

CLASS CONFLICT, MARXISM
AND THE GOOD-REASONS APPROACH:
A RESPONSE TO MICHAEL LERNER

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Summary

It is argued that the good-reasons approach does not have the conservative ideological implications attributed to it by Michael Lerner and that it can indeed be useful in setting out the conceptual foundations for a socialist ethic. After criticizing Lerner's attempt to give an intuitionist foundation for a Marxist ethic, I proceed to examine a central problem about Marxism and morality. Marx, on the one hand, exposes moralism and exhibits the ideological functions of morality and, on the other, requires objectively true moral norms for his critique of capitalism and defense of socialism. I set forth a way of looking at Marx and Marxism which shows how two apparently conflicting elements in Marxism form a coherent whole.

I want to commence with an autobiographical remark. I first heard a version of Michael Lerner's 'Marxism and ethical reasoning'* read at the Radical Philosopher's Caucus at the American Philosophical Association. I was struck by its power and importance and was, as I heard it being read, initially strongly inclined to believe that what I had said about good reasons in ethics was simply badly off the mark and that Lerner had smoked out what on my part was in effect a completely unintended apology for the bourgeois order. This, of course, distressed

* See preceding article in this volume (Ed. note).

me, for it is the last thing I would want to do, but I was also impressed, and still am impressed, by the way Lerner spotted certain ideological functions of moral discourse and by his recognition of the importance of moral conceptions in attaining and sustaining a socialist order.¹ On reflection, and after a careful study of his essay, I still remain convinced of its importance and power, though I do not now think that the good-reasons approach generally and my version of it in particular has the baleful ideological implications that Lerner attributes to it. I am also suspicious, as I was when I first heard him read his essay, of his intuitionism.

In this essay I shall endeavour to show (a) (in Section I) that the good-reasons approach does not have the implications Lerner claims it has; (b) (in Section II) that his intuitionist foundations for a Marxist ethic are in shambles and in conflict with the Marxist tradition and (c) (in Section III) that certain further considerations need to be raised concerning a Marxist ethics. I shall in that concluding section indicate – in part using certain foundational claims of the good-reasons theorists – something of what is needed for the resolution of some of the problems emerging from an examination of these considerations.

I. I have argued that even in class-divided societies dominated by the capitalist ruling class our conception of what it is to take the moral point of view has so developed that it is now correct to say, at least in terms of our conscious attitudes and what even this ruling class feels it must pay lip service to, that for large numbers of people it has become the case that in morality we are concerned with the reasoned pursuit of what is in *everyone's* – that is each and every individual's – best interest (Nielsen, 1971, Chap. 26; 1973b, Chap. 3). From the moral point of view, we are concerned with the most extensive welfare or

1. In an important article with a much more directly morally educative intent, Fann (1974, p. 39) has stressed the importance for socialism of a moral understanding, while remaining sensitive to the ideological distortions to which moral discourse is frequently subject. (Nixon's resignation speech is an obvious and particularly disgusting example of such a perversion of moral discourse.) Fann appropriately remarks: 'Liberation from this oppressive system (the class rule of capitalism) requires, first of all, the reintroduction of ethics as a motivating force of the revolution. Commitment to a new ethical order is the first prerequisite of a revolutionary.' As different as their political strategies were, such a common conception underlies the thought of both Marighela (1971) and Allende (1973).

well-being of all concerned. (Even the apologists for capitalism pay lip service to such an ideal, though what actually goes on *vis-à-vis* the quality of our lives under capitalism is quite different.) The most central and underlying function of morality — the justificatory rationale for there being such a form of life — is to adjudicate and harmonize conflicts of interest in order to attain a situation in which the most extensive and most fairly distributed satisfaction of interests is obtained for all human beings. That is to say, as I put it in my *Reason and Practice*, ‘...to a very considerable degree the very *raison d’être* of morality is to adjudicate between the frequently conflicting and divergent desires and interests of people in order to give everyone as much as possible of whatever it is that each one will want when he is being rational, when he would still want what he wants were he to reflect carefully and when his own wants are constrained by a willingness to treat the rational wants of other human beings in the same way’. (I quote at length my own previous statement because it is one that Michael Lerner fastens on to criticize in a way which I think is importantly mistaken.)

