

Karl Marx

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Although it was, until recently, unfashionable in certain circles to say this, Marx was not a philosopher in any interesting sense. He was a social theorist. As social theory, I am thinking primarily of two areas (in all social theory, there is also a large body of empirical work, which I am not competent to comment upon): (a) the methodology of social inquiry, and its metaphysical presuppositions, and (b) normative philosophy (ethics and political theory).

Many social theorists are also philosophers: Hobbes, Locke, Hegel and Mill provide good examples. They articulate and develop a general philosophy, a metaphysics and an epistemology, and typically their social theory relies in essential ways on that general philosophy, or at any rate they believe that it does. There is a connection, for example, between Mill's empiricism, on the one hand, and, on the other, both his utilitarian philosophy, and the methodology of social science that he outlines in Book VI of his *A System of Logic*.

Marx also believed that his social theory depended on certain philosophical assumptions, but, unlike these aforementioned social theorists, he does not, for the most part, articulate or develop in any significant way the philosophy on which he believes his social theory depends. Rather, he uses, or 'raids', the philosophy of others for this underpinning of his social theory, and provides us with only aphorisms or terse summaries of it, scattered across his works.

I will not engage in lengthy exposition of Marx's views. I refer to them, but do not elaborate upon them. I will identify three important sources for his ideas: Hegel, classical Greek Philosophy and humanism, especially as expressed by the French revolution. I will not necessarily discuss these sources separately, since some of his ideas come from more than one source. Since the source for many of Hegel's own ideas was classical Greek thought, it is not always easy to tell whether Marx was influenced in a particular case by Hegel or by the Greeks, and even where Marx thought he knew which was the influence, his own self-understanding need not constitute the last word on the matter.

I

There are three topics or areas I want to touch on, in discussing Marx's methodology of social inquiry and its metaphysical presuppositions: (1) individualism and holism; (2) the idea of historical change; and (3) Marx's metaphysics and epistemology.

1. There is a debate in the existing literature, much of it occasioned by Jon Elster,¹ about the compatibility or otherwise of Marx's apparently holistic ideas with ideas borrowed from an individualistic level of description, such as decision making, rationality, choices, preferences, desires, planning, action (or, in Marx's case, human labour), and the individual person. My understanding of Marx assumes that these two discourses, or sets of ideas, are compatible, and indeed that the latter ultimately lends support and credibility to the former, without reducing or in any way supplanting it. This is a theme which runs through much of what follows throughout my paper. (Perhaps my remark about the influence of humanism on Marx already suggests this.)

In thinking about Marx's views on these matters, there seem to be two strands of thought in Marx which one must acknowledge: an anti-individualist strand and an anti-Platonic one. On first inspection, the two strands are in some tension. If we take the anti-individualism seriously, we seem to reify social wholes, structures, and so on, and these seem to be abstract objects, very much like Platonic entities. On the other hand, if we take the anti-Platonising seriously, we seem to be back to individuals and their relations.

I believe that the two strands are consistent and can be reconciled. I interpret Marx's more holistic or sociological talk of social wholes, social structures, of the laws or tendencies of history, and so on as being grounded at the level of individuals and their interrelations. This does not make him what today we would call a 'methodological individualist', since there is no reductionist (or eliminativist) claim being advanced. Rather, it is that the individual level accounts for or supports the macrostructural features he claims to discover. The latter is made intelligible by the former. To think that the social or macrostructural is autonomous of the individual and has no need of such grounding would be Platonic; to think that, in the face of such grounding, the social can be replaced by what grounds it would be unacceptably (for Marx) individualistic.

Marx himself did not, and probably would not, have said of himself what I have said about him above. Marx was not entirely clear

¹ Elster raises these issues in many places, but see for example: Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

about this, and this unclarity arose for at least two reasons. First, unlike us, what Marx would have understood by 'individualism' signified either a methodological approach in political economy from which he wished to distance himself (he would have thought of Robinson Crusoe accounts of political economy as the allocation of scarce resources to meet an individual's needs²), or the objectionably egoistic philosophy of Max Stirner. Second, he seemed to think of the macrolevel or structural as potentially scientific, in contrast to the individual level of action, decisions and whatever, which he did not.

