

Afterword: Remarks on the Roots of Progress

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I

Analytical Marxists stress that Marx did not just want to provide a plausible historical narrative but sought 'to provide a theory,' as Debra Satz well put it, 'which explains the real causal structure of history.'¹ But it is also the case, as Richard Norman stresses, that 'Marxism claims to be a systematic theory, whose various elements hang together in an organized way.' It claims to be able to trace the connection between different aspects of social existence where these aspects are not viewed as merely conventional or ideological connections but 'real, objective connections . . . to be established by an examination of historical facts . . . ' For Marxists, analytical or otherwise, historical materialism is central in such an account. It is for Marxists the theory which seeks to explain in a systematic scientific

¹ Debra Satz, 'Marxism, Materialism and Historical Progress,' this volume. All quotations from the author's writings will be from this volume unless otherwise specified. In those instances where the citation is *not* from this volume, the citations will be noted in a standard way.

way epochal social change. Keeping this firmly in mind, I want to start from a series of issues emerging principally from a consideration of three essays in this volume which both significantly complement and conflict with each other. Seeing how this works out points to a way Marxian social theory can be developed. I then want to set such an account against more discouraging conclusions for Marxist social theory pointed to in Allen Buchanan's careful survey article on analytical Marxism as well as some remarks with a similar overall thrust by Jon Elster.² The three articles in question are Sean Sayers's 'Analytical Marxism and Morality,' Richard Norman's 'What is Living and What is Dead in Marxism?' and Debra Satz's 'Marxism, Materialism and Historical Progress.'

Both Sayers and Satz remark that historical materialism seeks to explain historical progress and further claim that it is also an important implication of such a theory that material progress is a necessary condition for moral progress. Sayers stresses, in traditional Marxist fashion, that historical materialism maintains that the 'process of historical change does not consist of a purely arbitrary succession of social forms, each merely different from and incommensurable with the others . . . rather, it takes the form of a *development through* stages and involves progress.' Marx and Engels speak, and Sayers follows them here, of 'higher and more developed historical forms,' of 'a higher condition' of 'higher stages' and the like. The conception of epochal social change is also a developmental conception to higher and more adequate forms. As we move from earlier modes of production to later ones we get to modes of production each of which, as Sayers puts it, 'initially constitutes a progressive development, justified for its time and

relative to the conditions which it supersedes. By the same token, however, no stage is stable or ultimate. Each stage constitutes a merely transitory form destined ultimately to perish and be replaced by a higher and more developed one.' Such a conception has been thought to be unacceptably teleological and unscientific by theoreticians as diverse as

2 Allen Buchanan, 'Marx, Morality and History: An Assessment of Recent Analytical Work on Marx,' *Ethics* 98 (October 1987) 104-36

John Anderson, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper and more lately by such a paradigmatic analytical Marxist as Jon Elster.

Are these articulations of historical materialism free of that charge? Sayers' account seems at least to be vulnerable to that charge. I shall argue, however, particularly when supplemented in a certain way by Norman's and Satz's account, that it can be read in such a way that it is not vulnerable in that way. The difficulty, as has been widely recognized, is how we are to get a higher and more adequate moral conception of the world out of more complex and more developed social forms or modes of production. Can we make sense of the very idea of moral progress and can we show that it has actually obtained as we move from epoch to epoch? We get increased productivity with the development of the productive forces but how does this yield moral progress? Can we show that moral progress depends on productive growth? Sayers, to oversimplify, stresses the scientific Marx while Norman stresses what is in effect the humanistic Marx. Both, though in different ways, have trouble with the link between the development of productive capacities and moral progress.

Like a traditional Marxist, Sayers claims that

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

However, Sayers hastens to add that Marxism is not just a descriptive-explanatory social theory. It is '*both* a social theory and a political outlook, both a scientific account of history and a form of socialism' which it seeks to encompass in a single unitary outlook. The scientific social theory provides the basis upon which its political commitments 'are thought through in concrete, practical and realistic terms.' The form of socialism he defends, against Elster's irony is, at least putatively, a scientific socialism. Historical materialism is an essential theoretical element in that. On such an account morality is looked at differently than it is in classical and

contemporary forms of moral philosophy. While Marx, and Marxists more generally, plainly condemn capitalism and advocate a socialism carrying with it 'a political outlook in which practical and moral commitments play a fundamental role,' historical materialism requires us to look on these moral commitments in a distinctive way. We must, Sayers would have it, avoid what he takes to be the moralistic Marxism of G.A. Cohen and Norman Geras.³ There can be no appeal in some ahistorical way to fundamental moral principles or to an independent moral theory which, in Norman's words, underpins Marx's scientific social theory including historical materialism. Marxism, *pace* Cohen and Geras and perhaps Satz and Norman as well, 'does not involve a moral approach to history; but rather a historical approach to morality.' Sayers fleshes this out by saying that the 'main purpose of Marxism is to analyze and understand the social significance of moral ideas, not simply to criticize and dismiss them. Marx thus portrays different moral outlooks as the products and reflections of specific historical conditions, and as the expressions of the needs, desires, interests and aspirations of the members of specific social groups and classes.'

This historical and indeed historicist outlook, as Sayers is well aware, poses relativistic problems. How can we, if we are viewing things so historically, assess progress, and indeed moral progress, in and through history? Sayers' response is not, I think, very satisfactory. He cites with approval Engels' remark that 'all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of the society obtaining at the time.'⁴ Such a recognition, Sayers remarks, leads most moral philosophers to conclude, though mistakenly, that Marxists who follow Engels here

must conclude that moral ideas `are purely relative, and can only

3 G.A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1988), particularly 286-304. I respond to it in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1988), 227-50. See also Norman Geras, `On Marx and Justice,' *New Left Review* 150 (March/April 1985) 47-89.

4 Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, trans. Emile Burns (New York: International Publishers 1939), 131-2. See my discussion of Engels in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 43-60.

reflect and endorse existing conditions.' Moreover, it is not infrequently added, this relativistic conception is incompatible with their being critics of society. Marxists, the criticism goes, in being such critics, are unwittingly 'appealing to moral principles' which purportedly transcend the social order but historical materialism plainly shows this to be impossible.⁵

Sayers' response to this, strangely enough and weakly enough, is to point to the fact that there are deep class conflicts in society which cause it to change and keep it from being 'a monolithic and homogeneous structure.' In all the conflicts in the established order 'critical tendencies arise within it.' But this merely shows that one historical structure replaces another and that there is a mechanism for change in moral ideas. It does show, as well, that there is conflict but it does not show that these changes result in higher or better forms progressively more adequately capturing a humane and enlightened moral stance. These conflicts within society may indeed be 'at the root of historical development' and because 'of them the present order is in a process of flux and change' such that nothing is stable or ultimate so that all social orders will in time perish and be replaced by other more complex and developed ones. But why does this add up to moral progress: to a better moral order? Greater complexity and greater productive power do not automatically add up to a better society.

Sayers points out that Marx, viewing morality historically and noting well its relativities, gives a more realistic account of morality than philosophers traditionally have and in doing this Marx notes that capitalist society is not only a gigantic economic development over feudalism but it has also led 'to moral and

political advances in equality and liberty, not only for the bourgeoisie but also for working people.' This came at a great cost in human misery and uprooting but the result was an advance in both liberty and equality for many more people than that which had obtained in the feudal order. The modern proletariat was created under conditions of vast misery and

5 I have tried to argue for the falsity of that not unfrequently made claim in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 136-54.

human degradation in which, as Engels put it, 'the situation of the workers has on the whole become materially worse since the introduction of capitalist production on a large scale' but with their creation as a proletariat, herded together into great cities as they were, they were put into 'a position to accomplish the great social transformation which will put an end to all class exploitation and all class rule.' This, like the increase in liberty and equality, marks a definite moral advance. Looking at things historically enables us to see that these changes occurred. But that we actually have a moral advance here rests on (a) the belief that the end of class exploitation, the achievement of classlessness and the extension of liberty and equality, are desirable things and (b) on these beliefs actually being justified. But that is not established by historical materialism but seems at least to rely on the moral underpinnings that Norman, along with Cohen and Geras, appeal to. Indeed, against such a moralizing stance, we can cite Marx, as Sayers does, and Satz as well, as claiming that 'communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, and *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.'⁶ That this is happening to be seen as a moral advance, requires the acceptance of the proposition, argued for by Marx himself, that communism will bring with it more extensive well-being, equality and liberty. It also makes the moral assessment, obvious as that assessment may be, that the achievement of these things is something *to be* desired. Sayers agrees that there is a moral element contained in Marx's claims about the development of society. How else, he remarks, could it be referred to as progress? But Marx does not seek to give a *wertfrei* social science and his approach to morality is that of a

historicized naturalism. Marxism, Sayers has it, 'regards morality as a social and historical phenomenon, and seeks to base its moral and political outlook on this understanding.'

