are many conflicts between two parents about how to educate their children, for example, or between fundamentalists and liberals about the nature of a good society which are not reducible to class conflicts even in this broad sense. There is of course no reason why we should expect them to disappear, or even to become any less acute, as abundance sets in. For these three distinct reasons, nothing prevents an abundant society from being a class society, and even less from being conflict-ridden.

### III Three Transitions

Despite all these warning remarks about what it does not entail, abundance, as defined, still represents a rather grandiose state of affairs of which it is uncontentious enough to say that it is not within our current reach and will never be. There are, however, two

<sup>17</sup> The underlying concept of class is spelled out and defended in Van Parijs (1987a).

general ways in which one can conceive of getting closer to it: through an upward expansion of the aggregate feasible set and through a downward expansion of the aggregate satiation set. The former is a matter of developing the productive forces, of increasing productivity.<sup>18</sup> The latter is a matter of containing wants, of inducing more austere preferences.<sup>19</sup> It is of course the former that has traditionally been given most emphasis in the Marxist tradition.<sup>20</sup> But it has come under attack from various quarters. From Veblen (1899) and Goblot (1929) to Baudrillard (1972) and Hirsch (1977), or Girard (1962) and Dumouchel (1979), many authors have analyzed and/or denounced the dynamics of wants which fatally undermines current attempts to satisfy these wants through the expansion of industrial production. The more radical inference from such analyses

18 Since what matters is the per capita productive potential, one variant of this first strategy in a world with scarce natural resources consists in negative population growth. In most of what follows, however, I shall concentrate on the standard variant of technical progress (including productivity-enhancing capital accumulation).

19 This second strategy would be ruled out if it were the case, as Phelps (1985, 7) claims, that 'not even monks and mystics have enough not as long as they could meditate longer or better with the help of more land or capital or the assistance of others. To have run out of uses for additional rewards is to suffer from a failure of the imagination.' The point, however, is that satiation is not defined as the fulfillment of any want one *might have*, but of those one *actually has*. It denotes the fact that 'all have access to whatever is needed to realize their ends' (Levine 1984, 34), not the fact that all have access to whatever is needed to realize whatever ends they *might want* to pursue, and is therefore crucially different from, and significantly less ambitious than, *full* real freedom (on one plausible interpretation). Whereas curbing the 'imagination' is, at best, ineffective as far as the latter is concerned, it is not irrelevant to the pursuit of the former.

20 Marx himself displays some interest in the latter approach in some of his early writings, but unambiguously dismisses it later on. For a useful discussion and textual evidence, see Elster (1985, 71; 231). Some later Marxists have not followed this lead, including Lenin (1917, section V.4), when he insists that reaching the higher stage of communism 'requires the disappearance of today's average man who takes pleasure in wasting public wealth and in demanding the impossible.'

is that the only way of getting closer to (or back to) abundance is the second one mentioned above want containment in the form of some modern analogue of, say, Buddhist character building as advocated by Schumacher (1973) or Kolm (1982) or of the moulding of ambition by gender as suggested by Illich (1983) or Sachs (1988). The more moderate inference, which I shall endorse in the remainder of this article, is that productive progress remains relevant to the pursuit of abundance, *providing that* the dynamics of wants can somehow be curbed.

Of course, even assuming that this condition is fulfilled, technical progress only has the potential to take us nearer to abundance, not to make us reach it in one stroke. For those who find communism an attractive ideal and are unwilling to wait (forever) until the condition for its full realization is met, it is therefore worth asking whether and how this ideal might be realized gradually, as the process leading up to abundance develops. If abundance has not been reached for all people, for all goods and at any level of want satisfaction, it may still have been reached for some people and/or for some goods and/or at some level of want satisfaction, thus making it possible to introduce a correspondingly partial form of communism. Of the three paths thus suggested, the first two do not make much sense, for two contrasting reasons.

It is most probably the case that abundance restricted to some subset of the total population is already with us. It would be possible to let a small number of people consume (free of charge) a satiating amount of all the goods they wish, without requiring them to do any work. This might be viewed as a very partial realization of communism, to be developed into a fuller version as more and more people can be allowed to indulge all their material desires thanks to enhanced productivity. If each of the privileged 'communists' is (successfully) asked to choose a bundle on the lower frontier of his/her satiation set, such partial materializations of communism can be efficient (there is no way of improving some people's lot without worsening that of some others). But they are, no doubt, unacceptable on grounds of gross unfairness. Even on purely utilitarian grounds, a reallocation of resources away from the lucky few to some of the non-satiated is certain to commend itself (assuming decreasing marginal utility of consumption). And anyone caring for fair-

ness or equality over and above what they contribute to aggregate welfare would of course be even more adamant in calling for such reallocation.

If it does not make sense to move towards communism person by person, can we not conceive of moving towards it good by good, as some have actually proposed.<sup>21</sup> One could, for example, provide water, salt, bread, electric power, housing, etc. free of charge and at satiation level to all, while still making people pay for any other good. People would thus have to keep making trade offs between the amounts of these other goods they choose to consume, as well as between their total consumption and their leisure, while being given as much as they wish (but no more) of a selected few items. This might again be viewed as a very partial realization of communism, to be developed into a fuller version as more and more goods can be made available free of charge thanks to enhanced productivity. The trouble, here, is no longer unfairness, but inefficiency. For if one assumes, as is plausible, that the consumption of any particular good yields decreasing marginal utility, it follows that the resources required to achieve everyone's satiation for one good are inefficiently allocated: unless these resources could not have been used for the production of any other welfare-enhancing good (which is utterly unlikely as soon as they include some human labour), gratuity (without rationing) for some goods is bound to be inefficient, in the sense that everyone could be made better off as a result of abolishing it.<sup>22</sup> Inefficiency, of course, need not be a le-

21 One classic instance is Lange (1937, 42): 'If the price is already so low, and incomes so high, that the quantity consumed of those commodities is equal to the saturation amount, free sharing can be used as a methods of distribution. . . . It is quite conceivable that as wealth increases this sector increases, too, and an increasing number of commodities is distributed by free sharing until, finally, all the prime necessities of life are provided in this way, the distribution by the price system being confined to better qualities and luxuries. Thus Marx's second phase of communism may be gradually approached.' A similar line is taken by Ernest Mandel (1969, 156), Howard Sherman (1972, ch.23) and some Soviet theoreticians quoted by Tartarin (1981, 244-5).

22 See Tartarin (1981, 250-1). There are, however, three types of circumstances under which this does not hold: (1) the competitive process too would lead

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thal sin. But it must be justified as a by-product of pursuing some other value, equality or fairness, for example, and no such justification is available in this particular case.

The two strategies explored so far have twin defects. By realizing communism for some people or some goods, they mobilize resources to guarantee abundance for those people or for those goods, thereby worsening scarcity for other people which is unfair or other goods which is inefficient. This leaves us with the third strategy. *All* people now keep being faced with trade offs i.e. with a budget constraint or opportunity costs for the full satisfaction of their wants for *all* goods. But a certain *level* of satisfaction of material wants is given to all at no cost i.e. without quid pro quo in terms of leisure forgone in the form of an unconditional income. Again, this may be viewed as a partial realization of communism, to be developed into a fuller version, as the height of the income that can be unconditionally provided to all rises, due to enhanced productivity, up to the point where it is sufficient to enable everyone to buy a satiating bundle of goods.<sup>23</sup> The objection of gross unfairness no longer

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to a zero price, due to the absence of a genuine opportunity cost (think of a subject say, philosophical logic which a few people, who know it well, are so keen on, that they would gladly teach it for free, while nearly everyone else finds it so utterly boring that even in the absence of any fee they would never dream of enrolling for a course in it); (2) the administrative cost of making people pay according to their consumption more than offsets the loss stemming from over consumption (think of Nove's example of water supply in Scottish towns which must be the sort of example Lange had in mind in the passage quoted in the previous footnote); (3) positive external effects justify that consumption should be encouraged by lowering the price, possibly all the way to gratuity (think of vaccination against contagious diseases or basic education). The question here is not whether under such circumstances some categories of goods should be provided free of charge, but whether it makes sense to expand the number of goods provided free of charge beyond these three categories, as a way of gradually realizing communism.

<sup>23</sup> See van der Veen (1984) and Van Parijs (1985). This may also be the transition Nielsen (1985, 285) has in mind when writing: 'Ideally, as a kind of ideal limit for a society of wondrous abundance, a radical egalitarianism would go beyond that [equal resources for the satisfaction of needs] to a similar thing for wants. . . . An egalitarian starts with basic needs, or at least with what are taken

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applies, since the income is given to all.<sup>24</sup> Nor does the objection of gross inefficiency, since what each good costs in resources used can keep affecting the allocation of resources, via the prices faced by consumers.

#### IV Three Concepts of Abundance

Pursuing this idea of a third path towards full communism naturally leads to a different notion of abundance, considerably weaker than the one explored so far but arguably present in many current uses of the term. For along this path, there is a point which is admittedly rather tricky to locate with precision but whose existence is nonetheless hard to question: the point as from which the level of people's want satisfaction provided by the unconditional income is such that their *needs* can be said to be satisfied. It is no part of the purpose of this article to work out a defensible notion of need.<sup>25</sup> On any defensible account, however, I regard it as certain that need satisfaction will fall far short of satiation, and that the income needed to reach it may vary considerably from one individual to another, though only to reflect some objective differences for which the individuals concerned cannot be held responsible. Hence, long before its productive development makes it achieve abundance as de-

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in the cultural environment in which a person lives to be basic needs, and moves out to other needs and finally to wants as the productive power of the society increases.'

<sup>24</sup> This does not mean that no other, more refined, objection of unfairness applies. Along with Elster (1986), for example, one could argue that even though everyone receives the same unconditional income, the outcome of introducing the latter is that some able-bodied people will become unfairly entitled to live off the labour of others. This is not the place to examine this sort of objection with the care it deserves. For an inchoate reply, see van der Veen & Van Parijs (1986b, 726-8) and, for a more extensive treatment, Van Parijs (1989).

<sup>25</sup> For some recent work, see Hagenars & Van Praag (1985), Braybrooke (1987), Doyall & Gough (forthcoming).

fined so far, a society may reach a point at which it could durably provide everyone of its members with an unconditional income, possibly differentiated to take objective differences into account, sufficient to cover her/his needs.<sup>26</sup> I shall call this point abundance in the weak sense or, for short, *weak abundance*, to contrast it with the earlier concept, which I shall henceforth refer to as *absolute abundance*.

One way of characterizing the relation between these two concepts is as follows. Whereas absolute abundance means that it is possible to sustainably satisfy everyone's material *wants* without anyone *toiling* (i.e. working more than s/he fancies), weak abundance means that it is possible to sustainably satisfy everyone's material *needs* without anyone *having to toil*. This characterization suggests a third, intermediate concept, which I shall refer to as *strong abundance* and covers the situation where it is possible to sustainably satisfy everyone's *needs* without anyone *toiling*.<sup>27</sup> To put it differently,

26 By speaking of 'durably provide,' I mean (1) that the granting of this income must not be achieved at the cost of running down the capital stock, and (2) that the possibility of granting such an income must be preserved, once it has been fully anticipated by the agents. The impact of such anticipation can of course vary greatly, depending, for example, on whether the means of production are privately or collectively owned. But this does not imply that whether or not a society is abundant (in this weak sense, *as well as* the earlier one) depends on its (*currently*) being capitalist or socialist: abundance has been reached in a given (capitalist or socialist) society when resources and tastes are such that under *some* institutional arrangement (whether capitalist or socialist), each could be durably given an unconditional income covering all her/his needs (or wants).