What I do say is that I cannot myself make ultimate sense of Marx's views, or reconcile the various strands in his thinking, without this somewhat individualistic underpinning to the social. Marx himself, when he reflects on his methodology, frequently makes observations that would support this view of what he is doing: 'The premises from which we begin are ... the real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions under which they live'³ Or: 'It is not "history" which uses men as a means of achieving – as if it were an individual person – its own ends. History is *nothing* but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends.'⁴ Moreover, this way of understanding him does make sense of many of his specific ideas, for example his idea of alienation as apparent objectification of the powers of persons, and his Feuerbachian insistence on the 'economy' merely being a projection of what is human.

2. Marx held a theory about the nature of social change throughout history. On at least one occasion, he refers to the theory as 'the materialist conception of history', but does not himself make much of this label. Much of the content of historical materialism is well known and I will take it for granted. I do not propose to recount once again the various stages through which Marx thought societies might pass on their way to socialism.

The main point of the doctrine is that it is an account of social change. There are two cases: first, the change that occurs within a single society and second, the change that occurs across societies. In the first case, societies not only change but that change has a definite directionality to it; their productive forces grow and, finally

² Karl Marx, *General Introduction to the Grundrisse* in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), pp. 188–9.

³ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 31.

⁴ Marx, *The Holy Family*; from *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA), I/3, ed. D. Ryazanov, *et al.* (Frankfurt and Berlin, 1927), p. 265.

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stagnate when further growth by those forces becomes impossible. After stagnation sets in, such societies transform their economic and social structures into something novel. For instance, the feudal system passes over into capitalism, a new social formation.

In the second case, there is, for Marx, a patterned development to history as a whole as well, even if particular societies might stagnate and fail to undergo further transformation. That development consists in the growth of the productive forces over time (or, from another angle, the growth and development of human labour), ending in their fullest realisation under socialism. In this overall sweep of things, there is no ultimate decay, although of course the development is not even, not without its setbacks and hiccups.

There are two salient features of this account: the importance it ascribes to change in human history, and the apparently nomic (law-like) character of that change. Marx takes great pains to stress how nothing in society remains and is permanent; everything social and human changes, is unstable and fluid. He thought that writers who denied, or forgot, this had been captured by a false conception of social reality. He contrasts his method with that of other, earlier, social theorists, who might have postulated a fixed human nature or a fixed social form (capitalism, for example) that exists, albeit within a range of permissible variations, across all historical epochs. As far as the social world is concerned, Marx is Heraclitean. No one can step in the same social river twice.

Moreover, for Marx, the source of essential social change, the growth, stagnation, and transformation, is internal to the society itself. On Marx's view, there is an inner dynamic to a society, a 'logic' as his followers would say, which accounts for that change. For example, capitalist societies are driven, at one level, by the need to accumulate capital, and the dynamic of this process has a set trajectory. That trajectory leads to the self-destruction of the social form; in the case of capitalism, it leads to a falling rate of profit, overproduction, and hence to economic crises and the aforementioned stagnation.

This is a case, mentioned above, in which it is difficult to decide if Marx is writing only under the influence of Hegel or indirectly, perhaps even directly, under the influence of Aristotle's thought.⁵ Both Hegel and Aristotle, in somewhat different ways, espoused a metaphysics of inner-impelled change. Both Aristotle and Hegel

⁵ For a defence of the Aristotelian interpretation, see Scott Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx* (Open Court, 1985). The Aristotelian interpretation was advanced in the 1970s by Professor Heinz Lubacz, of Essex University, in a short article in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

have teleological systems, in which things have their own telos, goal, or final end, towards which the change that befalls them advances, other, external influences being equal. Both use biological change as a paradigm for goal-directed change. The little acorn does not just change, but rather it grows into an oak tree. These two thinkers are philosophers of change par excellence, and Marx knew the work of both of them intimately.