It is not a naturalism in which values or at least fundamental ones are taken to be 'mere subjective preferences, independent of

6 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part 1 (New York: International Publishers 1970), 56-7

social and historical theory.' The moral superiority of socialism over capitalism is not rooted, Sayers maintains, in anyone's subjective preference but in its being an 'objective tendency and proximate end of the historical process itself.' But how goodness or moral superiority could be a tendency rooted in the historical process itself remains mysterious and Sayers does nothing to make it less so. (It is here, as we shall see, where Satz's analysis becomes very important.) *Perhaps* significant oughts can be derived from purely nonmoral, non-evaluative factual statements and perhaps some form of ethical naturalism is justified. But Sayers's historicized form of naturalism has not been made very plausible. There is a relativism here that is both unclear and otherwise problematic. Sayers partly sees this, but then uncritically saddles Marxism with relativism. But he then, to make matters worse, confusedly sets it apart from 'pure relativism' or 'mere relativism' without giving the slightest hint of how 'relativism' is distinct from 'pure relativism' or indicating how the former is actually a relativism. We are told we should not try appealing to 'eternal values' or 'absolutes' but little more and we are told as well that values are rooted in our biological natures and the historical process but this, by itself, tells us very little.

Human nature and indeed even practical rationality (*pace* Cohen) 'cannot,' Sayers argues, 'provide an absolute and trans-historical moral yardstick.' Sayers goes on to remark: 'When conditions are criticized for being "inhuman" or "degrading," it is an inescapably historical and relative judgment that is made. Current standards of what is human and worthy of mankind, or inhuman and degrading, are in part at least a product of current conditions. They are based on needs, aspirations, forms of relationship, etc. which have

themselves been created and developed by capitalism and modern industry. There is no question, therefore, of holding capitalism up against an absolute and ideal conception of what is "human" and finding it wanting.' But that current standards of what is inhuman and degrading are in part a product of current conditions does not mean that they are entirely so. Slashing or maiming someone just for the fun of it or parents utterly neglecting their children and a host of similar things are judged to be wrong anywhere and anywhen. They are not socially relative and similar things are true for some very basic needs, e.g. for rest, food, some sexual activity,

recognition, self-respect and some form of meaningful work. What is the case is that there are some pan-human needs, almost all of which get specific cultural readings, and some needs which arise under certain social circumstances.⁷ But it isn't that we have nothing at all which is trans-historical here that we can appeal to. It is indeed important, as well, to recognize, as Marx does, that 'new desires and wants emerge as society develops' and that some of these can appropriately be called needs. Indeed, it is important to see that there is an historical transformation of human nature going on. Sayers rightly sees that Marxists see this transformation in positive terms as growth and as an enhancement of human powers. But to show how it would be such things that we really need some criteria for 'growth' and 'enhancement' seem to be required. And this, in turn, at least appears to require some explicit articulation of and defense of norms and values that have some reasonable objectivity. Given what is attainable, given the level of development of the productive forces, capitalism impoverishes life for at least most human beings coming under its hegemony. But (to understate it) not every thoughtful human being believes that capitalism so impoverishes human life and if we would do philosophy or social theory it behooves us to try in as objective way as can be mustered to state criteria for such impoverishment.

That notwithstanding, against utopian socialism or forms of moralistic Marxism, Sayers is indeed justified in saying that 'Marxism seeks to ground its values and its criticisms on its social theory, and thus to give them sound objective and scientific rather than purely utopian and moralistic bases.' But we have not been shown in this domain what an objective and scientific basis would come to. Moreover, we are left rather deeply in the dark about in

what way our criteria for moral evaluation for assessing whole societies or modes of production can be objective when we are told, as Sayers tells us, that an `appeal to human needs and human nature is no better able to provide a trans-historical and non-relative criteri-

7 David Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1987)

on for Marxist morality than principles of justice and rights,' because 'standards of human nature and needs, just like those of justice and right, are inescapably historical, relative and, in that sense ideological.' This disquietude is exacerbated when there is an appeal to escape puzzlement here to an utterly unexplicated alleged distinction between relativism, on the one hand, which is okay and *mere* relativism, on the other, which is not.

II

Sean Sayers' account is a rather traditional Marxist one. Richard Norman departs rather more extensively from orthodoxy but *may* fall prey to some of the weaknesses of utopian socialism that Sayers powerfully critiques. Norman rejects a Marxism which seeks 'to be a complete and self-sufficient philosophy, or even a complete social theory.' Most emphatically, in a way that squares very well at least with the practice of analytical Marxism, he rejects, and takes to be moribund, 'a version of Marxism which sets itself up as an all-embracing philosophy' which 'takes the form of a conjunction of philosophical materialism and historical materialism, in which the former is taken to be a comprehensive ontological theory and the latter is seen as the application of the former to the social world.' There is, Norman argues, no need for anything like that and much reason to be sceptical of it. There are enough things which are problematical that are internal to the social theory and the revolutionary practice that constitutes the canonical core of Marxism without Marxism concerning itself with articulating a comprehensive ontological theory. Moreover, it is a mistake to think that philosophical materialism provides the premises from which historical materialism can be derived. Both

philosophical materialism and historical materialism may start, as the latter does for Cohen, with some assumptions about human nature or that 'human beings are endowed by their biological nature with certain inescapable physical needs.' But this does not require philosophical materialism for its articulation and defense. Dualists and historical idealists could very well accept those claims about needs. Such philosophical matters (e.g., matters about mind/body identity), problematical as they are, should be set aside

in discussions of Marxist social theory. I am inclined, perhaps rather dogmatically and uninformedly, to believe that some form of what Norman calls philosophical materialism must be true, but there is no need for me or for anyone else to appeal to it in arguing for historical materialism or defending Marxism. The plausibility of historical materialism would not be increased by even its warranted assertion. Moreover, Norman stresses, this traditionalist wedding of philosophical materialism and historical materialism into 'a supposedly comprehensive world view' has had a disastrous effect on Marxist treatments of moral conceptions. Philosophical materialism has carried with it a philosophical world-view in which ideas are seen as epiphenomena, as peripheral offshoots of material entities. Moral values were taken to be a paradigm case of such epiphenomena and were given a reading in which they were seen, one and all, 'as essentially ideological, as reflections of class positions and class interests. . . [without] independent efficacy or independent validity,' giving rise to Marxist immoralism or to ethical relativism or class relativism.⁸ Norman takes the impact of that version of Marxism to have been disastrous. He remarks:

It does violence to the fundamental impulse behind Marxism. The initial appeal of Marxism resides in the fact that it seems to offer a critique of existing society and to embody the desire for a better society, that critique and that desire being thought of precisely as *not* just reflections of class interests, but as rationally grounded. People are attracted to Marxism because they believe that the judgments that capitalism is built on exploitation and oppression, that it crushes and restricts people's lives and prevents them fulfilling their human potential, and that it can and should give way to a socialist society which would embody greater freedom and equality, are not of the same order as the ideological rationalization invoked to legitimate the status

quo and to protect the interests of the privileged.

8 Allen Wood, 'Marx's Immoralism' in Bernard Chavance, ed., *Marx en Perspective* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Haute Etudes en Sciences Sociales 1985), 681-98; Richard Miller, *Analyzing Marx* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1985) and Milton Fisk, *Ethics and Society* (New York: Columbia Universtiy Press 1984)

Norman believes that, in contrast to a strong strand of traditional Marxism, a viable Marxism should treat values as central and should see itself as part of a wider tradition of thought without which Marxism is incomplete. So embedded, a living Marxist theory may possibly be able to offer a perspective with which those moral judgments about socialism and capitalism may be rendered more rigorous and their justificatory rationale displayed in such a way that their objective warrantability would be established. Norman's claim is that whatever Marx may or may not have thought about morality, moral philosophy and social theory a 'Marxist social theory becomes properly intelligible only when it is seen as imbued with certain specific concrete values.' They, Norman claims, 'constitute the background against which Marxist social theory needs to be set.' Norman then adds that these 'values are by no means unique to Marxism. First and foremost they are socialist values, but these in turn are located within a wider tradition, the tradition of humanistic values and the ideal of the fully human life.'⁹

Thus, within this moralized Marxist perspective, Norman has it, as in Aristotle, but with an egalitarian rather than an elitist slant, there emerges an articulation of an 'ideal of the fully human life' with a conception of distinctively human capacities and a linked conception, since their proper functioning is taken to be something desirable, of a distinctive human flourishing. There is, for Marx, no achieving of this flourishing or living a fully human life without genuinely productive work. Marx sees capitalism as a social system which 'mutilates the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrades him to the level of an appendage of a machine'; communism, by contrast, makes realistically possible a community with

associations such that 'the free development of each is the condition for the free

9 See as well my 'Marx and the Enlightenment Project,' *Critical Review* 2, 4 (Fall 1988) 59-75. But that things are not so straightforward as Norman, or for that matter, in different ways, Sayers gives to understand can be seen from Andrew Collier, 'Scientific Socialism and the Question of Socialist Values' in J. Mepham and D.H. Ruben, eds., *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* 4 (Brighton, England: The Harvester Press 1981), 3-41 and my 'Coming to Grips with Marxist Anti-Moralism,' *Philosophical Forum* 19, 1 (1987) 1-22.

development of all.'¹⁰ There is, as Norman rightly notes, no worked out ethical theory or even a theory of ethics in Marx. This is equally true of the major figures in the classical Marxist tradition. The closest thing we get to such an account is a few chapters in Engels's *Anti-Dühring*. Norman takes it, here departing extensively from traditional Marxism, as 'a major task for a living Marxism to develop' a fully worked out ethical theory. In doing this it needs to self-consciously draw from wider traditions such as the work of Rousseau and in contemporary times from that of Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls. He believes that Marxism will be dead if it cuts itself off from these traditions. (Broadly similar claims were made by Andrew Levine and Jeffrey Reiman.) It must develop an account of values which makes it plain both that and how we can make 'rational value judgments about the relations characteristic of a particular society and the quality of human lives which they make possible.' But, like Jürgen Habermas, he does not want to substitute for traditional Marxism or what he calls 'positivistic Marxism' a 'merely ethical Marxism.' That would be an unrealistic retreat to utopian socialism. Both Karl Popper and Jon Elster wish to move in that utopian direction and by doing so to save a 'rational kernel' from Marxian theory by jettisoning in the process historical materialism and much else. Norman does not see how such a view is any more recognizably Marxist or even Marxian. (Here, as we shall see, Levine makes an interesting contrast.) The view Norman defends is 'not that we need to preserve Marxist values in contrast to Marxist social theory but that we need to see how values underpin the social theory.'

