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ANALYTICAL MARXISM:  
A FORM OF CRITICAL THEORY

I.

Analytical Marxists do not describe themselves as critical theorists. That, no doubt, would for them smack too much of the Frankfurt school and Jürgen Habermas, accounts they would regard as too distant from standards of rigor, clear articulation and sustained argument, virtues they take from the analytical tradition. Yet, given what critical theory is, analytical Marxism, while still being rigorous and clear, is plainly a form of critical theory.<sup>1</sup> Indeed it should be viewed as a model for what critical theory should be. It is a comprehensive theory made with an emancipatory intent. It is also an empirical theory: a descriptive-explanatory-interpretive theory providing an explanatory-diagnostic analysis of society as well as, in accord with its emancipatory intent, a normative critique of society including the society in which the analytical Marxists live.

As a critical theory its research program is largely structured by its emancipatory political interests. It sides, to put it boldly and crudely but also truthfully, with the working class and other dominated and exploited people. The questions it asks, the hypotheses it forms, most of the clarifications it engages in, the conceptualizations it utilizes, are all instrumental to its aim of gaining working class emancipation. It sets out to articulate an account which will enable workers and other dominated people to see their situation more clearly and to gain an understanding of what needs to be done to end their exploitation and subordination and to bring into existence and to sustain a classless society of sufficient wealth to meet the needs of everyone. We judge whether analytical Marxism or any other theory is a good critical theory not only by its empirical adequacy, its clarity and completeness but also by whether it answers to the interests of the working class. Among comprehensive, empirically adequate critical theories that theory is best which is most useful in aiding working class emancipation. It isn't just by empirical adequacy, consistency, comprehensiveness and clarity that

the theory is judged but as well by its ability to guide the working class in its struggles for emancipation.

Some nonanalytical Marxists have judged analytical Marxism to be a form of scholasticism. This is a mistake. Analytical Marxists do not construct theories for their own sake or just for whatever intellectual illumination they may provide. Rather the articulation of a Marxian critical theory is always made with an eye to, in one way or another, furthering a distinctive political agenda. It is a theory aimed at playing a helpful role in constructing a genuinely democratic socialism.<sup>2</sup> (This does not mean that analytical Marxists are not fallibilists and that there are no conceivable conditions under which they would not regard the struggle for socialism as resting on a mistake.) Analytical Marxists, like all Marxists, aim not just at understanding the world but also, and above all, at transforming it to accord with an understanding of what it would be like to bring into being and to sustain a world which most fully meets the needs of the working class and with that setting in train the bringing into being of a world which as fully as possible would answer to the needs of all human beings. But it is also vital for them that the understanding of the world be accurate. We have to know what the social world is really like and what its possibilities are to know how to transform it and how it can and should be transformed.

What Marxists or Marxians most fundamentally want to know is what is most pertinent to the transformation of society from capitalism to socialism where socialism can be correctly seen as more adequately meeting the needs of everyone alike, including most centrally, and as well most strategically, the needs of the working class. Working class emancipation is the key to a more general emancipation. It is that emancipation that will finally break class society. Seeing the struggle for workers to control their own lives, to overcome the strength of capitalist class oppression of workers, as the most central struggle of our time, analytical Marxists will try to theorize in such a way that it will help workers in their struggles. It seeks to theorize the situation and prospects of the socialist movement or, where none exists, the bringing into being of such a movement. What is crucial to ask is how well it serves the self-clarification and interests of contemporary workers. And with this it is vital to ask how well it contributes to their liberation from class society. Is analytical Marxism, its emancipatory *intent* to the contrary notwithstanding, really a form of scholasticism with little liberating potential? Can it really aid workers in gaining a

clearer understanding of their situation? Can it help them to come to see the necessity of struggling against the capitalist order and to struggle to replace the capitalist order with social structures that will more adequately answer to the needs of workers and other oppressed people?

## II

The grouping of people who are analytical Marxists is by no means limited to philosophers, though they include philosophers. In addition to philosophers there are political scientists, economists and sociologists. The main players here are G. A. Cohen, Joshua Cohen, Richard Miller, John Roemer, Jon Elster, Andrew Levine, Phillippe van Parijs, Jeffrey Reiman, Daniel Little, David Schweickart, Debra Satz, William Shaw, Erik Olin Wright, Robert Paul Wolf, Adam Przeworski, Richard Norman, and Allen Wood.<sup>3</sup>