27 Weak and strong abundance coincide with what is thus labelled in van der Veen & Van Parijs (1986a, 644-5 and 1986b, 729-30). Strong abundance provides a possible interpretation of the 'world of extensive abundance' which Nielsen (1985, 283; 291) views as the key condition of possibility for the ideal of equality to be turned into a right to equality. See, however Nielsen (1985, 285-6): 'Before we can rightly aim for the equality of condition I mentioned, we must first have the productive capacity and resource conditions to support the institutional means that would make possible the equal satisfaction of basic needs *and the equal satisfaction of other needs and wants as well*' (my emphasis), which suggests instead that absolute abundance is meant after all.



weak abundance amounts to the sustainability of (i) an adequate universal grant, i.e. an unconditional income sufficient to cover everyone's needs; strong abundance to the sustainability of (ii) an adequate universal grant absorbing the whole social product; and absolute abundance, as we have seen, to the sustainability of (iii) communism.<sup>28</sup> Under both (i) and (ii) but not (iii), only need-level consumption is available to those who perform no labour. Under both (i) and (iii) but not (ii), (most) people can consume more goods than is required to satisfy their needs. Under both (ii) and (iii) but not (i), work is left unpaid, and toil, therefore, has disappeared. Weak abundance, in other words, means the possibility of giving people the *individual* freedom not to toil (i.e. the bearable option, for each of them taken separately, to give up the sort of work they would not do for no pay). Strong abundance means the possibility of giving them the *collective* freedom not to toil (i.e. the freedom to simultaneously stop toiling). And absolute abundance, the possibility of giving them the collective freedom both not to toil and to indulge all their material wants. But in all three senses, abundance is consistent with the impossibility of giving people the collective freedom not to work, i.e. the freedom to simultaneously give up any form of productive activity.<sup>29</sup>

The relation between the three concepts of abundance can be further clarified with the help of Figure 2. Along the horizontal axis,  $t$  represents the proportion of the total product that is distributed

<sup>28</sup> There are, of course, more austere definitions of communism which make strong abundance, rather than absolute abundance, equivalent to the sustainability of communism. See, e.g. the pre World War II Soviet theoretician S.G. Strumilin, who insists that at the highest stage of communism goods should be distributed to match 'scientifically assessed needs' (Tartarin 1981, 242-3).

<sup>29</sup> The distinction between individual and collective freedom not to toil is parallel to, and inspired by, Cohen's (1983) distinction between individual and collective freedom to leave the proletariat. Note that whereas the collective freedom not to toil which can be given under strong (and hence absolute) abundance is not also a collective freedom not to work, the individual freedom not to toil which can be given under weak (and hence strong and absolute) abundance is also an individual freedom not to work.

in the form of a universal grant, i.e. irrespective of contributions. Along the vertical axis,  $G_1$ ,  $G_2$  and  $G_3$  represent the maximum sustainable absolute level of the grant as a function of  $t$ , for three levels of development of productivity. (The downward sections of the curves reflect the 'supply-side' assumption that high levels of  $t$  have a negative impact on incentives.)  $N$  and  $W$  represent the levels of income sufficient to cover everyone's needs and wants, respectively (both assumed to be homogeneous across individuals, for the sake of simplicity). Weak abundance is achieved if there is at least one value of  $t$  such that  $G(t) \geq N$ , i.e. such that the corresponding sustainable level of the grant is adequate. This is the case with  $G_1$ ,  $G_2$  and  $G_3$ . Strong abundance is achieved if  $G(1) \geq N$ , i.e. if people's incomes could (sustainably) remain adequate to their needs even if they were entirely distributed irrespective of people's contributions to production. This is the case with  $G_2$  and  $G_3$ . Finally, absolute abundance is achieved if  $G(1) \geq W$ , i.e. if people's incomes could (sustainably) remain sufficient to satiate their wants even if they were entirely distributed irrespective of people's contributions to production. This is the case with  $G_3$  only.<sup>30</sup>

Of these three concepts of abundance, the last one absolute abundance is clearly relevant to the normative ideal of communism, but is hopelessly utopian. The second one strong abundance still remains highly utopian, and is anyway hardly relevant to any defensible ideal. For realizing the potential it consists in distribution ac-

30 In language suggested by Nove, weak, strong and absolute abundance can equivalently be characterized as the sustainability of (i) uncompelled supply exceeding subsistence demand; (ii) zero-price supply exceeding subsistence demand; and (iii) zero-price supply exceeding zero-price demand. Or, if  $P$  means sustainability, while  $N_i$ ,  $W_i$ ,  $G_i$  and  $X_i$  refer to the needs, wants, unconditional income and total income of individual  $i$ , they can also be defined as (i)  $P$  (for all  $i$ ,  $G_i \geq N_i$ ); (ii)  $P$  (for all  $i$ ,  $G_i = X_i \geq N_i$ ); and (iii)  $P$  (for all  $i$ ,  $G_i = X_i \geq W_i$ ). Note, furthermore, that even weak abundance  $P$  (for all  $i$ ,  $G_i \geq N_i$ ) is still far stronger than what could be called *distributive sufficiency*, or the potential to generate and distribute income in such a way that everyone's needs are covered  $P$  (for all  $i$ ,  $X_i \geq N_i$ ) and a fortiori than *aggregate sufficiency*, i.e. the potential to generate an aggregate income larger than aggregate needs  $P$  ( $\sigma X_i \geq \sigma N_i$ ).

ording to needs and no more means forgoing the possibility of making everyone better off (by opting for a lower level of  $t$  in Figure 2), on the plausible assumption that reducing net pay for the labour performed has a significant impact on the level of output as long as the level of the grant falls far short of satiation.<sup>31</sup> The third

31 This makes the 'Marxian point' in van der Veen & Van Parijs (1986a) very hard to defend on substantive grounds as timidly conceded towards the end of that article and rightly stressed by some of our critics (see esp. the penulti-

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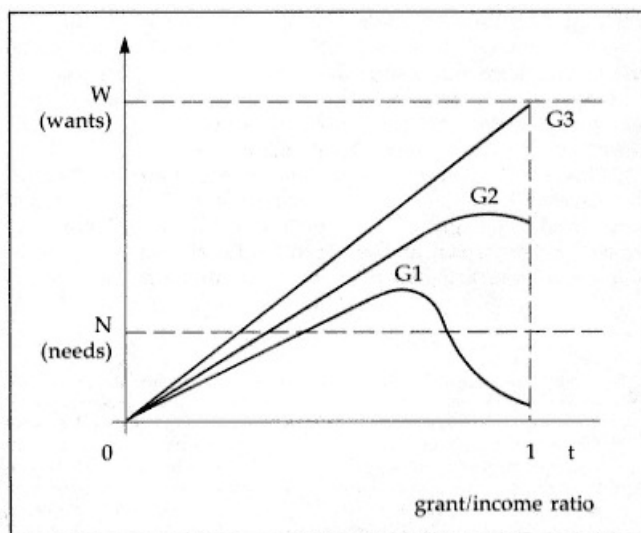


Figure 2  
Three concepts of abundance

concept weak abundance is of course the least demanding and, therefore, the least utopian of the three. Moreover, realizing the potential it consists in by introducing a universal grant at a level at least sufficient to cover needs does not lend itself to the normative objection just mentioned. For those who find full communism an attractive ideal and are not willing to wait for absolute abundance before beginning to realize it, the introduction of such a subsistence grant is an obvious way to start. And weak abundance is the first thing they must check on if they want to assess the feasibility of such a programme.

#### V Weak Abundance and the Limits to Growth

This is not the place to discuss the claim that weak abundance has now been achieved.<sup>32</sup> I want instead to conclude this paper by returning to my opening claim that growing awareness of the limits of our resources makes the notion of abundance, suitably (though still plausibly) defined, more and not less relevant to our pursuits. The notion of abundance I had in mind was of course weak abundance, as it has now been defined. Though far less extravagant than absolute abundance, which no doubt fits some uses of the term, it can still be regarded as a plausible understanding of the way the term is often used, typically by twentieth-century advocates of the introduction of some version of a universal grant.<sup>33</sup> But why should

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mate section of our reply: van der Veen & Van Parijs 1986b, 743-5) quite apart from its being hard to square with the bulk of Marx's own statements on the matter.

<sup>32</sup> For a useful discussion, see Przeworski (1986).

<sup>33</sup> From Major Douglas' Social Credit movement whose Newsletter happens to be called *Abundance* and the supporters of Jacques Duboin's 'économie distributive' whose organization used to call itself 'le mouvement français pour l'abondance' to Yoland Bresson's 'participat' (see esp. Bresson & Guilhaume 1987, 34; 48; 83; 88). In the Marxist tradition too, some related uses of the term can be found. Cohen (1978, 307), for example, emphasizes that 'the promise of abundance is not an endless flow of goods but a sufficiency

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growing awareness of the limits of our resources make this admittedly weak notion of abundance more and not less relevant to our pursuits? I would like to suggest the following link.

Concern with the depletion of natural resources and environmental destruction has prompted appeals to stop economic growth, or at the very least to slow it down in the most advanced industrial countries. Low rates of output growth, however, are most likely to fall short of the rate at which labour productivity increases, due to technical progress. As a consequence, we need less and less labour to achieve the level of production we think is desirable, and unemployment is bound to expand. There is nothing like massive unemployment to generate a broad social consensus around pro-growth policies. As a consequence, whether or not they are bothered by the unemployment problem as such, environmentalists who mean business must find a way of tackling the unemployment problem through means other than the fostering of economic growth. This is where the idea of an unconditional income comes in. For by giving everyone an unconditional income, whether or not s/he makes any contribution to the gross national product (i.e. to the magnitude whose increase is, by definition, growth), one reduces people's incentive to make such contribution, i.e. to work or invest in the formal, recorded sphere. And one increases instead the part of their lives which they will be able and keen to spend either producing nothing at all or, possibly, engaging in informal, unrecorded production which can be trusted to be on average far less polluting and less natural-resource-intensive than formal production.<sup>34</sup> Of course, for the introduction of a universal grant to have a significant impact along these lines and for it to be an acceptable alter-

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produced with a minimum of unpleasant exertion.' The stress on 'sufficiency' makes the notion Cohen here uses weaker than absolute abundance. And reference to 'a minimum amount of unpleasant exertion' (rather than no unpleasant exertion at all) makes it weaker than strong abundance, too.

<sup>34</sup> More or less explicit versions of this argument linking ecological concerns and basic income can be found in Johnson (1973, 181), Stoleru (1974, 306-8), Cook (1979, 6), etc.

native to prevailing social policies in advanced industrial countries, the level of this grant must not be shockingly low. This leads us straight to the question whether an adequate universal grant is sustainable, i.e. precisely to the question of whether weak abundance obtains.

The link thus suggested rests on two main premises: (1) awareness of the limits of what the Earth can provide, or of what the environment can take, tends to induce policies which generate unemployment, and (2) the universal grant provides an appropriate solution to the unemployment thus generated. I am not claiming that a fully compelling case can be made for both of these premises.<sup>35</sup> But their prima facie plausibility is sufficient to dispel the paradoxical appearance of the claim I made at the outset of this article. It is the growing awareness of the limits of our resources and hence of how unaccessible absolute abundance is that prompts us to look for a type of brake on the growth process that does not give rise to massive unemployment. If a decent universal grant provides such a brake, the question of its viability becomes of central importance. And weak abundance is just another name for what is at stake in this question.

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<sup>35</sup> I have explored a number of sore spots in the arguments behind these claims in Van Parijs (1987b).

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Afterword:  
Remarks on the Roots of Progress

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I

Analytical Marxists stress that Marx did not just want to provide a plausible historical narrative but sought 'to provide a theory,' as Debra Satz well put it, 'which explains the real causal structure of history.'<sup>1</sup> But it is also the case, as Richard Norman stresses, that 'Marxism claims to be a systematic theory, whose various elements hang together in an organized way.' It claims to be able to trace the connection between different aspects of social existence where these aspects are not viewed as merely conventional or ideological connections but 'real, objective connections . . . to be established by an examination of historical facts . . .' For Marxists, analytical or otherwise, historical materialism is central in such an account. It is for Marxists the theory which seeks to explain in a systematic scientific

<sup>1</sup> Debra Satz, 'Marxism, Materialism and Historical Progress,' this volume. All quotations from the author's writings will be from this volume unless otherwise specified. In those instances where the citation is *not* from this volume, the citations will be noted in a standard way.

way epochal social change. Keeping this firmly in mind, I want to start from a series of issues emerging principally from a consideration of three essays in this volume which both significantly complement and conflict with each other. Seeing how this works out points to a way Marxian social theory can be developed. I then want to set such an account against more discouraging conclusions for Marxist social theory pointed to in Allen Buchanan's careful survey article on analytical Marxism as well as some remarks with a similar overall thrust by Jon Elster.<sup>2</sup> The three articles in question are Sean Sayers's 'Analytical Marxism and Morality,' Richard Norman's 'What is Living and What is Dead in Marxism?' and Debra Satz's 'Marxism, Materialism and Historical Progress.'

