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Allen E. Buchanan

THE REHABILITATION OF MARX AS PHILOSOPHER

Only fifteen years ago the works of Marx received scant attention and even less respect from the analytic mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy. In part this was simply one facet of the near dormant condition of analytic political philosophy in general, but even in the latter narrow and unprestigious field the study of Marx was underrepresented. Since the publication in 1972 of Allen Wood's seminal essay "The Marxian Critique of Justice," there has been an extraordinary spate of philosophical articles and books dealing with Marx. Marx scholarship has now come to occupy a prominent place in the general renaissance of political philosophy in English-speaking countries.

The time is ripe to take stock of this remarkable turnabout. In this essay I offer a critical overview of what I take to be some of the most important developments in recent work on Marx by Anglo-American analytic philosophers. No attempt is made to canvass the whole of the recent literature. Some valuable contributions that would have to be discussed in a comprehensive survey will not even be mentioned here. Instead, my aim is to focus critical attention on the interconnections between what I take to be the most significant results of two central areas of contemporary Marx scholarship. The first is the explication and assessment of the fundamental theses of Marx's philosophy of history and the historical materialist model for explaining large-scale social change which they constitute. The second is the question of whether moral concepts play a significant role in Marx's criticism of capitalism, his characterization of the superiority of socialism and communism, and his explanation of the motivational component of successful revolutionary action by the proletariat. Although the investigation is thus highly selective, the results not only illuminate work of the recent past but also provide guidance for future productive scholarship.
MARX'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

History and Progress

It has been a perennial criticism that formulations of Marx's philosophy of history are either (1) clear but clearly false ("technology alone determines history"), (2) so vague as to be neither confirmable nor disconfirmable by empirical social science ("material conditions are ultimately—or in the final analysis—fundamental in social change"), or (3) so complex, hedged, and qualified that they have extremely limited fields of application or do not form a distinctive mode of explanation ("the mode of production is primary in explaining social change, but 'mode of production' is a complex and flexible notion subsuming not only technology but also work relations, other elements of the economic structure, and even political institutions, depending upon the context").

However, in 1978 G. A. Cohen's penetrating book, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, launched a new, more rigorous era in the study of historical materialism. Unwilling to leave the Marxist philosophy of history in the dubious shelter of vagueness, but equally convinced that attempts to hedge and qualify it rob the theory of its distinctive value, Cohen framed a lucid and simple statement of its key constituents, but one with sufficient empirical content to render it subject to confirmation or disconfirmation. His achievement was twofold. First, he provided clear, demystified formulations of the two most important theses of Marx's theory of history, the Primacy Thesis and the Development Thesis.

**The Primacy Thesis:** The productive forces are the primary explanatory factor in accounting for both large-scale social change and the stability of social structures. [G. A. Cohen 1978, pp. 134–80]

More precisely, what explains the change from one social structure to another is that the change enhances the productive forces; similarly, a social structure remains stable because, and only so far as, it provides the best framework currently feasible for the further development of the productive forces.

**The Development Thesis:** The productive forces develop in history, with less productive social structures being replaced by more productive ones. [G. A. Cohen 1978, pp. 25–27, 55–57]

Second, Cohen employed the notion of functional explanation to show how the primacy of the productive forces is compatible with the fact—clearly recognized in Marx's own historical writings—that elements of the economic and political superstructure act causally upon the forces of production. The attraction of Cohen's functionalist interpretation is that it allows causal influence from the explanandum to the explanans. Indeed, functionalism requires such causal influence. According to the functionalist explanatory model, the productive forces are explanatorily primary in the sense that the economic structure and superstructure
have the character they do because their having that character contributes (causally) to the expansion of the productive forces or the consolidation of past expansions. Similarly, the standard evolutionary explanation of changes in coloration in a species is also functionalist: changes in coloration are explained by their tendency to enhance survival. But note that this does not imply that increased probability of survival causes changes in coloration. On the contrary, the changes in question contribute (causally) to the enhancement of survival prospects.

Objections to the functionalist version of historical materialism emerged rapidly. On the one hand, it was noted that the Development Thesis is disconfirmed by several important historical cases, including the rise of European feudalism, in which the change from one social order to another was not marked by an increase in productivity, and that some social orders, especially in Asia prior to Western incursions, have remained stable for extended periods even though more productive alternatives were feasible (J. Cohen 1982, pp. 266–70). Thus far the criticism was hardly novel. Both the retrograde productivity of European feudalism and the stagnation of "the unchanging East" have been sources of embarrassment for historical materialism since Marx's time.

On the other hand, several writers went beyond this empirical objection to criticize the functionalist model of explanation in ways which threaten to undermine not only the Development Thesis but the Primacy Thesis as well. These objections begin with the apparent incompleteness of functionalist explanations. The problem is that, even if one initially accepts the functionalist explanation of why changes in the economic structure and superstructure occur (namely, because such changes facilitate growth of the productive forces), it is natural to expect in addition an explanation of how these changes come about. Functional explanations themselves are silent on the "how" question (Buchanan 1983; Elster 1980, 1986, pp. 28–29).

A plausible suggestion is that the missing piece typically will be an invisible hand explanation—an explanation that shows how a group of individuals, each pursuing his or her own particular interests, interacts so as to produce some state of affairs which was not the purpose of any of them. A sketch of such an explanation for a case of historical change, with which Marx was much concerned, might run as follows.

The landlord in sixteenth century England finds it more profitable to raise sheep than to have his tenants raise crops, so he drives his tenants from the land, replaces them with sheep, and encloses his fields. His aim is not to increase society's productive forces. Yet when a sufficient number of landlords—members of his class—act in the same way, the result is a displacement of former agricultural workers, the creation of a class of rootless individuals who, as wage-workers in the new manufacturing establishments in the towns, will help augment the productive forces of society. [Buchanan 1983, p. 426]
For most of Marx's historical explanations the invisible hand model seems appropriate since, throughout most of history, he believes, people have not even been aware of the direction of social change, much less aimed at it. But he also held that at a certain point in history—indeed, during his own lifetime—the path of historical change becomes discernible to the principal agents of change, the proletariat. At that point they will, he believed, act collectively with the conscious aim of creating a new, more productive social order. Consequently, it is more accurate to frame the first theoretical objection to functionalist historical materialism as follows. Functionalist explanations are incomplete: an account is needed to explain how rational-purposive interactions of individuals result in economic and superstructural changes that serve to enhance productivity. The needed rational-purposive explanation will either be (1) a deliberate collective action explanation or (2) an invisible hand explanation (or a combination of both), depending on whether the individuals in question act together with the purpose of attaining that state of affairs that is to be explained.

At this point, the full force of an objection to functionalist historical materialism advanced by Joshua Cohen (1982, pp. 264–65) becomes clearer. He argues that, because of potential coordination problems, the interactions of individuals pursuing their interests may or may not in the aggregate result in a growth of the productive forces. Whether the needed coordination will obtain depends upon the character of the concrete sociopolitical structure within which these individuals' actions take place. A specific instance will clarify this general problem. Whether the pursuit of individual interest through voluntary exchange will result in increased productive efficiency depends upon specific features of the particular sociopolitical structure in which the exchanges occur. The required structure includes stable property rights and other elements that are conditions for a competitive market. This example is not chosen at random. It is a poignant irony that Marx, who is credited with exposing the prevalent error of overgeneralizing truths about one's own particular society to all societies, should have ascribed to human history what may turn out to be the unique productive expansiveness of the competitive market society in which he lived (J. Cohen 1982, p. 271; Gray 1983, p. 1460).

The stability of relatively unproductive social orders, such as feudalism, can now be explained. Sometimes the existing sociopolitical structure has what it takes to coordinate the pursuit of individual interest in such a way that greater productivity results; in other cases it does not. In general there is no a priori reason to assume that the pursuit of individual interest will result in productive growth, whether in the short or the long run. As will become clear shortly, this holds true both for cases in which individuals interact while each pursues only his or her own interests and for cases in which individuals deliberately act together in the pursuit of a collective good.

The coordination objection has implications for both the Primacy Thesis and the Development Thesis. These will be considered in turn.
If appropriate sociopolitical institutions are a necessary condition for agents' interactions to be coordinated in such a way as to produce changes in the economic and political superstructure that enhance productivity, then there seems to be no justification for saying that the productive forces are explanatorily primary. The coordinating institutions and the rational-purposive behavior of individuals seem no less fundamental as explanatory factors.

To this a defender of the Primacy Thesis might reply that the rational-purposive explanations in question are themselves incomplete unless reference is made to the available level and type of productive forces. For it is the latter that shape the opportunities available to individuals.

This reply, however, does not show that the productive forces are explanatorily primary. At best it shows that among the constraints within which rational-purposive actions occur are included not only the coordinating resources of sociopolitical institutions but also the existing forces of production. There is as yet no reason to accord primacy to one of these types of constraints rather than the other since reference to each is a necessary component of the explanation. Further, once the role of rational-purposive explanations in explaining social change is appreciated, it is plausible to include individual utility-maximizing behavior among the "primary" explanatory factors. A plausible attempt to complete functionalist explanations by appeal to rational-purposive explanations (whether of the invisible hand or the deliberate collective action variety), then, appears to undercut the Primacy Thesis.