III

Stated just like that there remains a worry about the grounding for this normative political theory, particularly in the face of Marxist critiques of ideology and a concern for whether a more integrated

10 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, Chapter XXV, Section 4 and Frederick Engels and Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Section II

account of Marx's social theory and such normative concerns can be given. In this connection, as well as some others, which I will specify anon, Satz's essay is of some considerable interest.

Satz, correctly I believe, takes the 'theory of historical materialism' to be 'the core commitment of Marx's social theory.' She also remarks, again rightly I believe, 'that there is a tendency for societies to make moral and material progress. The point of Marx's theory of historical materialism is to offer a theory of the mechanisms which produce this tendency.' Satz contends that there are in Marx two specifications of mechanisms whose connections remain obscure in Marx himself. Sometimes and this is the mechanism that has been most extensively noticed 'Marx emphasizes the growth of human productive powers as the fundamental cause of historical change and progress. . . .' Social forms change, as G.A. Cohen has stressed, in order to adapt to the requirements of further productive development.¹¹ But Marx also, most notably in the *Grundrisse*, 'emphasizes the desires and interests of classes as fundamental to explaining social change.' Here, as Satz puts it, 'it is class struggles (aimed at ending specific conditions of oppression) which determines not only when an old social form will be replaced by a new one but also the nature of the new social form itself.' It is important to examine closely these theses about mechanisms, to see if, and if so how, they work and whether they are really two distinct mechanisms or only one.

Marx and the classical Marxist tradition aside, how can contemporary Marxians, in a rigorous and clear form (if, indeed, they can), develop historical materialism in such a way that the appropriate mechanisms of social change will be laid bare? Satz

recognizes that the place to start here is with G.A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. She recognizes, as most others have as well, that Cohen's account is a powerful, textually responsible and insightful account. But, that notwithstanding, she argues that
`Cohen's central claim

11 For a brilliantly articulated succinct statement see Chapter 1 of his *History, Labour, and Freedom*. His extended statement, of course, is in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978).

about the possibility of explaining social development solely in terms of material, technological causes is mistaken.' Startlingly, and in sharp contrast to Sayers and traditional Marxism, she also believes that 'ethical causes . . . must be appealed to in the explanation of the actual course of social development.' Such an account an account appealing to ethical causes is, she maintains, 'implicit in Marx's own account of historical change.' A proper understanding of this, she further maintains, will help relieve paradoxes about Marx's stance toward morality and help give us a firm, theoretically based understanding of Marx's claim that a communist society is a better society than a capitalist one. It is, that is, a more humane and a fairer society where there is an enhancement of human well-being and self-realization.

It is important to recognize, as Sayers stressed as well, that Marx doesn't 'simply posit communism as an ideal; rather, he aims to specify the mechanisms responsible for the realization of the ideal.' And here, Marx claims, that (a) history creates the conditions for the achievement of freedom in social life and (b) that it is communism which is that order of freedom. Satz's claim is the paradoxical claim paradoxical particularly as a Marxist claim that it 'is because freedom is objectively good for human beings that history moves in the way that it does' for human beings can, and will in time, recognize their interest their objective interest in freedom. That 'communism expands human freedom is a significant part of the explanation of why it eventually occurs.' Communism is better than capitalism *because* its institutions allow for greater freedom for more people than capitalist institutions: communism allows for the harmonization of the free development of the powers of 'each person with the free development of the

powers of all.'¹²

Satz has not stood Marx on his head and tried to make of him a historical idealist or a utopian socialist for she also firmly stresses

¹² Thus, on criteria that John Stuart Mill, John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin would take to be appropriate, communism, if its empirical claims are near to the mark, comes out better than capitalism. But here it is important that we compare empirically feasible models.

that Marx denies, and rightly denies, 'that freedom is best secured through a moral theory.' However important values are, they do not (*pace* Norman) provide on such a Marxian account *the* or even *a* underpinning for Marxist social theory. Satz's distinctive claim is that in addition to social forms changing in response to expanding human productive powers, they also change because 'there is a learning process in history through which social agents become aware of their interests in certain values (such as freedom) and use that awareness to constitute their practices and institutions.' Her claim is that over epochs the 'specific structure of history is explained both by the adaptation to new technology and learning about human interests.' Moreover, it is a mistake to take a reductionist turn here and to explain one mechanism in terms of another. 'Material technological changes cannot explain the expansion of freedom in social life, and progress in social freedom cannot be reduced to progress in productive development.'

Satz relies on a historical-sociological claim, namely the claim that as we move into modernity there is a broad convergence of societies on institutions and practices which are justified from a moral point of view. Some theorists believe, as John Rawls seems to, that this is just a fortunate historical circumstance that could have been otherwise.¹³ There is, for these thinkers, and indeed for most non-Marxist thinkers, 'no systematic link between what is good and what is historically efficacious.' Historical materialism is interesting and distinctive in maintaining that here is such a link. It is, of course, the same as Marx's claim 'that history tends, eventually, to generate the conditions for communism.'

These, of course, are empirical claims and require (if that is not

pleonastic) empirical evidence for their truth or warranted assertability. Satz appeals to relatively straightforward bits of empirical evidence. First there is throughout human history as a whole a tendency for human productive powers to expand and in fact over the course of human history they have expanded; second, there has also, if

13 John Rawls, 'The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus,' *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, 1 (1987)

we look at human society as a whole, been an 'increasing equality of basic social conditions, as evidenced in the decline of aristocratic and caste societies and the disappearance of slavery'; third, the importance of self-respect and a recognition of people as having moral standing has expanded so that people are no longer thought of so frequently or so unambivalently as mere instruments to be used by others: there is, that is, a growing sense of popular sovereignty where more and more people are incorporated into the public life with full citizenship and equal legal status and finally there has been an increasing secularization of values with the 'location of the source of moral authority in men and women themselves as opposed to natural law and divine sanctions.'¹⁴

There is, as a matter of fact, Satz claims, such a general convergence, though, as the extent and persistence of moral disagreement in the world and even within particular societies shows, there is a very considerable divergence in moral belief as well. Moreover, even within that extensive convergence, there are differences in interpretation and application. Equality and freedom, for example, do not invariably get applied or interpreted in the same way. But all the same with modernization over cultural space and historical time there has been a considerable convergence over what values are accepted and are structurally very central. Such considerations, along with the continued development of the productive forces, could have led Marx, and should lead Marxists, to believe that it is not impossible to believe that communism is plausibly on the historical agenda. Moreover, the considerations about moral convergence alluded

¹⁴ Some, perhaps reflecting on the various insanities going on in the United States and elsewhere, and thinking as well of what imperialism

in its various disguises is doing to the world, doubt the facts of such moral progress. My reply is that such a response doesn't take a long enough view. There are indeed horrors now as there have always been throughout history, and they are nothing to be complacent about. Something like Noam Chomsky's disciplined outrage seems to me exactly the right response. But that notwithstanding, there is now more equality in the world, more respect for liberty and more deeply entrenched ideas of democracy, equal citizenship and equal moral sovereignty than ever before. Even the hypocritical lip service paid to it is the compliment that vice pays to virtue.

to, if worked into an account of historical materialism and thus made to appear at least not to be a fluke of history, will strengthen Marxism considerably by providing a distinctive rationale for some of Marx's central claims. We will have good theoretical grounds for believing that 'communism and not some despotic but efficient alternative may very well be the endpoint of historical development.' It gives us reasonable grounds to hope for, and to struggle for, a world in 'which we achieve both technical mastery over nature and practical mastery over ourselves and the conditions of our social association.' But Satz's concern here is to give such an explanation within a form of historical materialism that like Cohen's provides 'a theory which explains the real causal structure of history.' She doesn't just want to do a hermeneutical dance or to engage in utopian moralizing singing the songs of ethical socialism. She has Marx's and Habermas's aversion for that.