Both Sayers and Satz remark that historical materialism seeks to explain historical progress and further claim that it is also an important implication of such a theory that material progress is a necessary condition for moral progress. Sayers stresses, in traditional Marxist fashion, that historical materialism maintains that the 'process of historical change does not consist of a purely arbitrary succession of social forms, each merely different from and incommensurable with the others . . . rather, it takes the form of a *development through* stages and involves progress.' Marx and Engels speak, and Sayers follows them here, of 'higher and more developed historical forms,' of 'a higher condition' of 'higher stages' and the like. The conception of epochal social change is also a developmental conception to higher and more adequate forms. As we move from earlier modes of production to later ones we get to modes of production each of which, as Sayers puts it, 'initially constitutes a progressive development, justified for its time and relative to the conditions which it supersedes. By the same token, however, no stage is stable or ultimate. Each stage constitutes a merely transitory form destined ultimately to perish and be replaced by a higher and more developed one.' Such a conception has been thought to be unacceptably teleological and unscientific by theoreticians as diverse as

<sup>2</sup> Allen Buchanan, 'Marx, Morality and History: An Assessment of Recent Analytical Work on Marx,' *Ethics* 98 (October 1987) 104-36

John Anderson, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper and more lately by such a paradigmatic analytical Marxist as Jon Elster.

Are these articulations of historical materialism free of that charge? Sayers' account seems at least to be vulnerable to that charge. I shall argue, however, particularly when supplemented in a certain way by Norman's and Satz's account, that it can be read in such a way that it is not vulnerable in that way. The difficulty, as has been widely recognized, is how we are to get a higher and more adequate moral conception of the world out of more complex and more developed social forms or modes of production. Can we make sense of the very idea of moral progress and can we show that it has actually obtained as we move from epoch to epoch? We get increased productivity with the development of the productive forces but how does this yield moral progress? Can we show that moral progress depends on productive growth? Sayers, to oversimplify, stresses the scientific Marx while Norman stresses what is in effect the humanistic Marx. Both, though in different ways, have trouble with the link between the development of productive capacities and moral progress.

Like a traditional Marxist, Sayers claims that

Marxism claims to offer a scientific account of society. Its primary aim is to understand the social world and to analyze the laws governing it, rather than to judge it in moral terms or to put forward an ideal conception of how it ought to be. Indeed, according to Marx, moral outlooks and ideals must themselves be viewed as social and historical phenomena, as ideologies, as the products and reflections of specific social conditions. Marxism thus rejects the appeal to moral principles, both in its account of capitalism and in its idea of socialism.

However, Sayers hastens to add that Marxism is not just a descriptive-explanatory social theory. It is '*both* a social theory and a political outlook, both a scientific account of history and a form of socialism' which it seeks to encompass in a single unitary outlook. The scientific social theory provides the basis upon which its political commitments 'are thought through in concrete, practical and realistic terms.' The form of socialism he defends, against Elster's irony is, at least putatively, a scientific socialism. Historical materialism is an essential theoretical element in that. On such an account morality is looked at differently than it is in classical and

contemporary forms of moral philosophy. While Marx, and Marxists more generally, plainly condemn capitalism and advocate a socialism carrying with it 'a political outlook in which practical and moral commitments play a fundamental role,' historical materialism requires us to look on these moral commitments in a distinctive way. We must, Sayers would have it, avoid what he takes to be the moralistic Marxism of G.A. Cohen and Norman Geras.<sup>3</sup> There can be no appeal in some ahistorical way to fundamental moral principles or to an independent moral theory which, in Norman's words, underpins Marx's scientific social theory including historical materialism. Marxism, *pace* Cohen and Geras and perhaps Satz and Norman as well, 'does not involve a moral approach to history; but rather a historical approach to morality.' Sayers fleshes this out by saying that the 'main purpose of Marxism is to analyze and understand the social significance of moral ideas, not simply to criticize and dismiss them. Marx thus portrays different moral outlooks as the products and reflections of specific historical conditions, and as the expressions of the needs, desires, interests and aspirations of the members of specific social groups and classes.'

This historical and indeed historicist outlook, as Sayers is well aware, poses relativistic problems. How can we, if we are viewing things so historically, assess progress, and indeed moral progress, in and through history? Sayers' response is not, I think, very satisfactory. He cites with approval Engels' remark that 'all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of the society obtaining at the time.'<sup>4</sup> Such a recognition, Sayers remarks, leads most moral philosophers to conclude, though mistakenly, that Marxists who follow Engels here must conclude that moral ideas 'are purely relative, and can only

<sup>3</sup> G.A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988), particularly 286-304. I respond to it in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1988), 227-50. See also Norman Geras, 'On Marx and Justice,' *New Left Review* 150 (March/April 1985) 47-89.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, trans. Emile Burns (New York: International Publishers 1939), 131-2. See my discussion of Engels in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 43-60.

reflect and endorse existing conditions.' Moreover, it is not infrequently added, this relativistic conception is incompatible with their being critics of society. Marxists, the criticism goes, in being such critics, are unwittingly 'appealing to moral principles' which purportedly transcend the social order but historical materialism plainly shows this to be impossible.<sup>5</sup>

Sayers' response to this, strangely enough and weakly enough, is to point to the fact that there are deep class conflicts in society which cause it to change and keep it from being 'a monolithic and homogeneous structure.' In all the conflicts in the established order 'critical tendencies arise within it.' But this merely shows that one historical structure replaces another and that there is a mechanism for change in moral ideas. It does show, as well, that there is conflict but it does not show that these changes result in higher or better forms progressively more adequately capturing a humane and enlightened moral stance. These conflicts within society may indeed be 'at the root of historical development' and because 'of them the present order is in a process of flux and change' such that nothing is stable or ultimate so that all social orders will in time perish and be replaced by other more complex and developed ones. But why does this add up to moral progress: to a better moral order? Greater complexity and greater productive power do not automatically add up to a better society.

Sayers points out that Marx, viewing morality historically and noting well its relativities, gives a more realistic account of morality than philosophers traditionally have and in doing this Marx notes that capitalist society is not only a gigantic economic development over feudalism but it has also led 'to moral and political advances in equality and liberty, not only for the bourgeoisie but also for working people.' This came at a great cost in human misery and uprooting but the result was an advance in both liberty and equality for many more people than that which had obtained in the feudal order. The modern proletariat was created under conditions of vast misery and

<sup>5</sup> I have tried to argue for the falsity of that not unfrequently made claim in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 136-54.

human degradation in which, as Engels put it, 'the situation of the workers has on the whole become materially worse since the introduction of capitalist production on a large scale' but with their creation as a proletariat, herded together into great cities as they were, they were put into 'a position to accomplish the great social transformation which will put an end to all class exploitation and all class rule.' This, like the increase in liberty and equality, marks a definite moral advance. Looking at things historically enables us to see that these changes occurred. But that we actually have a moral advance here rests on (a) the belief that the end of class exploitation, the achievement of classlessness and the extension of liberty and equality, are desirable things and (b) on these beliefs actually being justified. But that is not established by historical materialism but seems at least to rely on the moral underpinnings that Norman, along with Cohen and Geras, appeal to. Indeed, against such a moralizing stance, we can cite Marx, as Sayers does, and Satz as well, as claiming that 'communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, and *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.'<sup>6</sup> That this is happening to be seen as a moral advance, requires the acceptance of the proposition, argued for by Marx himself, that communism will bring with it more extensive well-being, equality and liberty. It also makes the moral assessment, obvious as that assessment may be, that the achievement of these things is something *to be* desired. Sayers agrees that there is a moral element contained in Marx's claims about the development of society. How else, he remarks, could it be referred to as progress? But Marx does not seek to give a *wertfrei* social science and his approach to morality is that of a historicized naturalism. Marxism, Sayers has it, 'regards morality as a social and historical phenomenon, and seeks to base its moral and political outlook on this understanding.'

It is not a naturalism in which values or at least fundamental ones are taken to be 'mere subjective preferences, independent of

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part 1 (New York: International Publishers 1970), 56-7



social and historical theory.' The moral superiority of socialism over capitalism is not rooted, Sayers maintains, in anyone's subjective preference but in its being an 'objective tendency and proximate end of the historical process itself.' But how goodness or moral superiority could be a tendency rooted in the historical process itself remains mysterious and Sayers does nothing to make it less so. (It is here, as we shall see, where Satz's analysis becomes very important.) *Perhaps* significant oughts can be derived from purely nonmoral, non-evaluative factual statements and perhaps some form of ethical naturalism is justified. But Sayers's historicized form of naturalism has not been made very plausible. There is a relativism here that is both unclear and otherwise problematic. Sayers partly sees this, but then uncritically saddles Marxism with relativism. But he then, to make matters worse, confusedly sets it apart from 'pure relativism' or 'mere relativism' without giving the slightest hint of how 'relativism' is distinct from 'pure relativism' or indicating how the former is actually a relativism. We are told we should not try appealing to 'eternal values' or 'absolutes' but little more and we are told as well that values are rooted in our biological natures and the historical process but this, by itself, tells us very little.

Human nature and indeed even practical rationality (*pace* Cohen) 'cannot,' Sayers argues, 'provide an absolute and trans-historical moral yardstick.' Sayers goes on to remark: 'When conditions are criticized for being "inhuman" or "degrading," it is an inescapably historical and relative judgment that is made. Current standards of what is human and worthy of mankind, or inhuman and degrading, are in part at least a product of current conditions. They are based on needs, aspirations, forms of relationship, etc. which have themselves been created and developed by capitalism and modern industry. There is no question, therefore, of holding capitalism up against an absolute and ideal conception of what is "human" and finding it wanting.' But that current standards of what is inhuman and degrading are in part a product of current conditions does not mean that they are entirely so. Slashing or maiming someone just for the fun of it or parents utterly neglecting their children and a host of similar things are judged to be wrong anywhere and anywhen. They are not socially relative and similar things are true for some very basic needs, e.g. for rest, food, some sexual activity,

recognition, self-respect and some form of meaningful work. What is the case is that there are some pan-human needs, almost all of which get specific cultural readings, and some needs which arise under certain social circumstances.<sup>7</sup> But it isn't that we have nothing at all which is trans-historical here that we can appeal to. It is indeed important, as well, to recognize, as Marx does, that 'new desires and wants emerge as society develops' and that some of these can appropriately be called needs. Indeed, it is important to see that there is an historical transformation of human nature going on. Sayers rightly sees that Marxists see this transformation in positive terms as growth and as an enhancement of human powers. But to show how it would be such things that we really need some criteria for 'growth' and 'enhancement' seem to be required. And this, in turn, at least appears to require some explicit articulation of and defense of norms and values that have some reasonable objectivity. Given what is attainable, given the level of development of the productive forces, capitalism impoverishes life for at least most human beings coming under its hegemony. But (to understate it) not every thoughtful human being believes that capitalism so impoverishes human life and if we would do philosophy or social theory it behooves us to try in as objective way as can be mustered to state criteria for such impoverishment.

That notwithstanding, against utopian socialism or forms of moralistic Marxism, Sayers is indeed justified in saying that 'Marxism seeks to ground its values and its criticisms on its social theory, and thus to give them sound objective and scientific rather than purely utopian and moralistic bases.' But we have not been shown in this domain what an objective and scientific basis would come to. Moreover, we are left rather deeply in the dark about in what way our criteria for moral evaluation for assessing whole societies or modes of production can be objective when we are told, as Sayers tells us, that an 'appeal to human needs and human nature is no better able to provide a trans-historical and non-relative criteri-

<sup>7</sup> David Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1987)

on for Marxist morality than principles of justice and rights,' because 'standards of human nature and needs, just like those of justice and right, are inescapably historical, relative and, in that sense ideological.' This disquietude is exacerbated when there is an appeal to escape puzzlement here to an utterly unexplicated alleged distinction between relativism, on the one hand, which is okay and *mere* relativism, on the other, which is not.

