
Chapter 6

Marx's Legacy

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At the climax of Volume One of *Capital*, Marx concludes hundreds of pages of theory and narrative by describing "the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation": "the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united, and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. . . . The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated" ([1867], p. 929). Few people now believe that modern social development has this trajectory. And yet, Marx's descriptions of mechanisms of domination and resistance in capitalist societies, from which he derived this apocalyptic vision, remain of enduring interest to many who reject the vision itself. For what is still plausible in Marx's account of capitalism casts a distinctive light on the nature of wage-labor, freedom, democracy, political legitimacy and community, and even on the authority of the moral point of view. This essay will describe currently promising uses of Marx's legacy to challenge or expand mainstream social and political philosophy, and will sketch some of the leading controversies among those engaged in this project of retrieval.

Marx's Capitalism

Since this project attempts to extract pieces of current wisdom from Marx's whole theory of capitalist society, it is helpful to begin with a sketch of this source. In Marx's view, societies are most fundamentally distinguished by dominant social relations of control in the production of material goods. The dominant form of production in capitalist societies is wage-labor in which those – the proletariat – who control no significant means of production sell the use of their labor power to those – the bourgeoisie – who control the means of production that they work

For reasons that partly derive from Adam Smith's discussion of wage-determination, Marx believes that proletarians in every capitalist society bargain at a severe disadvantage when they "sell their lives piecemeal" in the labor market. Typically, when a proletarian seeks employment from a capitalist firm, the firm has substantial funds in reserve while the applicant has no substantial savings, and the firm has less of an interest in hiring this particular applicant than the job-seeker has in landing a job now. So the firm is under less pressure to make a deal. Because firms in a typical local labor market are both under less pressure and vastly less numerous than their potential employees, they are in a better position to collaborate (usually tacitly) in resisting increased wages than proletarians are in resisting decreases. Because of the different relationships of employment change and investment change to personal life, "If you don't like it here, try to get a job elsewhere" threatens in a way that "If you don't like our terms for working, invest elsewhere" does not. The bourgeois can respond to low unemployment with labor-saving devices, while proletarians cannot use technology to reduce their need for employment. For these and other reasons, if people advance themselves solely through capitalist economic transactions, Marx thinks that the typical outcome of the labor market would be a wage no higher than what *capitalists* require — a wage that keeps workers alive, covers costs of training, and makes it possible for workers to raise children to serve as future grist for the capitalist mill.

According to one caricature of Marx, he thought an iron law of reduction to this physical minimum was irresistible, over the long run, unless capitalism was overthrown. In fact, at least in his post-1848 writings, Marx states that workers can often resist this "tendency of things" ([1865], p. 228) and maintain the value of their labor-power through nonrevolutionary collective action transcending market activity, for example, by resorting to trades-union militancy and engaging in political activity leading to economic reforms. According to Marx's labor theory of value, the value of the labor-power used in a working day is the labor time, using currently typical techniques, needed to produce the commodities bought with a day's wage that sustains the current proletarian standard of living. So constancy in value and increasing productivity entail an increase in the commodities that proletarians standardly consume.

Nonetheless, workers' wages will not, over the long run, exceed workers' needs, because needs grow as people perceive growth in what their society can provide. "[L]et a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut" ([1847], p. 84). Because of the enduring advantages of the bourgeois, Marx does not think that proletarians will be able to reduce the economy-wide ratio of surplus-value, i.e., the labor value of capitalists' consumption-goods and means of economic expansion, to the value of labor-power. At best, they will maintain their proportionate share of technological improvements, barely keeping pace with the growth of their needs, determined by "comparison with the state of development of society in general" (*ibid.*, p. 85).

In Marx's view, the conflict between the bourgeois and the proletariat shapes political and cultural institutions, as well as the economy: the most socially impor-

tant features of respectable political and cultural institutions are due to their role in advancing the interests of the bourgeois, despite the frequent conflict of those interests with those of the vast majority. In this sense, the bourgeois is "the ruling class" politically and in the realm of ideas. Yet Marx evades other caricatures by avoiding speculations about vast conspiracies in favor of appeals to such banal sources of bourgeois influence as governments' need to finance the national debt. One aspect of the project of retrieval, then, is to show how Marx's sober specific descriptions of the mechanisms of bourgeois influence could support the flamboyant general metaphors of class rule.

If, under capitalism, nonrevolutionary activity can preserve the value of labor-power, while the state and ideological institutions are instruments of class rule, won't capitalism last forever? Marx, of course, thinks not: the processes constituting any capitalist society inevitably give rise to its destruction, through the increasing misery and increasing unity described in the apocalyptic passage from *Capital*. Capitalist firms plan production on an ever larger scale, mobilize increasingly capital-intensive technology, and find less and less pre-capitalist territory to exploit, coping with consequent obstacles to successful expansion in the absence of a central plan and in the face of an increasingly knowledgeable and coordinated workers' movement. As a result, workers are victimized by increasing and increasingly violent instability — deepening industrial depressions, wars of mounting severity, and the abandonment of parliamentary democracy for unconstrained and brutal repression. Meanwhile, the advances in education and communication that capitalist production requires, and collective resistance that the burdens of capitalist labor promote, create a proletariat that is aware of common class interests, prepared by a growing history of reciprocal aid to make the individual sacrifices required for successful revolution, and capable of efficient democratic control of a modern economy. In one or another crisis, capitalism is replaced by workers' control of production: at first, through a workers' state, mobilizing individual economic incentives, then, when the psychological residues of capitalist life have dwindled and "all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly" ([1875], p. 325), through a noncoercive coordinative apparatus implementing a general willingness to work according to ability and provide according to need.