Besides being interdisciplinary in constitution, they are also nonpartisan though, as I have noted, they are all firmly on the Left but they are not even remotely concerned to defend Marxist orthodoxy and some of them (most notably Jon Elster) reject most of the canonical claims of Marxism.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, unlike some Frankfurt school theorists or end-of-philosophy-philosophers or end-of-sociology-sociologists, they are not alienated from the mainstream of their respective disciplines. G. A. Cohen uses the style of argument of analytical philosophy to argue for Marxian positions. Roemer uses orthodox economic methods and conceptualizations to argue for substantive Marxian positions. Erik Olin Wright does the same with sociology and Elster with rational choice theory. What distinguishes all analytical Marxists, whether they are philosophers or social scientists, from other critical theorists (including Western Marxists, say, from Georg Lukács to Louis Althusser) is a concern for standards of clarity and rigor. There is a commitment to making clear and hopefully sound arguments and not just to give narratives without clear empirical tests; there is also a scrupulous concern to provide careful conceptualization and careful arguments for the key substantive points strategically placed in their narratives.<sup>5</sup>

During a period when analytic philosophy appears at least to be digging its own grave, it may appear to be somewhat ironic that philosophers who are analytical Marxists should so describe themselves. While being politically a vanguard they tag along in the philosophical rear. However, I think there is no paradox here and indeed nothing very

problematic. The later work of Wittgenstein, Quine's attack on linguistic analysis, the rejection of any useful analytic/synthetic distinction, the rejection of foundationalism and Davidson's, Rorty's and Putnam's defense of holism (more broadly the pragmatization of analytic philosophy) have led many philosophers enculturated in the analytic tradition to abandon the allegedly distinctive philosophical techniques of analytical philosophy.<sup>6</sup> (Indeed, the techniques are very fragile, shifting with philosophical fashion.) Beyond this, such later generation analytical philosophers set aside the very conception of philosophical purity itself so precious to Wittgenstein, logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy. In short, they abandoned the claims characteristic of the analytical tradition while sticking with its concern for care in argument, careful conceptualization and the drawing out of the implications of arguments and claims. This penchant for clarity, analytical Marxists like many others so philosophically enculturated, take to be just the intellectual good manners left over from analytic philosophy and they see it as something to be preserved.

However, as Robert Ware notes, there is a difference between the philosophers and the social scientists who are analytical Marxists.<sup>7</sup> G. A. Cohen utilizes principally rather Rylean and Austinean techniques, techniques of (roughly) ordinary language philosophy, though without is usual rhetorical fanfare and Richard Miller and Andrew Levine often utilize claims and techniques widely practiced in contemporary analytical philosophy of science. But none of these philosophers avail themselves of the characteristic doctrines of contemporary analytic philosophy, conceptions such as rigid designators, a disquotational theory of truth, a causal theory of knowledge, and the like. By contrast, analytical Marxists who are social scientists (Roemer, Elster and van Parijs all being paradigmatic here) do emphasize the merits of using the tools, models and procedures that are, by conventional standards in the West, at the cutting edge of their disciplines. For Roemer this comes to using the contemporary tools of logic, mathematics and model building: indeed the whole repertoire of techniques of non-Marxist economics. Erik Olin Wright does the same thing with sociology. This comes with some analytical Marxists (e.g., Elster) to using rational choice theory and (surprisingly for a Marxist) methodological individualism and even more surprisingly the equilibrium method of neoclassical economics.<sup>8</sup>

That difference between analytical Marxists who are social scientists and those who are philosophers to the contrary notwithstanding, it is, still, fair to say, as Andrew Levine does, that in the world of analytical Marxism, “analytical philosophy, empirical social science and neoclassical economic analysis have been joined productively with traditional Marxian theoretical and political concerns.”<sup>9</sup> Though it also needs stressing, as I have above, that with different analytical Marxists some of these things get far more stress than others. Sometimes analytical philosophy almost drops out (as in the work of Adam Przeworski) and in other cases neoclassical economic analysis is not appealed to (as in the work of G. A. Cohen and Richard Miller). There is, however, in common between all analytical Marxists – philosophers and social scientists alike – a commitment to what I have characterized as critical theory (though they eschew the label), a penchant for clarity of statement, attention to empirical evidence and detail, careful detailed argumentation and a determination not to be *parti pris*. But there is no agreement about distinctive methods such as rational choice theory. There is, as Ware puts it, “no one theory of analytical Marxism, not even a way of doing analytical Marxism.”<sup>10</sup> It is, Ware adds, “certainly not a movement, either theoretical or practical, with a core set of beliefs.”<sup>11</sup> Even for such fundamental matters of method as to whether or not to have a genuine social science we must have micro-foundations, some (Elster and Roemer) take it as essential, others (Cohen and Levine) do not. Still, analytical Marxism is a form of critical theory. It is a comprehensive social theory with an emancipatory intent. What distinguishes it from other forms of critical theory is its concern for clarity and rigor of argumentation and its nonalienation from the styles of reasoning and techniques of the presently reigning philosophy of the Anglo-American-Scandinavian world and the reigning social science of the West: bourgeois philosophy and social science, if you will.