Stated baldly in this way there are many problems with such an account, not the least of which is its mingling of talk of wants and interests as if talk of wants and interests comes to the same thing. They, of course, do not, but I do not think that my skipping over that distinction in my above remarks makes any important difference to the claim I made there. What, however, I do need to confront is the perceptive critique of such an account made by Michael Lerner. Lerner, writing from a radical perspective which I share, argues that my analysis in fact has an unintended conservative ideological function which distorts, as does Toulmin’s account and presumably Baier’s as well, the social reality that such accounts of morality would comprehend and in some way build their theorizing on. I shall attempt to show that in very important respects Lerner’s argument fails, but I shall also try to indicate how Lerner brings to the fore some very fundamental considerations about morality which are crucial to take note of — considerations which I utterly neglect and which Toulmin, Baier and Rawls also neglect. Basically what is missing in our accounts is a sufficiently realistic picture of social reality and a concern with the social and political conditions of rationality (cf. Macpherson, 1973a, Chap. 4; 1973b).

Lerner argues that only if we accept a certain description of the social world will it be plausible to accept my account (and Toulmin’s as well) of the underlying and central function (rationale) of morality.

The description of the social world necessary — Lerner claims — to make our accounts plausible is this: We are human beings who, when we are in our adulthood, are of roughly equal strength, intelligence and vulnerability, and we all live in a world in which our historically conditioned positions of power, prestige and advantage are precarious. Given this position, even a thoroughly self-interested person, if he is rational, will see the advantage of human cooperation and an attempt to attain a harmonization of interests and desires to avoid a kind of Hobbesian war of all against all. Lerner, quite simply and correctly, I believe, responds that we do not live in such a world, for ‘it is certainly not the case today that we are all equally vulnerable to attack ... equally able to develop and hence to use in any important sense our strength and intelligence, and we are all not in positions equally precarious with regard to the coercive political power we may exercise’. This is so because we live in a class-stratified society in which there is a small but at present incredibly powerful capitalist ruling class which owns and controls the means of production, which from its position of strength and coercive power exploits in varying degrees and in various ways that complex and internally stratified group of people — the working class — who work for a salary and do not own the means of production. The ruling class of capitalists, possessing *de facto* control of industry, government, education, the mass media and the economy, has a disproportionate and entrenched political power and has ‘every reason to believe that their position is not subject to the same fluctuations in vulnerability that most everyone else faces’. While just to survive in the system it is in the short-run interests of the working class to harmonize their interests with the ruling class, it is not in the short-run interests of the ruling class to harmonize their interests with the working class in such a way as to adjudicate conflicts of interest in an equitable fashion, though it is in the interests of the ruling class to keep the working class passive. Between the capitalist class and the working class we have a conflict of interests which is not in principle harmonizable in any equitable manner because it is in the interest of the ruling class to remain in a dominant position of economic and political power while the interest of the working class is to eliminate inequalities in wealth and power. Between such forces there is a clash of interests which cannot be equitably harmonized, while such class divisions remain.

These remarks seem to me correct and indeed important remarks, particularly given their extensive neglect by bourgeois moral philoso-

phers. I would only deny that they are in conflict with the account of morality that I and the other good-reasons theorists have developed, though they do make a crucial stress which we utterly neglected. Lerner, by contrast, would have us believe that what is very centrally wrong with the good-reasons approach is that in picturing the underlying function — the point or purpose — of morality as that of seeking a harmonization of conflicting sets of interests the good-reasons approach groundlessly rules out as a conceptual impossibility a moral posture which holds that an interest in the exploitation of the weak is morally illegitimate and indeed not tolerable in a decent society.

As I just indicated, I thoroughly agree with Lerner that we do live in a class-divided society and I also agree that no equitable harmonizing of conflicts of interests is possible while there are such class divisions. Only in a classless society can such a harmonization of desires and interests take place in any thorough fashion. In a society well on its way to classlessness such a harmonization can be approximated, but in our society with its vast differences in wealth and power no such harmonization is possible. I also, of course, agree with Lerner's moral judgment that the failure to treat the interests of the ruling class in exploitation as morally illegitimate is itself morally unacceptable (to put it conservatively). Yet, as I remarked, I do not believe that my account at all commits me to either of these mistaken beliefs. But, if it does, then my account is mistaken in a very crucial way. I shall show (try to show), after I have remarked some more on Lerner's account, how I do not make the presuppositions Lerner attributes to me. More generally, whatever may be the actual ideological commitments of the moral philosophers defending the good-reasons account of the nature of morality, there is nothing in such an account itself which would commit one to such a conservative posture.