The next step of the argument undermines the Development Thesis as well by placing the functionalist-technological determinist on the horns of a dilemma: either (1) he must acknowledge the coordination problem and renounce the grand thesis that the productive forces inevitably develop in history, or (2) he must give some good reason why the coordination problem will generally be solved, at least in the long run. There seem to be only three strategies available for the Marxist who grasps the second horn of the dilemma. First, the functionalist might contend that any serious coordination problems will be overcome because sociopolitical institutions will have those characteristics that promote productive growth. This response, as Joshua Cohen (1982, p. 265) has observed, is obviously inadequate since it only restates the functionalist thesis, thus begging the question. Second, the functionalist may simply appeal to history—but as we have already seen, the historical record does not support the empirical generalization that less productive social orders evolve into more productive ones.

The third strategy, advanced by G. A. Cohen, is to fill the coordination gap in functionalism by appealing to an allegedly fundamentally generalization about human beings, which I shall call

**The Practical Rationality Thesis (PR):** Human beings are practically rational at least in the sense that they have sufficient
intelligence and motivation to develop means for satisfying their desires, including those desires that arise in the process of satisfying their initial desires.

Cohen (1978) concludes that “we put it as a reason for affirming the development thesis that its falsehood would offend human rationality.”

The great difficulty here is that PR, to the extent that it is at all plausible, can only be understood as a principle of individual, independent behavior, not as a principle of collective, interdependent behavior. Restricted to individual behavior—in situations in which the individual’s decision does not depend upon similar choices of others—PR is relatively uncontroversial. It can be understood as a deeply entrenched (though not universally valid) generalization stating a (rough) correspondence between the independent behavior of individual human beings and a fundamental axiom of the theory of rationality for individual agents acting independently, namely, that such an agent, who maximizes his utility, takes (the least costly) effective means toward his ends. Thus construed, PR’s best defense is that it makes possible what appears to be the single most fruitful form of explanation for a wide range of individual human behavior, that is, individual rational-purposive explanation. But understood in this way, PR does nothing to fill the gap in functionalist historical materialism and lends no support whatsoever to the Development Thesis. For the good in question, increased social productivity, is achievable only through the interactions of many individuals, not by any individual independently.

However, suppose that PR were taken to be a principle of interdependent, group action rather than independent, individual action. In other words, PR now says that groups of individuals will interact so as to achieve what is in the interests of the members of the group, either through deliberate collective action or by an invisible hand process. On this interpretation of PR the coordination problem disappears but only at the cost of ignoring all the problems which constitute the domain of the theory of interdependent action, that is, rational choice theory applied to the interactions of individuals and groups.

The theory of interdependent action, broadly understood, has arisen in response to two realizations. The first (credited to Bernard Mandeville, Adam Ferguson, and Adam Smith) is that collections of individuals, each pursuing his or her own particular interest, can, under certain conditions, achieve benefits for all which none of them aimed at. Microeconomic theory, the theory of the competitive market, is an attempt to specify just what these conditions are. The second (articulated by Hobbes and more recently by Paul Samuelson, James Buchanan, and Mancur Olson, among others) is that groups of individuals, each member of which acts rationally according to the theory that identifies rationality with individual

expected utility maximization, may fail to achieve outcomes which they all prefer. The theory of public goods broadly construed is an attempt to specify the conditions under which groups will succeed or fail to achieve outcomes which their members prefer and for which joint action is necessary.  

The Practical Rationality Thesis, then, is simply a dogmatic profession of faith that the collective good of productive growth will in fact be produced either by invisible hand processes, by deliberate collective action, or by some combination of the two. Thus the Practical Rationality Thesis cannot salvage the Development Thesis. It is remarkable—and quite revealing—that some otherwise sophisticated Marxists should have attempted to shore up historical materialism in this way, by appealing to a single, sweeping generalization about human practical rationality, ignoring the entire domain of the theory of rational choice for interdependent behavior. It will be a recurring theme of this essay that there is a deepening methodological division between those analytic philosophers concerned with Marxian issues who recognize the relevance, and even the centrality, of rational choice theory and those who do not.

The significance of this successful assault on the Development Thesis is not to be underestimated. To abandon the Development Thesis is to jettison the Marxist philosophy of history—the grand view that history is progress. What remains is at best a Marxist theory of social change in which progress is perhaps possible but not predictable.

The second part of this essay examines in detail the momentous implications of the rejection of the Development Thesis for Marx’s views on morality and his critique of capitalism. At present I only want to suggest that, even if the Development Thesis is false and even if the productive forces are no more explanatorily primary than individual utility

2. It may be useful to distinguish between public goods and collective goods, the former being a subset of the latter. By a ‘collective good’ I mean simply one that can only be attained through joint effort and such that (some level of) joint effort will be sufficient for producing it. Collective goods are public goods only if they also include the nonexcludability feature stated above.

3. P. Van Parijs (1984) offers what he believes to be a more plausible reading of the Primacy Thesis. According to Van Parijs, the productive forces are “primary” in the sense that whenever there is a “contradiction” between the forces of production and the relations of production, the contradiction is resolved by the latter adapting to the former, not vice versa. However, it is not clear that this makes the forces of production explanatorily primary. Since it only captures a relative priority of the forces over the relations, the possibility I still left open is that other factors (such as political institutional structures) may be equally or even more primary in explanation. Nor does this interpretation provide adequate support for the Development Thesis (since even if the Primacy Thesis, on Van Parijs’s interpretation, was true, the Development Thesis might still be false—if, e.g., the forces and relations of production were in a stagnant equilibrium). Finally, on Van Parijs’s interpretation, the Primacy Thesis is vulnerable to the same criticisms that were directed toward the Development Thesis: there is no a priori reason to think that the relations of production will always adapt to the forces of production, and there is considerable historical evidence to the contrary.
maximization or than the constraints on human interaction imposed by sociopolitical institutions, there is still an important respect in which, for Marxists, the growth of the productive forces is of primary concern. My suggestion is that anyone who, like Marx, believes that moral progress depends on productive growth will find especially illuminating and significant those explanations which account for social changes by showing how they enhance productive growth.

In a number of famous passages Marx assumes that the social harmony and opportunities for individual fulfillment that make communism as he envisions it so attractive are possible only if there is a high level of productivity. The following passage from the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* even says that communism will be more productive than capitalism, whose superior productivity over previous economic systems Marx keenly appreciated: "In a higher phase of communist society . . . after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be fully left behind and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (Marx 1977, p. 569). In the *German Ideology* the dependence of human progress on productive development—and the very possibility of classless, nonexploitative, communist society—is made even clearer: "[T]he development of productive forces . . . is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced" (Marx and Engels 1970, p. 56).

If the Development Thesis is abandoned, as I believe it must be, then history, for the Marxist, is no longer a predictable process of productive development but simply the story of changing patterns of domination, a succession of ruling classes, ceaseless social war with no promise of victory. It is important to emphasize that the rejection of the Development Thesis requires more than the admission that the replacement of capitalism by a more productive and humane communism is not inevitable. Without the Development Thesis, or something very much like it, we are not even justified in predicting that such progress is more probable than not. Whether this special moral significance of productive growth justifies the claim that explanations that focus on productive growth are *explanatorily* primary depends upon whether explanatory primacy can be determined in part by our *practical*, as opposed to purely theoretical, interests.

This is a complex issue that lies far beyond the bounds of the present essay. So much seems clear, however. It is only on the assumption of a strong positive correlation between increased productivity and progress that the unique importance of the productive forces, and hence of functionalist explanations that focus on the growth of the productive forces, can be maintained. Even this assumption, however, is questionable. Increased productivity in one society may tempt other societies to invade it in order to expropriate its surplus, and this may result in great moral
as well as physical damage. Or productive growth may make possible the creation of weapons that will put an end not only to progress but also to all human life itself.

If we set aside the grand issue of whether the appropriate connection between moral progress and productive growth obtains, there seems to be no reason to regard as explanatorily primary only those explanations that focus on the productive forces. Moreover, once the functionalist explanations of historical materialism are "completed" by appropriate rational-purpose explanations, and the Primacy and Development Theses are both abandoned, it is far from clear that the resulting explanations will remain distinctively Marxist. Nor is it obvious that they should be called functionalist simply because they may have a functionalist component. At any rate, such explanations would borrow at least as much from contemporary non-Marxist social science (especially rational choice theory) as from Marx.