In spite of, and not in conflict with, their writing with a political and emancipatory intent, a common view of all analytical Marxists, showing their fidelity to what Max Weber calls the vocation of a scientist, is to concern themselves centrally with whether a claim is true and only secondarily, if at all, with whether it is Marxist or even Marxian. They are, as good fallibilists, prepared to abandon any and all of Marx’s positions if they do not square with our best explanations or if they conflict with our best evidential claims or are unsoundly reasoned. “No

science has ever been nor could ever be fixed infallibly by a Master thinker. Nor, more generally, could any body of doctrine be expected to provide an infallible purchase on truth."<sup>12</sup>

### III

Some might say that there remain significant differences between analytical Marxism and anything that could properly be called critical theory. Critical theories of society (Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Habermas) have been grand, sweeping theories of society with a wide scope, giving us programmatic schemes of an all encompassing sort. But analytical Marxism maintains a disengaged character and a self-consciously modest and critical stance. "Sweeping philosophical pronouncements have given way . . . to modest but tractable theorizing, positions have been carefully elaborated, assessed, revised and, in some cases, abandoned."<sup>13</sup> Classical Marxists articulated grand theories committing themselves to philosophical materialism (some form of epiphenomenalism or physicalism) to ontological holism (where society is not decomposable into individuals without remainder) and to something obscure called "dialectical method." Analytical Marxists avoid such things. They typically articulate and defend historical materialism without linking it to philosophical materialism, eschew talk of dialectics while continuing to believe in the need to look at things diachronically as well as synchronically and, as well, and crucially, continue to believe, as do all Marxists, that we should view things historically. Some (Jon Elster) are methodological individualists and others (Robert Ware) are methodological holists. But the more typical stance is to seek to defuse the whole controversy in a way similar to the way Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty do for the realist/antirealist dispute. Erik Olin Wright and Andrew Levine are typical and perceptive analytical Marxists here. The following remark by Levine is paradigmatic.

Ostensibly, holists believe that societies are somehow more than the sum of their individual parts, while individualists regard societies just as collections of individuals. But the holist view, formulated plausibly, devolves into the claim that relational properties (of individuals) are explanatory. No reasonable individualist could deny this claim. Similarly, the individualist claim, properly understood, is just that "social facts" work through individual agents – a position no reasonable holist could deny. Of course, it *is* possible to imagine holist or individualist programs that genuinely are incompatible. Holists might

assert the explanatory relevance of emergent, supra-individual properties; or individualists might deny the explanatory relevance of relational properties.<sup>14</sup>

Holists or individualists addicted to metaphysics might take such exotic turns. But in doing so they fly in the face of common sense, well established and well working explanatory practices, and contribute nothing to the emancipatory goals of social theory. A sober social theory will travel, following John Rawls, metaphysically light, avoiding such arcane issues. Engaging in metaphysics is hardly conducive either to the progress of social science or to human emancipation.

I shall, in what follows, put considerable emphasis on Andrew Levine's discussion of the import, prospects and logical status of analytical Marxism. This could do with some explanation and justification. While his work has been influential, it has clearly not been as influential as that of G. A. Cohen, Jon Elster and John Roemer. I nonetheless put the stress on Levine that I do because the essay of Levine's that I principally discuss is the most extended and self-conscious programmatic statement of analytical Marxism to date. It depicts, more extensively than anywhere else, analytical Marxism's underlying rationale, its relation to other Marxisms, its internal development, its difficulties, its modifications to try to escape certain key difficulties, and its relations to the political upheavals of our time. Levine's work (now considering not only his programmatic essay) is also clearly (among other things) a critical development from the work of Cohen and Elster and is arguably an advance in the same general ballpark. Given all this, and given that analytical Marxists other than Levine have not written extensive programmatic essays, I have proceeded in much of what follows principally from Levine's essay hoping to do something for Levine similar to what he did for Cohen and Elster. Rational and informed criticism, hopefully in a good Peircean conception, will lead to the progressive development of a theory – in this instance to the development of analytical Marxism or, as I would prefer to call it, analytical Marxianism.