Most post-Enlightenment philosophers, Hume, Hobbes, Berkeley, Descartes, have no difficulty in principle with the idea of change. However, the change they focus on is what is sometimes called 'transeunt', the change that befalls a thing that is introduced from the outside, by an external influence. A paradigm case of this is Hume's billiard ball being struck by another billiard ball. What they lack is the idea of immanent change, change directed by something's own nature, where the source or motor for change is inner or internal.

There is little doubt, I think, that Marx derives, as a matter of psychological fact, much of his view of social change from Hegel or Aristotle or both. What is less clear, I think, is whether Marx wished to adopt this general, metaphysical view of change as applying to the natural as well as the social world. The evidence is somewhat ambiguous. Although Marx applies this view of change to society, he neither applies it to all of nature nor disclaims that it can be so applied. In the main, it was left to Engels to do this, in work such as *The Dialectics of Nature*. I will say something more about this below.

Is such social change lawful, as the above would make it seem? Are there iron laws to history, or even merely lawful tendencies, both as to what happens within a social formation and what happens across history? To be sure, somehow Marx's writings encourage this idea. Rather than thinking of these as independent laws, we are, I think, more productively to think of them as generalisations grounded in, or explained by, certain features of human choice and decision making. (I am of course aware that Marx himself sometimes uses the word, 'law'; the question is what we are to understand by his use of that word.)

In the case of the development of the forces of production across history, Marx assumes that when confronted with the choice between old relations of production and reduced productive output on the one hand, and new productive relations with increased productive output on the other, humans will at the end of the day make the rational choice and opt for the latter. They, or anyway the majority in whose interests it is to so choose, become pro-growth advocates, and hence revolutionaries. This is no law that works in history

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behind the backs of humans, but merely an anticipation of what Marx thinks the (in most cases, unforeseen) consequences of their rational choices will be, in the circumstances he envisages.

But does this just push the question of scientific law back one stage? One might ask if Marx thought there were psychological laws that governed human decision making, choice. Perhaps there are historical laws or tendencies, underwritten by psychological ones. In truth, I see no evidence that Marx even asked himself this question. He does remark that men make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing. This line of thought is neutral on the question I have posed. Marx asserts what is undoubtedly true: there are necessary conditions for making certain choices, conditions which may be beyond the power of the choosers to control. But that by itself provides no hint of an answer to our question.

As for the change within a society, for example the law of accumulation, this too merely anticipates how capitalists will rationally decide to act, given the circumstances and constraints in which they find themselves. All things being equal, the capitalist who accumulates acts rationally, given his situation and the parameters within which he must make his choice. For Marx, societies and history itself move in the way that humans, usually without understanding the consequences of those choices, choose. The choices are sometimes confused, and the correct description of the choice situation may be opaque to the chooser, shrouded in ideological claptrap. But human choices they still are, nonetheless, and they account for the flow of social change. To think otherwise, to think that the inner logic to the change in and across society develops literally independently of human choice, is (as I have already said) to think in an alienated way.

This observation helps us with our first question, about the ubiquity of directional change. The particular sort of change that Marx finds in society, or across societies, has ultimately as its ground the choices and decisions of human actors. However extensive the change in the natural world may be, it has other sources, other explanations, about which Marx is silent. There is no legitimate extrapolation, in my view, from Marx's views on the nature and pattern of social change to what his views might have been about the nature and pattern of change in the natural world.

3. Action (praxis) is a special sort of change, namely a change brought about by an agent. (Some further refinements would be needed to get this right, but I will not pursue those refinements here.) Inquiry in the social sciences without inquiry into human action, its causes, consequences and meaning, would be patently absurd. Perhaps if any category is central to capturing human and

social reality within a philosophy, it is the category of agency, of action. It is an amazing fact, but fact it is nonetheless, that the category of physical agency almost disappears in post-Enlightenment philosophy.

In Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant, we do find the idea of mental action – the mind abstracts for Locke, the soul or spirit is the source of all agency for Berkeley, the mind can combine simple ideas into complex ones for Hume, the mind imposes the categories of the understanding on experience for Kant. Since these philosophers are either subjective idealist philosophers or have only a very attenuated notion of physical reality, they can at most offer some reductionist account of physical agency, in terms of mental agency and ideas.