## II

Sean Sayers' account is a rather traditional Marxist one. Richard Norman departs rather more extensively from orthodoxy but *may* fall prey to some of the weaknesses of utopian socialism that Sayers powerfully critiques. Norman rejects a Marxism which seeks 'to be a complete and self-sufficient philosophy, or even a complete social theory.' Most emphatically, in a way that squares very well at least with the practice of analytical Marxism, he rejects, and takes to be moribund, 'a version of Marxism which sets itself up as an all-embracing philosophy' which 'takes the form of a conjunction of philosophical materialism and historical materialism, in which the former is taken to be a comprehensive ontological theory and the latter is seen as the application of the former to the social world.' There is, Norman argues, no need for anything like that and much reason to be sceptical of it. There are enough things which are problematical that are internal to the social theory and the revolutionary practice that constitutes the canonical core of Marxism without Marxism concerning itself with articulating a comprehensive ontological theory. Moreover, it is a mistake to think that philosophical materialism provides the premises from which historical materialism can be derived. Both philosophical materialism and historical materialism may start, as the latter does for Cohen, with some assumptions about human nature or that 'human beings are endowed by their biological nature with certain inescapable physical needs.' But this does not require philosophical materialism for its articulation and defense. Dualists and historical idealists could very well accept those claims about needs. Such philosophical matters (e.g., matters about mind/body identity), problematical as they are, should be set aside

in discussions of Marxist social theory. I am inclined, perhaps rather dogmatically and uninformedly, to believe that some form of what Norman calls philosophical materialism must be true, but there is no need for me or for anyone else to appeal to it in arguing for historical materialism or defending Marxism. The plausibility of historical materialism would not be increased by even its warranted assertion. Moreover, Norman stresses, this traditionalist wedding of philosophical materialism and historical materialism into 'a supposedly comprehensive world view' has had a disastrous effect on Marxist treatments of moral conceptions. Philosophical materialism has carried with it a philosophical world-view in which ideas are seen as epiphenomena, as peripheral offshoots of material entities. Moral values were taken to be a paradigm case of such epiphenomena and were given a reading in which they were seen, one and all, 'as essentially ideological, as reflections of class positions and class interests. . . [without] independent efficacy or independent validity,' giving rise to Marxist immoralism or to ethical relativism or class relativism.<sup>8</sup> Norman takes the impact of that version of Marxism to have been disastrous. He remarks:

It does violence to the fundamental impulse behind Marxism. The initial appeal of Marxism resides in the fact that it seems to offer a critique of existing society and to embody the desire for a better society, that critique and that desire being thought of precisely as *not* just reflections of class interests, but as rationally grounded. People are attracted to Marxism because they believe that the judgments that capitalism is built on exploitation and oppression, that it crushes and restricts people's lives and prevents them fulfilling their human potential, and that it can and should give way to a socialist society which would embody greater freedom and equality, are not of the same order as the ideological rationalization invoked to legitimate the status quo and to protect the interests of the privileged.

<sup>8</sup> Allen Wood, 'Marx's Immoralism' in Bernard Chavance, ed., *Marx en Perspective* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1985), 681-98; Richard Miller, *Analyzing Marx* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1985) and Milton Fisk, *Ethics and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press 1984)

Norman believes that, in contrast to a strong strand of traditional Marxism, a viable Marxism should treat values as central and should see itself as part of a wider tradition of thought without which Marxism is incomplete. So embedded, a living Marxist theory may possibly be able to offer a perspective with which those moral judgments about socialism and capitalism may be rendered more rigorous and their justificatory rationale displayed in such a way that their objective warrantability would be established. Norman's claim is that whatever Marx may or may not have thought about morality, moral philosophy and social theory a 'Marxist social theory becomes properly intelligible only when it is seen as imbued with certain specific concrete values.' They, Norman claims, 'constitute the background against which Marxist social theory needs to be set.' Norman then adds that these 'values are by no means unique to Marxism. First and foremost they are socialist values, but these in turn are located within a wider tradition, the tradition of humanistic values and the ideal of the fully human life.'<sup>9</sup>

Thus, within this moralized Marxist perspective, Norman has it, as in Aristotle, but with an egalitarian rather than an elitist slant, there emerges an articulation of an 'ideal of the fully human life' with a conception of distinctively human capacities and a linked conception, since their proper functioning is taken to be something desirable, of a distinctive human flourishing. There is, for Marx, no achieving of this flourishing or living a fully human life without genuinely productive work. Marx sees capitalism as a social system which 'mutilates the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrades him to the level of an appendage of a machine'; communism, by contrast, makes realistically possible a community with associations such that 'the free development of each is the condition for the free

<sup>9</sup> See as well my 'Marx and the Enlightenment Project,' *Critical Review* 2, 4 (Fall 1988) 59-75. But that things are not so straightforward as Norman, or for that matter, in different ways, Sayers gives to understand can be seen from Andrew Collier, 'Scientific Socialism and the Question of Socialist Values' in J. Mepham and D.H. Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* 4 (Brighton, England: The Harvester Press 1981), 3-41 and my 'Coming to Grips with Marxist Anti-Moralism,' *Philosophical Forum* 19, 1 (1987) 1-22.

development of all.<sup>10</sup> There is, as Norman rightly notes, no worked out ethical theory or even a theory of ethics in Marx. This is equally true of the major figures in the classical Marxist tradition. The closest thing we get to such an account is a few chapters in Engels's *Anti-Dühring*. Norman takes it, here departing extensively from traditional Marxism, as 'a major task for a living Marxism to develop' a fully worked out ethical theory. In doing this it needs to self-consciously draw from wider traditions such as the work of Rousseau and in contemporary times from that of Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls. He believes that Marxism will be dead if it cuts itself off from these traditions. (Broadly similar claims were made by Andrew Levine and Jeffrey Reiman.) It must develop an account of values which makes it plain both that and how we can make 'rational value judgments about the relations characteristic of a particular society and the quality of human lives which they make possible.' But, like Jürgen Habermas, he does not want to substitute for traditional Marxism or what he calls 'positivistic Marxism' a 'merely ethical Marxism.' That would be an unrealistic retreat to utopian socialism. Both Karl Popper and Jon Elster wish to move in that utopian direction and by doing so to save a 'rational kernel' from Marxian theory by jettisoning in the process historical materialism and much else. Norman does not see how such a view is any more recognizably Marxist or even Marxian. (Here, as we shall see, Levine makes an interesting contrast.) The view Norman defends is 'not that we need to preserve Marxist values in contrast to Marxist social theory but that we need to see how values underpin the social theory.'

### III

Stated just like that there remains a worry about the grounding for this normative political theory, particularly in the face of Marxist critiques of ideology and a concern for whether a more integrated

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, Chapter XXV, Section 4 and Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Section II

account of Marx's social theory and such normative concerns can be given. In this connection, as well as some others, which I will specify anon, Satz's essay is of some considerable interest.

Satz, correctly I believe, takes the 'theory of historical materialism' to be 'the core commitment of Marx's social theory.' She also remarks, again rightly I believe, 'that there is a tendency for societies to make moral and material progress. The point of Marx's theory of historical materialism is to offer a theory of the mechanisms which produce this tendency.' Satz contends that there are in Marx two specifications of mechanisms whose connections remain obscure in Marx himself. Sometimes and this is the mechanism that has been most extensively noticed 'Marx emphasizes the growth of human productive powers as the fundamental cause of historical change and progress. . .' Social forms change, as G.A. Cohen has stressed, in order to adapt to the requirements of further productive development.<sup>11</sup> But Marx also, most notably in the *Grundrisse*, 'emphasizes the desires and interests of classes as fundamental to explaining social change.' Here, as Satz puts it, 'it is class struggles (aimed at ending specific conditions of oppression) which determines not only when an old social form will be replaced by a new one but also the nature of the new social form itself.' It is important to examine closely these theses about mechanisms, to see if, and if so how, they work and whether they are really two distinct mechanisms or only one.

Marx and the classical Marxist tradition aside, how can contemporary Marxians, in a rigorous and clear form (if, indeed, they can), develop historical materialism in such a way that the appropriate mechanisms of social change will be laid bare? Satz recognizes that the place to start here is with G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. She recognizes, as most others have as well, that Cohen's account is a powerful, textually responsible and insightful account. But, that notwithstanding, she argues that 'Cohen's central claim

<sup>11</sup> For a brilliantly articulated succinct statement see Chapter 1 of his *History, Labour, and Freedom*. His extended statement, of course, is in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978).

about the possibility of explaining social development solely in terms of material, technological causes is mistaken.' Startlingly, and in sharp contrast to Sayers and traditional Marxism, she also believes that 'ethical causes . . . must be appealed to in the explanation of the actual course of social development.' Such an account an account appealing to ethical causes is, she maintains, 'implicit in Marx's own account of historical change.' A proper understanding of this, she further maintains, will help relieve paradoxes about Marx's stance toward morality and help give us a firm, theoretically based understanding of Marx's claim that a communist society is a better society than a capitalist one. It is, that is, a more humane and a fairer society where there is an enhancement of human well-being and self-realization.

It is important to recognize, as Sayers stressed as well, that Marx doesn't 'simply posit communism as an ideal; rather, he aims to specify the mechanisms responsible for the realization of the ideal.' And here, Marx claims, that (a) history creates the conditions for the achievement of freedom in social life and (b) that it is communism which is that order of freedom. Satz's claim is the paradoxical claim paradoxical particularly as a Marxist claim that it 'is because freedom is objectively good for human beings that history moves in the way that it does' for human beings can, and will in time, recognize their interest their objective interest in freedom. That 'communism expands human freedom is a significant part of the explanation of why it eventually occurs.' Communism is better than capitalism *because* its institutions allow for greater freedom for more people than capitalist institutions: communism allows for the harmonization of the free development of the powers of 'each person with the free development of the powers of all.'<sup>12</sup>

Satz has not stood Marx on his head and tried to make of him a historical idealist or a utopian socialist for she also firmly stresses

12 Thus, on criteria that John Stuart Mill, John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin would take to be appropriate, communism, if its empirical claims are near to the mark, comes out better than capitalism. But here it is important that we compare empirically feasible models.



that Marx denies, and rightly denies, 'that freedom is best secured through a moral theory.' However important values are, they do not (*pace* Norman) provide on such a Marxian account *the* or even *a* underpinning for Marxist social theory. Satz's distinctive claim is that in addition to social forms changing in response to expanding human productive powers, they also change because 'there is a learning process in history through which social agents become aware of their interests in certain values (such as freedom) and use that awareness to constitute their practices and institutions.' Her claim is that over epochs the 'specific structure of history is explained both by the adaptation to new technology and learning about human interests.' Moreover, it is a mistake to take a reductionist turn here and to explain one mechanism in terms of another. 'Material technological changes cannot explain the expansion of freedom in social life, and progress in social freedom cannot be reduced to progress in productive development.'

Satz relies on a historical-sociological claim, namely the claim that as we move into modernity there is a broad convergence of societies on institutions and practices which are justified from a moral point of view. Some theorists believe, as John Rawls seems to, that this is just a fortunate historical circumstance that could have been otherwise.<sup>13</sup> There is, for these thinkers, and indeed for most non-Marxist thinkers, 'no systematic link between what is good and what is historically efficacious.' Historical materialism is interesting and distinctive in maintaining that here is such a link. It is, of course, the same as Marx's claim 'that history tends, eventually, to generate the conditions for communism.'