Lerner also tries to show that the good-reasons approach has a definite conservative ideological effect. It is itself, he argues, a reasonably valuable weapon of the ruling class in its campaign to suppress, control and halt the ascendancy of the working class. One ideological ploy the ruling class will try to utilize is to convince most 'people that, all things considered, the present order is the best possible world they can achieve, and that any alternative course would be at least as bad, or would be so costly in terms of the personal risk necessary to achieve it and so uncertain as to what would be achieved that it is more rational to accommodate oneself to the established order'. Ideologically speak-

ing, the actual, though unacknowledged, function of morality in society — that is the actual morality of society — is to ‘help to reconcile the majority of people to the rule of a given class over the entire society’. The good-reasons approach is itself, though no doubt unwittingly, a weapon in such ideological thrusts, for it, Lerner claims, provides an abstract and philosophically elaborate rationale or model for such a reconciliation. People are in effect told to accept such a reconciliation for it is grounded in a recognition of what it is to take the moral point of view, of what it is to reason morally. In what is in effect a linguistic sleight of hand, it is made to appear that the very use of moral language is such that it makes no sense to say that social harmony should not be promoted if that harmony requires or even involves human exploitation. But such a remark is perfectly intelligible. Whether or not one is justified in believing one ought to fight for certain moral ideals even though they do involve social disequilibrium and the suppression of the interests of exploiters, is a substantive issue in ethics which cannot be established one way or another by an appeal to linguistic usage. It is not a deviant utterance or an incoherent remark to say that ‘the true ethical order can be established only when the present exploiters are overthrown’.

I indeed stress the desirability of giving people what they rationally and reflectively want, when satisfying one’s wants is constrained by a willingness to treat the rational wants of other human beings in the same way, but with respect to this Lerner points out that we should not fail to note that the established order helps form people’s wants, e. g. desires for snowmobiles, color TV sets, yellow fingernail polish and clothes with a new cut. *What* we want and even *that* we will have certain wants is subject to manipulation and indeed is manipulated by the ruling class. And to adjust the wants of the working class (the masses) to the wants of the ruling class makes them still more dependent on the ruling class and passive in the face of the ruling-class control. Yet this is something that is quite flagrantly done by the ruling class.

What I wholeheartedly agree with in Lerner’s account and what I confess I did not but should have had before my mind in giving my account of morality is a description of social reality such as Lerner’s. (Lerner details this account and justifies his bald sociological claims in his *The new socialist revolution*.) It is surely not the case that, as a matter of fact, all adult human beings are roughly in positions of equality and equal vulnerability and that there is (considering the short term)

nothing very precarious about the advantages the ruling class does possess. There is gross exploitation, and, with such an imbalance of power and wealth, we are not in a position — working with some consensus model — to work out, as rough equals, some balance or harmonization of interests that will be equitable and in the best interests of everyone. What is in the best interests of the working class (the vast mass of the people) is to end capitalist domination by bringing about the demise of capitalism. I wrote — and Toulmin and Baier do as well — as if we were living in a social world in which such conditions of rough equality prevailed, such that even mutually self-interested and rational people could get together and work out with a mutual give and take an equitable resolution of interests; but this would only be possible if the capitalists generally — and not just in isolated instances — would in the interests of fairness and humaneness de-class themselves voluntarily. But it is an idle dream to expect this to happen. They will hold on or try to hold on to their positions of power and privilege. And in our present historical circumstances it is surely not in their self-interest to do otherwise. In such a social situation the conditions which make it possible for morality to function, as I described it as functioning, do not obtain. All the good-reasons theorists (myself included) write as if it did obtain, but it plainly doesn't, and we should be grateful to Michael Lerner for driving this important point home.

However, the soundness of Lerner's above point notwithstanding, the good-reasons theorists should be understood as being engaged in a quite different and non-conflicting task. They should be taken as philosophers setting out the underlying structure of moral reasoning and the rationale of morality and not as social theorists attempting to delineate social reality. I do not mean to give it to understand that those tasks can be adequately carried out independently of each other, but I am claiming they are distinct tasks. The characterization of man in society by the good-reasons theorists can and should be viewed as very like the articulation of ideal types to make more perspicuous the underlying rationale of morality. We want to know what we could reasonably, even in a communist society, have morality for, where it was not simply — in a pejorative sense of 'ideology' — functioning ideologically. I make it plain in my account of morality that I am speaking not of the harmonization of desires of men culturally drugged as they are in our bourgeois culture but of the harmonization of desires and interests of men in a certain condition (Nielsen, 1971, 1973b, 1974). The

condition that Lerner utterly neglects — and the neglect of which undermines his most central critique of the good-reasons approach — is that on such an account the harmonization of interests and desires must be of a distinctive kind. A condition for the morally acceptable harmonization of desires is that it will ‘give everyone as much as possible of whatever it is that each one will want when he is being rational...’. But surely, if working-class people are typically bamboozled through a manipulation of their wants into wanting the continuation of the capitalist order with its system of exploitation, then it is not the case that these are the things that working-class people would want when they are being rational. The very wanting of such things is a sign that there has been some diminution of their rational understanding of their situation. They have been kept by the conditions of their lives from gaining a sufficiently rational understanding of social reality so that they could have an undistorted conception of their condition. Thus a key condition for the ethically justified harmonization of interests has not and cannot be met in capitalist society and from this it follows that my account of the underlying rationale (purpose) of morality cannot be in effect an apology for the capitalist order, for on my account it is impossible under capitalism to harmonize desires and interests in a morally acceptable way.