For Marx, physical action or agency is an irreducible, ineliminable category. He makes physical activity, especially labour, work, central to his understanding of persons and society. This theme is salient in his 'Theses on Feuerbach'. Marx thought that the recovery of action, or 'praxis' as he, and subsequent Marxists so quaintly put it, was one of the most important advances of his own work.

We tend to distinguish between reductionist and eliminativist versions of a doctrine. For example, Berkeley was not an eliminativist idealist. He did not say that there were no such things as tables and chairs, that there were only ideas in minds. Rather, he was a reductionist idealist; he said that there were tables and chairs, but that all they are, are ideas in the mind. Only by utilising this distinction could Berkeley even attempt to portray himself as a defender of common sense.

Materialism offers the same alternatives. An eliminativist materialist would tell us that there is no social world, no action, no tables and chairs, only atoms, or matter, in motion. More plausibly, a reductive materialist says that there is a social world, there is action and agency, there are tables and chairs, but all they are, at bottom, are matter, or atoms, in motion.

Marx was not alive to the distinction between elimination and reduction, and it is no use pretending otherwise. (Nor was Lenin, when he wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, as one can see by his mis-characterisation of Berkeley's position.) Marx saw materialism, or anyway all 'hitherto existing' varieties of materialism as eliminativist, and hence he would have thought of such materialism as denying the existence of human action, or anyway finding no metaphysical room in which to accommodate it.

Marx knew about the atomistic philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus, and indeed the latter formed the subject matter of his doctoral thesis. The atomistic philosophy of the Greeks was an early

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form of materialist philosophy, and Marx was acquainted with latter forms of materialism as well, in Hobbes, in the French encyclopedists, especially Holbach, and in his immediate predecessor, Ludwig Feuerbach. All of these forms of materialism, for Marx, were inconsistent with accepting the reality of action, or the social world more generally, and so he could not possibly have been a materialist in the standard sense.

Confusingly, Marx contrasts his doctrine with 'hitherto existing materialism', suggesting that his own doctrine is a distinct variety of materialism. If by materialism is intended a metaphysical doctrine of the kind I have specified, nothing could be a less accurate description of Marx's views. It is clear, I think, that he rejects the atomist-Hobbesian-Holbachian metaphysical picture of reality. The world they imagine is too barren, too austere, for him. It does not include the social and human world which forms the centre of his intellectual attention. Marx's world is richer, more variegated, than any world that he can imagine the traditional materialist imagining.

Marx was, in contemporary terminology, a realist about the physical world. What he was anxious to reject was Hegelian idealism, the doctrine that everything that existed was essentially dependent on mind. The contradictory of idealism is not materialism, but (external-world) realism, the doctrine that there are objects, events, things, or whatever that are not mind-dependent in the Hegelian (or Berkleyian) sense.⁶

When Marx thinks of his doctrine as a form of materialism unlike previously existing versions of materialism, he is in fact espousing a realist and pluralist philosophy which holds both that there is a physical world essentially independent of the mind and also that there are parts of reality (the social, for example) which have their own integrity and can neither be eliminated nor reduced to the subject matter of physics.

Realism comes in a variety of versions, and I have attributed to Marx realism about the external world. Was he also a scientific realist, in the sense that he thought that the theoretical terms of mature scientific theory typically (attempt to) refer to real, but unobservable, entities, structures, or whatever in the world? To what, if anything, does 'capitalism' or 'capitalist societies' refer or designate? On this issue, there is reason to hesitate. Marx provides a discussion of this issue in a passage in his *Introduction to the Grundrisse*.⁷ The passage in question is somewhat obscure, but the gist seems to be

⁶ I have tried to defend this view of Marx in my *Marxism and Materialism* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).

⁷ Karl Marx, *General Introduction to the Grundrisse*, pp. 205-7.

that 'pure' theory consists of a set of abstractions, whose connection to reality is indirect and highly mediated. Theories in the natural sciences are often said to work in the same way, when they postulate perfectly elastic bodies, ideal gasses, or frictionless surfaces. Perhaps this understanding of abstracted theory is consistent with a properly interpreted scientific realism, but the point is only that due attention should be given to Marx's understanding about the nature of theory and how it might ultimately relate to the actual world, before ascribing scientific realism to him with any confidence.