These, of course, are empirical claims and require (if that is not pleonastic) empirical evidence for their truth or warranted assertability. Satz appeals to relatively straightforward bits of empirical evidence. First there is throughout human history as a whole a tendency for human productive powers to expand and in fact over the course of human history they have expanded; second, there has also, if

<sup>13</sup> John Rawls, 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus,' *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, 1 (1987)

we look at human society as a whole, been an 'increasing equality of basic social conditions, as evidenced in the decline of aristocratic and caste societies and the disappearance of slavery'; third, the importance of self-respect and a recognition of people as having moral standing has expanded so that people are no longer thought of so frequently or so unambivalently as mere instruments to be used by others: there is, that is, a growing sense of popular sovereignty where more and more people are incorporated into the public life with full citizenship and equal legal status and finally there has been an increasing secularization of values with the 'location of the source of moral authority in men and women themselves as opposed to natural law and divine sanctions.'<sup>14</sup>

There is, as a matter of fact, Satz claims, such a general convergence, though, as the extent and persistence of moral disagreement in the world and even within particular societies shows, there is a very considerable divergence in moral belief as well. Moreover, even within that extensive convergence, there are differences in interpretation and application. Equality and freedom, for example, do not invariably get applied or interpreted in the same way. But all the same with modernization over cultural space and historical time there has been a considerable convergence over what values are accepted and are structurally very central. Such considerations, along with the continued development of the productive forces, could have led Marx, and should lead Marxists, to believe that it is not impossible to believe that communism is plausibly on the historical agenda. Moreover, the considerations about moral convergence alluded

14 Some, perhaps reflecting on the various insanities going on in the United States and elsewhere, and thinking as well of what imperialism in its various disguises is doing to the world, doubt the facts of such moral progress. My reply is that such a response doesn't take a long enough view. There are indeed horrors now as there have always been throughout history, and they are nothing to be complacent about. Something like Noam Chomsky's disciplined outrage seems to me exactly the right response. But that notwithstanding, there is now more equality in the world, more respect for liberty and more deeply entrenched ideas of democracy, equal citizenship and equal moral sovereignty than ever before. Even the hypocritical lip service paid to it is the compliment that vice pays to virtue.

to, if worked into an account of historical materialism and thus made to appear at least not to be a fluke of history, will strengthen Marxism considerably by providing a distinctive rationale for some of Marx's central claims. We will have good theoretical grounds for believing that 'communism and not some despotic but efficient alternative may very well be the endpoint of historical development.' It gives us reasonable grounds to hope for, and to struggle for, a world in 'which we achieve both technical mastery over nature and practical mastery over ourselves and the conditions of our social association.' But Satz's concern here is to give such an explanation within a form of historical materialism that like Cohen's provides 'a theory which explains the real causal structure of history.' She doesn't just want to do a hermeneutical dance or to engage in utopian moralizing singing the songs of ethical socialism. She has Marx's and Habermas's aversion for that.

However, against Cohen's powerful defense of a historical materialism that does not rely on moral considerations, it is essential to inspect the soundness of Satz's criticism of Cohen that 'material causes alone cannot suffice to explain historical progress.' (Recall that for the sake of argument she is accepting the correctness of *the development thesis*, namely the thesis that the productive forces tend to develop throughout history.) If her argument will turn out to be near to the mark, Cohen's 'argument fails as an explanation of the direction of social evolution taken as a whole.' Cohen's account would be shown to be inadequate if it turns out that there are functionally equivalent social relations: 'sets of social relations which are co-optimal for productive development.' If there is more than one way of maximally developing the productive forces, it becomes questionable whether material factors alone will explain the general direction of history. But it is just this that seems at least to obtain and Marx himself is best seen as claiming such in the *Grundrisse*. There he argues, as Satz puts it, that there are three distinct routes out of the 'primitive life of communal nomadic tribes: (1) the Asiatic mode of production; (2) the Ancient mode of production; and (3) the Germanic mode of production.' These three modes of production coexist historically and Marx does not claim that they can be ranked according to the levels of surplus they produce thus giving us a purely materialist basis for ranking them. But that notwithstanding-

ing he presents them as if they were successive stages of development. Yet there is no ranking them in terms of the levels of surplus they produce. Rather he ranks them according to how they increase social freedom.<sup>15</sup> If this is how the world went and not just how Marx's categories categorized things, there are alternative social forms alternative modes of production functionally equivalent in the sense that they are all at approximately the same level of material development and they, as well, are alternative paths of development from a common prior mode of production. *Still, Marx ranks them as higher and lower stages of development, but according to ethical considerations and not according to levels of productive development.* This shows that for Marx, at least in some of his mature writings, he appealed to ethical considerations rooted in class struggle as well as to the development of human productive powers.

The following, Satz argues, would be a more adequate historical materialist explanation of the historical development of social forms toward communism: prior to communism, every mode of production every social formation has either a determinant dominant class or (more or less) cooperative dominant classes in conflict with a dominated class or classes. This dominant class(es) in one way or another appropriates the surplus product produced in the society. The activities of this class in normal circumstances both reproduces that mode of production and expands the forces of production. But crises will arise when 'the expanding forces of production can no longer be accommodated within the prevailing property relations.' In that situation the dominated class, the class which does not exercise control over the social surplus, will come to learn that some of its own interests require the transformation of existing property relations. This will give it the motivation, in such circumstances, to engage in revolution. In this way, the account goes, 'every class divided society. . . contains the agent of its own destruction.' But the agent is not just the developing productive forces coming

15 Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, E. Hobsbawm, ed. (New York: International Publishers 1965), 83. Some have taken this reading of Marx to be controversial.

into conflict with production relations which now fetter them but there being a dominated class which comes to understand its own interests and comes to see the situation is propitious for that class their class to act in their own interests.<sup>16</sup>

Still why should we say that when the mode of production is capitalism and it is in such circumstances of instability that workers in coming to note their own class interests will begin to move towards communism? Why should working class cooperation generate communism? Cohen's account, even if it explains how there is throughout history a tendency of the productive forces to grow, does not explain how the forces of production will eventually yield a mode of production that is communism.<sup>17</sup> It does not explain the viability of Marx's central ambition to explain how communism is not just an ideal to be advocated by utopian socialists but is the product of a real historical movement that is explained by a genuinely causal theory of history. In this important way, Marx aspired, in a way that Norman perhaps does not sufficiently recognize, to do something more than provide a moral underpinning to his theory of classes and historical materialism: a picture of how it would be *desirable* for the working class to move to communism. He wanted both to be able to acknowledge *and* also to provide an explanation for why certain class interests would come to prevail. The point is to show not only that they *should* prevail but to show, as well, that circumstances will come about in which they *will* prevail. This is an important way to move beyond utopian socialism.

Satz goes beyond just a straight appeal to class together with a mechanism (the development of the productive forces) which ex-

16 For an interpretation that would attend to the same social facts but stress the class interests side rather than the ethical side, see Allen Wood, 'Marx's Immoralism' and his 'Justice and Class Interests,' *Philosophica* 33, 1 (1984) 9-32. I have criticized Wood in a way that nicely meshes with Satz's account in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 227-41.

17 See here Stanley Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1980).

plains material development, to an *intentional mechanism*, operating through classes, constituting a recognition by the dominant classes of their interest in freedom. As Marx stressed himself, under certain conditions the advances made by slaves, serfs, and workers through actions generated at least in part by their awareness of their own interests and by a recognition of the *legitimacy* of those interests, importantly contributed to the inability of their respective social forms to continue to prevail. Moreover, these are not in Marx's view of things just changes the switching of one ideology for another but *advances* in awareness in moral understanding, leading, as the forces of production develop, to higher social forms. The changes in consciousness are at one and the same time both causally significant and emancipatory.

There is such a thing as a class making an emancipatory gain by learning more about the nature of their fundamental interests, including an understanding of these interests in relation to other classes, and then, acting on these interests so understood. Here we have a use of ethical values in the *explanation* of historical progress. Satz contends (controversially, she recognizes) that it is not because humans *just happen to prefer*, where conditions are auspicious for it, to be free, that history moves towards communism. Rather one of the important mechanisms that moves the world toward communism is that 'freedom is an objective value for human beings; human beings have the capacity to recognize the value of freedom; they do in fact increasingly recognize its value, and their recognition motivates them to act in such a way that freedom is expanded in social life.' On such a conception of historical materialism and social evolution, 'historical progress. . . results both from a causal mechanism which expands the productive forces, and from an intentional mechanism through which agents act on what they recognize as objectively valuable.' And the reason why class, class antagonisms and class struggle has been so important in Marxist theory and practice is that 'it is through class struggles that the oppressed social classes learn more about the conditions which limit their freedom and the possible ways of overcoming these conditions.' Marx rejects a basically Kantian conception of morality which roots morality in concepts of rights, duty and justice and abstracts moral deliberation from a consideration of human interests. For Marx, ade-

quate moral thinking requires that we should come to think in terms of our real interests and that in these terms we form an informed opinion about what is good for human beings.

If we want to say that Marx has an implicit moral theory or that Marxists should articulate a moral theory, we should realize à la Norman that this is a rather different conception of moral theory than we have inherited from Kant and Sidgwick. But, even for the articulation of an adequate form of historical materialism, we do need, whether we call it a moral theory or not, an informed view about a good life for human beings rooted in a reasonable conception of objective interests and needs. More specifically, we need to recognize that human beings do have an objective interest in freedom (perhaps 'autonomy' is the better word here) and that while this plainly is not the only objectively good thing there is none the less freedom is a value or so the claim goes which dominates over other objective values at least in determining what a society should aim to become where the conditions of productive abundance are such as to make such a life feasible for human beings generally. As a moral conception freedom (autonomy) dominates in a world in which human beings, given the level of productive development, could live an unalienated life in which they were treated as ends and not as means only. A communist world, as part of the very idea of a communist world, would be a world in which 'people could realize their aspirations to be free and autonomous persons in a world in which each person would be treated as an end.'<sup>18</sup> (The distance between this and what goes on in Russia and China hardly needs commenting on.) Marx, Satz concludes, 'advocates communism because its basic structure institutionalizes the conditions required for objective values, in particular for "the free development of all."

<sup>18</sup> Wil Kymlicka, 'Marxism and the Critique of Justice,' unpublished manuscript.

## IV

This movement from Sayers to Norman to Satz, yielding a historical materialism which remains scientific (thus supporting the ideals of scientific socialism) and yet incorporates into its very conception suitably non-relativized moral conceptions, is attractive indeed. But is it just another just-so story, a comforting philosophical myth? Initially, when analytical Marxism came into being (what Levine calls its first phase), historical materialism had some distinguished rational reconstructions and defenses (Cohen, McMurtry and Shaw). As was to be expected those accounts came in for sustained examination and critique on the part of other analytical Marxists as well as others. Richard Miller produced an importantly different articulation and defense of historical materialism and Andrew Levine produced a sustained critique and reformulation that aimed at formulating and saving the rational kernel of historical materialism. Other analytical Marxists most notably Jon Elster definitely have rejected historical materialism in any form and Allen Buchanan, as I have already remarked, in a careful survey essay of analytical Marxism, has delivered himself of the judgment (though not without prior careful argument) that 'Marx's philosophy of history should no longer be of interest to social philosophers or to social scientists but only to historians of those disciplines.'<sup>19</sup> He concludes, after a critique of Cohen, that both the *development thesis* and the *primacy thesis* should be abandoned and that there are no viable replacements in the offing. With this it becomes very questionable, Buchanan contends, whether there is a valuable and distinctively Marxist theory of epochal social change. I would like, in the light of the discussion in the previous sections and particularly with Satz's essay firmly in mind, to consider if things are really that bleak.

*The development thesis* is the claim that in the history of humankind (human society as a whole) the productive forces tend to develop throughout history with less productive social structures being replaced over time by more productive ones. This or something

<sup>19</sup> Buchanan, 132



rather like it has been taken to be a central element in many formulations of historical materialism without which no plausible scientifically rigorous theory of historical materialism can be articulated. Satz registers some scepticism about this thesis but accepts *the development thesis* in the articulation of her argument. (She accepts it, that is, as something she need not challenge in stating her case though presumably she thinks she could defend her formulation of historical materialism without it.) *The development thesis* has been thought by others to be empirically false (disconfirmed by the record of history) or conceptually flawed. What should be said about these issues if something like Satz's theory of historical materialism is to be sustained? (Remember, whatever her misgivings, she accepts it in the formulation of her argument, so in that argument, as developed, that thesis is required.)