In justifying this vision, Marx often shows awareness of capitalist realities to which most of his learned contemporaries were blind. But the evidence yielded by the twentieth century made this a highly implausible conception of the trajectory of modern society. Should Marx, then, be treated as a shrewd observer of his time, with some attitudes and observations that are still of interest — a nineteenth-century social observer of the limited stature of Ruskin and Carlyle, who disastrously succeeded, where they fortunately failed, in inspiring successful revolutions? Or is he a social theorist whose falsehoods are mixed with general insights of enduring systematic importance — all the more important now, because they shed light on what capitalist triumphalism obscures?

Exploitation

One source of hope that Marx's legacy might have this larger importance is his insistence that capitalist wage-labor is a burden for reasons that are independent of the suffering described in his grimmest indictments. For example, in his last major work, a critique of the 1875 Gotha Program inaugurating the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany, Marx condemns as "truly outrageous" its appeal to an iron law that wages under capitalism tend to decline to the minimum compatible with physical survival: "the system of wage labor is a system of slavery . . . whether the worker receives better or worse payment" ([1875], p. 329).

Because we are still in an era of production by wage-labor, though not in an era of mounting proletarian misery, such passages have excited much interest. "Exploitation," a word that Marx applies to capitalist wage-labor as such, has become the standard term for posing the central question in this project of retrieval, "What is it about capitalist wage-labor that makes it a form of exploitation?" After examining responses that do not appeal to Marx's other celebrated indictment of capitalist wage-labor, as alienated, I will consider the virtues of integrating these two parts of Marx's legacy.

At a certain abstract yet superficial level, it is clear enough why Marx took capitalist wage-labor to be exploitive. He thought that capitalists took advantage of the inferior bargaining power of proletarians in a way that is objectionable. But a *useful* legacy of Marx's discussion will consist of a specific and plausible description of the nature of the objection. Even though Marx thinks that capitalist wage-labor sometimes, initially, has a "historical justification" by reason of its expansion of productive powers, cooperative tendencies and individual prerogatives, he thinks that other reasons for objecting to the capitalist wage-labor system, justifying the label "exploitation," are always part of the system. What could these inherent reasons be?

Such terms as "subjugation," "force," and "slavery" pervade Marx's descriptions of the wage-labor system, and everyone agrees that they indicate a necessary element in its indictment as exploitive. If someone who is delighted to play basketball twice a week for nothing decides to expand his purchases of luxuries by accepting a local promoter's offer to play for so much per game, the transaction hardly seems exploitive. It is too unforced. But Marx's proletarians are not literally slaves. Nothing forces them to work for one capitalist rather than another, and no person forces them to work at all. Why is their engagement in wage-labor forced?

In his discussions of the forced character of the system of freely contracted labor, Marx says that a proletarian is forced to work for the capitalist class, i.e., for one capitalist or other, though not for any particular capitalist. She is forced to do so by her circumstances in the capitalist labor market, even though no person or group forces her to engage in wage-labor. Admittedly, if the constraining circum-

no objection to the social order. But the absence of control over means of production on the part of the vast majority was created and is sustained by coercive acts. In blazing narratives, Marx describes the role of violent dispossession, imperial conquest and repression in the historical process which ultimately made such circumstances the typical worker's fate. More importantly, he also insists that non-violent capitalist competition, starting with a situation of equal possession, would produce analogous circumstances over time, through the class-differentiation of winners and losers and their descendants. The forced character of capitalist wage-labor essentially depends on the current, politically enforced rules of self-advancement and the limited alternatives to wage-labor that they yield.

If proletarians' only alternative to wage-labor were starvation, few would deny that proletarians are forced by their circumstances to sell the use of their labor-power. But this circumstance is not essential to capitalist exploitation. Despite his flamboyant resort to "work or starve" scenarios, Marx must have been aware that the rural folk flocking to the new factories of the Prussian Rhineland, in his youth, were often escaping a physically tenable but utterly dreary existence as poor peasants.

On the other hand, it would hardly do to characterize the choice of wage-labor as forced just because it is rationally preferable to the alternatives (cf. the basketball player). The other alternatives, in a forced choice of wage-labor, must be, not just rationally dispreferred, but sufficiently bad, posing a choice that one would prefer not to contemplate, even though one might have to, in order to avoid a fate that is even worse. Unlike the basketball player, typical proletarians, in Marx's view, have no real choice because of the badness of the alternatives to wage-labor. Like the prospect of slogging through deep mud that forces a hiker to take the other fork in the road, this badness can fall far short of physical extinction.

Once force is associated with the unacceptability of alternatives to wage-labor, those who seek a currently productive legacy in Marx need to ask whether the alternatives really are so circumscribed. For example, proud owners of thriving small businesses sometimes started out as proletarians, getting where they are by working long hours for little initial reward in the face of large risks of failure. Are workers forced into wage-labor if this escape is available? Cohen (1983) argues that even if each individual proletarian is free for this reason, proletarians as a class are unfree: no large proportion could actually escape by this route, since the consequent undermining of capitalist production would undermine small proprietors, who depend on its flourishing.

Others have insisted that the risks and burdens of the escape routes available to any individual proletarian whose situation is at all typical make them fit for a menu of alternatives constituting forced choice. Also, some (for example, Reiman 1987) take the time required for exit to be compatible with an ascription of forced choice in the meantime.