It could only have force to respond that I am characterizing the function of morality in such a way as to make morality a hopelessly utopian enterprise, on the assumption that a classless society is a pointlessly utopian conception utterly unrealizable by human beings in any achievable historic situation. Rawls, as Macpherson (1973a, 1973b) has perceptively pointed out, does make it his assumption, but it is a rationally challengeable assumption which thoroughgoing socialist would not make. I did not and would not make it; unless it can be shown that to make my account of the nature of moral reasoning sound I should make it, my account is not flawed with a pointless utopianism.

In addition, Lerner neglects the fact that I stress that a morally acceptable harmonization of desires operates under the limitation that each individual’s maximization of the satisfaction of desire is to be constrained by a willingness to treat the rational desires of other human beings in the same way. But with the exploitative system of human relations which is unavoidable under capitalism, the capitalist ruling class could not accept the constraint that they are to seek to achieve an organization of society in which the satisfaction of the rational wants of

the working class are to be maximized. In spite of what Lerner says about rationality, the rational wants of the working class or any class would be (though this is not all they would be) the wants they would continue to have if they understood their condition, the alternatives open to them and the like. This would mean they would understand the way they were being exploited, the way their wants were being manipulated and that they would also understand about socialist alternatives to capitalism. With such knowledge they could not rationally want their own continued exploitation or the continuation of capitalism. Thus the capitalist ruling class could not, while remaining such a ruling class, want the working class to achieve a maximization of the satisfaction of their *rational* desires. This would be tantamount to capitalists desiring their own demise. Moreover, for just these reasons, there is, Lerner's remarks to the contrary notwithstanding, no room in my account for treating as legitimate the rational wants and needs of exploiters to stay in their exploitative positions, for these very wants and needs, while indeed being something it is rational for these people to have, are on my criterion *morally* unacceptable, for they are not governed by the constraint that they must be compatible with the maximum equitable satisfaction of the rational wants and needs of all human beings.

What I have been concerned to show in this first section of my essay is that Lerner has not shown that the good-reasons account of morality is a mistaken one rooted in a mistaken bourgeois conception of man and society. It is indeed important to make the stress he makes about the class-ridden nature of social reality in societies we have known and to indicate, as he has done, its importance to morality and its relevance to an understanding of some of the ideological functions of moral discourse, but an unblinkered acceptance of this is perfectly compatible with the good-reasons theorists' conception of the underlying rationale of morality.

II. Lerner also attempts to articulate a Marxist conception of ethics. I want now to show that this positive account of his has serious defects which should make us very wary of accepting it as articulating the rational foundations for a socialist morality or a Marxist account of morality.

There are, I should say initially, many good things in Lerner's dis-

cussion of a Marxist foundation for morality. It is, moreover, a strikingly different account from what we have come to expect of thinkers of a Marxist persuasion. To get anything comparable, we have to go back to Karl Vorländer's attempt in the first part of our century to effect a wedding of Kant and Marx. Lerner's account is also one — given its intuitionist meta-ethic — which will surely be opposed by many Marxists. There are, however, many perceptive and important things in his account which are not dependent on his intuitionism. There are insightful remarks about alienation, freedom, rationality, self-realization and progress; there is also a good account of the problem of relativism as it arises in the work of Marx and Engels, together with a sensible statement of an important way in which their account of norms aims at being an objectivist one while still accounting for pervasive relativistic and contextualistic features in morality. There is also a set of well-taken deflationary remarks about violence, together with a persuasive criticism of some of Popper's crucial arguments against Marx and Engels. Finally, and perhaps most centrally, there is an excellent account of the central moral commitment embedded in Marxism and a perspicuous arrangement of the underlying moral assumptions in Marx and Engels.

All of this is to be welcomed, for there is a good bit of confusion about Marxism and ethics. Vorländer recounts that it was said of Marx that he would burst into laughter when anyone spoke to him of morality. But be that as it may, Lerner perceptively points to certain moral assumptions which are embedded — though hardly explicitly — in the work of Marx and the acceptance of which is crucial to his critique of capitalism, defense of a socialist order and his account of the human condition. Lerner claims that Marx's most central normative assumption is that 'human beings ought to be respected and their human capacities for freedom, love, rationality, solidarity and creativity ought to be given opportunity for development'. If such a conviction, Lerner argues, were not at least reasonably believed to be true — and indeed objectively true (to utter a pleonasm) — the basis for Marx's critique of capitalism and defense of socialism would be undermined.