This is not to deny that the articulation and application of these more fully developed models of explanation would profit greatly from Marxian insights. An integration of what is fruitful in Marxian social theory with good contemporary social science would include at the very least adherence to a set of heuristic principles such as the following: (1) social power is not to be identified with formal, legal power, though it includes the latter (thus the ruling class may not be the governing class); (2) reformist political measures may not achieve a genuine reallocation of power since they may only serve to stabilize the existing defective system by blunting enthusiasm for more revolutionary change; (3) there is a pervasive tendency to overgeneralize from truths about one's own particular society (or social class) to societies (or social classes) in general; (4) the feasible set of alternative distributions of the social surplus is strongly constrained by the nature of the productive process—and in particular by the distribution of control over the means of production; and (5) political debates couched in terms of high principles and "the public interest" usually have a latent text in which the basic issues are economic and ultimately have to do with control over the means of production. Indeed, these heuristic principles have now become so widely accepted that some would be surprised by the claim that they are Marxist.

**Revolution, Rationality, and the Theory of Collective Action**

One important special case of Marx's account of social change, his theory of socialist revolution, is receiving increasingly intense and sophisticated scrutiny by analytic philosophers, as well as by decision theorists and political economists. This interest would appear to have three chief sources. The first is the very mixed record of actual socialist revolutionary movements, more specifically, the repeated failures of attempted socialist revolutions in many countries and the gross disparities between the realities of "successful" socialist revolutions and Marx's vision of the new society in others. Second, there is increasing dissatisfaction with Marx's theory of
revolution itself, arising from a growing appreciation of the difficult problems which any adequate theory of collective action must solve. Third, because of a growing general interest in problems of collective action among social philosophers and social scientists, even those who have no special interest in Marx see the need for explaining the successes and failures of revolutions since the latter are surely among the most dramatic and momentous instances of collective action.

Perhaps the most prevalent single, coherent theme in Marx's scattered, unsystematic, and perhaps even inconsistent writings on revolution is what I have called the Simple Rational Interest Theory (Buchanan 1979, pp. 60–82, 1986, p. 129). As capitalism advances, what Marx calls its contradictions become more starkly apparent, as does the irreconcilable conflict of interest between proletarians and capitalists. In increasingly severe business cycles, workers are laid off because they have been too productive. Wealth continues to accrue to the shrinking minority of those who own the means of production; worsening impoverishment and mental and physical degradation are the lot of a growing majority. Once the proletarians, aided by the educational efforts of the revolutionary leadership ("the communists," Marx calls them), recognize these basic facts, they will realize that it is in their interest to overthrow the system. As the capitalists, driven by competition, continue to exert more pressure on the proletarians, squeezing ever more surplus value out of them, the need for revolution becomes more apparent to more proletarians. The proletarians then collectively take the appropriate means to achieve their interests—the capitalist system falls.

One of the most striking features of the Simple Rational Interest Theory is the absence of any significant motivational role for moral principles, including principles of justice. Marx stresses that revolutionary leaders need not appeal to the proletarian's sense of justice, going so far as to say that talk about justice and rights is "obsolete verbal rubbish" and "ideological nonsense" and emphasizing that "communists preach no morality" (1977, p. 569).

Thus stated, the Simple Rational Interest Theory is ambiguous. Does the individual proletarian join the revolutionary struggle simply because he sees that it is in his own interest to do so or because he is motivated by the belief that it is in the interest of the proletariat (of which he is one member) to revolt? There are two reasons to opt for the first, individual interest, interpretation. First, it is generally recognized that the assumption of individual self-interested motivation is weaker, and more easily justified, than either the assumption that the individual is motivated altruistically or that he makes no distinction between his own interests and that of some group with which he identifies. Second, Marx's own views, especially his emphasis on the ways in which capitalism alienates workers from one another and breeds egoism, give additional force to the methodological rule of thumb that we should first attempt to explain collective action on the assumption of individual utility maximization. Marx even goes as
far as to state that competition among workers (for jobs and for advancement) is even worse than competition among capitalists (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 75). Thus altruism toward the other members of one's class or identification with their interests is more plausible as a product of collective revolutionary action than as an explanation of how it comes about in the first place (Buchanan 1982, p. 95).

Several writers have observed that the Simple Rational Interest Theory of revolutionary action is subject to the familiar free-rider problem (Buchanan 1979, pp. 60–65; Elster 1985, pp. 347–48; Olson 1965, pp. 105–6). Collective revolutionary action, as conceived by the Simple Rational Interest Theory, appears to be a public good in the technical sense. A public good is any desired object or state of affairs which has these characteristics: (1) producing it requires the contribution of a group of people; (2) if it is produced, it will be available to everyone in the group including those who did not contribute to its production; (3) it would be either impossible or too costly to exclude noncontributors from partaking of the good; (4) each individual's contribution is a cost to him; and (5) the benefit each individual will gain if the good is produced will outweigh his cost of contribution. When these conditions obtain, individuals may refrain from contributing to the public good in order to take a free ride on the efforts of others and reap the benefit without incurring the cost. The decision matrix in figure 1 illustrates the problem. The numbers in the cells represent the individual's preferences among the possible outcomes, the most preferred outcome (no. 1) being the situation in which she benefits from the successful participation in collective revolutionary action by others without bearing any costs of participation herself. Thus the dominant strategy for any rational individual utility maximizer here is not to participate—this is her best choice regardless of what others do.4

The obvious response to the proletarian's free-rider problem is to argue that the payoff structure represented in the matrix above is inaccurate. On the one hand, one might argue that there are certain goods \textit{intrinsic} to participation that offset the costs of participation, namely, the sense of solidarity or community that people often experience when they struggle together.5 The difficulty with this proposal, however, is that

4. Relaxing the assumption of \textit{strict} individual utility maximization without abandoning it completely in favor of strongly altruistic assumptions does not eliminate all obstacles to successful collective action. Even if the individual does not seek to maximize her utility, by taking a free ride, she nonetheless may be unwilling to incur the costs of participation unless she has assurance that others will do so as well.

5. On at least one occasion, Marx seems to depart from the simple Rational Interest Theory, emphasizing the importance for revolutionary motivation of what I have called "in-process benefits" (Buchanan 1982, p. 94): "When communist artisans \textit{[Handworker]} form associations, teaching and propaganda are their first aims. But their association itself creates a new need—the need for society—and what appeared as means has become an end." This passage, from the \textit{1844 Manuscripts}, is cited and discussed by S. Avineri (1971, p. 141).
while such benefits may help to explain the persistence of collective efforts in the face of adversity, they are, being by-products of collective action, incapable of explaining how it gets started in the first place (Buchanan 1982, p. 95; Elster 1985, p. 364).

Another source of benefits from participation appears if we retreat from the assumption that the individual proletarian’s interests are strictly self-regarding. The benefits of participation may exceed the costs if (1) the individual takes sufficient interest in the interests of other members of his class (who will benefit from successful revolutionary action) or if (2) the individual values reciprocity or fairness to the extent that he is unwilling to be a free rider. As noted earlier, however, utilizing either of these approaches would at the least require a significant revision of Marx’s own theory, to the extent that Marx stresses egoistic competition and eschews reliance on moral motivation.

On the other hand, it could be argued that there are significant costs of nonparticipation and that once these are appreciated the temptation to be a free rider will be overcome. I have noted elsewhere that although Marx himself seems never to have considered this strategy, terror inflicted on recalcitrant proletarians by dedicated revolutionary elites may be seen as an attempt to overcome the free-rider problem by increasing the costs of nonparticipation (Buchanan 1982, pp. 92–93). Jon Elster (1985, p. 363) notes that informal sanctions (public shaming and denunciation of “scabs”) can also have this function. The efficacy of both ways of imposing costs on nonparticipants depends on two circumstances that are not present in the simple, single-play many-person Prisoner’s Dilemma situation in which the classic free-rider problem arises but which are likely to obtain in the case of real-world revolutions: (1) repeated attempts at collective action and (2) availability of information as to who has par-
ticipated and who has not. There is in fact considerable evidence that coercive retaliation and peer pressure against would-be nonparticipants have played a significant role in historical revolutionary struggles.

Finally, whether revolutionary action is thwarted by the free-rider problem may depend upon two other factors. The first is the role of leadership by example. Some may be so inspired by the heroic or charismatic behavior of others that they strive to emulate it, without calculating the costs and benefits of doing so. The difficulty here is not only to provide an account of the conditions under which inspiration by example leads people to act in spite of the fact that rational self-interest dictates non-participation but also to provide a non-question-begging explanation of how the leaders themselves come to act. The second factor is the individual's perception that collective efforts are or are not approaching the threshold level of participation needed for success or for favorable prospects of success (see Elster 1985, pp. 357–58). If the individual believes (rightly or wrongly) that his contribution may put the group's effort near or over the threshold required for success, then he may contribute.

Although serious work on this topic has only just begun, it seems safe to conclude that an account of revolutionary motivation which is both theoretically coherent and confirmed by the facts about how rev-olutions actually succeed or fail will be multifactorial, relying upon a complex combination of sources for revolutionary action, including self-interest, intragroup coercion and informal sanctions, leadership by example, and moral exhortation.