Where *the development thesis* has been thought to be empirically disconfirmed is in the development of European feudalism which was not marked by an increase in productivity and in Asia for considerable periods prior to extensive Western incursions. But these facts (if they are facts) about the rise of feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production do not falsify or even infirm *the development thesis* as stated above for it is about what trajectory human society as a whole has taken as long as we have any archaeological or historical records. It involves a prediction about what it will continue to be and a retrodiction of what was before that. Over the long haul and taking human society as a whole, there plainly has been a development of the productive forces. But on Cohen's account there is also an account of the mechanisms of this change and *that mechanism* does not appear, at least, to have been the mechanism for change with the rise of feudalism or in certain periods in Asia. Sometimes elements other than the development of the productive forces appear to have brought about major social changes such as the movement from one mode of production to another. Satz, on one understanding of her account, would have no trouble with that for she could say that sometimes moral motivations rooted in an understanding of class interests brought about the change. Sometimes, that is, epochal social change occurs because of the development of the productive forces and sometimes because of moral motivations rooted in objective class interests.

The above is a messier version of historical materialism than Cohen's but arguably it (a) squares better with Marx's own account, (b) fits better with the historical record, (c) is a complete account always supplying mechanisms for epochal social change, and (d) unifies class struggle and our moral understanding into a single theory of historical materialism. Moreover, problems raised for *the development thesis* by coordination problems can be met within the resources of Satz's theory. It is surely true that the interactions of individuals, proletarians or otherwise, pursuing exclusively their own interests either *may or may not* result in a growth of the productive forces. But Satz's mechanisms bring in moral conceptions so we should not posit individuals acting solely on the basis of self-interest but individuals with a sense of solidarity and a respect for the autonomy of others as well as being persons who have an interest in their own autonomy. *With such motivations* coordination problems are not a stumbling block but are problems readily solvable by individuals with the unproblematic rationality attributed to them by Cohen and the moral sense attributed to them by Marx as read by Satz. The historical materialist need make no Smithian invisible hand assumption that the pursuit of individual interest will result in productive growth. In some circumstances in some societies it perhaps will; in other circumstances in other societies it will not. But there is no need for historical materialists to appeal to it as the underlying mechanism generating productive growth and historical change. On Satz's formulation of historical materialism there is no need at all to make what Buchanan regards as Cohen's 'dogmatic profession of faith that the collective good of productive growth will in fact be produced either by invisible hand processes, by deliberate collective action or some combination of the two.'<sup>20</sup> We posit as a mechanism, whether there is productive growth or not, (a) the having by people of a certain minimal and uncontroversial rationality that they tend to act on (the rationality appealed to by Cohen) and (b) that they have objective moral interests which under conditions of modernity take a certain form. That rationality

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 111

and those interests explain the fact that there has been a convergence on values including moral values in such modernizing societies. Moreover, people who are minimally rational in Cohen's sense will come through class struggle to have an enhanced sense of their own interests, including their moral interests. This is not just a matter of what they take an interest in but of there being things which are in their objective interest. Whether they *take* an interest in them or not, they *have* an interest in their being realized. (This says nothing about what stance we should take about paternalism and antipaternalism.) So there will tend to be collective action rooted in the moral conceptions, which in turn are rooted in objective human interests. There is a hypothesis here grounded in judgments about the historical record which is falsifiable, but not falsified. There is no profession of faith here, let alone a dogmatic one, but only a not unreasonable hope and expectation. (There is no reason at all, *pace* Buchanan and Elster, to get involved in the complexities of rational choice theory here.)

I think of a historical materialist conception of moral progress and indeed moral progress generally up to a certain threshold (a threshold of the abundance necessary for communism) as resting on productive growth. (Without this productive growth there would not be this moral progress though it is not sufficient for it.) But this does not require the acceptance of *the primacy thesis* (the thesis that the productive forces are the primary explanatory factor in accounting for both large-scale social change and for the stability of social structures) but can rest on the kind of conception of historical materialism proffered by Satz. But it does seem to require (whatever Satz may believe) *the development thesis* as a thesis concerning the development of *human society as a whole*.<sup>21</sup> The truth of *the development thesis* so understood, *pace* Buchanan, is demonstrated by the record of his-

21 I developed a way of construing *the development thesis* and historical materialism more generally in terms of *human society as a whole* in my 'On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously,' *Dialogue* 22, 2 (1983). See also G.A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom*, 26-9. William Shaw has criticized my account, finding it, puzzlingly enough, too Hegelian, in his 'Historical Materialism and the Development Thesis,' *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 16, 2 (1986).

tory: *the epochal changes of human society*. If the mechanisms located by Cohen, and added to in a significant way by Satz, are indeed the mechanisms of large scale social change, and I see nothing in Buchanan's or Elster's arguments to gainsay that, then we need not reject historical materialism as either a theory of epochal social change or as a view, rooted in an empirical and causal theory of history, that there is progress in history. We can continue to believe these things without being blinded by ideology. We can reasonably believe, that is, that *moral* progress is a reality and that it depends on productive growth. With Cohen's account and like accounts we have no reason to believe that history would yield communism rather than some form of state socialism or a technocratically authoritarian but efficient form of statism replacing the welfare state. With Satz's account we have a recognizably historical materialist conception that explains how it is not unreasonable to expect that with the development of the productive forces and with an enhanced moral understanding rooted in a better understanding, particularly by the dominated classes, of their class interests, we can reasonably predict we will move to socialism and through socialism to communism. The development of the productive forces something *the development thesis* gives us reason to believe is true is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for communism; there must also be something like the moral development articulated by Satz.

We have here a reasonable, empirically responsible, alternative to the roughly Weberian conception that history is not a predictable process 'but simply the story of changing patterns of domination, a succession of ruling classes, ceaseless social war with no promise of victory.'<sup>22</sup> The claim, of course, is not that moral progress is inevitable or guaranteed but that it is reasonably expectable and that the tough-minded, empirical, responsible view is not uniquely captured by the *realpolitik* Weberian perspective. A human communism is not inevitable, but it is also not an unreasonable hope, without an empirically grounded scientific rationale. We need make no Kierkegaardian leaps here. On Satz's account, unlike Cohen's,

<sup>22</sup> Buchanan, 111

the growth of the productive forces do not have a unique importance but they still retain a very central importance for without productive growth there will be no moral progress and there will be no communism. (The kind of abundance required by productive growth for socialism and eventually communism could be the relatively moderate kind precisely portrayed in this volume by Philippe Van Parijs.) Productive growth, let me stress again, is a necessary condition, though not a sufficient condition, for moral progress. Nuclear weapons result from productive growth, and they very well could be the end of us all.

V

Does not such talk of moral progress as integral to historical materialism have unwittingly incorporated into it the unacceptable and unscientific conceptions claimed by Jon Elster?<sup>23</sup> Elster draws an ancestry here from Leibniz to Hegel to Marx. History human history as a whole had a goal for Leibniz. Ordinarily when we speak of a goal we assume there must be some intentional agent or agents for whom it is a goal. Moreover, 'to act in the light of the future is to act intentionally.'<sup>24</sup> But historical change is not ordinarily thought to be so agent dependent. This, of course, provided no problem for Leibniz, because on his view 'the course of human history was decided by God when he chose the actual world from among the possible worlds. God is the intentional agent where His goal to create the best of all possible worlds makes sense of the local and temporary defects of the universe.'<sup>25</sup> A teleological view of history makes sense here *if* talk of God makes sense because there is an appropriate intentional agent. When we get to the increasingly secularized view of the world of Hegel and even more so of Marx

<sup>23</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press 1985), 107-18

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 109

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 104

things get rather more problematic. So while for Leibniz history has a goal *and* a creator who directs it, by the time we get to Hegel we get the disastrous view that history has a goal without its having a creator, a designer or even a director some intentional agent directing the scene. Hegel 'did not invoke any intentional agent whose actions were guided by that goal.'<sup>26</sup> 'Hegel's philosophy of history,' Elster remarks, 'is a secular theodicy, which is to say that it is nonsense.'<sup>27</sup>

Elster believes that Marx did not fully emancipate himself from these Hegelian ideas.<sup>28</sup> Marx continued sometimes to think, if his words are taken straightforwardly, of history as having a goal, though without some agent for whom it is a goal. Marx, like Hegel, Elster claims, remained imprisoned 'between a fully religious and a fully secular view of history.'<sup>29</sup> In arguing for this, Elster attempts, by citations from Marx, and then by an interpretation of those citations, to show that Marx, at least sometimes, had an objectionable teleological view of history, namely a view 'in which the earlier stages are seen as tending irresistibly towards the latter as being explained by their contribution to the latter.'<sup>30</sup> If Marx's view is alternatively to be seen, as I wish to see it, as a purely empirical view, then Marx, Elster has it, would simply be stating a series of necessary conditions for the successive stages to emerge. Elster sees Marx as having a richer view in which he uses humanity as Hegel used Spirit or Reason as 'the supra-individual entity whose full development is the goal of history, even though it is not endowed with the qualities of an intentional agent who could *act* to bring about that goal.'<sup>31</sup>

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 David Schweickart argues otherwise in his 'Reflections on Anti-Marxism: Elster on Marx's Functionalism and Labour Theory of Value,' *Praxis International* 8, 1 (April 1988) 109-22.

29 Elster, *On Making Sense of Marx*, 104

30 Ibid., 114

31 Ibid., 116

This, Elster claims, is an inescapably teleological conception, a conception which is thoroughly unscientific. Indeed, it is not only unscientific, it is actually incoherent, for it postulates a goal without an agent whose goal it is in which 'the development of humanity' is thus spuriously teleologically explained 'by its indispensable place as a stepping stone to communism.'<sup>32</sup>

Elster ties the above claim (unnecessarily, I believe) to his espousal of methodological individualism, a view trenchantly criticized by Andrew Levine.<sup>33</sup> What Elster takes as Marx's appeal to an immanent teleology has, in Elster's view, an *ersatz* subject, namely humanity, which sets the goals that will be realized as history unfolds. But 'according to methodological individualism, humanity as such cannot act. . . .'<sup>34</sup> It may be that there will arise in history a communist society in which men and women will at long last in fact be able to control their own development. That cannot be ruled out a priori or on purely conceptual grounds. But, Elster remarks, 'one cannot coherently assume that the development of humanity up to that stage will occur as if it had already been reached' and it makes no sense, Elster claims, to speak of humanity as either acting or failing to act.<sup>35</sup> Humanity, unlike God, is not the name of an individual who could act or fail to act.

However, as Levine argues, it is anything but clear that there is any plausible version of methodological holism to contrast with methodological individualism in which holists would be making an

32 Ibid.

33 Andrew Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' *Journal of Philosophy* 83, 12 (December 1986) 721-8. See also Andrew Levine, Elliot Sober and Erik Olin Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism,' *New Left Review* 162 (1987). See also note 10 of Levine's article in this volume. The article by Levine et al. from *New Left Review* is, among other things, a powerful critique of Elster's methodological individualism. It should, in my judgment, be regarded as the classic text on methodological individualism. It is an article which should end much barren debate on the subject and dispose of a lot of pseudo-issues.