The obvious question which arises is that though this is indeed a very fundamental moral conviction which many of us — perhaps almost all of us in our cultural milieu, socialist and non-socialist alike — share there is still the question about how, and indeed even whether, we know that such a principle is true.

Lerner answers this in a very surprising way for a Marxist. He remarks that it is a 'basic ethical intuition' which 'is the foundation of all ethical knowledge' and 'which is known directly and non-inferentially'. It is here where we should, I believe, balk, for there are here crucial critical questions of at least two distinct orders. There is in the first place the recognition that the appeal to intuitionism goes flatly against the materialism and ethical naturalism of Marx himself and of such important Marxist thinkers as Lukàcs (1968), Goldmann (1972; no date,a; no date,b) and Ollman (1971), all of whom resolutely reject the is/ought dichotomy and thereby (or so it would seem) commit themselves to the meta-ethic of ethical naturalism. Secondly, and more fundamentally, there is the question of the adequacy of an intuitionist account of ethics. (It is not the acceptability of the moral ideal that is so much in question but the account of its nature, its logical status and the way – if at all – we can speak of its truth.)

I shall deal with the first consideration first. Marx in his youth, before he studied Hegel, held to the rather commonly accepted belief that there is no deriving an ought from an is and that moral discourse and factual discourse are of two distinct logical orders. But, after his study of Hegel – that is, throughout his mature intellectual life – he rejected such autonomist ethical theories and held (rightly or wrongly), like Hegel, that such traditional dichotomies were quite untenable. And while there have been some socialist thinkers who thought of themselves as somehow in the Marxist tradition who have resisted Marx here, the central philosophical figures in the Marxist tradition have stood with Marx on this issue. Lukàcs and Goldmann, for example, are two Marxists of stature who are the most explicit and the clearest about a Marxist position here. (Though even here the level of clarity over this argument leaves much to be desired.) Lukàcs stressed that human agents, as historical agents, act not as isolated individuals but as members of a group who both constitute history by their collective actions and understand what they are doing. This entails, Lukàcs and Goldmann claim, that our knowledge of man in society will not in its most important aspects be an objective non-normative knowledge. Any separation of judgments of value and fact and any separation of theory and practice is impossible for a correct account of the human estate. As Goldmann (1972, p. 20) put it (paraphrasing Lukàcs), the knowledge we have of history and society is not the knowledge of a 'contemplative science; historical action is neither social technique (Machiavelli) nor ethical

action (Kant); the two constitute an indivisible whole which is a progressive awareness of the march of humanity towards freedom'. In fine this emancipatory knowledge is a knowledge where fact and value are inextricably intertwined; and indeed any consciousness of society, which was not a grossly false consciousness, would be of that general nature. Where the matter is at all complex there is no understanding society in a 'purely factual', normatively neutral way. In understanding society, proper dialectical thought must understand social reality in a totalistic way which admits of no sharp separation of facts and values, means and ends. Judgments and conceptions of value and fact are indissolubly linked; in viewing significant human action, there is no separating out one from the other. Only by snatching propositions out of context is there even the impression that there are these distinct pure statements of value and pure statements of fact standing there independent of any viewpoint. Understanding, explanation and evaluation are strictly inseparable and the whole analysis is set in a materialist epistemological and ontological framework which would hardly admit of any direct non-empirical, scientifically uncheckable, knowledge of right and wrong, good and bad (Goldmann, 1972, pp. 14, 20-21).

Even if Lerner were convinced by the above arguments that his account was in fundamental conflict with the methodological, epistemological and (if one chooses to use that idiom) ontological commitments of traditional Marxism, it is still far from evident that he would abandon it just on that account. He could and would argue, I believe, that his account is essential for the kind of grounding of democracy that Marx gives and that acceptance of Marx's historical materialism, his critique of capitalism and justification of socialism, are not touched by an abandonment of naturalistic assumptions for intuitionist ones. Indeed it is such an intuitionist account of ethics, Lerner claims, which gives us 'the best grounding for a justification of democracy' and that, even if it is not compatible with certain assumptions of Marxists and indeed Marx himself, it is 'consistent with Marx's approach to ethics' and it 'would be wise to adopt an ethical intuitionist position to justify his [Marx's] approach to the world even if Marx did not do so'. Lerner could argue that the methodological, epistemological and ontological conceptions in Marx and the Marxist tradition are not really central to Marxism. What is essential is his critique of capitalism and his justification of democracy and socialism. I doubt whether these elements can be so pulled apart without serious damage both to Marxist conceptions

and to our understanding of social reality. However, I shall not argue that here. Rather for the remainder of my discussion of Lerner's statement of a Marxist ethic I shall assume, what I do not in fact believe, namely, that Lerner is home and free on the issues discussed above, and I shall turn to my second major point.