Quite apart from the difficulties posed by the free-rider problem, there are two other serious obstacles to reconstructing a plausible Marxist theory of revolutionary action. The first concerns the problem of collective action faced by the other class, the capitalists. Marx himself, as we have seen, seems to make continual pressure by the capitalists upon the proletariat—the insatiable "werewolf" hunger for ever more surplus value—a necessary condition for successful collective revolutionary action (Buchanan 1982, p. 91). According to Marx, each capitalist must either compete successfully or lose his capital (and his class position as a capitalist). Now to compete successfully the capitalist must, Marx believes, extract more surplus value. But it is this unrelenting pressure which makes revolutionaries out of passive wage laborers. Even if each capitalist reads all volumes of Capital and understands that such individually rational behavior will lead to the ruin of the capitalist class, he cannot do otherwise (and remain a capitalist). The structural similarity—or identity—of the proletariat's public good problem (on the Simple Rational Self Interest Theory) and that of capitalists is striking. Yet oddly enough, while Marx does not appear to have taken seriously the possibility that the free-rider problem might block the proletariat from achieving its collective good, he seems to have made the inability of the capitalists to secure their public good a cornerstone of his theory of revolution.
Further, Marx's assumption that the probability of revolution is a function of the pressure exerted by the current system on the potentially revolutionary class is a very reasonable one. The rub is that the historical record in Western Europe since Marx's time, as well as Marx's own theory of the state, indicate that the capitalists are at a distinct advantage when it comes to problems of collective action. The capitalists are in an excellent position to achieve a coercive solution to their public good problem if they are, as Marx held, in control of the coercive apparatus of the state. And, of course, it has been argued with much plausibility that beginning with Bismarck's Germany in Marx's own day, the capitalist class has in fact effectively used its control over the state to make the conditions of the workers just bearable enough to cool their revolutionary ardor. In other words, the modern welfare state, which alleviates the condition of the propertyless while preserving a large sphere of private ownership of the means of production, is an obvious candidate for a solution to the capitalists' many-person Prisoner's Dilemma (Buchanan 1982, pp. 96, 101-2).

Thus far recent analytic work on Marx's theory of revolution has tended to focus on the problems of collective action encountered by the proletariat to the neglect of those faced by the capitalists. Although, as I have argued, Marx's own views on both groups' collective action problems are inadequate, his insight that the problems are interdependent is a valuable one that should guide future research. Such an approach would integrate an account of how opposing social groups individually achieve coordination and compliance with collective decisions with an explanation of strategic interaction between opposing groups. The two sets of issues cannot be dealt with independently because the goal of collective action for one group will in many cases be to thwart the other group's efforts to achieve their collective goal by creating or exacerbating free-rider, assurance, or coordination problems or by depriving the other group of means for solving them.

A second, at least equally important, problem for developing an adequate Marxist theory of revolution attends the abandonment of the Development Thesis. With the loss of the Development Thesis the crucial link between social change and progress is severed: the prediction that the productive basis for a better society will emerge is undercut. Add to this the fact that the historical record of the past seventy years shows that, whether it brings an increase in productivity, socialist revolution can produce oppression and severe social inequalities, and the result is that the outcome of collective revolutionary action is disturbingly uncertain at best. Finally, where the welfare state has blocked Marx's scenario of the "immiseration" of the proletariat, the costs of remaining in the current system are lower, and the transition costs of efforts to bring about a new system are greater. But if for most proletarians the transition costs are high, the costs of remaining in the current system are low relative to its
benefits, and the outcome of revolution is highly uncertain, then it may be rational for most proletarians not to revolt.

In the absence of the Development Thesis, the minimal requirement for alleviating the problem of uncertainty is to provide a theory of postcapitalist social coordination powerful enough to explain how what Marx confidently predicted is, though not predictable, at least feasible. Communist society, for Marx the ultimate goal of revolution, is said to achieve highly efficient, nonexploitative, democratic social coordination, without the use of markets and without state coercion. Although Marx has shockingly little to say about how democracy works in communism, he apparently means that each individual, at least over time, will have an equal share of control in the process by which rational, comprehensive decisions for the allocation of productive resources and for the production and distribution of goods are to be made. Since he speaks of organizing production "according to a common plan" and strenuously condemns competitive motivation and reliance upon supply and demand, it is safe to conclude that Marx had in mind something that might roughly be called "centrally planned socialism" and that he would reject any of the more decentralized variants of market socialism (Buchanan 1985, pp. 106–7; Gray 1986, pp. 170–75; Arnold, in press).

On this issue, analytic philosophers concerned with Marx may be divided into two groups: those whose work evidences no awareness that providing an account of the feasibility of communism is a major task for reconstructing Marx's theory and those who acknowledge the necessity of the task but have done little or nothing to discharge it. Some, if not all, of those who fall into the first category apparently see no need to make a case for the feasibility of communist society because they subscribe to what I have called the impediment theory: the view that no theory of communist social coordination is needed because the required coordination will occur, once the impediments of egoism and class conflict are removed through the destruction of the system of private property (Buchanan 1983, pp. 432–33). Coupled with the assumption that communism will rely on production according to a democratic planning process, this amounts to the assertion that all the well-known problems of democratic decision making have their source in a lack of altruism. Not only is this assumption unargued for by those who hold it and far from self-evident, it is also on its face implausible. The need for a theory of democratic decision making seems only to presuppose conflicting preferences—not egoism or class conflict. Even members of a classless society, all of whom sincerely seek the common good, may have serious disagreements over how to specify the common good, how best to achieve it, and how to order its constituents when not all can be attained at once (Buchanan 1982, p. 167).

Some who recognize this need for a theory of communist social coordination have concluded that it cannot be provided, if communism is understood to be a planned economy that does not rely on markets
and that satisfies the other constraints Marx specifies (Buchanan 1985, chap. 4). The consensus that planned, nonmarket socialism is not a viable alternative, either from the standpoint of efficiency or of freedom, stems from two main sources. The first, and most obvious, is the dismal record of actual regimes of this sort. The second is an appreciation of well-known problems of instability, inefficiency, manipulation, and domination to which democratic procedures in general are vulnerable and which, if anything, seem to be exacerbated when we attempt to conceive of an entire modern economy being run democratically. 6

Those who hold this view, but are nevertheless sympathetic to important elements of Marx’s critique of capitalism, have concluded that the task is to develop a theory of market socialism capable of showing how high levels of productive and distributive efficiency can be attained in the absence of private ownership of the means of production and without alienation or exploitation. 7 In other words, the goal is twofold: to develop an economic and an ethical theory of market socialism. Since these efforts constitute a dramatic departure from Marx and raise a number of complex issues treated in an increasingly sophisticated literature of their own, it is not feasible to explore them here.

MARX AND MORALITY

The second major area of research on Marx by analytic philosophers has focused on the question, What roles, if any, do moral conceptions play in Marx’s work? Attention mainly has been focused on the role of moral conceptions in Marx’s critique of capitalism and in his characterization of the superiority of communism. The role of moral conceptions in justifying or providing constraints on revolutionary action has been less thoroughly examined.

Problems of Interpretation.

Marx’s remarks about morality are dispersed, unsystematic, even inconsistent. The predominant theme in Marx’s most explicit assertions about morality appears to be a rejection of juridical conceptions—conceptions of justice and rights. We are told that talk about justice and rights is “outdated verbal rubbish” and “ideological nonsense” and that the very concept of an equal right as such is defective because it is inherently insensitive to the diversity of individual needs (Marx 1977, pp. 568–69). Further, the hypothesis that Marx rejected juridical conceptions in general seems to be the best explanation of some rather striking omissions: Marx never describes communism as a just society or even as being more just

6. For influential discussions of problems of democratic decision making, see Arrow (1951), Downs (1957), Mackay (1980), Mueller (1970), and Riker (1982).

7. For what may be the best available defense of market socialism, see Schweikart (1980). For a critical discussion of some of Schweikart’s views and a survey of some of the main problems for a theory of market socialism, see Buchanan (1985, pp. 104–17).
than capitalism. Finally, in some passages Marx appears to reject moral conceptions in general, not just those having to do with justice and rights, as when he says that “communists preach no morality” and when he suggests that morality is simply a disguise for class interest (1977, p. 230).

However, despite these explicit disavowals, Marx’s work strikes one as imbued with moral content. In particular, it is tempting to assume that his critique of capitalism, especially the charge that it is an exploitive system, rests at least in part on an unarticulated principle of distributive justice. To complicate matters even more, even if Marx’s explicit remarks about justice are predominantly dismissive, there are exceptions. In one passage we are told that the capitalists’ appropriation of surplus value from the worker is an “injustice” and in another that it is called “robbery”—a notion which seems to imply the wrongful taking of property (see Elster 1985, pp. 216–23).