Any of these specifications of the forced nature of wage-labor could, in principle, be part of a celebration of wage-labor, illuminating its virtues by contrast with the bad alternatives. The dilemma of the "exploitation" charge must be

characterizations of what proletarians actually choose. Of course, it is important that capitalists benefit from the circumstances forcing proletarians to sell them the use of their labor-power. Exploitation involves deriving a benefit from someone on account of a weakness (as Wood, 1995, emphasizes). But another ingredient seems to be required. After all, dentists benefit from others' being forced by toothaches to seek their aid. Yet we do not take them, on this ground, to exploit their patients or their patients' suffering (cf. *ibid.*, p. 136). The nature of this missing ingredient, the objectionable feature of the way in which bargaining weakness forces proletarians to work on terms that benefit capitalists, is the central controversy over Marxian exploitation (a controversy much invigorated by Roemer's thesis (e.g., in Roemer, 1985) that exploitation does not in fact merit normative interest from Marxists).

"Unpaid" labor

According to some, the needed ingredient, in addition to capitalist benefit from workers' bargaining weakness, is provided by Marx's characterization of the benefit itself. A capitalist firm will not last for long unless the wage paid for a working day is worth less than what a worker adds to output in a working day. Marx often characterizes the working day remaining after the worker produces the equivalent of her wage as "unpaid" (though he also often concedes that this usage is not literally correct). Perhaps Marx thought that capitalism was exploitive because "its social structure is organized so that unpaid labor is systematically forced out of one class and put into the disposal of another" (Reiman, 1987, p. 3; see also Holmstrom, 1977).

But is this surplus-extraction sufficient, by itself, to make a social process exploitive? At the start of the *Communist Manifesto*, without a trace of irony, Marx celebrates a heroic era in which capitalism overcomes technological stagnation, geographic isolation, stultifying conformity to tradition, and abject feudal deference. These benefits depend on the extraction of "unpaid" labor, which provides incentives and resources for capitalist improvement of productive powers. In principle, if not in Marx's view of actual history, the benefits could make capitalism the best feasible system, on balance, for workers in a certain phase of a certain society. Marx's quip about well-paid slaves implies that capitalist wage-labor would still count as exploitation. But unless more is said about the process of surplus-extraction, the charge of exploitation seems farfetched.

Granted, if a capitalist and a proletarian employee are typical occupants of their social roles, their incomes will be quite out of proportion to the time that they invest in economic activity. But, as Arneson (1981, pp. 206f) and others have noted, such disproportion need not be a basis for condemning a relationship as exploitive. If healthy workers are taxed to help those who are physically unable to work, the **final will benefit out of proportion to their labor, but this does not seem**

capitalist societies that Marx regards as overcoming exploitation (see [1875], pp. 322f, 325).

Unfairness

If the proletarian disadvantage from which capitalists benefit is an unfair circumstance, then the charge of exploitation is apt. And some, for example, Arneson (1981), have taken the charge that the underlying differences in control of means of production are unfair to be implicit in Marx's critique of capitalist wage-labor. They are well aware that Marx strenuously avoids talk of unfairness in his indictments, even mocks praise of the superior fairness of socialist distribution in the Gotha Program as "ideological nonsense" ([1875], p. 325), but they take these features of his writings to reflect limited, tactical aims, or to represent a false and dispensable part of his legacy.

Even so, Marx's avoidance of fairness-talk in his indictments would be significant for the project of retrieval. He thought he could describe what makes wage-labor exploitive without applying the label "unfair." Those who think that unfairness is part of a valid charge should concede that this more specific description would be his central achievement. For them, it is a description of what makes the capitalist labor market unfair.

Inequality

The disadvantages of proletarians are due to unequal control over means of production. Is this what makes wage-labor exploitive, perhaps because it makes the capitalist labor market unfair? Mere unequal control does not seem sufficient. I rule that the first to farm a plot gets to own it were to benefit all, because of incentives it provides for irrigation and fertilization, the resulting advantage due to unequal control, of first-farmers over newcomers need not be exploitive. Suppose, then, that exploitation is restricted to situations of unequal control which some would be better off in a situation of equality. Then we lack an account of why progressive capitalism can constitute exploitation even if equal control would be so inefficient that everyone loses.

Alienated labor

These difficulties may dictate a more thorough appropriation of Marx's legacy, including the discussions of alienation which occur throughout his life, even though they are most prominent early on.

Marx takes the domination of economic life by capitalism to alienate people from one another and from themselves, and he alienated from one another

above all because the other's neediness, which could be an object of positive concern in a valued relationship, is instead used as a source of tactical advantage ("the means whereby I acquire power over you," [1844a], p. 275) or confronted as a source of resistance to one's own aspirations. The prime example of this estrangement is the capitalist labor market, in which capitalists, if they are to stay in business, must do what they can to take advantage of needs driving people to seek employment (the word "exploit" comes very naturally, here), and to find the response to workers' demands that most enhances their own profits. Because the other's needs are not themselves a source of concern yet express her aspirations to human dignity, Marx characterizes relationships that are wholly determined by the imperatives of the market in a Kantian way, as relationships in which one person "makes use of the other . . . as his means" ([1857-8], p. 243), and the capitalist treats "the real producer as a means of production, material wealth as an end in itself" ([1866], p. 1037).

It is natural to characterize someone as exploiting another's needs when she benefits from them *and* is only sensitive to them as useful information in her promotion of her independent interests. A dentist who charges as much as he can from those driven by pain to seek his services and who avoids preventive advice that will make a patient less lucrative does exploit his patients' suffering. But something more, something more encompassing, is going on in the capitalist-proletarian relationship, which constitutes exploitation of the proletarian, not just exploitation of his neediness. The outcome is the alienation of the worker from himself. Even if the outcome of the proletarian's bargaining weakness is not a life scarcely better than death by starvation, Marx thinks it is (always or almost always) a work-life that is endured as a sacrifice, "not the satisfaction of a need, but a mere means to satisfy needs outside itself" ([1844], p. 326). Such an existence is an option that the worker, if self-respecting, could not embrace as an expression of who he is, as "an activation of his own nature" ([1844], p. 326). Rather, he must be disposed to resist it as not "worthy and appropriate for . . . [his] human nature" ([1894], p. 959).