However, against Cohen's powerful defense of a historical materialism that does not rely on moral considerations, it is essential to inspect the soundness of Satz's criticism of Cohen that 'material causes alone cannot suffice to explain historical progress.' (Recall that for the sake of argument she is accepting the correctness of *the development thesis*, namely the thesis that the productive forces tend to develop throughout history.) If her argument will turn out to be near to the mark, Cohen's 'argument fails as an explanation of the direction of social evolution taken as a whole.' Cohen's account would be shown to be inadequate if it turns out that there are functionally equivalent social relations: 'sets of social relations which are co-optimal for productive development.' If there is more than one way of maximally developing the productive forces, it becomes questionable whether

material factors alone will explain the general direction of history. But it is just this that seems at least to obtain and Marx himself is best seen as claiming such in the *Grundrisse*. There he argues, as Satz puts it, that there are three distinct routes out of the 'primitive life of communal nomadic tribes: (1) the Asiatic mode of production; (2) the Ancient mode of production; and (3) the Germanic mode of production.' These three modes of production coexist historically and Marx does not claim that they can be ranked according to the levels of surplus they produce thus giving us a purely materialist basis for ranking them. But that notwithstanding-

ing he presents them as if they were successive stages of development. Yet there is no ranking them in terms of the levels of surplus they produce. Rather he ranks them according to how they increase social freedom.¹⁵ If this is how the world went and not just how Marx's categories categorized things, there are alternative social forms alternative modes of production functionally equivalent in the sense that they are all at approximately the same level of material development and they, as well, are alternative paths of development from a common prior mode of production. *Still, Marx ranks them as higher and lower stages of development, but according to ethical considerations and not according to levels of productive development.* This shows that for Marx, at least in some of his mature writings, he appealed to ethical considerations rooted in class struggle as well as to the development of human productive powers.

The following, Satz argues, would be a more adequate historical materialist explanation of the historical development of social forms toward communism: prior to communism, every mode of production every social formation has either a determinant dominant class or (more or less) cooperative dominant classes in conflict with a dominated class or classes. This dominant class(es) in one way or another appropriates the surplus product produced in the society. The activities of this class in normal circumstances both reproduces that mode of production and expands the forces of production. But crises will arise when 'the expanding forces of production can no longer be accommodated within the prevailing property relations.' In that situation the dominated class, the class which does not exercise control over the social surplus, will come to learn that some of its own interests require the transformation of

existing property relations. This will give it the motivation, in such circumstances, to engage in revolution. In this way, the account goes, 'every class divided society. . . contains the agent of its own destruction.' But the agent is not just the developing productive forces coming

15 Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, E. Hobsbawm, ed. (New York: International Publishers 1965), 83. Some have taken this reading of Marx to be controversial.

into conflict with production relations which now fetter them but there being a dominated class which comes to understand its own interests and comes to see the situation is propitious for that class their class to act in their own interests.¹⁶

Still why should we say that when the mode of production is capitalism and it is in such circumstances of instability that workers in coming to note their own class interests will begin to move towards communism? Why should working class cooperation generate communism? Cohen's account, even if it explains how there is throughout history a tendency of the productive forces to grow, does not explain how the forces of production will eventually yield a mode of production that is communism.¹⁷ It does not explain the viability of Marx's central ambition to explain how communism is not just an ideal to be advocated by utopian socialists but is the product of a real historical movement that is explained by a genuinely causal theory of history. In this important way, Marx aspired, in a way that Norman perhaps does not sufficiently recognize, to do something more than provide a moral underpinning to his theory of classes and historical materialism: a picture of how it would be *desirable* for the working class to move to communism. He wanted both to be able to acknowledge *and* also to provide an explanation for why certain class interests would come to prevail. The point is to show not only that they *should* prevail but to show, as well, that circumstances will come about in which they *will* prevail. This is an important way to move beyond utopian socialism.

Satz goes beyond just a straight appeal to class together with a mechanism (the development of the productive forces) which ex-

16 For an interpretation that would attend to the same social facts but stress the class interests side rather than the ethical side, see Allen Wood, 'Marx's Immoralism' and his 'Justice and Class Interests,' *Philosophica* 33, 1 (1984) 9-32. I have criticized Wood in a way that nicely meshes with Satz's account in my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*, 227-41.

17 See here Stanley Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1980).

plains material development, to an *intentional mechanism*, operating through classes, constituting a recognition by the dominant classes of their interest in freedom. As Marx stressed himself, under certain conditions the advances made by slaves, serfs, and workers through actions generated at least in part by their awareness of their own interests and by a recognition of the *legitimacy* of those interests, importantly contributed to the inability of their respective social forms to continue to prevail. Moreover, these are not in Marx's view of things just changes the switching of one ideology for another but *advances* in awareness in moral understanding, leading, as the forces of production develop, to higher social forms. The changes in consciousness are at one and the same time both causally significant and emancipatory.

There is such a thing as a class making an emancipatory gain by learning more about the nature of their fundamental interests, including an understanding of these interests in relation to other classes, and then, acting on these interests so understood. Here we have a use of ethical values in the *explanation* of historical progress. Satz contends (controversially, she recognizes) that it is not because humans *just happen to prefer*, where conditions are auspicious for it, to be free, that history moves towards communism. Rather one of the important mechanisms that moves the world toward communism is that 'freedom is an objective value for human beings; human beings have the capacity to recognize the value of freedom; they do in fact increasingly recognize its value, and their recognition motivates them to act in such a way that freedom is expanded in social life.' On such a conception of historical materialism and social evolution, 'historical progress. . .

results both from a causal mechanism which expands the productive forces, and from an intentional mechanism through which agents act on what they recognize as objectively valuable.' And the reason why class, class antagonisms and class struggle has been so important in Marxist theory and practice is that 'it is through class struggles that the oppressed social classes learn more about the conditions which limit their freedom and the possible ways of overcoming these conditions.' Marx rejects a basically Kantian conception of morality which roots morality in concepts of rights, duty and justice and abstracts moral deliberation from a consideration of human interests. For Marx, ade-

quate moral thinking requires that we should come to think in terms of our real interests and that in these terms we form an informed opinion about what is good for human beings.

If we want to say that Marx has an implicit moral theory or that Marxists should articulate a moral theory, we should realize à la Norman that this is a rather different conception of moral theory than we have inherited from Kant and Sidgwick. But, even for the articulation of an adequate form of historical materialism, we do need, whether we call it a moral theory or not, an informed view about a good life for human beings rooted in a reasonable conception of objective interests and needs. More specifically, we need to recognize that human beings do have an objective interest in freedom (perhaps 'autonomy' is the better word here) and that while this plainly is not the only objectively good thing there is none the less freedom is a value or so the claim goes which dominates over other objective values at least in determining what a society should aim to become where the conditions of productive abundance are such as to make such a life feasible for human beings generally. As a moral conception freedom (autonomy) dominates in a world in which human beings, given the level of productive development, could live an unalienated life in which they were treated as ends and not as means only. A communist world, as part of the very idea of a communist world, would be a world in which 'people could realize their aspirations to be free and autonomous persons in a world in which each person would be treated as an end.'¹⁸ (The distance between this and what goes on in Russia and China hardly needs commenting on.) Marx, Satz concludes, 'advocates communism because its basic structure institutionalizes the conditions required for objective values, in

particular for "the free development of all."

18 Wil Kymlicka, 'Marxism and the Critique of Justice,' unpublished manuscript.

IV

This movement from Sayers to Norman to Satz, yielding a historical materialism which remains scientific (thus supporting the ideals of scientific socialism) and yet incorporates into its very conception suitably non-relativized moral conceptions, is attractive indeed. But is it just another just-so story, a comforting philosophical myth? Initially, when analytical Marxism came into being (what Levine calls its first phase), historical materialism had some distinguished rational reconstructions and defenses (Cohen, McMurtry and Shaw). As was to be expected those accounts came in for sustained examination and critique on the part of other analytical Marxists as well as others. Richard Miller produced an importantly different articulation and defense of historical materialism and Andrew Levine produced a sustained critique and reformulation that aimed at formulating and saving the rational kernel of historical materialism. Other analytical Marxists most notably Jon Elster definitely have rejected historical materialism in any form and Allen Buchanan, as I have already remarked, in a careful survey essay of analytical Marxism, has delivered himself of the judgment (though not without prior careful argument) that 'Marx's philosophy of history should no longer be of interest to social philosophers or to social scientists but only to historians of those disciplines.'¹⁹ He concludes, after a critique of Cohen, that both the *development thesis* and the *primacy thesis* should be abandoned and that there are no viable replacements in the offing. With this it becomes very questionable, Buchanan contends, whether there is a valuable and distinctively Marxist theory of epochal social change. I would like, in the light of the discussion in the previous sections and particularly with Satz's essay firmly in

mind, to consider if things are really that bleak.

The development thesis is the claim that in the history of humankind (human society as a whole) the productive forces tend to develop throughout history with less productive social structures being replaced over time by more productive ones. This or something

19 Buchanan, 132

rather like it has been taken to be a central element in many formulations of historical materialism without which no plausible scientifically rigorous theory of historical materialism can be articulated. Satz registers some scepticism about this thesis but accepts *the development thesis* in the articulation of her argument. (She accepts it, that is, as something she need not challenge in stating her case though presumably she thinks she could defend her formulation of historical materialism without it.) *The development thesis* has been thought by others to be empirically false (disconfirmed by the record of history) or conceptually flawed. What should be said about these issues if something like Satz's theory of historical materialism is to be sustained? (Remember, whatever her misgivings, she accepts it in the formulation of her argument, so in that argument, as developed, that thesis is required.)