What I want now to query is whether it would be wise for a Marxist or indeed for anyone else to adopt such an intuitionist position. I shall argue that there are difficulties of a very considerable magnitude which need to be overcome before it would be wise to make such a claim or to opt for intuitionism, and I shall suggest that it is unlikely that these difficulties can be overcome.

Lerner tells us that 'an intuitionist account is the most plausible account of ethics' and that we have a fundamental ethical principle – a postulate (to use Lerner's way of putting it) – which provides us with the ethical foundation for a Marxist theory of society and for a Marxist social critique. This principle which is 'known directly and non-inferentially', is said to be 'the foundation of all ethical knowledge'. The principle, recall, is that all human beings ought to be respected and their capacities for freedom, love, rationality, creativity and solidarity ought to be given maximum opportunity for development.

However, there are the standard difficulties with intuitionism which Lerner, distressingly enough, does nothing at all to meet. It is *perhaps* clear enough what it means to say that I know directly and non-inferentially that there is a yellow pencil lying on the desk in front of me, and it is perhaps even justifiable to say I know whether or not I have a headache directly and non-inferentially. I simply observe the former to be the case, and I simply have the latter. In both cases the sensory mechanisms are well understood, and there are in the former case non-question-begging observational checks on the truth of my claim, and in the latter case a parallel statement, e. g., Nielsen has a headache, can be known to be true by observing my behavior. But in the moral case we need the appeal to intuition because we have no such an observational basis for ascertaining the truth or falsity of Lerner's basic principle. (Indeed, trivially, if we had it, we would not need to speak of intuition.) Lerner's principle is not simply a psychological claim, and yet there is no question of just looking to see if it is true (or false). But then it is quite unclear what it *means* to say it is known to be true directly and non-inferentially. Indeed it is not clear what it means to say it is 'known to be true' at all.

Lerner would presumably respond that it is not a matter of empirical knowledge based on observation, but it is known non-sensuously. That is to say, it is only where observation, direct or indirect, is at least possible that verification is in order. Where non-sensuous apprehension is involved there is no possibility of verification and indeed talk of verification there is senseless. But then there emerges in full force the standard puzzles about this mysterious non-sensuous moral faculty. What kind of evidence do we have for its existence? And what is it to 'non-sensuously apprehend something' and how do we check for mistaken or *ersatz* intuitions? What if someone has or claims to have Nietzschean intuitions rather than Lerner's kind? How do we show that Lerner's are correct and the Nietzschean's are mistaken? People having such at least putative intuitions both claim to have direct non-inferential knowledge of the truth of their conflicting principles. Do we simply count noses at this point to find out who is right? If we do that — particularly given Marx teaches about ideology — how do we know or do we know that what most people claim they intuit to be true is true and that the people in the minority are mistaken? Do we need another intuition for that? How in fine do we tell a genuine intuition from a mistaken one?

If there is some non-intuitive way of doing that, then an appeal to intuition is superfluous, for then we can know independently of the intuitions which basic moral claims are true. If we say instead that we just have a plurality of conflicting intuitions without any way of ascertaining which, if any, of the often conflicting intuitions give us genuine moral knowledge, then we may call our moral claims objective-knowledge claims if we like, but we actually have, as Bertrand Russell has observed, a form of subjectivism which by a perfectly understandable ideological conjuring trick is labelled as, and indeed regarded as, a form of objectivism.

To say, given the actual existence of conflicting ostensible intuitions firmly held by different agents, that one's intuitions are self-evidently true or synthetic *a priori* truths raises problems which are again standard, important and not easily, if at all, resolvable in a way that would give comfort to intuitionists. Again, given several conflicting claims to possess self-evident truths, how do we decide which truths are really self-evident? Are we to say in good Thomistic fashion that some are *self-evident in themselves* but not self-evident to us? Such claimed self-evidence is at best of little help to human beings and is itself of doubtful intelligibility. But if we cannot ascertain which of several ostensible

self-evident truths are really self-evident, we do not have a workable distinction between what is really self-evident and what is only apparently so. There is also the quite distinct problem whether the very notion of a synthetic *a priori* truth is a coherent one. We cannot now so confidently answer that in the negative as we could ten years ago, but it still remains an extraordinarily problematic notion which we can hardly accept just like that (to put it minimally).