In part, Marx regards this need not to identify with one's work-life as the worker's alienation from herself, because work-life under capitalism takes up so many of a proletarian's waking hours. But the thesis of self-alienation also reflects an assessment of the value of production. (If Marx thought that only leisure was worthy of enjoyment, he would have regarded all work as alienated.) Like Aristotle (see Miller, 1981), Marx thinks that the molding of one's environment according to one's imaginatively formulated plans, guided by one's aspirations, is fundamental to a worthwhile human life. Circumstances that make someone's productive activity unworthy of her enjoyment make it impossible for her life as a whole to be an adequate expression of her humanity.

This verdict does not depend on the proletarian's enduring the mind-numbing drudgery described in the most heartrending passages in *Capital*. But it does depend on the *features of work-life under capitalism that Marx sometimes*

inevitably results from its "formal rationality," the control of the labor-process by the bourgeoisie. In pursuit of discipline, coordination and efficient use of technology, capitalist firms will so structure proletarian work that proletarians are ordered around in activities that do not merit much interest, permit much initiative or mobilize a broad range of human capacities.

Suppose that in capitalist production those with significant control over the means of production benefit from bargaining disadvantages that others are forced to endure, to which they are responsive as tactical advantages to be used or sources of discontent whose cost is to be minimized. That a relationship is characterized by this alienated response to others' imposed weakness does seem a reason (which is not to say a conclusive reason) to object to it, and does seem a basis for regarding the relationship as exploitive. Suppose, in addition, that the outcome for the weaker party is forced acceptance of certain terms for living that are not fully worthy of a human being, and that the stronger party benefits from the imposition of these terms. Then one might naturally say that the stronger party exploits the weaker party. So perhaps Marx's theory of exploitation and his theory of alienation are continuous. Capitalist wage-labor is a form of exploitation because capitalists benefit, in an alienated way, from socially imposed weaknesses in others, benefiting from the capacity to impose work-lives on them that alienate those others from themselves.²

Many, probably most wage-earners in any modern capitalist economy could see themselves as the exploited in this portrait. But the vast majority of them think that further gains from this form of production, including gains derived from added efficiency, make some form of capitalism better for working people than any non-capitalist alternative. Suppose that they are right. Does the view that capitalist wage-labor exploits workers still have a bearing on modern political choice? It does if one takes seriously the forced and alienated character of capitalist exploitation.

According to one familiar perspective on political choice, government interference with individuals' efforts to retain the full benefits of capitalist self-advancement is a troubling interference with freedom, justifiable, if at all, by the need to take account of other values, such as economic equality. But if a complaint of exploitation is a complaint of being forced to have a work-life with which one cannot self-respectfully identify because it does not enjoyably exercise a reasonably wide range of valuable human capacities, then it is a complaint of unfreedom. If taxation or restrictions of freedom of contract are feasible ways of mitigating or compensating in response to exploitation, then these measures would often express a proper valuing of freedom. To adapt an example of Raz's (1986, p. 374): a woman who must spend eight hours a day devoting her energies to evading a tiger is significantly unfree. If the Island Council can help her by requiring someone to cage his pet, they need not be troubled by the thought that freedom has been reduced to promote another good.

In addition to its challenge to restricted understandings of freedom characteristic of libertarian political philosophy, the alternative theory of exploitation also ca-

doubt on forms of liberal egalitarianism in which the ultimate perspective of equality avoids reliance on a ranking of ways of life. Liberals count equal freedom as a specially important aspect of equality, and, for reasons just noted, this seems to make complaints of exploitation serious, the more serious the greater the degree of exploitation. These degrees correspond to differences in alienation due to the "real subsumption of labor" and differences in the difficulty of escape routes on the menu of alternatives, as well as to differences in the ratio of "unpaid" to "paid" labor. Yet mitigation of the distinctive burdens of those whose exploitation is relatively intense may produce a reduction in their net income, the "all purpose resource" favored by liberal neutralists in their judgments of economic justice. For example, this trade-off is posed by costly restrictions on prerogatives to fire employees and by public funding of access to cultural resources that facilitate the enjoyment of a broad range of capacities but do not add to income. At such junctures, it is hard to see how neutrality among ways of life can be observed if complaints of exploitation are given appropriate weight. But it is also hard to see how the dismissal of these complaints in the name of neutrality could be reconciled with the liberal valuation of freedom.

Finally, if the Marxist critique of exploitation is valid, the emphasis on equality of life-chances in current liberal politics as well as liberal-egalitarian political philosophy is one-sided. The fundamental project of economic justice is often envisaged as the elimination of unjustified disadvantages in "starting places" at birth (Rawls, 1971, p. 7). Certainly, those who are sympathetic to Marx will share the concern with the lower prospects of economic success of those whose parents or communities have not fared well in capitalist competition. But sensitivity to harms of exploitation can support strong criticism of the structure of economic success and failure, which is independent of inequality in life-chances. Suppose (probably *per impossible*) that a reasonably efficient capitalist society could so arrange education and initial economic resources that everyone has an equal initial chance of winding up on top. If, nonetheless, some, inevitably, spend significant parts of their lives being severely exploited, those sympathetic to Marx will discern an objectionable form of inequality. As usual, they extend routine democratic attitudes toward politics into the economic realm: an enduring regime of tyranny is not much improved if a lottery system gives everyone an equal initial chance to be a tyrant.

The State and Capitalism

Those who have lost hope in Marx's vision of post-capitalist society while sympathizing with his accounts of harms generated by capitalism will look to government action to reduce those harms. So they need to assess Marx's further view that the bourgeoisie is the political ruling class under capitalism.