34 Elster, 116

35 Ibid.

*ontological* claim that was distinct from that made by individualists. I am a methodological holist, as is Levine, but we both agree with methodological individualists that 'societies are collections of individuals, just as individuals are collections of cells; and social phenomena are effects of individuals' actions in much the way that individuals' actions are effects of the behaviours of the cells that compose individuals.'<sup>36</sup> So on this ontological issue holists and individualists need not dispute. If, that notwithstanding, there is a *metaphysically* inclined Marxian holist around who wants to dispute the ontological claim that societies are collections of individuals, the non-metaphysically inclined Marxian methodological holist can say, much in the spirit of what Norman said about philosophical materialism, that that issue can, as far as Marxian social theory and Marxian political practice is concerned, be set aside, for, as Levine puts it, 'it is clear. . . at least for individuals' actions, that ontological reducibility (decomposability without remainder) does not entail *explanatory* reducibility.'<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it is explanatory irreducibility to the actions of individual agents that is vital for Marxian social theory. Even if, as common sense (at least in Western societies at present) and bourgeois social science and psychology assumes, namely that 'individuals compose societies,' explanatory holism could still very well be in place. From the fact individuals compose society it does not follow, as Levine well puts it,

. . . that the best explanation of social phenomena need appeal to the behaviors of individuals. In all likelihood, supra-individual relational properties population density, kinship relations, social norms and so on will sometimes be explanatory. But these properties are not properties of individuals, *except* in the irrelevant sense that societies are decomposable ontologically into individuals. Very generally, with social phenomena, as with individual behavior, what is explanatory cannot be specified *a priori*.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' 734

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



Moreover, in social science practice, including good social science practice, both Marxians and non-Marxians appeal to such supra-individual, relational properties. Neither Elster nor, as far as I know, anyone else has shown why there is, generally speaking, anything wrong with such explanatory practices.

It is also the case that Marx's not infrequently extravagantly Hegelian language can be sanitized into rather straightforward language that does not offend current scientific descriptions of the world. 'Humanity' need not be taken like Hegel's 'Spirit' as some mysterious supra-individual entity that has goals, or as any kind of supra-individual entity at all, but simply as a convenient label for all human beings past and present and for those, whoever they will be, who will occur in the future. 'The goal of history,' as we can see in Cohen's and Satz's reconstructions of historical materialism, can readily be taken as referring to nothing more than the claim that such and such social formations can be expected and reasonably be predicted to emerge (1) given the way the productive forces have been developing and can be expected and reasonably predicted to develop and (2) given the way that certain objective interests (including moral interests) can be expected and reasonably predicted to be recognized by human beings when, as members of antagonistic classes, they come, as they predictably will, to engage in class struggles in predictably determinate circumstances. This, together with the recognition that this is a *desideratum* warmly to be welcomed, is all that need be meant by 'the goal of history.' 'Classes' in the previous sentence can, of course, be treated as I treated 'humanity.' No supra-individual entities are referred to, no mysterious unfolding of an immanent teleology presupposed and no empirically unconfirmable or infirmable statements are made. There is no need to saddle Marx, as Elster does, with an extravagant philosophy of history, a speculative enterprise, that violates canons of good scientific practice and Marx's conception of himself as a social scientist. Cohen's and Satz's reconstructions of historical materialism keep, in a Marxologically respectable way, historical materialism as set important theoretical claims within social science and it makes, in applying this social science thesis, 'scientific socialism' something that, *pace* Elster, can be a legitimate part of Marxian social theory and not a term of abuse.

Unlike Elster, Levine in 'What Is A Marxist Today?' sees 'Marx's signal achievement' as having 'retained Hegel's sense of history's intelligibility without advancing teleological explanations, and, without purporting to identify "meanings" in history. For Marx, history is as meaningless as nature is. But history is structured and is discernible nevertheless.' It is discernible in the purely causal and empirical way Cohen and Satz have characterized, though the particulars of their accounts might in one way or another be mistaken. They look, that is, for the causal determinations of epochal social change and do not like philosophers of history try to interpret the past by unveiling its meaning. Such an 'unveiling of the meaning of history' would only make sense if it made sense to see the world in Leibniz's or Aquinas's general way. Without an identifiable agent we simply get, as in Hegel, unintelligibility. These traditional philosophies presupposed that there was an end something requiring an agent for its envisagement in the light of which everything becomes retrospectively meaningful. Marx admittedly sometimes spoke in those grand teleological terms, but, as we have seen, Marx's historical materialism can be reconstructed in a completely non-teleological way. 'Historical materialism,' as Levine puts it, 'is a theory of historical trends, and an account of the conditions under which economic structures of different sorts become (materially) possible.'

These historical materialist accounts may turn out to be false, disconfirmed by the historical record, or the facts they appeal to may indeed be facts but they may be better explained by an alternative theory of epochal social change of comparable scope. Atheoreticians, in turn, may be right: history may turn out to have no general theory of explanatory interest. Or some rival general theory may be better confirmed or explanatorily neater. It might turn out to be that military force or ethnic, racial, religious or gender divisions is the dominant cause of epochal social change. If any of those things clearly obtain then historical materialism would have been shown to be empirically untenable and thus untenable *sans phrase*. This cannot, and should not, be something claimed a priori any more than historical materialism can be established a priori. Rather, historical materialism is an elaborated theory, with a cluster of related hypotheses, that might very well be shown, through empirical research, to be

sustainable. Levine's claim that there can be good though inclusive reasons for believing it to be the best available theory of that scope seems to me reasonable. We have here, that is, a viable research program not to be rejected on philosophical grounds and certainly not on ideological or political grounds.

## VI

What Marxists or Marxians most fundamentally want to know is, as Levine puts it, 'What is pertinent to the transformation of society from capitalism to communism?' When we look for what a Marxist would regard as essential for the Marxian explanatory project, we look for what empirically and intellectually sustainable claims minimally must be appealed to get a grip on this. Historical materialism, if true, explains history's trajectory so it is plainly relevant to gaining that understanding and so is class analysis, another canonical part of Marxian theory. Marxisms of all varieties have accorded fundamental importance to class structure and class conflict. Centrally, what is involved here, as Levine stresses, is the idea that at the level of social structure it is power that accounts for both social order and social change. Moreover, the fundamental source of power, Marxists claim, rests in whomever has the 'real (as opposed to the merely juridical) ownership of resources and that in turn is the basis for class divisions where in not inconsiderable measure the interests of the different classes are conflicting.' The underlying idea 'is that class power structures social life.' This is a distinctive Marxist claim, which in turn is explained by and supported by historical materialism. That notwithstanding, it would still be available to the Marxist should all recognizably distinctive views of historical materialism turn out to be untenable, though, if that turns out to be so, class is more contestable by rival views of the underlying base or bases of power. I refer here to alternatives such as the claims of some feminist theorists, the arguments of Michel Foucault, and Durkheimian-Parsonian claims, which see in society's norms integrative mechanisms which allow power to remain firmly embedded in traditions. These accounts compete or at least appear to compete and which (if any) account is correct, or whether any general

account is correct, cannot be settled by philosophical analysis: cannot, that is, be settled a priori. (I said above that one alternative is that they might only 'appear to compete' for the different analyses might be correctly applied at different levels.)

Historical materialism and class analysis are plainly canonical parts of Marxist or even Marxian theory. Jon Elster's magisterial *Making Sense of Marx*, which no doubt for some time will remain the central text of the second phase of analytical Marxism, rejected almost all of these canonical parts. Elster's analysis, if on the mark, wreaked havoc with those parts of Marxist theory that could plausibly be said to be canonical. The devastation was so great that the question was reasonably raised by Michael Walzer concerning whether Elster could really plausibly regard himself as a Marxist, or even a Marxian.<sup>39</sup> (I should add that Andrew Levine has indicated how Elster can reasonably stick with such an appellation.)<sup>40</sup> Cohen's recent work and work in this volume, particularly that of Joseph McCarney, Andrew Levine and Debra Satz, have shown how certain very central canonical elements, to wit, class analysis and historical materialism, can resist challenges such as those of Elster and can be seen as a part of a Marxian social science and emancipatory critique that have not (*pace* Buchanan) simply been incorporated, by now plitudinously, into good social science, Marxian and non-Marxian alike. Similar things should be said, I believe, against Elster's devastation of the tradition by setting Marxism on methodological individualist and rational choice theorist foundations. Here Levine's and McCarney's analyses are particularly important. (It is also useful to ask, in this connection, whether the harsh critique of Elster by Ernest Mandel really strikes its target and makes a good case for restoring in rather traditional terms much of the Marxism of the classical tradition.)

Elster, along with Cohen and Roemer and most analytical Marxists, rejects another traditionally canonical core of Marxian the-

<sup>39</sup> Michael Walzer, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' *New York Review of Books* (November 21, 1985)

<sup>40</sup> Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' 728

ory, namely its analysis of exploitation in terms of the labor theory of value. Something of what is at issue here emerges in this volume in the extensive and important set of papers on exploitation papers not discussed in this Afterword. I think they deserve careful study, comparison and a critical analysis of the unfolding argument. I want to make only one general comment here, principally in line with comments about what is salvageable from the canonical core. Jeffrey Reiman, right at the beginning of his important and original discussion of exploitation, points out, correctly I believe, that the arguments arising from and about Cohen's, Roemer's (and I would have added Elster's) work have carried the discussion forward as follows. 'Exploitation' taken as a technical descriptive term defined in terms of the labour theory of value is of little interest. Even if the labour theory of value gets a formulation which is viable, the term 'exploitation' in such a conceptualization loses its normative and critical force. But it is just this which makes it a useful element in Marxist analysis or critique. A viable Marxian conception of exploitation, as Roemer, Cohen and Elster have argued, 'must include *injustice* as part of its definition.' Forced extraction of unpaid labour or surplus labour is not enough for there to be exploitation. The extraction must be unjust for it to be exploitative. Roemer goes on to treat exploitation as principally a distributive matter, making, if that is correct, exploitation a rather minor component, though still not a negligible one, in a theory of distributive justice. This pushes us over into a discussion of the alternative accounts of justice given by Rawls, Barry, Dworkin, Walzer and even libertarian accounts like those of Nozick. This, as Reiman, Norman, Nielsen, Levine and Cohen have recognized, pushes Marxians into terrain ordinarily occupied by liberalism. But this, I think, is all to the good, for the reasons brought out by Reiman, and leaves a *non-parti pris* Marxism in a strong position here. But Reiman also argues resourcefully that treating 'exploitation,' as we should, as a normative term, should not (*pace* Roemer and Cohen) commit us to taking exploitation as principally a 'manifestation of an unjust distribution of assets' and thus a distributive injustice rather than something that most paradigmatically occurs, where capitalist injustice most extensively occurs, namely in production. Reiman also argues for a normative and morally freighted conception of exploitation. While, like Cohen and Roemer, he

retains the concept's link with injustice, he reads this differently than such 'distributive' Marxism does. Reiman does this by centering exploitation in the *subjugation* of producers by non-producers, where, in unjust circumstances, producers are forced in the sphere of production to work and live in certain distinctive ways by non-producers. What is offended against most centrally here is an ideal vital to the tradition including the liberal tradition growing out of the Enlightenment. I refer here to the 'ideal of equal sovereignty,' an ideal that 'holds roughly that individuals should have equal and maximum power over their own destinies and equal and minimum power over others' destinies.' What we need to get at in exploitation most essentially, Reiman argues, is a certain power relationship between people as the central injustice of exploitation. In speaking of the non-producer's power over the worker's labour, rather than over their products, as what is essential to exploitation, Reiman brings out how *domination* in the work place is essential to exploitation. This clearly catches, in a suitably general form, the distinctive features of exploitation Marx focuses on in classical slavery, feudal serfdom and capitalist wage labour. In all of these circumstances the worker is being forced at the time of her working to work for non-producers, thus violating the ideal of equal sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, this brings us back to class analysis, for in exploitation, in classical slavery, feudal serfdom and capitalist wage-labour, we have *the domination of one class by another*. Distinctively, and in a way that should elicit considerable critical attention, Reiman is arguing for injustice in exploitation understood as a distinctive social relation which analyzes socio-economic systems 'in the light of a moral version of the labor theory of value.' This, of course, ties in with a canonical element of classical Marxism, namely the labour theory of value, while giving it a distinctive conceptualization. Reiman calls it 'the labour theory of moral value.' This keeps close to an important canonical element in Marx by articulating something which bears a reasonable family resemblance to the labour theory of value

41 In doing this, Marx plainly makes contact with liberal thinkers such as Rawls and Dworkin, who stress the importance of equal liberty for everyone.

without being subject to the well-known difficulties of such a theory. While sticking close to the canonical elements of the theory, it also makes a distinctive contribution to the ongoing discussion of exploitation in a Marxian theory of justice. Even if the classical labour theory of value is as moribund as most analytical Marxists believe, this conception remains alive.