It is of no avail to appeal, as earlier intuitionists such as Clarke and Reid did, to a conception of moral blindness in order to pick out inauthentic, mistaken intuitions from authentic, genuine ones. The analogy between color-blindness and moral-blindness is not a good one. With color-blindness we have independent tests of a non-question-begging sort to ascertain when someone is or is not color-blind, such that people, including the color-blind people themselves, will come to agree who is and who is not color-blind. We have, as well, physiological tests for color-blindness. Nothing like this obtains for moral-blindness. We have no physical tests for when it occurs or even a hint of what physical mechanisms (if any) are involved. And morally-blind people will not, unlike color-blind people, agree that they are morally-blind. The case of Hitler, though extreme, is instructive. He was a moral monster — a paradigmatically, monstrously evil man — yet he was thoroughly convinced of the rightness and justice of his cause, and there was a wide following of educated people who agreed with him. He would not, for a moment, nor would they, have agreed that he was morally blind. It was the others — the communists and the bourgeoisie — who were morally blind. And to say that Hitler was simply mad and so can be discounted as a candidate for a paradigmatically evil but still responsible moral agent is to make a mistake. The last few months of his life apart, when he was under considerable pressure (pressure sufficient to crack many a human being), he was not, if we use non-moral criteria, mad, unless we want to use criteria for madness which are so strong that all fanatics are said to be mad. He was evil, reasonably intelligent, determined and unfortunately possessed of an extraordinary amount of charisma which he utilized for vile and destructive ends. He, indeed, had some crazy beliefs, but if we use the having of crazy beliefs as a criterion for or decisive test of madness, then we should indeed judge many, many more people to be mad than we in fact are prepared to do. Many people who function well in responsible positions and relate reasonably within their families and at their work-place are so afflicted.

There is no morally neutral way of sifting out morally blind from non-morally blind people. The very conception is a mistaken one of no use in shoring up intuitionism.

In sum, the intuitionist foundations on which Lerner tries to build are in shambles, and he does nothing at all to repair such foundations. Marxists should remain suspicious of such accounts as they were in the past suspicious of attempts to weld Marxism to a neo-Kantianism. In Lerner's account, more straightforwardly than in a Kantian account, we have unabashed yet undefended appeal to intuitionism. But intuitionism appears at least to be brokenbacked when it is construed as Lerner and intuitionists have traditionally construed it. (A kind of Rawlsian 'intuitionism' is not so evidently vulnerable.) There is nothing here on which to found a Marxist or socialist account of morality or a Marxist critique of society. To the extent that there is a problem about progress, development and objective evaluations for Marxists, the problem is not solved by such an intuitionist account.

III. Where are we then in trying to untangle questions about Marxism and morality? It is beyond my present capacity to say, though I would like in this final section to make some suggestions concerning matters which we need to research and carefully think through.

People solidly in the Marxist tradition have rejected any is/ought dichotomy. Here they are striking resemblances between Marxist thought and that of that much underrated and neglected American philosopher John Dewey. Yet suggestive as the discussion of these topics by such distinguished Marxists as Lukàcs and Goldmann have been, they have not been nearly rigorous enough to dismantle Hume's guillotine. However, there have in recent years been arguments by philosophers from what might in very broad terms be called 'the analytical camp' which have rigorously attacked the is/ought dichotomy. I refer to the work of MacIntyre, Taylor, Searle, Foot, Melden and Norman.² But their work in turn has been powerfully criticized by philosophers who defend

2. Some of the core writings about this have been collected together by Hudson (1969). The essays which argue that an ought can be derived from an is which are particularly worthy of note are the essays by MacIntyre, Black, Searle, Anscombe and Foot. In addition to the essays in this volume, note for further non-autonomist arguments Mavrodes (1968), Melden (1961-62), Taylor (1967) and Norman (1972). The last two essays mentioned should be of particular interest to people on the Left.

such an autonomist conception of ethics.³ We need, if we can, to see if in a thoroughly rigorous fashion we can get to the bottom of this issue. The philosopher in us will, of course, understandably enough be skeptical about whether we can ever get to 'the bottom' of such an issue. But be that as it may, we should do the following. (1) We need to become as clear as possible concerning Marx's position about the is/ought and about Lukàcs' and Goldmann's as well; (2) we need to see how Marxist thought joins with contemporary analytical discussions of the issue; and finally, (3), with (1) and (2) reasonably in hand, we need to probe the issue ourselves so that we can come to resolve, if possible, questions about the viability of Hume's (Poincaré's) law. Can we derive a fundamental moral ought from an is? Is there an intelligible and reasonably clearcut division between moral discourse and factual discourse such that a derivation is impossible or is it the case that there is no such intelligible division yielding such results? (I do not mean to give to understand that these questions suggest all the possible alternatives.) We on the Left need to gain greater clarity about this general issue and we need to think through the implications — including the ideological implications — of whatever position we come to have.