Marx as Radical Critic of Morality

Among those who take at face value Marx’s dismissive statements about morality, Richard Miller (1984) and Allen Wood (1981) have offered the most detailed defenses of what they take to be Marx’s view. Miller’s reconstruction of Marx is the most radical: it presents Marx as rejecting all morality as a delusion that impedes social progress. Wood’s position is only slightly less radical: morality, for Marx, is simply superfluous—the absence of a moral theory, or even a distinctive moral point of view, in no way impairs Marx’s critique of capitalism and his vision of the superiority of communism. Each of these views will be examined in detail.

Miller’s conclusion that Marx rejects not only justice but also all morality as such (not just the bourgeois variety) rests on an implausibly narrow conception of morality. In fact, Miller’s view of morality is so constricted that neither Aristotle’s view, nor utilitarianism, nor John Rawls’s theory, nor Kant’s, nor any position that permits destruction of incorrigible dangerous criminals or of the enemy in a just war seems to count as a morality. Miller’s position warrants extended discussion since it is the most serious attempt to provide a systematic basis for Marx’s scattered antimoralist remarks.

Miller holds that morality, at least so far as it applies to social and political issues, characteristically has three basic features. The first is equality: “People are to be shown equal concern or respect or afforded equal status . . . everyone is to be treated as an equal.” The second feature is a set of general norms: “The right resolution of any major political issue would result from applying valid general norms to the case at hand. These rules are valid in all societies in which cooperation benefits almost everyone but . . . [there is scarcity].” The final feature is universalizability: “Anyone who rationally reflects on relevant facts and arguments will

8. The criticism of Miller that follows is drawn from Buchanan (in press). This material is used with the generous permission of D. Reidel Publishing Co.
accept these rules, if he or she has the normal range of emotions" (1984, p. 17). Miller simply states, without argument, that something cannot be a morality unless it includes one or more of these principles. Although he apparently concedes that in principle a morality might reject any two of them, the attention he devotes to the first—the Equality Principle—suggests that he believes that most if not all moralities ascribe to it, even though some might not include one or even both of the other items. Unfortunately, he offers no explanation of why a morality could reject any two of them but not all three. His contention is that Marx rejects all three of these tenets and that this shows that Marx abandons morality.

Miller is most concerned to discredit the Equality Principle. He says that Marx believed that the bourgeoisie and their allies are not to be accorded “equal status,” that their interests are not to be taken seriously, and this, Miller thinks, shows that Marx rejected the Equality Principle. (He does concede, however, that for Marx the fact that something would be in someone’s interest is a reason in favor of it.) Miller does not see that on this criticism, not only Rawls’s theory and Kant’s, but every deontological theory—every view which ascribes to the priority of the right over the good—fails to qualify as a moral view. For as Rawls points out, it is distinctive of deontological moral theories that they do not count all interests equally. Indeed, some interests—namely those that run contrary to principles of justice—are to be given no weight at all. It is true that such theories, at least if they are Kantian, nevertheless claim that all persons are to be treated with equal respect. But this is taken to be quite compatible with depriving the individual of his liberties and even his life if he is sufficiently evil or if he is an enemy in a just war—so long as we use no more force than is needed, avoid unnecessary suffering, and so on. (Indeed, Locke, that quintessential “bourgeois moralist,” maintained that incorrigible criminals forfeit their rights and may be destroyed like dangerous beasts.)

Only the most radical pacifism would forbid infringements of property rights, abrogations of basic civil and political liberties, and the use of deadly force in all circumstances. Consequently, it is fallacious for Miller to cite Marx’s statements about the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat that will trample the rights of the bourgeoisie and disregard their interests and then conclude that Marx rejects the Equality Principle, a basic tenet of morality. After all, Marx constantly emphasizes that the class struggle is a war, a fight to the finish, and even goes as far as to say that the continuation of capitalism is inconsistent with the existence of society.

Thus Miller is too quick in assuming that Marx rejected morality. He neglects to consider the alternative hypothesis that Marx’s views about revolutionary violence are consistent with rather traditional moral views, if the latter are combined with a very questionable set of empirical assumptions about the way the world now is and how it can be in the future. Marx may have thought that capitalism is such a great evil, the
alternative so wonderful, and the nature of the struggle so desperate—so utterly lacking in room for compromise—that revolutionaries are morally justified in regarding most ordinary moral obligations toward the enemy as being suspended for the duration of the conflict. Similarly, a partisan fighting against the Nazi reign of genocidal terror might conclude that the gravity of the struggle justified relaxing basic moral constraints on her conduct toward German soldiers, without in any sense adopting an antimoral position. However, regardless of whether Marx’s advocacy of ruthless class war was based upon a wholesale rejection of morality or upon the assumption that the nature of the struggle justifies the suspension of at least some basic moral obligations toward the bourgeoisie and their allies, his view is vulnerable to serious criticism.

Consider the first alternative, according to which the proletariat’s struggle against its class enemies need recognize no moral constraints because no moral constraints of any kind are valid. If this was Marx’s view, then he failed to supply good reasons for adopting it. It can, of course, be given a sort of Thrasymachian defense, and some Marxists, including perhaps Engels, have done so, contending that all morality is an illusion, an ideological smokescreen for naked self-interest. To my knowledge, Marxists who have held this view have tended simply to assert it, rather than to argue for it in any systematic way. Miller, as we have seen, does argue for the rejection of morality, but those arguments do not convince because Miller’s conditions for something being a morality are much too narrow. However, if the Marxist acknowledges that there is such a thing as morality—and that morality includes serious constraints on how we may treat human beings in pursuing our ends, even laudable ends—then it is up to him to show why the usual moral constraints are suspended when it comes to the conduct of proletarians toward their class enemies.

It seems that such a suspension of moral constraints would only be justified if (1) the analogy of a just war for extremely high stakes is apt or, perhaps, if (2) the feasibility of a vastly superior life for all in communism is firmly grounded in an adequate theory of noncapitalist social coordination. The second of these conditions, as we have seen, is not fulfilled. Even if it were, however, it would follow that no account of moral constraints on revolution is needed only if some version of act-consequentialist moral theory were correct. If the correct moral theory has a significant non-consequentialist component or if the correct moral theory is of the rule (or indirect) consequentialist sort, then satisfaction of condition (2) does not by itself suffice to show that moral constraints are suspended when it comes to revolutionary action.

Nor is condition 1 satisfied: contrary to Marx’s rhetoric, we are not as a rule confronted with a life-and-death struggle in which the only alternatives are violent revolution and a capitalist order which increasingly “immiserates” the vast majority, breaking them mentally and physically, so that they must choose between starvation and “wage slavery.” Marx’s
jeremiads notwithstanding, the crushing contradictions of capitalism have often given way to the more tolerable tensions of the welfare state.

There are, of course, situations in which revolutionary workers are like soldiers fighting for a just cause in mortal combat. If striking Chilean mine workers are attacked by government troops they may—according to commonsense morality and any moral theory worth considering—under certain circumstances fight back with lethal force. But this is not to say that in general the revolutionary struggle is subject to no serious moral constraints.

More important, the absence of an adequate theory of social coordination in communism, along with the historical record of authoritarian Marxist regimes, undercuts Marx’s prediction that the abolition of private property in the means of production will lead to a society that is radically better, either from the standpoint of freedom or welfare. Surprisingly, Miller nowhere takes up the challenge of providing a theory of highly productive, noncapitalist social coordination, though he apparently rejects the Development Thesis, denying that Marxist theory can support a prediction that if capitalism is destroyed such a social order will replace it (1984, pp. 273–83). Like Wood, he may be a victim of what I referred to earlier as the impediment theory.

If the thesis that the class struggle is the moral equivalent of a just war to the finish is an irresponsible hyperbole, an overgeneralization, and if the prediction of a vastly superior life after the destruction of the system of private property is not well grounded, then it is difficult to see how anyone who believes that morality is not an illusion could plausibly ascribe to the Marxist view that the revolutionary’s conduct toward those who oppose social revolution is not subject to serious moral constraints. If Marxism recognizes no such constraints but provides no good reason to reject them, then it not only fails to replace morality but is profoundly defective as a guide to social and political choice as well.

Marx is not so much concerned to attack morality as to bypass it, according to Wood. He believes that Marx has no normative conception of justice and hence does not—indeed cannot—criticize capitalism for being unjust, nor can he praise communism for being just. Wood thinks that ‘justice,’ for Marx, is a purely descriptive term, denoting the correspondence between an action and the mode of production in which it occurs: a just transaction in capitalism is simply one that “harmonizes with” that mode of production; an unjust transaction is one that “clashes with it or is dysfunctional relative to it” (Wood 1981, p. 131).

The implications of this interpretation are startling. Since the transaction between worker and capitalist is adequate to or contributes to the functioning of the capitalist mode of production, that transaction is just. Further, Wood attributes to Marx the view that a given conception of justice can only be sensibly applied to the particular mode of production which gives rise to it and to whose functioning it contributes. Although
wage labor is exploitive, coercive, and a disguised form of slavery, it is not unjust. Wood concludes that Marx does not criticize capitalism as being unjust.