If there is action, even physical action, then those beings who act have a mind, are conscious, possess a mental life with purposes, intentions, and so on. Marx certainly accepts this, as his remark about what makes human beings special presupposes: the human being 'raises his structure [what he intends to create] in imagination before he raises it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement ... he also realises a purpose of his own ...'.⁸ Any being that possesses the powers of imagination and purposive planning has a mind.

On the other hand, Marx was certainly no dualist. Of course, even dualists can recognise that, by interacting with the body, mind is causally dependent on body. Marx seems to have wanted to make mind more dependent on body than merely causally dependent, although he never defined the nature of the dependence he was supposing. In some sense, he wants to tie consciousness down, to rob it of its essential independence: 'Thought and being are indeed distinct but they also form a unity.'⁹ Unity, I take it, whatever it means here, is meant to be stronger than causal interaction.

Marx's thoughts on the mind are consistent, and indeed make his view similar to contemporary positions in the philosophy of mind, that try to steer a path between reductive materialism (in the standard philosophical sense) and dualism. To borrow terminology and use it anachronistically, Marx held that consciousness, or the mind, supervened on the physical without being reducible to it.

There is a very secure sense of agency, and hence of self or inner directedness, in both Hegel and Aristotle. Hegel's agency was suspect, from Marx's point of view. It is the agency of Idea or ultimately the Deity. It is whatever sense can be given to agency by Absolute Idealism. Aristotle's realism, on the other hand, left Aristotle with a real physical world. Hence, there was for Aristotle

⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 178.

⁹ From *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, and in *MEGA I/3*, pp. 116-17.

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genuinely physical action, the understanding of which was one of the tasks of philosophy. On this score, Marx is much closer to Aristotle than he is to Hegel. Marx's view is that what makes persons special, and sets them apart from the rest of nature, is their capacity for intentional action, action undertaken according to a plan.¹⁰ It is this, and other, considerations that makes Marx value so highly the planned economy, as the expression of what is truly human. We will return to the importance of the centrality of action for Marx, in connection with his normative theory, in the section below.

A great deal of ink was spilt in trying to uncover Marx's theory of knowledge. Hegel rejected the correspondence theory of truth (and hence of knowledge), and some, like Leszek Kolakowski, have attempted to find, in the writings of the early Marx, a similar rejection of the 'classical' correspondence theory in favour of an idealist view on which reality is itself a human creation.¹¹ Much of this interpretation is built on the evidence of cute aphorisms in Marx's early work.

I find all such arguments unconvincing. Marx has little to say on these matters, and it takes some bending of quotes to show otherwise. Unlike Hegel, Aristotle is a defender of the 'classical' conception of truth: to say of what is, that it is, and to say of what is not that it is not, is to speak truly; to say of what is, that it is not, and of what is not, that it is, is to speak falsely. Since I believe the classical account of truth is vastly superior to Hegel's idealist account, and since nothing explicit in Marx forces either interpretation, I prefer to land Marx with the most plausible account, especially since that plausible account is consistent with his realist position and the Hegelian account is not. On this issue again, we find Marx closer to Aristotle than to Hegel.

II

In thinking about Marx's normative philosophy, the most important fact to remember is that Marx was, first and foremost, a true philosophical son of the Enlightenment. He shared its general philosophical humanism, but coupled it with a specific social critique which attempted to show under what social conditions its goals were genuinely achievable. One need not look for a particular individual who influenced him, although he does mention some by name. The impact of this humanism was visible all around him, and especially

¹⁰ See text above and footnote 8.

¹¹ L. Kolakowski, 'Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth', in *Marxism and Beyond*, trans. J. Z. Peel (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969), pp. 58–86.

in Trier, his birth city, close as it was to the French frontier. French revolutionary ideas were part of the air which he, and his immediate family, breathed.