Where *the development thesis* has been thought to be empirically disconfirmed is in the development of European feudalism which was not marked by an increase in productivity and in Asia for considerable periods prior to extensive Western incursions. But these facts (if they are facts) about the rise of feudalism and the Asiatic mode of production do not falsify or even infirm *the development thesis* as stated above for it is about what trajectory human society as a whole has taken as long as we have any archaeological or historical records. It involves a prediction about what it will continue to be and a retrodiction of what was before that. Over the long haul and taking human society as a whole, there plainly has been a development of the productive forces. But on Cohen's account there is also an account of the mechanisms of this change and *that mechanism* does not appear, at least, to have been

the mechanism for change with the rise of feudalism or in certain periods in Asia. Sometimes elements other than the development of the productive forces appear to have brought about major social changes such as the movement from one mode of production to another. Satz, on one understanding of her account, would have no trouble with that for she could say that sometimes moral motivations rooted in an understanding of class interests brought about the change. Sometimes, that is, epochal social change occurs because of the development of the productive forces and sometimes because of moral motivations rooted in objective class interests.

The above is a messier version of historical materialism than Cohen's but arguably it (a) squares better with Marx's own account, (b) fits better with the historical record, (c) is a complete account always supplying mechanisms for epochal social change, and (d) unifies class struggle and our moral understanding into a single theory of historical materialism. Moreover, problems raised for *the development thesis* by coordination problems can be met within the resources of Satz's theory. It is surely true that the interactions of individuals, proletarians or otherwise, pursuing exclusively their own interests either *may or may not* result in a growth of the productive forces. But Satz's mechanisms bring in moral conceptions so we should not posit individuals acting solely on the basis of self-interest but individuals with a sense of solidarity and a respect for the autonomy of others as well as being persons who have an interest in their own autonomy. *With such motivations* coordination problems are not a stumbling block but are problems readily solvable by individuals with the unproblematic rationality attributed to them by Cohen and the moral sense attributed to them by Marx as read by Satz. The historical materialist need make no Smithian invisible hand assumption that the pursuit of individual interest will result in productive growth. In some circumstances in some societies it perhaps will; in other circumstances in other societies it will not. But there is no need for historical materialists to appeal to it as the underlying mechanism generating productive growth and historical change. On Satz's formulation of historical materialism there is no need at all to make what Buchanan regards as Cohen's `dogmatic profession of faith that the collective good of productive growth will in fact be produced either by invisible hand processes, by deliberate collective action or some combination of

the two.²⁰ We posit as a mechanism, whether there is productive growth or not, (a) the having by people of a certain minimal and uncontroversial rationality that they tend to act on (the rationality appealed to by Cohen) and (b) that they have objective moral interests which under conditions of modernity take a certain form. That rationality

20 Ibid., 111

and those interests explain the fact that there has been a convergence on values including moral values in such modernizing societies. Moreover, people who are minimally rational in Cohen's sense will come through class struggle to have an enhanced sense of their own interests, including their moral interests. This is not just a matter of what they take an interest in but of there being things which are in their objective interest. Whether they *take* an interest in them or not, they *have* an interest in their being realized. (This says nothing about what stance we should take about paternalism and antipaternalism.) So there will tend to be collective action rooted in the moral conceptions, which in turn are rooted in objective human interests. There is a hypothesis here grounded in judgments about the historical record which is falsifiable, but not falsified. There is no profession of faith here, let alone a dogmatic one, but only a not unreasonable hope and expectation. (There is no reason at all, *pace* Buchanan and Elster, to get involved in the complexities of rational choice theory here.)

I think of a historical materialist conception of moral progress and indeed moral progress generally up to a certain threshold (a threshold of the abundance necessary for communism) as resting on productive growth. (Without this productive growth there would not be this moral progress though it is not sufficient for it.) But this does not require the acceptance of *the primacy thesis* (the thesis that the productive forces are the primary explanatory factor in accounting for both large-scale social change and for the stability of social structures) but can rest on the kind of conception of historical materialism proffered by Satz. But it does seem to require (whatever Satz may believe) *the development thesis* as a thesis concerning the development of *human society as a whole*.²¹ The

truth of *the development thesis* so understood, *pace* Buchanan, is demonstrated by the record of his-

21 I developed a way of construing *the development thesis* and historical materialism more generally in terms of *human society as a whole* in my 'On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously,' *Dialogue* 22, 2 (1983). See also G.A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom*, 26-9. William Shaw has criticized my account, finding it, puzzlingly enough, too Hegelian, in his 'Historical Materialism and the Development Thesis,' *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 16, 2 (1986).

tory: *the epochal changes of human society*. If the mechanisms located by Cohen, and added to in a significant way by Satz, are indeed the mechanisms of large scale social change, and I see nothing in Buchanan's or Elster's arguments to gainsay that, then we need not reject historical materialism as either a theory of epochal social change or as a view, rooted in an empirical and causal theory of history, that there is progress in history. We can continue to believe these things without being blinded by ideology. We can reasonably believe, that is, that *moral* progress is a reality and that it depends on productive growth. With Cohen's account and like accounts we have no reason to believe that history would yield communism rather than some form of state socialism or a technocratically authoritarian but efficient form of statism replacing the welfare state. With Satz's account we have a recognizably historical materialist conception that explains how it is not unreasonable to expect that with the development of the productive forces and with an enhanced moral understanding rooted in a better understanding, particularly by the dominated classes, of their class interests, we can reasonably predict we will move to socialism and through socialism to communism. The development of the productive forces something *the development thesis* gives us reason to believe is true is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for communism; there must also be something like the moral development articulated by Satz.

We have here a reasonable, empirically responsible, alternative to the roughly Weberian conception that history is not a predictable process `but simply the story of changing patterns of domination, a succession of ruling classes, ceaseless social war with no promise of victory.'²² The claim, of course, is not that moral progress is

inevitable or guaranteed but that it is reasonably expectable and that the tough-minded, empirical, responsible view is not uniquely captured by the *realpolitik* Weberian perspective. A human communism is not inevitable, but it is also not an unreasonable hope, without an empirically grounded scientific rationale. We need make no Kierkegaardian leaps here. On Satz's account, unlike Cohen's,

22 Buchanan, 111

the growth of the productive forces do not have a unique importance but they still retain a very central importance for without productive growth there will be no moral progress and there will be no communism. (The kind of abundance required by productive growth for socialism and eventually communism could be the relatively moderate kind precisely portrayed in this volume by Philippe Van Parijs.) Productive growth, let me stress again, is a necessary condition, though not a sufficient condition, for moral progress. Nuclear weapons result from productive growth, and they very well could be the end of us all.

V

Does not such talk of moral progress as integral to historical materialism have unwittingly incorporated into it the unacceptable and unscientific conceptions claimed by Jon Elster?²³ Elster draws an ancestry here from Leibniz to Hegel to Marx. History human history as a whole had a goal for Leibniz. Ordinarily when we speak of a goal we assume there must be some intentional agent or agents for whom it is a goal. Moreover, 'to act in the light of the future is to act intentionally.'²⁴ But historical change is not ordinarily thought to be so agent dependent. This, of course, provided no problem for Leibniz, because on his view 'the course of human history was decided by God when he chose the actual world from among the possible worlds. God is the intentional agent where His goal to create the best of all possible worlds makes sense of the local and temporary defects of the universe.'²⁵ A teleological view of history makes sense here *if* talk of God makes sense because there is an appropriate intentional agent. When we get to the increasingly secularized view of the world of Hegel and

even more so of Marx

23 Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press 1985), 107-18

24 *Ibid.*, 109

25 *Ibid.*, 104

things get rather more problematic. So while for Leibniz history has a goal *and* a creator who directs it, by the time we get to Hegel we get the disastrous view that history has a goal without its having a creator, a designer or even a director some intentional agent directing the scene. Hegel 'did not invoke any intentional agent whose actions were guided by that goal.'²⁶ 'Hegel's philosophy of history,' Elster remarks, 'is a secular theodicy, which is to say that it is nonsense.'²⁷

Elster believes that Marx did not fully emancipate himself from these Hegelian ideas.²⁸ Marx continued sometimes to think, if his words are taken straightforwardly, of history as having a goal, though without some agent for whom it is a goal. Marx, like Hegel, Elster claims, remained imprisoned 'between a fully religious and a fully secular view of history.'²⁹ In arguing for this, Elster attempts, by citations from Marx, and then by an interpretation of those citations, to show that Marx, at least sometimes, had an objectionable teleological view of history, namely a view 'in which the earlier stages are seen as tending irresistibly towards the latter as being explained by their contribution to the latter.'³⁰ If Marx's view is alternatively to be seen, as I wish to see it, as a purely empirical view, then Marx, Elster has it, would simply be stating a series of necessary conditions for the successive stages to emerge. Elster sees Marx as having a richer view in which he uses humanity as Hegel used Spirit or Reason as 'the supra-individual entity whose full development is the goal of history, even though it is not endowed with the qualities of an intentional agent who could *act* to bring about that goal.'³¹

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 David Schweickart argues otherwise in his 'Reflections on Anti-Marxism: Elster on Marx's Functionalism and Labour Theory of Value,' *Praxis International* 8, 1 (April 1988) 109-22.