"[T]he bourgeoisie has won its own state, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie" ([1848], p. 37). "[T]he State power which nascent middle-class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of their own emancipation from feudalism . . . full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labour by capital" ([1871], p. 290). What can Marx have meant by these claims? They seem to announce far-flung conspiracies uniting the leaders of politics and commerce, yet Marx engages in no such speculation, and, indeed, makes the second claim right after noting the blithe disengagement of businesspeople from political activity under Louis-Napoleon.

Three general claims are jointly summed up in the blazing metaphors of class rule:

1 *Government actions serve the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole, even if those interests conflict with those of the rest of society.* This is not to deny that shifts in government policy may satisfy or forestall proletarian demands whose existence is not in the interest of the bourgeoisie. Since the bourgeoisie have an important (though not an all-important) interest in acquiescence and stability, such accommodation may be essential to their long-term interests as a whole. Still, at least in a mature capitalist society, Marx thinks that all shifts in policy that, taken in isolation, impose significant costs on the bourgeois function as prudent tactical retreats from disruption or the threat of disruption – prudent, that is, from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie.

2 *This bias in interests served is sustained by mechanisms that are part of the social context of political choice, sufficient mechanisms which will exist, in one form or other, so long as capitalism endures.* In particular, in describing ties between government action and bourgeois interests in stable parliamentary democracies, Marx ascribes the pattern of choice on the part of successful elected officials to underlying relations of economic power rather than bribery or conspiracy. The approval of bourgeois-controlled media is a centrally important resource for electoral success. Elected officials rely on the bourgeoisie to finance the national debt. Those at the top of political hierarchies are isolated from the lives and problems of most people, and drawn into the cultural milieu and interpersonal networks of those at the top of economic hierarchies. (For this reason, Marx celebrates the Paris Commune's restriction of officials' salaries to no more than a skilled worker's wage as part of what made it "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour" ([1871], p. 294).) Many people outside of the bourgeoisie falsely identify their own interests because of bourgeois control of media and other "means of intellectual production" or because their social situation spontaneously gives rise to false hopes and distorted beliefs, such as the hopes leading small farmers to align themselves with business interests that will ultimately destroy them, or the retreat of the oppressed into faith in heavenly redemption.

3 *If a social movement throws to end the bourgeois interests, the old connection between class and government will be defeated through violence which mobilizes residual bourgeois political resources, violence which can only be defeated by organized counter-violence, rooted, in part, in non-electoral activity.* Even within the bounds of apt metaphor, the state would not be a means for the enslavement of labor if bourgeois dominance of society could be ended by legally protected electoral activity. Marx thought that a bourgeois confronted with this prospect would either successfully promote a regime of direct and violent repression, such as Louis-Napoleon's, or, at a minimum, support a "pro-slavery rebellion" against an elected working-class government (see Engels' Preface to the English edition of *Capital*, volume 1 (Marx, [1867], p. 113)). If the latter regime could be defended, this would be because of resistance led by proletarians, taking advantage of extensive experience of non-electoral conflicts in which workers had confronted capitalist firms and prior, pro-capitalist regimes.³

It is, to put it mildly, hard to tell whether reforms benefiting workers at direct cost to capitalists are best explained as the result of social mechanisms making government action sensitive to long-term bourgeois interests including interests in acquiescence, or as the result of the independent power of the exercise of democratic rights, a process that is capable of producing departures from the long-term interests of the bourgeoisie. In the absence of a compelling argument that the bourgeoisie (alias big business) is more than an exceptionally influential interest group, what could be the value of this part of Marx's legacy?

One currently quite plausible feature of Marx's theory of the capitalist state is his view that the existence of mechanisms insuring that state action will be importantly biased toward the interests of the bourgeoisie is an inevitable feature of capitalism. Suppose that private campaign contributions are illegal and everyone has the means to form political opinions through intelligent, sufficiently leisureed reading of the most informative nonspecialized media. Still, managers and professionals at the top of the capitalist economic division of labor, who tend, for obvious reasons, to over-identify the interests of the bourgeoisie with the interests of society as a whole, will have knowledge, skills and networks of acquaintance that make them especially likely to be recruited to positions of political power or to offer influential advice. Resource allocation will still be dominated by a stock market driven by the lust for returns of self-interested investors, so that political leaders must take care to avoid creating anxiety among investors about their returns. Marx and his critics agree that such underlying sources of bias toward the bourgeoisie could not be eliminated without destroying requirements of reasonable efficiency in capitalist production. Moreover, capitalist ownership of media gives rise to disproportionate influence over public opinion, which (even apart from the dangers of stifling domination) per se, given the value of state ownership would hardly remove, given bourgeois influence on the state.

A common and plausible view, which I will sometimes call "the post-Marxist synthesis," combines the core of Marx's theory of the capitalist state with two other elements. First, even if the conflict between the interests of the bourgeoisie and the interests of most working people is not as severe as Marx supposed, there are often serious conflicts between the interests of the bourgeoisie and measures reducing burdens of life under capitalism in desirable ways, through feasible reductions in the degree of exploitation, unemployment, inferiority in economic opportunity, and inequalities that push minorities to the margins of civil life. Because such measures add to costs of production, make work discipline harder to achieve, or make it harder for those in or allied with the bourgeoisie to maintain their personal wealth and status and pass them on to their children, the structural political power of the bourgeoisie will seriously limit responsiveness to disadvantage. The other element in the post-Marxist synthesis is the quite non-Marxist view that some form of capitalism is better, for all, than any form of non-capitalism.