Humanism is itself a rather vague body of propositions, but its guiding thread is the centrality and the importance of the human person, the need for humankind to be responsible and master of its own destiny. This humanist ideal runs through all of Marx's work, but is perhaps most apparent in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx elaborates the idea that there are no gods responsible for man and his fate, that men have the power, given the right social circumstances, to be masters (and mistresses) of their social world, to take control of the social structures in which they exist. To be powerless in the face of one's own creations, or to falsely believe that one is powerless in this way, is what Marx called 'alienation'. The 'iron law of history' view, far from being Marx's own view, is itself an example of alienation.

As I said above, Marx says that what makes humankind unique, and sets it apart from any animal kind, is its ability to plan, the ability to raise in conception an idea and then to execute a series of tasks calculated to achieve that idea. For Marx, loss of control and mastery is the antithesis of planning. To be human is to plan. Although he does not use the words, what Marx is stressing is the centrality of practical deliberation to the human enterprise. Marx's view of man as the practical deliberator shares much in common with Aristotle's view of man in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Another aspect of Marx's own brand of humanism is his self-development or self-realisation theory. Such theories were rife at the time, thinkers as intellectually distant as Fichte and Mill providing examples. Hegel's theory itself can be seen as a self-realisation theory, where ultimately the Self to be realised is God. Marx's self-development theory asserts that the goal of each person is the fullest development of all of his latent powers and abilities, his human potential. When Marx speaks, in the *German Ideology*, of each person being a hunter in the morning, a fisherman in the afternoon, a cattle rearer in the evening, and a critical critic after dinner, he is proposing, in what he intends to be humorous fashion, the development of human potentiality in many different facets and directions for each person. He believed that the division of labour, for example, inhibited this desirable development. Marx believed that work, meaningful, creative work, was an ineliminable need of man. It is a need that capitalism, with its division of labour, does not answer. Part of what Marx understands by self-development is the developing of this creative capacity in all persons. Marx thought that such creative work would include both mental and physical elements.

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The novel twist, both in Marx's self-development theory and his view of man as rational planner and doer is that these ideals can only be achieved collectively: 'Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in community, therefore, is personal freedom possible'.¹² The interconnection between persons within a community is a distinctively Hegelian idea.

In this way, the realisation of the moral goals of humankind, self-mastery and self-development, require more than the self; they require the collective effort of many individuals in the sorts of social circumstances conducive to these desiderata. Social and economic forces which defy human control and which inhibit the development of the individual are too strong for any individual, but not too strong for the joint efforts of the many. Planning is not just for the Aristotelian individual, but for Hegelian interrelated persons co-operating with one another and attaining desired ends that none could reach by himself. Not surprisingly for someone who so closely followed Hegel in these matters, Marx was a communitarian philosopher before the term was dreamt up.

The collective economy would do away with the division of labour, and thereby permit the encouragement of the multi-talented individual, do away with the market and thereby permit planning of the social output. Marx's idea of production planned to meet human need gives expression to this moral vision. Each person can work with others to tame the forces that humankind itself creates. The achievement of humanist ideals requires, according to Marx, the triumph of socialism, the collectively planned economy.

Because of his view that each person should contribute to planning as a social effort, there can be no doubt that Marx's ideal is a democratic one. Perhaps his belief that the State will ultimately wither away is naive, but it can leave us in no doubt about his theoretical commitment to a democratic vision, a vision in which there is no State power required to coerce individuals. The vision is also reinforced by his remarks on the Paris commune, in *The Civil War in France*, in which he praises direct or participatory over representative democracy. How is it possible, then, that such anti-democratic forces have taken his name in vain?

Marx says little about the transitional stage from contemporary society to full democracy, and what he does say misleads. His expression 'the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' is a term borrowed from Roman history and apt to mislead someone with modern ears. The theoretical gap in Marx's thinking about the transition was

¹² Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 93.

filled in by others, who wrote in different circumstances and in ways of which Marx may well not have approved.

But there is a theoretical problem here worth considering. Social theorists often have to grapple with the tension between a final ethic and an interim ethic. To what extent is it plausible to think that these can differ? Can a revolutionary really use non-democratic means to achieve democratic ends?