29 Elster, *On Making Sense of Marx*, 104

30 Ibid., 114

31 Ibid., 116

This, Elster claims, is an inescapably teleological conception, a conception which is thoroughly unscientific. Indeed, it is not only unscientific, it is actually incoherent, for it postulates a goal without an agent whose goal it is in which 'the development of humanity' is thus spuriously teleologically explained 'by its indispensable place as a stepping stone to communism.'³²

Elster ties the above claim (unnecessarily, I believe) to his espousal of methodological individualism, a view trenchantly criticized by Andrew Levine.³³ What Elster takes as Marx's appeal to an immanent teleology has, in Elster's view, an *ersatz* subject, namely humanity, which sets the goals that will be realized as history unfolds. But 'according to methodological individualism, humanity as such cannot act. . . .'³⁴ It may be that there will arise in history a communist society in which men and women will at long last in fact be able to control their own development. That cannot be ruled out a priori or on purely conceptual grounds. But, Elster remarks, 'one cannot coherently assume that the development of humanity up to that stage will occur as if it had already been reached' and it makes no sense, Elster claims, to speak of humanity as either acting or failing to act.³⁵ Humanity, unlike God, is not the name of an individual who could act or fail to act.

However, as Levine argues, it is anything but clear that there is any plausible version of methodological holism to contrast with methodological individualism in which holists would be making an

32 Ibid.

33 Andrew Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' *Journal of Philosophy* 83, 12 (December 1986) 721-8. See also Andrew Levine, Elliot Sober and Erik Olin Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological

Individualism,' *New Left Review* 162 (1987). See also note 10 of Levine's article in this volume. The article by Levine et al. from *New Left Review* is, among other things, a powerful critique of Elster's methodological individualism. It should, in my judgment, be regarded as the classic text on methodological individualism. It is an article which should end much barren debate on the subject and dispose of a lot of pseudo-issues.

34 Elster, 116

35 Ibid.

ontological claim that was distinct from that made by individualists. I am a methodological holist, as is Levine, but we both agree with methodological individualists that 'societies are collections of individuals, just as individuals are collections of cells; and social phenomena are effects of individuals' actions in much the way that individuals' actions are effects of the behaviours of the cells that compose individuals.'³⁶ So on this ontological issue holists and individualists need not dispute. If, that notwithstanding, there is a *metaphysically* inclined Marxian holist around who wants to dispute the ontological claim that societies are collections of individuals, the non-metaphysically inclined Marxian methodological holist can say, much in the spirit of what Norman said about philosophical materialism, that that issue can, as far as Marxian social theory and Marxian political practice is concerned, be set aside, for, as Levine puts it, 'it is clear. . . at least for individuals' actions, that ontological reducibility (decomposability without remainder) does not entail *explanatory* reducibility.'³⁷ Moreover, it is explanatory irreducibility to the actions of individual agents that is vital for Marxian social theory. Even if, as common sense (at least in Western societies at present) and bourgeois social science and psychology assumes, namely that 'individuals compose societies,' explanatory holism could still very well be in place. From the fact individuals compose society it does not follow, as Levine well puts it,

. . . that the best explanation of social phenomena need appeal to the behaviors of individuals. In all likelihood, supra-individual relational properties population density, kinship relations, social norms and so on will sometimes be explanatory. But these properties are not properties of individuals, *except* in the irrelevant sense that societies are decomposable ontologically into individuals. Very generally, with

social phenomena, as with individual behavior, what is explanatory cannot be specified *a priori*.³⁸

36 Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' 734

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

Moreover, in social science practice, including good social science practice, both Marxians and non-Marxians appeal to such supra-individual, relational properties. Neither Elster nor, as far as I know, anyone else has shown why there is, generally speaking, anything wrong with such explanatory practices.

It is also the case that Marx's not infrequently extravagantly Hegelian language can be sanitized into rather straightforward language that does not offend current scientific descriptions of the world. 'Humanity' need not be taken like Hegel's 'Spirit' as some mysterious supra-individual entity that has goals, or as any kind of supra-individual entity at all, but simply as a convenient label for all human beings past and present and for those, whoever they will be, who will occur in the future. 'The goal of history,' as we can see in Cohen's and Satz's reconstructions of historical materialism, can readily be taken as referring to nothing more than the claim that such and such social formations can be expected and reasonably be predicted to emerge (1) given the way the productive forces have been developing and can be expected and reasonably predicted to develop and (2) given the way that certain objective interests (including moral interests) can be expected and reasonably predicted to be recognized by human beings when, as members of antagonistic classes, they come, as they predictably will, to engage in class struggles in predictably determinate circumstances. This, together with the recognition that this is a *desideratum* warmly to be welcomed, is all that need be meant by 'the goal of history.' 'Classes' in the previous sentence can, of course, be treated as I treated 'humanity.' No supra-individual entities are referred to, no mysterious unfolding of an immanent teleology presupposed and no empirically unconfirmable or infirmable statements are made.

There is no need to saddle Marx, as Elster does, with an extravagant philosophy of history, a speculative enterprise, that violates canons of good scientific practice and Marx's conception of himself as a social scientist. Cohen's and Satz's reconstructions of historical materialism keep, in a Marxologically respectable way, historical materialism as set important theoretical claims within social science and it makes, in applying this social science thesis, 'scientific socialism' something that, *pace* Elster, can be a legitimate part of Marxian social theory and not a term of abuse.

Unlike Elster, Levine in 'What Is A Marxist Today?' sees 'Marx's signal achievement' as having 'retained Hegel's sense of history's intelligibility without advancing teleological explanations, and, without purporting to identify "meanings" in history. For Marx, history is as meaningless as nature is. But history is structured and is discernible nevertheless.' It is discernible in the purely causal and empirical way Cohen and Satz have characterized, though the particulars of their accounts might in one way or another be mistaken. They look, that is, for the causal determinations of epochal social change and do not like philosophers of history try to interpret the past by unveiling its meaning. Such an 'unveiling of the meaning of history' would only make sense if it made sense to see the world in Leibniz's or Aquinas's general way. Without an identifiable agent we simply get, as in Hegel, unintelligibility. These traditional philosophies presupposed that there was an end something requiring an agent for its envisagement in the light of which everything becomes retrospectively meaningful. Marx admittedly sometimes spoke in those grand teleological terms, but, as we have seen, Marx's historical materialism can be reconstructed in a completely non-teleological way. 'Historical materialism,' as Levine puts it, 'is a theory of historical trends, and an account of the conditions under which economic structures of different sorts become (materially) possible.'

These historical materialist accounts may turn out to be false, disconfirmed by the historical record, or the facts they appeal to may indeed be facts but they may be better explained by an alternative theory of epochal social change of comparable scope. Atheoreticians, in turn, may be right: history may turn out to have no general theory of explanatory interest. Or some rival general

theory may be better confirmed or explanatorily neater. It might turn out to be that military force or ethnic, racial, religious or gender divisions is the dominant cause of epochal social change. If any of those things clearly obtain then historical materialism would have been shown to be empirically untenable and thus untenable *sans phrase*. This cannot, and should not, be something claimed a priori any more than historical materialism can be established a priori. Rather, historical materialism is an elaborated theory, with a cluster of related hypotheses, that might very well be shown, through empirical research, to be

sustainable. Levine's claim that there can be good though inclusive reasons for believing it to be the best available theory of that scope seems to me reasonable. We have here, that is, a viable research program not to be rejected on philosophical grounds and certainly not on ideological or political grounds.

VI

What Marxists or Marxians most fundamentally want to know is, as Levine puts it, 'What is pertinent to the transformation of society from capitalism to communism?' When we look for what a Marxist would regard as essential for the Marxian explanatory project, we look for what empirically and intellectually sustainable claims minimally must be appealed to get a grip on this. Historical materialism, if true, explains history's trajectory so it is plainly relevant to gaining that understanding and so is class analysis, another canonical part of Marxian theory. Marxisms of all varieties have accorded fundamental importance to class structure and class conflict. Centrally, what is involved here, as Levine stresses, is the idea that at the level of social structure it is power that accounts for both social order and social change. Moreover, the fundamental source of power, Marxists claim, rests in whomever has the 'real (as opposed to the merely juridical) ownership of resources and that in turn is the basis for class divisions where in not inconsiderable measure the interests of the different classes are conflicting.' The underlying idea 'is that class power structures social life.' This is a distinctive Marxist claim, which in turn is explained by and supported by historical materialism. That notwithstanding, it would still be available to the Marxist should all recognizably distinctive views of historical materialism turn out to

be untenable, though, if that turns out to be so, class is more contestable by rival views of the underlying base or bases of power. I refer here to alternatives such as the claims of some feminist theorists, the arguments of Michel Foucault, and Durkheimian-Parsonian claims, which see in society's norms integrative mechanisms which allow power to remain firmly embedded in traditions. These accounts compete or at least appear to compete and which (if any) account is correct, or whether any general

account is correct, cannot be settled by philosophical analysis: cannot, that is, be settled a priori. (I said above that one alternative is that they might only 'appear to compete' for the different analyses might be correctly applied at different levels.)