This mixture has an important bearing on views of legitimacy and loyalty in the mainstream of political thought. Like the positions that Marx criticized from a more radical perspective, these views (if the post-Marxist synthesis is right) exaggerate the importance of purely political processes through neglect of inequalities of economic power. Ironically, these criticisms are more powerful because of the concession that some form of capitalism is best.

To begin with, the post-Marxist synthesis is a challenge to political liberalism, the most important explicit affirmation, in current political philosophy, of the primacy of the purely political (see Rawls, 1993). According to political liberalism, citizens of a democracy should strive to resolve questions of basic justice including basic economic justice, through principled, mutually attentive deliberations establishing a broad consensus concerning the proper interpretation of principles of political liberal values, such as civil liberty and equal citizenship. This restriction to consensus based on liberal political values assessed in the forum of public reason is not arbitrary, political liberals say, because it is required to reconcile the inevitable coerciveness of political choice with the mutual respect that citizens owe to one another.

However, if the post-Marxist synthesis is right, political choice constrained by political liberalism will, in important cases, be incompatible with respect for fellow citizens. Suppose that those who are exploited have a serious complaint against the laws and policies that make exploitation such as theirs inevitable, the more serious the higher the degree of exploitation. (Virtually all political liberals accept this, as they should, given the implications of their attitude toward coercion.) Can one have respect for the exploited with insistence that a political response to their complaints take place through certain channels, only if this political process is not biased against them. But, according to the residue of Marx's ruling-class thesis, the process of consensus formation through principled discussion is biased against the exploited in any capitalist society. If, in response, the political liberal protests that the intended forum of public reason excludes such systematic

tion, then the thesis of the superiority of some form of capitalism comes into play: the constraint restricted to unbiased processes applies to no society which ought to be promoted.

Those who reject political liberalism on these grounds can still insist that coercion of those who protest out of conscientious adherence to principles is always a serious cost, especially if the protest is grounded on an interpretation of liberal values. But they will take such costs to be justifiable in systematically important cases. Because of their view of the dynamics of social change, they will be especially concerned to allow that non-officials in a constitutional democracy may sometimes advance their political programs by coercive means even as reasonable discourse continues. The sitdown strikers of the 1930s in the United States, Canada, Sweden and elsewhere did not wait for a consensus on the meaning of equal citizenship and civil and political liberties to develop and to sustain their aspirations by appropriate legislation. If they had waited, this consensus might never have emerged.

Political liberalism is one special way of further developing an assumption about political legitimacy that is much more widely shared: any morally responsible citizen should help to achieve a polity whose legislation ought to be upheld, by each citizen, even if she regards it as unwise or unjust, because of the political process that produced it and the overall division of benefits and burdens that this process sustains; this support for each outcome of the whole process may, of course, include efforts to change the law, but each citizen should have grounds for regarding it as everyone's duty to help implement the law until it is changed. Whether or not they are political liberals, many political theorists regard this as a feasible goal, so that it is at least an open question whether current societies have attained it. Even if they take the answer to be "no," many are inclined to suppose that current democracies have come close enough that the disobedient should, at the very least, honor the political process as a whole by disobeying symbolically and publicly, and willingly submitting to punishment. But the ideal is utopian from the standpoint of the post-Marxist synthesis.

The actual consent of all will not be forthcoming as a basis for the general duty of political commitment. In any case, consent can be irrelevant because of the pressures that create it. For these and other reasons, the most likely basis for the duty of political commitment is a condition which, apart from consent, makes it wrong for someone not to uphold the outcomes of a collective process. Plausible descriptions of such circumstances incorporate requirements of fair treatment, as in the claim that it is wrong to disobey rules governing a collective process if one has benefited from general conformity and if the benefits and burdens of the process are fairly shared. But at least if the collective process dominates one's whole life, as the process of government does, it is essential that this fair sharing involve adequate equality in responsiveness to one's needs, interests and desires as compared to others'. Given the threat of destructive chaos, Ivan the Terrible's autocracy may have been by far the best feasible regime from the standpoint of fairness, but they

counted for so much less than others. **any for some citizens of any modern state, according to the post-Marxist synthesis; any feasible and desirable political arrangement is too systematically biased in favor of others' interests for these citizens to have a comprehensive, overriding duty to uphold its outcomes because of the kind of polity it is. They might still conform on humanitarian grounds, because of harmful consequences of nonconformity, but not because the nature of the political process makes disobedience wrong.**

In addition to these doubts about political legitimacy, Marx's legacy yields a cosmopolitan reassessment of patriotic loyalties. Marx himself scornfully rejects such loyalties. "The workingmen have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got" ([1848], p. 51). In its full extent, this radical cosmopolitanism depends on views of the destructiveness of rule by the local bourgeoisie and of the international proletarian interest in world revolution that now seem outmoded. The post-Marxist synthesis does leave some room for duties of special concern for compatriots that bind proletarians. In a modern democracy – most post-Marxists would accept – everyone benefits from the general preference for principled persuasion and support for democratic rights and civil liberties. A proper valuing of this civic respect can require special loyalty to its source, one's fellow-citizens, analogous to the special loyalties of friendship. Also, ongoing active political participation in capitalist democracy is a duty, in the post-Marxist synthesis, and there is a special obligation to mitigate burdens of disadvantage created by a process of political coercion in which one actively participates.

Still, Marx's legacy adds considerable weight to cosmopolitan considerations extending them far beyond ordinary humanitarian concerns, on account of current international economic relations. The critique of exploitation cannot stop at the borders: because people in countries with high per-capita income benefit from the especially intense international exploitation of people in poor countries, they have a special obligation to help them. A proper valuing of nonalienated relationships in which others' needs are a source of positive concern, entails a commitment to change a world economy in which the needs of those in poor countries are exploited (and, sometimes, created) as sources of tactical advantage in a process that is facilitated by international institutions. Finally, if (as post-Marxists think) inequalities of bargaining power based on the mobility of capital and the capacity of capitalist firms to shift productive tasks elsewhere still dominate workers' lives, the growth of international ties among workers and their allies is a central means of reducing exploitation.