Marx's political behaviour, and some of the things he says (and certainly many of the things some of his followers said very clearly), suggest non-democratic means to achieve democratic ends. This is always a position fraught with difficulty, and one might identify the seeds of the prevalence of anti-democratic tendencies within Marxism in this dilemma, a dilemma which Marx never wrote about and which he may not even have seen very clearly.

Marx's normative theory is implicit rather than explicit, and is a matter of some controversy, in part because Marx himself was confused about the issue of normativity. His disclaimers that there is any normative element in his critique and analysis of capitalism seem to derive from his distaste of *a priori* ethics, which he saw as groundless and open to unsupported speculation. He is thinking of Hegel, and perhaps of Kant as well, as examples of such ethical theorists from whom he wished to distance himself. For Marx, at least most of the time, there is an unbridgeable gap between scientific theory and normativity. He wished his critique of capitalism to rely only on the former and not the latter.

Had he been clearer about the possibility of a naturalistic system of ethics,¹³ the ethical system that is undoubtedly latent in his thought might have been more fully acknowledged and elaborated. His normative theories of human self-development, and self-control, and the ethics they support, are implicit for the most part rather than explicit, but they are very much there nonetheless.

Marx's theory of just distribution is a matter of some scholarly and interpretative dispute.¹⁴ Sometimes Marx seems to criticise the economic distribution under capitalism as unjust, as theft from the

¹³ Can an ethic be fully grounded naturalistically, or is there always an ultimately normative principle that must reappear in any such grounds? This is an issue that is not specific to Marx, and that we need not deal with here. For this issue with specific reference to Marx's ideal of human nature, see Steven Lukes, 'Alienation and Anomie', in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, third series, ed. Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), pp. 134-56.

¹⁴ See for example the articles by A. Wood, Z. Husami, and others, in *Marx, Justice and History*, ed. Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Tim Scanlon (Princeton University Press, 1980).

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worker, and so on. At other times, he says that the distribution is fair, fairly arrived at by the sale of his labour power for a wage by the worker, although with distressing social consequences. I suspect that this confusion too arises from Marx's unwillingness to admit that there are any normative strands to his critique of capitalism, given the view he had of normativity.

On the other hand, when it is not a matter of his analysis of capitalism and where it leads, Marx does espouse quite explicitly alternative principles of economic distribution, one for the transitional period to full communism and another to operate under a fully communist society. The latter is the famous ability-need principle: from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.¹⁵ Given Marx's view, which we have already discussed, that holds as an ideal the full self-development of each individual, it follows that Marx would wish to ensure that each person had the resources to achieve this. And since part of self-development is to be able to work creatively at the many things one is capable of, it follows that Marx would wish to ensure that each person has the opportunity to give of himself appropriately. The ability-need principle seems just what one might expect from him.

If humanism proposes that man is the measure of all things, then it is in this framework that we can understand Marx's Labour Theory of Value. According to Marx, only human labour power creates new value. Why should this be so? Some have suggested that machines, even animals, are capable of value creation, whereas Marx insists that machines and non-human animals can only transfer the value they have, given them by human labour in their creation or training, into the objects produced with their help. Marx's view relates to this humanistic perspective, which places humankind and only humankind on centre stage.

Marx makes many disparaging remarks about Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the war cry of the Revolution. I understand these disparaging remarks not really as about the abstract ideals themselves, which I believe he shares, but about the possibility of their realisation within a capitalist framework. For Kant, it is a matter of principle to develop an ethical system without reference to the empirical world. In later German philosophers, Hegel and Feuerbach for example, in different ways the real world gets a (sometimes perfunctory) look-in, but it is only with Marx that there is a serious attempt to investigate the extent to which a certain sort of society is compatible with ethical goals and ideals.

On Marx's view, only under socialism could these ethical ideals become realised. Under socialism, freedom, as we have seen, has a

¹⁵ See Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

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social rather than only an individual meaning, and can only be realised therefore on a social scale. Equality, understood as giving each according to his need and not as strict equality regardless of circumstance, is the method of distribution of full communism. Fraternity, the true brotherhood (and sisterhood) of all persons, is the guiding principle of socialism. In short, only socialism could achieve the genuine goals of the French Revolution. Marx's ethic is an enlightenment ethic, with a hitherto undeveloped social dimension.

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