The difficulty with Wood's interpretation is that it does not distinguish between two levels of discourse about justice (Buchanan 1983, pp. 429–30). When Marx says that a transaction is just whenever it corresponds to the mode of production, he is making an observation about what he believes is in fact common to the types of action people in that society generally label "just." He is not providing an analysis of the meaning that the term 'just' has in that society. The term can serve the ideological function that Marx attributes to it only if the meaning that the term has in that society is quite different from what is in fact common to the actions to which it is generally applied.

Perhaps the clearest example of Marx's recognition of the ideological role of justice is his critique of the belief that current inequalities can be explained and justified by appeal to individual desert plus the right of inheritance. Marx attacks this notion in his scathing parody of the Myth of Primitive Accumulation, according to which the rich are entitled to their wealth because they inherited it from frugal and industrious ancestors. Marx's point is that this simply misrepresents the facts of history: the current concentration of wealth to a large extent is a result of past rapacity and violence. Wood's analysis not only renders the ideological role of concepts of justice utterly mysterious, it also blinds us to what I have called Marx's internal juridical criticisms, his attempts—as in the Myth of Primitive Accumulation—to turn concepts of justice that have been used to justify the capitalist system against it by correcting the false factual assumptions to which they have been applied (Buchanan 1982, pp. 67–73).

Going still further, Wood contends that Marx neither employs nor requires any moral theory because he bases his criticism of capitalism and his commendation of communism on a commonsense, noncontroversial conception of nonmoral goods: self-actualization, security, physical health, comfort, community, and freedom. As examples of moral goods, Wood cites "such things as virtue, rights, justice, the fulfillment of duty, and the possession of morally meritorious qualities of character" (1981, p. 127). According to Wood, Marx's nonmoral goods are uncontroversially good. No philosophical theory, moral or otherwise, is needed to show their desirability nor to explain why a society that fails to attain them for all is bad. Hence, even if, as Marx's critics sometimes charge, he has no moral theory or value theory, their absence does not weaken his criticism of capitalism.

Wood's defense of Marx here is subject to two serious objections. First, some of the goods Marx ascribes to communism, such as community and autonomy, are uncontroversial only if left rather abstract and vague. But serious disagreements arise as to how to flesh out their content. Second, and more important, a moral theory or value theory
may be needed to solve ordering problems. Wood, like Marx, may have overlooked this point by assuming what is sometimes called the unity of the good—the thesis that all good things are composable (at least in communism).

Wood does correctly stress, however, that Marx's point is not simply that capitalism fails to secure important goods (or causes the corresponding evils) but also that these are avoidable defects. The word "avoidable" here is extremely important. If Marx had merely shown that capitalism causes the evils in question, he would not be the revolutionary radical social critic he is. In addition, he asserts that these evils can be eliminated (or greatly reduced) only by a radical transformation of the social order. As long as capitalism exists, these evils are necessary and unavoidable. Hence, it is only by comparison with the new social order he calls communism that Marx can support his judgment that capitalism causes unnecessary and avoidable death, hunger, and so on. In other words, because Marx is neither a reformist nor a meliorist but a radical, his indictments of capitalism are implicitly comparative and the standard of comparison is external to capitalism: the hunger, death, exhaustion, and loneliness of capitalism are seen to be avoidable— and hence irrational— only by reference to communism.

It is in this sense that the vision of communist society provides Marx's basic or ultimate evaluative perspective: without reference to life in communism, Marx's criticisms lose their radical character. Consequently, it is implausible to suggest, as Wood and others have, that Marx's main interest was in criticizing capitalism rather than in providing an account of communism. Nor is it helpful to reply that the comparative nature of Marx's indictment of capitalism implies only a reference to socialism, not communism. This later Marxist terminology simply obscures Marx's insistence that what he calls the early stages of communism are themselves defective and incomplete and that they too must be understood in relation to developed communism. The charge that the evils of capitalism are unnecessary can be sustained as a radical, rather than a reformist, criticism only by reference to a description of communism or, more precisely, by providing a theory of communist social coordination.

The same conclusion is reached by examining the presuppositions of G. A. Cohen's attempt (1977, pp. 107–36) to make plausible Marx's claim that advanced capitalism produces an irrational pursuit of consumption at the expense of leisure. Cohen argues that the same competitive self-interest that results in capitalism's increased productivity relative to earlier systems produces a bias toward continual expansion of outputs and toward encouraging (through advertising) continually increasing consumption of what is produced. But at some point, Cohen notes, it is rational to prefer increased leisure (i.e., freedom from toil) to further consumption. Advanced capitalism is inefficient and, in that sense, irrational because it has an inherent tendency to overshoot the optimal trade-off point between toil and leisure.
Cohen's argument rests on a hidden—and by him wholly unsupported—premise, namely, that there is a feasible alternative to capitalism which would at least approach the productivity of capitalism. Even if it is true that capitalism tends to exceed the optimal level of toil, and even if it can be shown that this tendency will not be checked, capitalism may still be preferable if the alternative is so much less productive that people are better off under capitalism in spite of its "irrationality" (Buchanan 1985, pp. 27–29). Once again a central Marxian critique of capitalism is seen to depend upon assumptions about the efficiency of communism which in turn presuppose a theory of communist social coordination that has not been provided.

Progress and Morality

It is at this point that the results of recent work on Marx's philosophy of history have a crucial and direct bearing on attempts to reconstruct his views on morality. We have seen that the Development Thesis must be rejected both on empirical and theoretical grounds. But without the Development Thesis Marxism offers no basis for predicting that further growth of the productive forces which it reviews as a necessary condition for the emergence of a more humane, postcapitalist society. So if the Marxist critique of capitalism is to avoid the charge of utopianism and make good its claim that the ills of capitalism are unnecessary, rather than necessary, evils, there is only one alternative: a theory of social coordination must be produced to show that such a society is at least feasible.

The lack of an adequate theory of highly productive, postcapitalist social coordination has equally serious implications for Marx's views on justice and rights. Several writers have argued that Marx rejects juridical principles while leaving open the possibility that he does espouse moral principles of some other type.9 I have argued in detail elsewhere that the most plausible reconstruction of Marx's puzzling statements (and omissions) concerning justice is that he is advancing a radical critique of all conceptions of justice, but one which presupposes neither Miller's antimoralist interpretation nor Wood's claim that Marx understood 'justice' as a purely descriptive term (Buchanan 1982, chap. 4). On this reconstruction, Marx saw the practical and theoretical preoccupation with justice as a symptom of deeper problems. Once these problems are solved

9. See, e.g., G. Brenkert (1988). Brenkert argues that Marx systematically rejected concepts of justice and rights, building his critique of capitalism and his vision of communism around a multifaceted concept of freedom. In a later work, Steven Lukes (1985, p. 3) espouses this same view in slightly altered form, saying that Marx rejected "the morality of Recht," exposing instead "a morality of emancipation." Lukes also restates the case made earlier in Buchanan (1982) for the thesis that Marx rejected juridical concepts because he thought that the appropriate goal is to achieve a society that will be beyond the circumstances of justice—those conditions of conflict which make principles specifying individuals rights valuable.
by the transition to the allegedly more rational communist mode of production, what Hume and Rawls call "the circumstances of justice" will disappear. This does not mean that communism literally will bring an end to scarcity and to all conflict but, rather, that problems of conflict and scarcity will be so reduced (and otherwise made more tractable) that institutionalized principles of justice, including those specifying individual rights, will no longer be needed. The chief virtue of this reconstruction of Marx is that it links (1) his dismissal of talk about justice and rights, (2) the absence of any systematic theorizing about justice in his work (and in particular the lack of any statements to the effect that communism will be a more just society), and (3) his frequent insistence that communism will be a society of greatly increased abundance and harmony.

What Marx apparently failed to appreciate, however, is that there are at least four distinct functions which rights principles can serve and which presuppose neither egoism nor class conflict (Buchanan 1982, pp. 66–67). Rights principles can serve (1) as constraints on democratic procedures (e.g., for the protection of minorities) or as guarantees of access to participation in democratic procedures; (2) as constraints on paternalism—that is, as limits on when and how we may interfere with a person’s liberty for the sake of benefiting that person; (3) as constraints on what can be done (and how it may be done) to maximize social welfare, or some particular specification of the common good; and (4) as a way of specifying the scope and limits of our obligations to future generations. Whether rights principles that serve these functions will require coercive sanctions (or a "separate" institutional apparatus, the state, for applying coercive sanctions) will depend upon particular circumstances. Absent a developed theory of noncoercive, democratic social coordination for communism, Marx’s assumption that these functions can be successfully achieved without coercion is also unsupported.

In contrast, some commentators have argued that Marx’s work implicitly contains a conception of distributive justice, even if he sometimes gave the strong impression that he was advancing a radical critique of conceptions of justice in general. Zayid Husami (1978) and Jon Elster (1985, pp. 219–29) maintain that Marx can be read as subscribing to a principle of distributive justice for "the lower stage" of communism (what Lenin and later Marxists call socialism): "To each according to his contribution." Even if these commentators are correct, this shows at most that a principle of distributive justice is to play a kind of interim, stopgap role, until the "higher stage" of communism is reached in which no such principle will be needed to play a significant role in social organization.