Morality and Social Interests

In addition to many discussions of capitalism that have normative implications, Marx occasionally directly confronts general moral perspectives. His arguments against these particular perspectives are **light on brief, shocking, un-** **guessed gibes in which Marx sees**

Marx's criticisms of large normative perspectives are typically arguments that this or that consideration of equality is not decisive. Certainly, he has only scorn or pity for those who would make mere equality of well-being the overriding social standard, so that leveling downward would be an advance. What is more surprising is the ferocious attack on appeals to equal rights that he launches in response to the Gotha Program's call for "a fair distribution of the proceeds of labour," ending in his condemnation of this passage for perverting the realistic outlook which German socialist workers had gained with "ideological nonsense about rights and other trash so common among the democrats and French socialists" ([1875], p. 325). For Marx's own strategic goals are naturally characterized in terms of rights. For example, in his critique of the Gotha Program, he proposes that the first stage of socialism would implement an equal right of all able-bodied adults to gainful employment and to reward in proportion to labor time and skill. At a higher stage, in communist society, each has a right to be provided for according to his or her need, from the social output to which all have a duty to contribute according to ability.

Still, Marx insists that every right "is a right of inequality" (ibid., p. 324). He seems to have in mind that every right definite enough to regulate social cooperation will favor some people's interests or goals over others' in ways that violate a rival principle of right that also merits consideration; no super-principle of equal right is broad and powerful enough to provide a satisfactory rights-based adjudication of all such conflicts among social rights. His prime example is the neglect of the needs of relatively frail workers or those with many dependants at the first stage of socialism, in comparison with the later standard of provision according to need. But analogous comparisons of capitalist rights with socialist rights are also apt (if out of tune with a socialist manifesto such as the Gotha Program). The first stage of socialism that Marx describes prevents self-denying entrepreneurial strivers from establishing capitalist enterprises, and this violation of the right to peaceful self-advancement through voluntary agreement merits a non-question-begging justification — one which (Marx implies) cannot rest on an appeal to rights.⁴

Utilitarian impartiality

In denying that all politically important conflicts among rights can be adequately adjudicated by appeal to a further, deeper right, Marx agrees with utilitarianism.⁵ Yet Marx's discussions of utilitarianism drip with contempt for what he sees as crass neglect of the diversity of human experiences and relationships. Jeremy Bentham is mocked as "a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity," who takes what is useful to the modern English shopkeeper to be absolutely useful ([1867], p. 759). Reflecting the subordination of all relationships to the shopkeeper's narrow interest mon-

etary-commercial system" in bourgeois society, utilitarianism is said to commit the manifest "stupidity of regarding all the manifold relationships of people in the one relationship of usefulness" ([1845-6], p. 409).

In these acid discussions (especially ibid., pp. 409-19), Marx seems to criticize utilitarianism for a failure to cope with the diversity of competing forms of happiness, which parallels the failure of rights-based morality to cope with conflicting standards of equal right. If utilitarianism measures overall well-being solely by the extent and intensity of pleasurable feelings, then, despite its claim to impartiality, it is arbitrarily biased against most people's life-goals, which are not crude hedonistic, and is fated to rate relationships solely by their pleasurable payoffs, so that, for example, a relationship grounded on successful mutual shameless flattery is worth no less than a relationship of mutual respect and concern. On the other hand, a Millian proposal to employ the rankings of kinds of experiences to which all would agree if they had the relevant experiences must confront relationship between forms of enjoyment and social situations that Marx repeatedly emphasizes. Different social experiences give rise to different rankings of competing forms of enjoyment, such as the zest of competition versus the warmth of mutual support, pleasures of material consumption versus pleasures of materially modest leisure, enjoyment of the pursuit of enormous income, with some prospect of success, versus enjoyment of the security of a guaranteed modest minimum without the possibility of enormous income. In a class-divided society, the differences in dispositions to enjoy are sufficiently rigid that further experience of alternative ways of life would not produce a unanimous ranking, uniting, for example, industrial workers, maids, investment bankers, commodity brokers, farmers and shopkeepers.

Admittedly, if Marx were right about the consequences of modern capitalism and the socialist alternative, the joint verdicts on kinds of enjoyment would determinate enough to dictate the choice of socialism on utilitarian grounds, since capitalism would expose many more people to forms of suffering and premature death which are dire fates in any ranking. Still, a class-neutral standard would be an inadequate guide to evaluations which might be crucial at other junctures, such as policy-choice in the first stage of socialism, and which would sometimes be crucial in a post-Marxist view of current social facts.

Forms and limits of morality

In the *Manifesto*, responding to an imagined protest that "Communism abolishes all morality, instead of constituting [it] . . . on a new basis," Marx blithely notes that "it is no wonder" that such a radical revolution "involves the most radical rupture with traditional ideas" ([1848], p. 52). In *The German Ideology*, his criticisms of utilitarianism end with the broadly anti-moral declaration that communism "has shattered the basis of all morality, whether the morality of asceticism of enjoyment" ([1845-6], p. 419). The *Manifesto* and Marx really intend to re-

that partiality does not intrude. But there is often no such evidence of the innocence of one's response to a controversial principle of social choice. If one's distinctive moral inclinations correspond to the interests of those in one's social situation (a tendency from which intellectuals are hardly exempt), there may be no adequate assurance that those inclinations do not essentially depend on those partial interests. Even when inclinations depart from social background, as in Marx's case, they may simply reflect the forces that give a temperament its distinctive cast (in Marx's case, a cast of defiance).