However, to return to my line of argument, things may not be quite so straightforward as I claim above. Levine, who in most of his remarks, takes a rather philosophically deflationary tone, *seems* at least also to suggest that an analytical Marxist should also be a scientific realist holding some version of the correspondence theory of truth. Levine remarks:

I assume, as did Marx, that there is indeed a truth to be discovered, and that the truth conditions for theoretical claims are supplied by a mind-independent reality, not by thought or language. Many Western Marxists – and their “post-Marxian” successors – effectively deny this assumption, making “truth” dependent on particular points of view (the point of view of the proletariat, for example) or on “discursive structures” without subjects. I would hazard that positions of this sort are of very dubious intelligibility. In any case, it is worth noting that what strikes most analytical Marxists as obvious is actually denied by some non-analytic survivors of Western Marxism’s decline, and that, in this respect, analytical Marxists, unlike their contemporary rivals, are faithful to the core idea underlying the materialism Marxists have always vociferously professed.<sup>15</sup>

Levine is surely right in rejecting such relativizing conceptions of truth. They are both unsound and un-Marxian, the former being much more important than the latter. But to think that this must carry us on to scientific realism (materialism) or to the correspondence theory of truth is not at all justified. Dualists have not infrequently accepted correspondence theories of truth, fully acknowledging that at least many truth claims have truth conditions supplied by a mind-independent reality. There certainly does not appear to be a conceptual link, or any other kind of non-fortuitous link, between the correspondence theory of truth and materialism or scientific realism. Furthermore, and perhaps even more centrally, reasonably to believe that most truth claims are not mind-dependent, one need not accept or even regard as intelligible either the correspondence or the coherence theory of truth. Here the quite objectivist accounts of Donald Davidson, P. F. Strawson, Richard Rorty, and Paul Horwich are cases in point.<sup>16</sup> Truth can be mind-independent without it being the case that sense can be made out of the “correspondence relation.” We may well, again travelling philosophically light, get along with a deflationary minimalist account of truth in the way Strawson, Rorty and Horwich do. We can, with such a deflationary turn, avoid anything so metaphysical as a *theory* of truth and the attached issues of metaphysical realism. Moreover, it is important that we keep in mind that thinking about what truth *means* is one thing and thinking about how we can know or reasonably believe that certain claims are true is another. This is a distinction stressed by the analytic tradition from Rudolf Carnap to Alvin Goldman.<sup>17</sup> This being so, an accommodation to the historicism of Western Marxism can reasonably be made without going idealist or pragmatist or perspectivist about what truth *means*. Analytical Marxists should travel philosophically light and social science, whether in the form of critical theory or otherwise, should not be burdened with arcane philosophical issues. It



is difficult enough to articulate a systematic descriptive-explanatory, interpretive theory of society – a straightforwardly empirical theory of society with an emancipatory role – without encumbering it with metaphysical issues, residues (better benignly neglected) of the tradition. If, suffering from a metaphysical malaise, we must, just must, given the absurdity of dualism or idealism, be materialists or physicalists, succumbing to either common sense (perhaps a Santayana-like common sense) or to a philosophical itch, we should be physicalists of the nonreductive, nonscientistic sort advocated (though somewhat differently) by Davidson, Rorty and Strawson.<sup>18</sup> Here we have something which does not offend Wittgensteinian sensibilities and squares well with a selectively commonsense view of such matters welling up from the life-world.

#### IV

The above, if well taken, gives us good grounds for believing that analytical Marxism should set aside the standard philosophical issues that have obsessed the tradition. But it also gestures at how and why analytical Marxism can and should be both a critical theory and still rightly be resolutely un-Frankfurtish and un-Lukácsian and avoid grand programmatic schemes of an all encompassing sort.<sup>19</sup> Analytical Marxists loyal to an analytical tradition growing out of Russell, the logical positivists, Wilfrid Sellars, Quine, and Davidson (moving from atomism to holism but remaining stubbornly empirically oriented) have wanted their social theories not to be speculative theories of history but, while being systematic and theoretical, to be testable and responsible to empirical constraints. So it is natural, and indeed appropriate, for analytical Marxism to avoid grand philosophies of history or philosophical anthropologies. To say this is one thing, to say that it should not be a systematic and comprehensive theory is another. Levine, for example, argues, as I do as well, that analytical Marxism eschews, and should continue to do so, sweeping philosophical pronouncements. But he also sees it, with its account of class and of historical materialism, as a systematic and comprehensive but still an empirical social theory. It articulates a systematic collection of substantive and at least indirectly empirically testable substantive claims. But they are not just a helter-skelter collection of claims but a theoretically coordinated set of claims with class analysis and historical materialism standing at its center.