Historical materialism and class analysis are plainly canonical parts of Marxist or even Marxian theory. Jon Elster's magisterial *Making Sense of Marx*, which no doubt for some time will remain the central text of the second phase of analytical Marxism, rejected almost all of these canonical parts. Elster's analysis, if on the mark, wreaked havoc with those parts of Marxist theory that could plausibly be said to be canonical. The devastation was so great that the question was reasonably raised by Michael Walzer concerning whether Elster could really plausibly regard himself as a Marxist, or even a Marxian.³⁹ (I should add that Andrew Levine has indicated how Elster can reasonably stick with such an appellation.)⁴⁰ Cohen's recent work and work in this volume, particularly that of Joseph McCarney, Andrew Levine and Debra Satz, have shown how certain very central canonical elements, to wit, class analysis and historical materialism, can resist challenges such as those of Elster and can be seen as a part of a Marxian social science and emancipatory critique that have not (*pace* Buchanan) simply been incorporated, by now platitudinously, into good social science, Marxian and non-Marxian alike. Similar things should be said, I believe, against Elster's devastation of the tradition by setting Marxism on methodological individualist and rational choice theorist foundations. Here Levine's and McCarney's analyses are particularly important. (It is also useful to ask, in this connection, whether the harsh critique of Elster by Ernest Mandel really strikes its target and makes a good case for restoring in rather

traditional terms much of the Marxism of the classical tradition.)

Elster, along with Cohen and Roemer and most analytical Marxists, rejects another traditionally canonical core of Marxian the-

39 Michael Walzer, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' *New York Review of Books* (November 21, 1985)

40 Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' 728

ory, namely its analysis of exploitation in terms of the labor theory of value. Something of what is at issue here emerges in this volume in the extensive and important set of papers on exploitation papers not discussed in this Afterword. I think they deserve careful study, comparison and a critical analysis of the unfolding argument. I want to make only one general comment here, principally in line with comments about what is salvageable from the canonical core. Jeffrey Reiman, right at the beginning of his important and original discussion of exploitation, points out, correctly I believe, that the arguments arising from and about Cohen's, Roemer's (and I would have added Elster's) work have carried the discussion forward as follows. 'Exploitation' taken as a technical descriptive term defined in terms of the labour theory of value is of little interest. Even if the labour theory of value gets a formulation which is viable, the term 'exploitation' in such a conceptualization loses its normative and critical force. But it is just this which makes it a useful element in Marxist analysis or critique. A viable Marxian conception of exploitation, as Roemer, Cohen and Elster have argued, 'must include *injustice* as part of its definition.' Forced extraction of unpaid labour or surplus labour is not enough for there to be exploitation. The extraction must be unjust for it to be exploitative. Roemer goes on to treat exploitation as principally a distributive matter, making, if that is correct, exploitation a rather minor component, though still not a negligible one, in a theory of distributive justice. This pushes us over into a discussion of the alternative accounts of justice given by Rawls, Barry, Dworkin, Walzer and even libertarian accounts like those of Nozick. This, as Reiman, Norman, Nielsen, Levine and Cohen have recognized, pushes Marxians into terrain ordinarily occupied by liberalism. But

this, I think, is all to the good, for the reasons brought out by Reiman, and leaves a *non-parti pris* Marxism in a strong position here. But Reiman also argues resourcefully that treating 'exploitation,' as we should, as a normative term, should not (*pace* Roemer and Cohen) commit us to taking exploitation as principally a 'manifestation of an unjust distribution of assets' and thus a distributive injustice rather than something that most paradigmatically occurs, where capitalist injustice most extensively occurs, namely in production. Reiman also argues for a normative and morally freighted conception of exploitation. While, like Cohen and Roemer, he

retains the concept's link with injustice, he reads this differently than such 'distributive' Marxism does. Reiman does this by centering exploitation in the *subjugation* of producers by non-producers, where, in unjust circumstances, producers are forced in the sphere of production to work and live in certain distinctive ways by non-producers. What is offended against most centrally here is an ideal vital to the tradition including the liberal tradition growing out of the Enlightenment. I refer here to the 'ideal of equal sovereignty,' an ideal that 'holds roughly that individuals should have equal and maximum power over their own destinies and equal and minimum power over others' destinies.' What we need to get at in exploitation most essentially, Reiman argues, is a certain power relationship between people as the central injustice of exploitation. In speaking of the non-producer's power over the worker's labour, rather than over their products, as what is essential to exploitation, Reiman brings out how *domination* in the work place is essential to exploitation. This clearly catches, in a suitably general form, the distinctive features of exploitation Marx focuses on in classical slavery, feudal serfdom and capitalist wage labour. In all of these circumstances the worker is being forced at the time of her working to work for non-producers, thus violating the ideal of equal sovereignty.⁴¹ Moreover, this brings us back to class analysis, for in exploitation, in classical slavery, feudal serfdom and capitalist wage-labour, we have *the domination of one class by another*. Distinctively, and in a way that should elicit considerable critical attention, Reiman is arguing for injustice in exploitation understood as a distinctive social relation which analyzes socio-economic systems 'in the light of a moral version of the labor theory of value.' This, of course, ties

in with a canonical element of classical Marxism, namely the labour theory of value, while giving it a distinctive conceptualization. Reiman calls it 'the labour theory of moral value.' This keeps close to an important canonical element in Marx by articulating something which bears a reasonable family resemblance to the labour theory of value

41 In doing this, Marx plainly makes contact with liberal thinkers such as Rawls and Dworkin, who stress the importance of equal liberty for everyone.

without being subject to the well-known difficulties of such a theory. While sticking close to the canonical elements of the theory, it also makes a distinctive contribution to the ongoing discussion of exploitation in a Marxian theory of justice. Even if the classical labour theory of value is as moribund as most analytical Marxists believe, this conception remains alive.

Whatever the upshot of the argument about exploitation, pursued actively in this volume and elsewhere, it is clear that arguments about exploitation carry over into discussions of Marx and morality and to Marxian conceptions of justice. What I think is emerging, against rather traditionalist conceptions, such as that of Sayers or the Marxist immoralism of Richard Miller, is that there is a distinctive theoretically based Marxian account of morality, including that of justice, which yields a rationally defensible and reasonably objective conception of a moralized version of Marxism that does not just trade one ideology for another. This has been argued in detail in two books, roughly in the mold of analytical Marxism, that, while proceeding very differently, strikingly overlap and mesh very well with the general lines of Satz's essay and Levine's analysis. One, Philip J. Kain's *Marx and Ethics*, proceeds historically, with an exhaustive analysis of Marx's texts. Kain argues that, while the *German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto* argue in a way that squares reasonably well with Marxist immoralism, from the *Grundrisse* on there emerges in Marx a more balanced and nuanced treatment of morality that states historical materialism in such a way that the cogency and objectivity of some moral conceptions are retained and a conception of a transformation of morality is articulated for socialist and communist societies. Here we have close textual analysis yielding a

non-ideological, moralized Marxism. My own *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* yields a very similar conclusion by a very different route, namely by delineating a set of canonical conceptions from the Marxist tradition (including a conception of ideology and ideological critique) and then showing that these canonical conceptions are fully compatible with the moral point of view where that point of view has an objectivity and reasonability that shows it is not an ideologically distorting moral stance.

Those works, if near to the mark, show that neither in Marx nor in Marxism is there a rejection of morality. Marxist sociology of

morals shows how much of the moralizing in class societies is ideological and how pervasive class bias is in the *extant moralities* of class societies. But Marxism does not advance an *epistemology* of morals let alone a deflationary one showing that there is something in the very nature of morality per se that makes moral conceptions illusory, subjective or the ideological biases of one class or another. It does not attempt to show that morality is such that it would wither away with the state, or end with the ending of class societies.

However, once it has been shown that Marxism doesn't reject morality, it may be that what needs to be said about it and in favor of a socialist society is less obvious than Marx and Engels and many Marxists have thought. Here Norman's advice is sound about directly engaging in reasonably systematic argument in and about morality, and in doing so, competing with liberal accounts such as Rawls's or Dworkin's, libertarian and neo-Hobbesist accounts such as Nozick's and Gauthier's, and communitarian accounts such as MacIntyre's, Walzer's and Taylor's. Marxists and Marxians are beginning to do that. Richard Norman's own *Free and Equal* is an example, as is a parallel book by John Baker, *Freedom and Equality*. Similar things should be said for Levine's *Arguing For Socialism* and *The End of the State*, for my *Liberty and Equality*, for G.A. Cohen's *History, Labour and Freedom*, Jeffrey Reiman's *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy* and the sections on morality in Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx*.⁴² These works work out at least fragments of a moral philosophy and do what Norman calls normative political philosophy directly engaging the best efforts in the various reigning bourgeois traditions. Often the works here depart extensively from standard Marxian themes and approaches.