It might seem that equal respect would still require striving to free oneself from partial interests, even though one's best effort may very well be inadequate. But Marx's theory of ideology suggests that this effort is not a means of moving closer to a determinate perspective of equal respect, for most people when they reflect on fundamental questions of social choice. What *does* determine choice if one has broken the hold of one's special interests and inclinations? Presumably, the moral milieu in which one has grown up. But where social choice is concerned (Marx argues), this milieu reflects a process of reconciling social stability with the dominance of an economic elite. If this is true to a significant extent, then detachment from their special interests by those outside of the elite will not be a route to equal respect, even though attachment to those interests poses its own threats of callousness, intolerance and envy.⁷

Given Marx's empirical beliefs, this indeterminacy might not affect the choice of socialism over capitalism, because of the differences between these alternatives on all dimensions of concern to those who are striving, however diversely, to show equal respect for all. Still, given the dangers, uncertain prospects and speculative goals of any particular socialist revolutionary initiative, orthodox Marxists wondering whether to call workers to the barricades may well have found it impossible to resolve the question on the basis of impartialist morality. In any case, nowadays, in the absence of old empirical convictions, the diversity of specifications of respect, justice and well-being may make the sphere of indeterminacy quite extensive in the choice of whether and how to intervene to change market-based economic fates.

Suppose that there are spheres of political choice, too fundamental to be grounded on the rule: "Whatever the majority favors is, by that token, the right choice," in which no partisan is in a position to claim that her choice is a dictate of equal respect for all. Does it follow that partisans must give up the project of reconciling their activity with equal respect for all, regarding it as a constraint only appropriate to a future, more harmonious society? No, for what impartial morality does not require, impartial morality may (or may not) permit. When I do not have a warrant for regarding my construal of equal respect as uniquely compelling, I may still be warranted in supposing that my reasons for seeking to impose my alternative are sufficiently serious to make my political activity respectful of everyone's interests, in light of the costs imposed by others' alternatives. The reduction of exploitation, poverty and marginalization could be sufficiently serious reasons. So an heir of Marx's legacy in moral epistemology would be concerned to

reconcile her political commitments as *forms of impartial morality*, even if she does not regard all these commitments as *forms of impartial morality*. Morality in the first, broad sense fills the gaps left by morality in the second, impartialist sense.⁸

Of course, what counts as a sufficiently serious justification depends on empirical scrutiny of likely gains and losses. And here, the post-Marxist social democrat often faces a peaceful analogue of the Marxist revolutionary's quandary. In many cases, she lacks reasons for confidence that a costly initiative in helping the poor or exploited or marginalized will be effective. Given those costs (as well as possible harms to the intended beneficiaries), it would be self-indulgent to appeal to her fine goals. But perhaps oldtime Marxism has something to contribute. Marxists who chose militance or revolution in the name of socialism were aware that harm was certain and success was not on the current occasion. But they also thought that their ultimate goal of human liberation could not be attained unless people in circumstances of uncertain success took initiatives that impartial morality did not require. Similarly, a post-Marxist who is uncertain whether a particular attempt to reduce burdens of capitalism would succeed may have adequate reason to believe that the long-term project of reducing these burdens is doomed in the absence of a political movement that produces such attempts and learns from their failures as well as their successes. Despite its now all-too-evident dangers, perhaps the old talk of historical mission still has a use in justifying engagement in political movements that impose risks and costs and do not merely implement requirements of impartial morality.

Notes

- 1 Marx also uses less pretentious terms for the key groups, such as "the workers" for the proletariat, when the reference is clear, and so will I. Further specification of this general conception of capitalist relations of production would clarify the crucial ascriptions of control, distinguish different sources of power or vulnerability within the two classes, and characterize other classes in capitalist societies. Wright (1997) presents an influential effort to develop specifications that provide a framework for explaining current social phenomena.
- 2 Earlier forms of surplus-extraction, such as slavery and serfdom, also have these features, and are forms of exploitation – though, here, the direct coercion through which the stronger force the weaker to work for them is probably enough to justify the label.
- 3 Avineri (1970), Moore (1975) and others either have denied that organized political violence was ever essential to the establishment of socialism in Marx's view or have taken him to have departed from this judgment after the failure of the revolutions of 1848. This is hard to reconcile with his enduring emphasis on the actively pro-capitalist role of the state under capitalism and with such late texts as *The Civil War in France*.
- 4 Breukert (1983) argues that Marx relied on a morality of freedom, but such a morality similarly confronts conflicts among different people's freedoms and different kinds of freedom.

- 5 Indeed, Allen (1973) and others have argued that Marx implicitly relied on some form of utilitarianism. However, Marx's explicit criticisms of utilitarianism turn out to cut deep.
- 6 Olson (1965), who first noted the public-goods problem, took it to undermine Marx's account of revolutionary motivation. Buchanan (1979) argues that Olson's challenge has not yet been answered. My sketch of an answer is along the lines of Holmstrom (1983) and of Miller (1984); which also further develops the Marxist critiques of moralities and morality in this essay and the analysis of Marx's theory of the state).
- 7 Brudney (1998) discusses Marx's concern with social barriers to moral justification, in the 1840s.
- 8 Arguably, specific kinds of moral judgments, such as judgments of justice, might, nonetheless, be excluded, where impartiality is unavailable, because they intrinsically appeal to dictates of moral impartiality. The case of justice has been specially significant in controversies over Marx and morality because of the stimulus of Wood's argument (1972) that Marx regarded justice as a non-normative property, involving conformity to stabilizing social rules.

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