This empirical theory of history stands opposed, as Levine stresses, both “to the dominant atheoreticism of contemporary historiography and social science” and to speculative philosophers of history à la Augustine, Leibniz and Hegel. For the dominant atheoreticism, past events are at least in principle susceptible to causal explanation but history itself cannot be explained except trivially by the conjunction of particular causal accounts. Marx believes that empirical science can do more than that. But the “more” is not, à la Hegel or Augustine, to give an account of the *meaning* of history where the attempt is to interpret the past by unveiling its meaning.<sup>20</sup> To talk in this way of the meaning of history is to suppose that there is an end, a definitive perspective, in the light of which everything retrospectively becomes meaningful or significant. Such speculative theories – the grand philosophies of history of the past – were teleological: history’s structure and direction, on such an account, is explained by its end. Levine remarks:

Hegel’s was the last great teleological philosophy of history and the inspiration for Marx’s own attempt to make sense of historical change. Marx’s signal achievement was to have retained Hegel’s sense of history’s intelligibility without advancing teleological explanations, and without purporting to identify “meanings” in history. For Marx, history is as meaningless as nature is. But history’s structure and direction is discernible nevertheless.<sup>21</sup>

## V

This attempt to explain epochal change and to discern the trajectory of human history, the laws of motion of society (if you will), is called by Marxists historical materialism. The reconstruction, defense and revision of historical materialism has been central to the analytical Marxian project. Like much atheoretical historiography, historical materialism attempts to give causal explanations of certain historical events. But it, like the speculative philosophies of history, but without their teleological orientation or talk of meaning, seeks to discern, in an empirically disciplined manner, the way the human world is changing and is likely to continue to change. More specifically:

Historical materialism conceives the structure and direction of history as a consequence of correspondences and “contradictions” (failures of correspondence) between forces and relations of production. In the historical materialist view, there is a tendency for forces to change discontinuously – to accommodate ever increasing levels of development of the forces. Since for the range of human history historical materialism purports to account

for, social classes are the bearers of social relations, classes are the agents of historical change. In this sense, class struggle explains why production relations are as they are (and not otherwise); and, more to the point, given Marx's concern with "the laws of motion" of capitalist societies, why capitalism (rather than some other set of production relations) exists. Similarly, class relations explain capitalism's (possible) futures.<sup>22</sup>

It attempts, that is, to give "an account of history's structure and direction."<sup>23</sup> It is "a theory of historical trends and an account of the conditions under which economic structures of different sorts become (materially) possible."<sup>24</sup>

Showing the scientific and analytical spirit of analytical Marxism, Levine remarks:

In the end, historical materialism may prove empirically untenable. Even supposing that its account of history is derivable from general and unexceptionable claims about human nature and the human condition, as Cohen has argued, it may nevertheless have little explanatory pertinence to actual history – if only because the endogenous processes it invests with the task of moving history along may always be swamped by countervailing "forces." In short, the atheoreticists may be right: history may have no theory of explanatory interest. Or some rival theory of history – based perhaps on the distribution of military force or on racial, ethnic or gender divisions – may supplant Marx's in whole or in part. Then the role historical materialism ascribes to forces and relations of production – and to class struggle – would not be sustainable. I think that good, though inconclusive, reasons can be adduced in support of the strict Marxian view. But, for now, this question remains open. It is, I think, among the most pressing theoretical issues in social science today – though, for most practicing social scientists and historians, it is hardly a question at all.<sup>25</sup>

We can see here what would be required to have a Marxian critical theory that sticks reasonably close, though with the careful conceptual elucidations and rational reconstructions, to Marx's own account of historical materialism. But doing this is typical of analytical Marxism. Among analytical Marxists, G. A. Cohen, Allen Wood, William Shaw, John McMurtry, Daniel Little, Richard Miller and Andrew Levine have set out such accounts.<sup>26</sup> These accounts have been determinate enough and perspicuous enough to free historical materialism from charges of conceptual incoherence or from the charge of being inherently untestable and therefore metaphysical. But whether any of these accounts of historical materialism or any account of that scope is empirically warranted is an open question. It has not only to compete with alternative accounts of a similar scope, e.g., feminist accounts such as Linda Nicholson's or alternative conceptions of the centrality of power such as Michel's or Pareto's or some combination of them, it also has to face,

as do these alternative accounts as well, the powerful challenge of the dominant atheoreticism in historiography.<sup>27</sup>

Any of these alternative non-atheoretical accounts could yield, if they also had an emancipatory component, critical theories of society as well as analytical Marxism and we would need to make comparative judgments concerning their explanatory power, the adequacy of their political agendas and the adequacy of their emancipatory ideals. We would need, as well, to be able to assess the comparative likelihood of their various agendas and ideals being realized and sustained.