Whatever the upshot of the argument about exploitation, pursued actively in this volume and elsewhere, it is clear that arguments about exploitation carry over into discussions of Marx and morality and to Marxian conceptions of justice. What I think is emerging, against rather traditionalist conceptions, such as that of Sayers or the Marxist immoralism of Richard Miller, is that there is a distinctive theoretically based Marxian account of morality, including that of justice, which yields a rationally defensible and reasonably objective conception of a moralized version of Marxism that does not just trade one ideology for another. This has been argued in detail in two books, roughly in the mold of analytical Marxism, that, while proceeding very differently, strikingly overlap and mesh very well with the general lines of Satz's essay and Levine's analysis. One, Philip J. Kain's *Marx and Ethics*, proceeds historically, with an exhaustive analysis of Marx's texts. Kain argues that, while the *German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto* argue in a way that squares reasonably well with Marxist immoralism, from the *Grundrisse* on there emerges in Marx a more balanced and nuanced treatment of morality that states historical materialism in such a way that the cogency and objectivity of some moral conceptions are retained and a conception of a transformation of morality is articulated for socialist and communist societies. Here we have close textual analysis yielding a non-ideological, moralized Marxism. My own *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* yields a very similar conclusion by a very different route, namely by delineating a set of canonical conceptions from the Marxist tradition (including a conception of ideology and ideological critique) and then showing that these canonical conceptions are fully compatible with the moral point of view where that point of view has an objectivity and reasonability that shows it is not an ideologically distorting moral stance.

Those works, if near to the mark, show that neither in Marx nor in Marxism is there a rejection of morality. Marxist sociology of

morals shows how much of the moralizing in class societies is ideological and how pervasive class bias is in the *extant moralities* of class societies. But Marxism does not advance an *epistemology* of morals let alone a deflationary one showing that there is something in the very nature of morality per se that makes moral conceptions illusory, subjective or the ideological biases of one class or another. It does not attempt to show that morality is such that it would wither away with the state, or end with the ending of class societies.

However, once it has been shown that Marxism doesn't reject morality, it may be that what needs to be said about it and in favor of a socialist society is less obvious than Marx and Engels and many Marxists have thought. Here Norman's advice is sound about directly engaging in reasonably systematic argument in and about morality, and in doing so, competing with liberal accounts such as Rawls's or Dworkin's, libertarian and neo-Hobbesist accounts such as Nozick's and Gauthier's, and communitarian accounts such as MacIntyre's, Walzer's and Taylor's. Marxists and Marxians are beginning to do that. Richard Norman's own *Free and Equal* is an example, as is a parallel book by John Baker, *Freedom and Equality*. Similar things should be said for Levine's *Arguing For Socialism* and *The End of the State*, for my *Liberty and Equality*, for G.A. Cohen's *History, Labour and Freedom*, Jeffrey Reiman's *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy* and the sections on morality in Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx*.<sup>42</sup> These works work out at least fragments of a moral philosophy and do what Norman calls normative political philosophy directly engaging the best efforts in the various reigning bourgeois traditions. Often the works here depart extensively from standard Marxian themes and approaches. Yet they are recognizably socialist and in a broad sense Marxian.

<sup>42</sup> Rodney Peffer in his *Marxism, Metaethics and Morality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1990) combines a careful historical elucidation of Marx's views on ethics with argumentation with contemporary theories of ethics.



## VII

Some critics of analytical Marxism have accused it of scholasticism: theory for theory's sake. If this criticism were well founded, it would undermine analytical Marxism for Marxism of any sort, simply in virtue of what it is, is tied to a distinctive project a political project which, to put it crudely, consists in a commitment to replacing capitalism with socialism, with the construction of socialism and to a vision of a communist future.<sup>43</sup> Levine, paraphrasing Marx, puts it very well when he remarks: 'Marxists aim not just at understanding the world, but also above all at transforming it to accord with this understanding.' If analytical Marxism is a scholasticism then, given what Marxism is, it is not and cannot be a Marxist or even Marxian theory. But there is no reason to so criticize analytical Marxism. Analytical Marxists in all their varieties, from Richard Miller and Dan Little, to Jon Elster and John Roemer, defend left-wing positions and in various ways have close affinities with Marx. Elster, of the analytical Marxists, raises the greatest devastation to traditional Marxism. Still, as Levine remarks at the end of his review of *Making Sense of Marx*, 'Elster remains radical and sympathetic to the Marxian project, and he defends many of its fundamental components.'<sup>44</sup> Analytical Marxists, particularly the social scientists among them, but to a lesser extent the philosophers as well, use many of the tools traditionally associated with the right or the centre, but they are used where (a) it is at least plausible to believe these tools are useful, (b) may help us gain core insights concerning social reality and (c) not infrequently, where, as Levine puts it, it 'is a case of turning the enemy's weapons back against the enemy.'<sup>45</sup>

*Perhaps,*

43 Bertell Ollman, by collecting together the various passages and then perspicuously representing them, clearly depicts Marx's vision of a communist future. See Bertell Ollman, 'Marx's Vision of Communism: A Reconstruction' in S. Bixler and S. Sluzer, eds., *Radical Vision of the Future* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1977).

44 Andrew Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' 728

45 Ibid.

in the way most analytical Marxists do not believe, there is after all a distinctive Marxist method which it is crucial for Marxists to employ and perhaps analytical Marxists use the wrong methods, remaining too captive to the dominant intellectual culture in which they work.<sup>46</sup> Such things would hardly be surprising or novel. But even if that is so something I actually doubt it would not render analytical Marxists scholastics or people who had abandoned the Marxian radical project. It would just mean that they were bringing a mistaken theory to their political practice: something that could as readily happen to Lukácsians or Althusserians.

I want in closing to return to a theme gestured at by others, but taken up explicitly by Levine in the last half of 'What Is a Marxist Today?' Suppose that the devastation to traditional Marxism to what I have called canonical Marxist positions is as deep as Elster and Roemer believe. Suppose historical materialism against what I have argued proves untenable and class analysis is left without any *theoretical* basis. What is left of the Marxian political agenda? What would the Marxian agenda look like in such a circumstance? Or could there, if that obtains, be an intelligible Marxian agenda? It would seem, minimally, that there could still be research towards the realization of a communist future. That conception would not be rendered senseless by the demise of the canonical claims of Marxism, though it might be rendered more utopian than would be hoped with some of those positions intact. Marxian class analysis would still be intact, as would the stress on the importance of class struggle, though without the theoretical underpinning afforded by historical materialism. There would also remain room for direct normative argumentation concerning the ideals implicit in the very idea of communism. Such a free ranging Marxian analysis does not make of 'being a Marxian' simply a name for anything which is vaguely on the left. As Levine well puts it, 'a commitment to communism as a possible and desirable future does constrain the content of

<sup>46</sup> Philip Kain and Bertell Ollman both argue that there is such a distinctive methodology in Marx. See Kain, *Marx and Ethics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press 1989), 138-75 and Bertell Ollman, *Social and Sexual Revolution* (Boston, MA: South End Press 1979), 99-123.

Marxian theory.' So Marxists and Marxians, analytical or otherwise, will believe in the possibility and desirability of a classless society, believe that 'in *some* sense and to some *extent*, history is shaped and moved by class struggles,' that social revolutions are relevant to our understanding of societies and their futures and they will believe, as well, that in some way life the things that human beings in their acting do and accept conditions consciousness so that 'life' does not arise out of 'consciousness' but 'consciousness' out of life. These are in varying degrees vague and indeterminate notions, anything more precise would break the underlying consensus about what it is to be either a Marxist or Marxian. But I think these conceptions, vague though they be, do help Marxists and Marxians 'to orient inquiry in a certain fashion to direct theory to accord with and, if successful, to advance the political commitment' to a communist future that motivates it.

However, it is important to recall that political commitment is also vital here. Marxists and Marxians must not only believe in the *possibility* they must, as well, believe in the *plausibility* of a communist future and be committed to engaging in class struggle. This goes, as Engels stressed about Marx in his graveside speech, with the very idea of being a Marxist or a Marxian. But here is a place where the relation between the real world and our political theorizing is very strange. To many political observers, and indeed activist participants, talk of the possibility of a classless society and a communist future may sound very unworldly indeed. There are, at the moment of this writing, incredible changes going on in what is conventionally called 'the communist world.' (Perhaps 'authoritarian state socialist' or just 'statist' world would be a better designation. There is no neutral terminology here.) It is very difficult to even guess at what the upshot of these activities will be. I am certainly not wise enough or informed enough to have anything like even an educated guess at what they will be. One can, however, have hopes and if one is a Marxist or Marxian the hope will be that this future will be communist and at the same time democratic. ('Democratic communism' should, given the conception of communism in Marx, be a redundancy.) The official 'communist' societies may be in the process of re-inventing the wheel. In doing so they may eventually gain, along with the modernization of market socialism, the kind

of limited, though within these limits, genuine, democracy characteristic of bourgeois countries. It is also to be hoped that they would, taking the very idea of socialism seriously, eventually be more extensively democratic, carrying (among other things) democracy right into the work place. The hopeful thing (at least from the point of view of the left) is that this will get meshed with communism in some coherent way. Probably the counterparts of Western Left intelligentsia (including analytical marxists) in those societies I speak here of the overt and covert dissidents, and not of the hacks would look with utter incredulity at talk of a communist future. Their 'dialectic of liberation' will have a different trajectory. I hope I have got my sociology wrong here, or that the differences here are more on the level of slogans and not over deep substantive content. But there is reason to think I am probably near to the mark. The political experience of Western intelligentsia and Eastern intelligentsia are very different indeed.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Levine's pessimistic remark that in 'different ways in the First, Second and Third Worlds the banner of communism. . . has brought disrepute upon itself and exhausted its creative potential' is very worrisome. Perhaps that last bit is too strong, or at least it is not unreasonable to hope that it is, but Levine's equally pessimistic comment that it 'seems unlikely that there will ever again come a time when masses of people marching, as it were, under the banner of Marxism will offer a realistic promise of revolutionary change and reconstruction' is deeply depressing to those of us who are on the left. Perhaps that remark too is too pessimistic, reflecting too much the present political situation with disarray of the left and with 'Marxian political styles in decline.' That is, it may be too reactive to what may be short term trends just as it was too reactive to have had great hopes for the left as many of us did because of the heady events of the 60s. But, at a minimum, there is sufficient realism in Levine's remarks to make Marxian theoreticians reflect carefully on whether or not they should derail the Marxian agenda or, at a minimum, call for a reconstruction of

47 Ferenc Feher and Agnes Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left* (Oxford, England: Polity Press 1987)

what it should look like, given the political realities referred to. It does not, of course, matter, as Levine well remarks, what the words and outward symbols are. These terms (and their equivalents in other languages) could disappear from the scene, thought of as the outmoded ideas of the nineteenth century, as long as the concepts remain in mass political struggles as well as in the work of Left theoreticians. (Maybe even the very term `left' may fall out of our discourse while the concept remains.)

What remains unclear, given our present political realities, is whether anything like communism has a reasonable shot at becoming a reality. One thing counting for the Marxian project though it may turn into a commitment to communism under another name is (particularly when we look at things globally) the plain and pervasive evils of capitalism. They will, as Levine puts it, generate, particularly if the official `communist' countries turn (a) more democratic and (b) more prosperous, `mass opposition to the existing order.' It is reasonable to believe that this opposition, in time, if not in the first instance, will take a Leftward orientation and possibly a Marxian one, putting a communist future on the agenda. Though again, the terms of political discourse may be very different. Where normative political theorizing of a Marxian sort has been persuasive and the ethical case for communism or at least socialism is strong, the attractiveness, at least among intellectuals, of the Marxian agenda will be further enhanced. This, of course, gives lots of hostages to fortune, but it does not leave the prospects for Marxism and communism nearly as badly off as our culture, where it is becoming very fashionable to announce `the death of communism,' firmly gives us to understand.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> I should like to thank Robert Ware for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I have made many changes as a result of his comments, though in some instances I have remained stubbornly, perhaps pigheadedly, resistant.

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