Elster contends that Marx went further, subscribing to "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" as a principle of distributive justice for the "higher stage" of communism (Elster 1985, pp. 230–31). But this interpretation seems implausible since it makes inexplicable Marx’s dismissal of talk about justice and the conspicuous absence in his writings of any statement to the effect that communism
will be a just society or even more just than capitalism. Elster and I agree, however, that Marx did not produce a theory of justice capable of providing an adequate normative structure for postcapitalist society.

**Exploitation**

Nowhere is the undeveloped character of Marx's moral view more apparent than in the results of recent work on his concept of exploitation. Though exploitation seems to play a major role in Marx's critique of capitalism, careful exegesis has revealed no systematic explication of the concept in his writings.

Two questions are fundamental: what is exploitation, and what is wrong with it? (see Arneson 1981). Attempts to answer both questions, I shall argue, have converged on the same rather deflationary conclusion: either 'exploitation' is understood in a rather precise and purely descriptive way (e.g., as the appropriation of surplus value or as the worker's not getting back the full value of what he produces), in which case one cannot even say that exploitation as such is unjust or in any way morally wrong, or 'exploitation' is understood as a normative term, but one which only stands as a kind of placeholder or promissory note for a theory of justice which neither Marx nor subsequent Marxists have successfully articulated. This result agrees with Jon Elster's assessment that "the [Marxian] concept of exploitation is not a fundamental concept from the ethical standpoint" (1985, pp. 228–29).

We may begin with John Roemer's analysis of Marxian exploitation. Roemer maintains that "workers are exploited in the Marxian view not because they contribute surplus labor in production [i.e., not because the value of their wages is less than the value of what they produce], but, more fundamentally, because they do not have access to their per capita share of the nonhuman, alienable means of production [in their society]" (1982b, p. 81). He defines what he calls his "property relations theory of exploitation" as follows. "Call a group of economic agents exploited if [and only if?] they would be better off under a redistribution of assets in which everyone in the society were endowed with exactly the same amount of alienable assets, and if their complement in society would be worse off (in terms of income) under this [re]distribution. . . . [To determine whether there is exploitation we] . . . compare the existing distribution of income with the distribution of income which would ensue were property in the alienable (nonhuman) means of production to be redistributed in an egalitarian way" (Roemer 1982b, p. 81).

By focusing on productive assets, Roemer rejects any attempt to define Marxian exploitation as a maldistribution of products or of income. More specifically, he recognizes that simply defining 'exploitation' as Robert Paul Wolff (1982) does, as the appropriation of surplus value from the worker (or as the worker's not getting back in wages the full value of what he produces), fails to reveal that there is anything wrong
with exploitation.10 (As I have noted in an earlier discussion, Marx himself criticized socialists who espoused the latter definition, noting that even in communism the worker would not receive the full value of what he produces because of the need for social investment and for subsidization of those unable to work [Buchanan 1982, p. 44].) What is surprising is that Roemer appears simply to define stipulatively as 'exploitative' any system in which property is not distributed strictly equally or in which, if property is distributed unequally, the worst off would be better off if property were distributed equally. In other words, in the passage just cited Roemer asserts without argument that exploitation occurs in every society in which Rawls's Difference Principle is not satisfied.

However, on the next page of the same article, Roemer seems to endorse an even more strictly egalitarian definition of 'exploitation'—one which states that exploitation exists whenever there are any inequalities in the distribution of property (including those that work to the advantage of the worst off in the sense that they are better off under the inegalitarian system than under strict equality): "Hence, the recipe for ending Marxian exploitation . . . is to eliminate differential ownership . . . of the means of production" (Roemer 1982b, p. 82). Roemer does little to explain why inegalitarian distributions of property are wrong and nothing at all to explain why, even if they are morally wrong, they are exploitative. No attempt is made to connect the inegalitarian distribution of property with practice or actions that are, according to ordinary usage, exploitative.

One clue to the implicit moral perspective that underlies Roemer's second, strictly egalitarian definition of 'exploitation' is found in this remark: "Thus certain inequalities may be to the benefit of the exploited, or the least well off. The Rawlsian theory views such inequalities as just. I think, however, that justice entails that incomes to individuals are deserved" (1982a, pp. 309–10; emphasis added). This passage at least dispels the suspicion that Roemer has begged the central question in the theory of distributive justice by simply assuming that justice requires strict equality. It is both more plausible and more charitable to reconstruct his view as follows.

1. Justice requires that incomes to individuals are deserved.
2. If property (i.e., income-generating assets) is distributed unequally,

10. R. P. Wolff apparently uncritically accepts the notion that exploitation for Marx is the appropriation of surplus value, in spite of the fact that, as Marx himself pointed out in Critique of the Gotha Programme (see Wolff 1982, n. 57), even in classless, communist society, part of what the workers produce will have to be appropriated for investment and for the support of those unable to work. The novelty of Wolff's approach lies, it seems, not in his definition of 'exploitation' but, rather, in his account of the locus of exploitation. According to Wolff, exploitation "takes place in the interaction between the spheres of production and circulation" (1982, p. 114) rather than exclusively in production or exclusively in circulation, as some Marxists have held. Wolff does not broach the issue of what is wrong with exploitation.
then incomes to individuals will not be deserved (i.e., there will be differences in incomes among individuals that are not deserved—and hence that are unjust).

3. (Therefore) Justice requires that property be distributed equally.

Note, first of all, that this reconstruction still provides no clue as to why the alleged injustice in question should be called exploitation (not all injustices are cases of exploitation) rather than simply a violation of a right of distributive justice, for example. More important, this reconstruction of Roemer’s view of what is wrong with exploitation as he defines it is subject to two fundamental substantive objections. First, it fails to distinguish between desert and entitlement (or right) or simply assumes, without argument, that the latter is reducible to the former. But this is to beg one of the most basic questions in the theory of distributive justice. While some theories defend the attempt to reduce entitlement to desert, many others, including those as disparate as Rawls’s and Nozick’s, contend that one may be entitled to something (or have a right to it) even though one cannot be said to deserve it. Further, as Elster has suggested, premise 2 is also subject to criticism and in need of support as well: whether differences in income that are based either in part or exclusively on differences in assets are undeserved may depend upon how the differences in assets arose in the first place. For example, unequal assets “may [simply] reflect unequal savings in the past” (1985, p. 177).

Second, by claiming that justice requires strict equality even when inequality would benefit the worst off, Roemer has divorced justice both from efficiency (understood in the Pareto way) and from the rational self-interest of the worst off. These objections can be addressed adequately only by articulating and defending a theory of distributive justice. Until this is accomplished, Roemer’s definition of ‘exploitation,’ like Wolff’s, achieves clarity and precision at the price of emptying the concept of normative force. Without the required theory of justice, the concept of exploitation cannot serve as a tool for social criticism. If the theory is supplied, however, it is not at all clear that the concept of ‘exploitation’ (as opposed to the concept of justice embodied in the theory) would have any role to play.

Partly out of dissatisfaction with definitions of ‘exploitation’ that leave the moral wrongness of exploitation a mystery (in particular, the traditional Marxist definition of exploitation as the appropriation of surplus value) and partly out of the belief that Marx’s own discussions of what he calls exploitation are not totally disconnected from nontechnical, commonsense conceptions of exploitation, other writers have taken a different tack. G. A. Cohen (1981, pp. 8–11; 1983, pp. 440–45) has argued that what makes wage labor exploitative is not that the workers produce value, a portion of which is not returned to them, but instead that, although it is the workers who produce things which are valuable, nonproductive people (capitalists) get much of the benefit of those valuable things.
Cohen’s proposal has two virtues. First, it dissociates the concept of exploitation from what many believe to be the moribund theory of surplus value and from Marx’s preoccupation with something he called ‘value’ and believed to be distinct both from price and from subjective valuations—and which Cohen views as an unhelpful reification. Second, on Cohen’s analysis the exploitation of the wage worker is a kind of unfairness, more precisely a lack of reciprocity: the capitalist—if indeed she is unproductive—gets something for nothing, and for this reason the worker gets less than she should. This simple account squares well with Marx’s frequent characterizations of the capitalist as a parasite, feeding on the lifeblood of the worker, his capacity for production.

Another initially plausible strategy is to view Marxian exploitation as a special, institutionalized case of a second, commonsensical understanding of exploitation: the idea that to exploit a person is to treat him as a mere means (usually) toward one’s own gain or to utilize a person as one would a nonhuman thing, as when we speak of exploiting mineral deposits. Such an approach is attractive in part because it reveals close connections between Marx’s views on exploitation and his theory of alienation: the latter can be understood as an attempt to provide a systematic account of ways in which human beings in capitalism are treated (and thought of) as mere things and of the diverse kinds of harms that this inflicts upon them (Buchanan 1985, pp. 42–49).