These, however, are the standard ways in which a critical theory is to be appraised: they involve criteria which are partly straightforwardly scientific and partly moral and otherwise normative. But, even with the moral-normative side, empirical scientific questions enter, for in assessing the ideals, questions about what best meets human needs and best answers to the interests of human beings are crucial questions requiring careful answers. And these, we should not forget, are empirical issues though empirical issues of considerable and direct moral interest.

## VI

What challenges most deeply the very idea of a critical theory is not the not implausible possibility that the atheoreticists are right and that history – human history as a whole or even just whole social formations such as the capitalist order or the feudal order – may have no theory of explanatory interest that would enable us to explain – causally explain – epochal social changes so that we could account for the trajectory of history or even coherently say that it has one. Suppose such atheoreticism is on track, something that Karl Popper or Isaiah Berlin or Max Weber, among many others less prominent, believe to be so. Historical materialism was designed minimally to track capitalism's future and, more adventuresomely, history's trajectory. But what if no theory, Marxian or otherwise, can do that? Does the Marxian agenda collapse and should we, if we want to be reasonable, turn postmodern or traditionally liberal and set aside any attempt to construct a critical theory of society? Levine believes that even in such a circumstance we need not and should not give up on a Marxian agenda. It is his belief that "traditional Marxian concerns in politics and social science would still

combine to produce a certain agenda."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there would, Levine claims, still remain a point in calling that agenda Marxian.

Let me follow out a bit how Levine defends this belief. Marx believed that history, with the continued development of the productive forces, would change in a certain direction so that a certain life for people would become possible and eventually, though not without class struggle, actually come on stream and be sustained. He believed that was something we could know to be the case. Suppose, however, that things do not turn out that way. We come to recognize, let us further suppose, that we have no good grounds for believing that history will take that trajectory or any similar trajectory and we further see that we are not justified in accepting historical materialism or any theory of similar scope. We cannot, let us now assume, know anything like that about the direction that history will take. However, we also realize that it remains a real possibility that the state of affairs historical materialism predicts will come to obtain. It, that is, remains a genuine historical possibility. We do not know that it will obtain; we do not even have, given the failure of historical materialism, good grounds for believing that it will obtain. But we also know that it might obtain and that we have no theory telling us that something else is more likely to obtain. Seeing the desirability of there coming into being of a classless society devoid of domination, we can, linking empirical possibility and desirability, see that it is something worth struggling for. We recognize that with intelligent and resolute action we might be able to bring it into existence or to in some way approximate it. The attaining of such a classless society remains an ideal, an ideal worth struggling to realize or approximate. Indeed, atheoreticism plays into the hands of such a non-strict Marxian account. Since we can have no good grounds for believing that human history must take any determinate trajectory at all, the future, though causally explainable (though perhaps only retrospectively), is open. By determined and strategically rational action, we may be able eventually to bring about a communist future.

What Marxists want to know, in doing theoretical work, in constructing a critical theory, is what is pertinent to the transformation of society from capitalism to communism. This objective determines the questions Marxists ask and the research they undertake."<sup>29</sup> Here we can plainly see the straightforwardly *political* character of such a critical theory. A theory, as we initially noted, to be a critical theory of society must (by definition must) be political, though, as with the feminist ones, the

particular political agenda will be in some ways different than a Marxian one. But it must be political and, in aim at least, politically transformative. A non-radical critical theory is a contradiction in terms.

Analytical Marxism frames its conceptual framework and research program with an eye trained on the working class in its struggle with the capitalist class. It identifies with working class interests and seeks to sharpen them in ways that will lead to the end of class society and to the liberation of working people from domination and subservience. More broadly it aims at human liberation from conditions of domination and subservience, though it believes the way to do this is first through working class emancipation. It seeks to show how workers, and others as well, are dominated and forced into conditions of subordination and sometimes even servitude by the workings of the capitalist system, including the domination of the rest of society by the capitalist class. It further seeks to show, but not by moralizing but rather by careful empirical investigation, theorizing and perhaps some reconceptualization, that this servitude and subordination can be brought to an end and a classless society can be established giving rise to a general human flourishing. In giving up historical materialism in its strong form there is an end to saying that such a transformation must happen or even to claiming that it will happen. Rather, it is more modestly claimed instead that it is worth struggling to make it happen. In that important way socialism remains on the historical agenda.