Yet they are recognizably socialist and in a broad sense Marxian.

42 Rodney Peffer in his *Marxism, Metaethics and Morality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1990) combines a careful historical elucidation of Marx's views on ethics with argumentation with contemporary theories of ethics.

VII

Some critics of analytical Marxism have accused it of scholasticism: theory for theory's sake. If this criticism were well founded, it would undermine analytical Marxism for Marxism of any sort, simply in virtue of what it is, is tied to a distinctive project a political project which, to put it crudely, consists in a commitment to replacing capitalism with socialism, with the construction of socialism and to a vision of a communist future.⁴³ Levine, paraphrasing Marx, puts it very well when he remarks: 'Marxists aim not just at understanding the world, but also above all at transforming it to accord with this understanding.' If analytical Marxism is a scholasticism then, given what Marxism is, it is not and cannot be a Marxist or even Marxian theory. But there is no reason to so criticize analytical Marxism. Analytical Marxists in all their varieties, from Richard Miller and Dan Little, to Jon Elster and John Roemer, defend left-wing positions and in various ways have close affinities with Marx. Elster, of the analytical Marxists, raises the greatest devastation to traditional Marxism. Still, as Levine remarks at the end of his review of *Making Sense of Marx*, 'Elster remains radical and sympathetic to the Marxian project, and he defends many of its fundamental components.'⁴⁴ Analytical Marxists, particularly the social scientists among them, but to a lesser extent the philosophers as well, use many of the tools traditionally associated with the right or the centre, but they are used where (a) it is at least plausible to believe these tools are useful, (b) may help us gain core insights concerning social reality and (c) not infrequently, where, as Levine puts it, it 'is a case of turning the enemy's weapons back against the enemy.'⁴⁵ *Perhaps,*

43 Bertell Ollman, by collecting together the various passages and then perspicuously representing them, clearly depicts Marx's vision of a communist future. See Bertell Ollman, 'Marx's Vision of Communism: A Reconstruction' in S. Bixler and S. Sluzer, eds., *Radical Vision of the Future* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1977).

44 Andrew Levine, 'Review of *Making Sense of Marx*,' 728

45 Ibid.

in the way most analytical Marxists do not believe, there is after all a distinctive Marxist method which it is crucial for Marxists to employ and perhaps analytical Marxists use the wrong methods, remaining too captive to the dominant intellectual culture in which they work.⁴⁶ Such things would hardly be surprising or novel. But even if that is so something I actually doubt it would not render analytical Marxists scholastics or people who had abandoned the Marxian radical project. It would just mean that they were bringing a mistaken theory to their political practice: something that could as readily happen to Lukácsians or Althusserians.

I want in closing to return to a theme gestured at by others, but taken up explicitly by Levine in the last half of 'What Is a Marxist Today?' Suppose that the devastation to traditional Marxism to what I have called canonical Marxist positions is as deep as Elster and Roemer believe. Suppose historical materialism against what I have argued proves untenable and class analysis is left without any *theoretical* basis. What is left of the Marxian political agenda? What would the Marxian agenda look like in such a circumstance? Or could there, if that obtains, be an intelligible Marxian agenda? It would seem, minimally, that there could still be research towards the realization of a communist future. That conception would not be rendered senseless by the demise of the canonical claims of Marxism, though it might be rendered more utopian than would be hoped with some of those positions intact. Marxian class analysis would still be intact, as would the stress on the importance of class struggle, though without the theoretical underpinning afforded by historical materialism. There would also remain room for direct normative argumentation concerning the ideals implicit in the very idea of communism. Such a free ranging Marxian analysis does not

make of 'being a Marxian' simply a name for anything which is vaguely on the left. As Levine well puts it, 'a commitment to communism as a possible and desirable future does constrain the content of

46 Philip Kain and Bertell Ollman both argue that there is such a distinctive methodology in Marx. See Kain, *Marx and Ethics* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press 1989), 138-75 and Bertell Ollman, *Social and Sexual Revolution* (Boston, MA: South End Press 1979), 99-123.

Marxian theory.' So Marxists and Marxians, analytical or otherwise, will believe in the possibility and desirability of a classless society, believe that 'in *some* sense and to some *extent*, history is shaped and moved by class struggles,' that social revolutions are relevant to our understanding of societies and their futures and they will believe, as well, that in some way life the things that human beings in their acting do and accept conditions consciousness so that 'life' does not arise out of 'consciousness' but 'consciousness' out of life. These are in varying degrees vague and indeterminate notions, anything more precise would break the underlying consensus about what it is to be either a Marxist or Marxian. But I think these conceptions, vague though they be, do help Marxists and Marxians 'to orient inquiry in a certain fashion to direct theory to accord with and, if successful, to advance the political commitment' to a communist future that motivates it.

However, it is important to recall that political commitment is also vital here. Marxists and Marxians must not only believe in the *possibility* they must, as well, believe in the *plausibility* of a communist future and be committed to engaging in class struggle. This goes, as Engels stressed about Marx in his graveside speech, with the very idea of being a Marxist or a Marxian. But here is a place where the relation between the real world and our political theorizing is very strange. To many political observers, and indeed activist participants, talk of the possibility of a classless society and a communist future may sound very unworldly indeed. There are, at the moment of this writing, incredible changes going on in what is conventionally called 'the communist world.' (Perhaps 'authoritarian state socialist' or just 'statist' world would be a better

designation. There is no neutral terminology here.) It is very difficult to even guess at what the upshot of these activities will be. I am certainly not wise enough or informed enough to have anything like even an educated guess at what they will be. One can, however, have hopes and if one is a Marxist or Marxian the hope will be that this future will be communist and at the same time democratic. ('Democratic communism' should, given the conception of communism in Marx, be a redundancy.) The official 'communist' societies may be in the process of re-inventing the wheel. In doing so they may eventually gain, along with the modernization of market socialism, the kind

of limited, though within these limits, genuine, democracy characteristic of bourgeois countries. It is also to be hoped that they would, taking the very idea of socialism seriously, eventually be more extensively democratic, carrying (among other things) democracy right into the work place. The hopeful thing (at least from the point of view of the left) is that this will get meshed with communism in some coherent way. Probably the counterparts of Western Left intelligentsia (including analytical marxists) in those societies I speak here of the overt and covert dissidents, and not of the hacks would look with utter incredulity at talk of a communist future. Their 'dialectic of liberation' will have a different trajectory. I hope I have got my sociology wrong here, or that the differences here are more on the level of slogans and not over deep substantive content. But there is reason to think I am probably near to the mark. The political experience of Western intelligentsia and Eastern intelligentsia are very different indeed.⁴⁷ Moreover, Levine's pessimistic remark that in 'different ways in the First, Second and Third Worlds the banner of communism. . . has brought disrepute upon itself and exhausted its creative potential' is very worrisome. Perhaps that last bit is too strong, or at least it is not unreasonable to hope that it is, but Levine's equally pessimistic comment that it 'seems unlikely that there will ever again come a time when masses of people marching, as it were, under the banner of Marxism will offer a realistic promise of revolutionary change and reconstruction' is deeply depressing to those of us who are on the left. Perhaps that remark too is too pessimistic, reflecting too much the present political situation with disarray of the left and with 'Marxian political styles in decline.' That is, it may be too reactive to what may be short term trends just as it was too reactive to have

had great hopes for the left as many of us did because of the heady events of the 60s. But, at a minimum, there is sufficient realism in Levine's remarks to make Marxian theoreticians reflect carefully on whether or not they should derail the Marxian agenda or, at a minimum, call for a reconstruction of

47 Ferenc Feher and Agnes Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left* (Oxford, England: Polity Press 1987)

what it should look like, given the political realities referred to. It does not, of course, matter, as Levine well remarks, what the words and outward symbols are. These terms (and their equivalents in other languages) could disappear from the scene, thought of as the outmoded ideas of the nineteenth century, as long as the concepts remain in mass political struggles as well as in the work of Left theoreticians. (Maybe even the very term 'left' may fall out of our discourse while the concept remains.)

What remains unclear, given our present political realities, is whether anything like communism has a reasonable shot at becoming a reality. One thing counting for the Marxian project though it may turn into a commitment to communism under another name is (particularly when we look at things globally) the plain and pervasive evils of capitalism. They will, as Levine puts it, generate, particularly if the official 'communist' countries turn (a) more democratic and (b) more prosperous, 'mass opposition to the existing order.' It is reasonable to believe that this opposition, in time, if not in the first instance, will take a Leftward orientation and possibly a Marxian one, putting a communist future on the agenda. Though again, the terms of political discourse may be very different. Where normative political theorizing of a Marxian sort has been persuasive and the ethical case for communism or at least socialism is strong, the attractiveness, at least among intellectuals, of the Marxian agenda will be further enhanced. This, of course, gives lots of hostages to fortune, but it does not leave the prospects for Marxism and communism nearly as badly off as our culture, where it is becoming very fashionable to announce 'the death of communism,' firmly gives us to understand.⁴⁸

48 I should like to thank Robert Ware for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I have made many changes as a result of his comments, though in some instances I have remained stubbornly, perhaps pigheadedly, resistant.