However, both of these attempts to capture the moral force of the charge of exploitation by linking—or assimilating—it to commonsense conceptions of exploitation have a fundamental limitation. Neither can stand alone; each in effect makes ‘exploitation’ a theoretical term, but a theoretical term still in search of a theory.

Students of the history of moral philosophy, and especially those acquainted with the work of Kant, have long recognized that the distinction between treating a person as a means (which I do, e.g., when I ask a stranger for the time of day) and treating him as a mere means is a theoretical distinction. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, one central issue which distinguishes rival moral theories is the different accounts they give of when it is permissible to utilize a person’s skills or abilities. Thus any explication of exploitation in which the notion of the merely instrumental utilization of persons plays a central role presupposes a moral theory.

Similar, though more subtle, difficulties arise if one makes the notion of parasitism central to the analysis of Marxian exploitation (Buchanan 1985, pp. 90–95). If the claim that capitalists are unproductive—pure social parasites—is to be at all plausible, it must be restricted to the capitalist qua owner of capital, independent of the entrepreneurial and managerial functions which many owners of capital perform, since these functions are, in an obvious sense, productive.

However, even this is not sufficient to show that the capitalist is an unproductive taker. Presumably the relevant sense of ‘being productive’
is quite broad, the idea being that one is productive if in some sense one makes a necessary contribution to the benefits that flow from the system, that is, that one's role is genuinely functional, not superfluous. (A parasite, unlike a member of a symbiotic relationship, is not necessary for the well functioning of its host.) But to assume that the role of owner of capital is superfluous is simply to deny (not to refute) one of the most important traditional justifications for private ownership of the means of production: the view that the chance to gain wealth—sufficient wealth to allow one to delegate managerial and entrepreneurial tasks to others—provides the best practicable incentive for risk taking, effort, and saving, thereby increasing productivity and making possible the social benefits that depend upon it.

At this point the disarmingly simple explication of exploitation in terms of parasitism (or lack of reciprocity) leads us into perennial disputes about alternative systems of incentives for productivity. The validity of the charge that the capitalist, qua owner of capital, exploits is then seen to depend upon which theory of incentives is empirically correct. Once again, 'exploitation' is seen to be a theoretical term, and the final judgment on the theory it presupposes is probably not yet in.

To summarize: recent work on Marxian exploitation tends to fall into two categories. On the one hand, there are reasonably precise but purely descriptive definitions of 'exploitation' (as the appropriation of surplus value or as the worker not getting back the full value of his product) which fail to show that exploitation is morally wrong (much less why the wrong in question should be called 'exploitation'). On the other hand, there are explicitly normative but rather vague definitions (treating a person as a mere means, parasitism or lack of reciprocity) whose moral force depends ultimately upon disputed issues in moral theory or in the motivational theories of empirical psychology. Roemer's view provides a third, but equally unsatisfying, alternative. He identifies exploitation with the unequal distribution of alienable assets, explaining the appropriation of surplus value as a consequence of this fundamental inequality, and concludes that exploitation and its consequences are wrong because unjust. However, his claim that the unequal distribution of alienable assets is wrong because unjust rests upon an unarticulated and undefended theory of justice.

THE AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

No attempt will be made to summarize this extensive critical survey of recent analytical philosophical work on Marx. Instead, I shall only venture a few suggestions concerning the probable direction of future productive scholarship in this area.

If the analysis in the first part is correct, then Marx's philosophy of history should no longer be of interest to social philosophers or to social scientists but only to historians of those disciplines. Whether there even
remains, after the abandonment of the Development Thesis and the
Primacy Thesis, a valuable and *distinctively Marxist theory of social change*
can be disputed. It seems safe to say, however, that in the foreseeable
future the best social science will at least incorporate some of the more
Marxian themes concerning power, economic interest, and ideology as
heuristic principles. Yet even in the study of problems that have been
of central, if not unique, concern for Marxism, including the theories of
revolution and of class struggle, productive research shows a growing
dependence upon non-Marxist methodologies—in particular, the theory
of rational choice (construed broadly so as to include microeconomics
and game theory; see Elster 1986; Roemer 1986b).

Sustained investigations of Marx’s views on morality have yielded a
wide range of sometimes diametrically opposed reconstructions. Attempts
to find in Marx adequate materials for the rejection of morality as a
delusion that threatens to block social progress or to show that Marx’s
critique of capitalism requires no moral theory thus far have failed.

Marx’s insistence that our reliance on principles of justice, including
those specifying individual rights, signals a failure to harmonize interests
reveals his failure to understand that the conflicts which make rights
valuable are not limited to those arising from egoism or class interest.
Whether an adequate Marxian moral theory would include a fundamental
role for individual rights is perhaps not clear, but at least this much can
be said: Marx’s own critique of rights provides no good reason for thinking
that it would not.

The need for developing a Marxian moral theory is perhaps most
evident in two areas of recent Marx scholarship: the theory of exploitation
and the theory of revolution. There is a growing consensus that appeal
to a Marxian concept of exploitation cannot take the place of systematic
theorizing about distributive justice. Those sympathetic to Marx have
been somewhat less quick to appreciate the need for a moral theory
capable of specifying appropriate constraints on revolutionary action.
But the need for such a theory is made all the more evident by the failure
of attempts to show that Marx successfully attacked morality in general
and by the necessity of abandoning two basic Marxian tenets: the De-
velopment Thesis and the confident prediction that proletarian revolution
will ultimately bring human progress that rested upon it.

Quite apart from the question of the morality of socialist revolution,
recent applications of game theory to revolution as a collective-action
problem yield disturbing results for Marxism. On the one hand, accounts
which view successful proletarian revolutionary action as the straight-
forward outcome of rational, self-interested behavior have been shown
to ignore familiar obstacles to collective action, in particular, the free-
rider problem. On the other hand, once the uncertainty of the intended
goal of revolution, the costs of contribution, and the reduction of costs
of remaining in the current social order affected by the blandishments
of the welfare state are appreciated, the assumption that revolution is in the worker's interest, and hence that revolutionary action is rational, is seriously challenged.

Both from the standpoint of the morality and the rationality of socialist revolution, then, a theory of postcapitalist social coordination is needed to show that such a society is at least feasible. At present, none of the contributors to the recent analytic literature on Marx has taken up the latter challenge. Some, perhaps most, of those who recognize the problem have concluded that, both from the standpoint of efficiency and from that of ethics, some version of the theory of market socialism holds greater promise than Marx's conception of communism as a centrally planned, nonmarket social order. If their judgment is accurate, then fruitful "Marxian" scholarship will become increasingly concerned with getting straight about what Marx's view was and more on developing better solutions to the problems he brought into prominence.

Sustained exploration of the market socialism alternative will have two interrelated components: (1) the development of a more adequate explanatory theory of market socialism capable of showing whether some version of market socialism can, under realistic conditions, at least compete with largely private property systems on grounds of efficiency and (2) the articulation and defense of an ethical theory of market socialism. Quite disparate ethical theories of market socialism are not difficult to imagine. On the one hand, it could be argued that market socialism can do a better job of realizing the same basic liberal democratic values which champions of the restrained capitalism of the welfare state purport to espouse. On the other hand, market socialism might be viewed as resting on an ideal of community and fulfillment through collective, creative productive activity—a value which some would argue is foreign to liberal thought (Buchanan 1985, p. 117).

Roemer has christened the new direction in Marx scholarship as "Analytical Marxism" (1986a, p. 1). This label is useful in emphasizing that much of the recent philosophical work on Marx by English and American philosophers exhibits that attention to distinctions and clarification of concepts that is thought to be a distinguishing mark of "analytic philosophy." However, a more fine-grained classification might distinguish (less elegantly) between "conceptual analysis Marxism" and "rational choice-institutional analysis Marxism." It is an undisguised implication of this essay that the former approach is of extremely limited value—that its work is already largely completed. By a "conceptual analytic" approach, I mean one which emphasizes conceptual clarity and logical analysis but which does not systematically utilize the results of research in two areas which have (at least until very recently) not been thought to be part of philosophy: (1) the "pure" theory of rational choice and (2) the analysis of the effects of real-world institutional structures, as constraints within which agents act rationally, as sources of incentives, and as factors in the formation of agent's preferences. One dramatic example of the limitations
of the conceptual analysis approach and of the necessity of the rational choice-institutional analysis approach was encountered earlier in this essay: the failure of some writers even to recognize the need for a theory of communist social coordination. Another related example is the unsuccessful attempt by one philosopher (Gould 1980) to argue for the moral superiority of socialism and the need to abolish private property by analyzing "the concept of social property" (for a critique, see Buchanan 1980).

It is important to emphasize that even those philosophers whose interest in Marxism is restricted to moral issues—not just those concerned with Marxian explanatory theories of social change—neglect rapidly evolving research in rational choice and institutional analysis theory at their peril. To do so is to ignore what is surely one of Marx’s most important insights: that any moral view worthy of consideration must not be utopian.

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