Here, as in feminist critical theory and in Frankfurt school and Habermasian critical theory, critique of ideology will play an important role. The nature, extent and avoidability of worker subordination and servitude is obscured by capitalist ideology. We are sometimes led to believe that in our societies nobody is in control and that there aren't even any classes not to mention a ruling or a dominant class. Ideology critique will help us see through that. It will unmask distorted conceptions of social relations, distortions which aid capitalist class domination of both workers and the even more desperately impoverished: the people that Marx called the *Lumpenproletariat*. Ideology critique, without donning any masks itself (if it is a good critique), will unmask these ideological constructions.<sup>30</sup>

## VII

There is, however, a further problem that affects analytical Marxism. Marxism and both communism and socialism require not only an ideal

articulation of the vision of a communist future or a socialist future, they also require at least the feasible possibility of a political exemplification and eventual realization of these things. Socialism plainly requires politics with political parties and mass movements. But – and here is the stinger from a Marxian point of view – Marxian politics is everywhere in decline. Indeed it is possible to believe, one’s Left commitments notwithstanding, that the decline has turned into a rout. We live, some say, in a post-communist, even a post-Marxist, age. “Communism” and even “socialism” are by now dirty words for most people who live in what were the actually existing socialisms. The states representing themselves as actually existing socialisms have discredited themselves. Indeed by now there are so few left that they are an endangered species. And in the West, Marxist parties are increasingly losing their influence. (France and Italy are striking instances.) Capitalism seems everywhere triumphant, sometimes carrying with it liberal or neo-liberal regimes, sometimes traditional conservative regimes and sometimes (where things are not very stable) fascist authoritarian regimes. But a Marxism without a political movement is hardly a Marxism. The Marxian agenda to have much in the way of a future needs a political movement. But it seems at least just this that it does not now have and has little prospect of gaining in the foreseeable future.

Now *may* be the time when Marxians again need a ticket to the British museum. Marxian theory certainly needs critical rethinking and this may be a good time for it, making a virtue of necessity, when there seems to be no direct way in which we Marxians can be politically effective. Indeed it may possibly be true that we can better reexamine our theoretical commitments and the practices they justify when we are less pressed to use them to play the role of guides for the practices of a party. This, of course, is a situation Anglo-American Marxists know all too well. Marxians, however, should indeed make a virtue of necessity. But this political marginalization is not something with which Marxians should rest content. Marxians, analytical or otherwise, are also revolutionaries committed to transforming society and to the overthrow of capitalism. That is an *essential* part of even the most minimal Marxian agenda. This serves as an extra-theoretical constraint on Marxian research programs. If a Marxian critical theory of society is to remain a genuinely critical theory of society this cannot be forgotten.

Analytical Marxians rightly remain skeptical about and critical of classical Marxist conceptions, e.g., the labor theory of value, commodity fetishism, dialectics, and the like. But the radical agenda – the

commitment to communism or at least to socialism – is not an optional thing for a Marxist or a Marxian. Moreover, while it may very well be the case that masses of people will never again march under red banners or sing “The Internationale” and that what I have called the Marxist agenda will cease to be *called* such, still if the capitalist order, even by means of the welfare state, cannot overcome the palpable evils of capitalism, these very evils will “again generate organized mass opposition to the existing order.”<sup>31</sup> This being so, communism, or at least socialism, under whatever different name, and perhaps with rather different theoretical and conceptual tools, will remain in place or return. The term “communism” may disappear as the marker for the radical revolutionary transformation of society into a thoroughly autonomy respecting egalitarian society committed to the ending of a world in which some dominate and others are dominated and, as well, to a world of abundance in which the needs of everyone are met as fully and equally as possible. But that just is communism. Whether it is called that matters little.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For some attempts to articulate Habermasian critical theory more perspicuously see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Kai Nielsen: ‘The Very Idea of a Critical Theory’, *Ratio* (Fall 1991), ‘The Confirmation of Critical Theory: The Role of Reflectiveness’, *Human Studies* (forthcoming), ‘Critical Theory as Distinct from Scientific Theory: Its Distinctive Features and Import’, *Arab Philosophical Journal* I, nos. 1–2 (Summer/Winter 1990), 1–21; and ‘On the Status of Critical Theory’, *Interchange* 23, no. 3 (1992), 265–84.

<sup>2</sup> What a democratic socialism would come to needs careful specification. Something of what it would be has been articulated in the following books, though in the last mentioned book the concept is there but not the term. Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Andrew Levine, *The End of the State* (London: Verso, 1987), Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, *On Democracy* (New York: Penguin, 1983). Frank Cunningham and Andrew Levine have reviewed each others books in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (September 1989), 455–76.

<sup>3</sup> G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), G. A. Cohen, *History, Labour and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), Joshua Cohen, ‘Review of Karl Marx’s Theory of History’, *Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 5 (1982), Richard Miller, *Analyzing Marx: Morality, Power and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), John Roemer, *Free to Lose* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Andrew Levine, *Arguing for Socialism: Theoretical Considerations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), Andrew Levine, *The End of the*



*State* (London: Verso, 1987), Phillippe van Parijs, 'In Defense of Abundance' in Robert Ware and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Analyzing Marxism* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 1989), 469–95, Jeffrey Reiman, *Justice and Modern Moral Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), Daniel Little, *The Scientific Marx* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), David Schweickart, *Capitalism or Worker Control? An Ethical and Economic Appraisal* (New York: Praeger, 1980), William Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1978), Debra Satz, 'Marxism, Materialism and Historical Progress' in Robert Ware and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Analyzing Marx*, 393–424, Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: New Left Books, 1985), Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Marx* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), Richard Norman, *Free and Equal: A Philosophical Examination of Political Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), and Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*. Michael Walzer perceptively asks how Elster can be rightly regarded as a Marxist. Michael Walzer, 'What's Left of Marx?' *New York Review of Books* 21 (November 1985). Andrew Levine well shows how he is properly so regarded in 'Review of Making Sense of Marx', *Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 2 (1986), 721–28. See also Kai Nielsen, 'Elster's Marxism', *Philosophical Papers*, XXI, no. 2 (1992), 83–106.

<sup>5</sup> They see the force of the critique of standard Western Marxism made by people such as Peter Crews. See his *Skeptical Engagements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 115–78.

<sup>6</sup> See here Richard Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), *Contingency Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), particularly Part One. For a deeply insightful introduction which places that demise, see James Conant, 'Introduction to *Realism with a Human Face*', 1–1xxiv. See as well my *After the Demise of the Tradition* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991) and John P. Murphy, *Pragmatism From Peirce to Davidson* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Ware, 'How Marxism is Analyzed: An Introduction' in Robert Ware and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Analyzing Marxism*, 3–5.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, 1–8 and John Roemer, *Analytical Foundations of Marxian Economic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). For criticism of some of this from within analytical Marxism see Andrew Levine, Elliot Sober and Erik Olin Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism', *New Left Review* 162 (1987), 67–84. Chandra Kant Kumar, *Historical Materialism: Some Conceptual and Methodological Issues* MA Thesis (University of Calgary, 1990). Erik Olin Wright, 'What is Analytical Marxism?' *Socialist Review* 19, no. 4 (October–December 1989), 35–56.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' in Robert Ware and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Analyzing Marxism*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ware, 'How Marxism is Analyzed: An Introduction', 5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 37. See, as well, his 'Review of Elster's Making Sense of Marx', *Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 2 (1986), 721–28 and classically his, with Sober and Wright, 'Marxism and Methodological Individualism', *New Left Review* 162 (1987), 67–84. For more holistic views see Robert Ware, 'Group Action and Social Ontology', *Analyse & Kritik* 10, no. 1 (1988), 48–70 and Richard Miller, 'Methodological Individualism and Social Explanation', *Philosophy of Science* 45 (1978), 387–414.

<sup>15</sup> Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' 33–34.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Davidson, 'The Structure and Content of Truth', *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXXVII, no. 6 (June 1990), 279–328; P. F. Strawson, 'Truth', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 24 (1950); Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 126–61; and Paul Horwich, *Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Carnap, 'Truth and Confirmation' in Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars, eds., *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1949), 119–27; Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 142–56.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 113–25; and Peter Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' 32.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Elster shows the senselessness of such talk in his *Making Sense of Marx*, 107–18. See also my 'Remarks on the Roots of Progress' in Robert Ware and Kai Nielsen, eds., *Analyzing Marxism*, 523–29.

<sup>21</sup> Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' 46.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>26</sup> See references in note 3; John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978); and my 'On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously', *Dialogue* 22 (1983).

<sup>27</sup> Linda Nicholson, *Gender and History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' 49.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Kai Nielsen, *Marxism and the Moral Point of View* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 98–116 and my 'The Concept of Ideology: Some Marxist and Non-Marxist Conceptualizations', *Rethinking Marxism* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1989).

<sup>31</sup> Levine, 'What is a Marxist Today?' 58.

<sup>32</sup> In that last sentence there can be seen the link between my *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985) and my *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*.

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