We also need to think through the issue raised by the fact that, on the one hand, Marx and Engels thought of law and morality as mystifying ideological intuitions which, along with religion, have a reactionary pacifying effect on people and indeed distort their understanding of social reality and, on the other hand, produced a critique of capitalism and capitalist society in terms which are plainly and irreducibly moral. (Capitalist systems of production, as Marx put it in *Capital* [Vol. 1, p. 645], 'mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage to a machine...'.) Morality is part of the superstructure and yet Marx, as Lerner sees, needs objective moral categories and an objective moral point of view to make his critique of capitalism and capitalist society. Lerner shows well enough how a positivist solution will not work here. But his own intuitionist 'new foundations' are, as we have seen, utterly useless.

Tony Skillen in his significant 'Marxism and morality' (1974) wrest-

3. In the Hudson (1969) collection, the following essays are of particular importance for a defense of an autonomist position: Flew, Phillips, Hare and James and Judith Thomson. In addition, the following are crucial: Jaggard (1974), Martin (1974) and Wengraf (1964). Chapters 5 and 6 of Hudson (1970) provide a useful summary discussion of the arguments pro and con here.

les with this issue without succeeding in resolving it. He readily sees that none of the following, frequently made moves will do: (1) 'Morality is indeed at the root of Marxism but Marx's own bewitchment by a positivistic ideology of science led him to conceal it from himself', (2) 'a Marxist science makes no moral assumptions but functions practically to advance the objective interests of the working class' and (3) 'Marxism is value-free but Marxist *praxis* presupposes an extra-empirical commitment to socialist ideals' (p. 11). All of these claims fit badly with Marx's text, and they all have obvious difficulties of their own. How do we, or can we, make a coherent account of a view that contains the following two claims: (a) Capitalism is a vicious social order which is to be and will be replaced by a better order with the achievement and consolidation of socialism and (b) morality (the moral point of view) is to be rejected as a mystifying social device which is itself one of the evils of class society? But surely, if we reject morality or moral categories, we cannot coherently speak of the evils of capitalism or of capitalism being a vicious social order or of socialism being a better social order. Such talk, unless it is itself just an ideological smoke screen, presupposes a coherent and objectively justified conception of a moral point of view. Skillen, for all his perceptiveness about the ideological functions of morality, fudges this point; it is to Lerner's credit that he feels its force and squarely faces it.

What we need to do is to assimilate the profound and humanly useful insights that Skillen marshalls to show why Marx could and did speak of the evils of morality with an understanding of the rationale behind Marx's moral critique of capitalism. Intelligently borrowing from Marx, Stirner, Nietzsche, Freud, Reich and Anderson, Skillen, even more forcefully than Lerner, drives home how it is the case that our societies and indeed in most societies morality often functions 'to batter people into acquiescing in their own oppression and impoverishment' and how 'it domesticates people into a subjected kind of "sociability"' (1974, p. 14). He shows how Marx attacks moralism and why; indeed Skillen reinforces and further justifies that attack. What he does not show is how Marx or Marxists or anyone else have established that the moral point of view is to be identified with this moralism. *Some* moral points of view are indeed to be so identified and are to be unmasked and rejected. But that is not to identify the taking of a moral point of view with this moralism. Indeed only if the taking of a moral point of view were not identified with this moralism would Skillen's and Marx's cri-

tique of moralism make sense, for they do not simply show that this moralism is irrational, they also show that it is inhumane and evil. But this claim only makes sense if there is an objectively justified moral point of view or at least if there are some objectively justified moral norms.

Skillen fleetingly sees this when he remarks, toward the end of his essay (1974, p. 15), that we 'may . . . need a radical-materialist "conception of morality" '. But he makes nothing of this and does not see the problems it raises — most crucially the question Lerner tries but fails to answer concerning the justification of an objective moral point of view which in turn would square with Marx's critique of capitalism and advocacy of socialism. Skillen argues (p. 15) that such a conception, if it were to be justified, would not be justified in terms of any higher power (God or reason) 'controlling our inclinations etc.' but would find its rationale in the 'necessity for human cooperation in conditions of at least relative scarcity'. The resulting conception of morality is seen by Skillen as a device for attaining cooperation in terms of conceptions of good and bad such that with all the different and conflicting interests involved the good is maximized and the bad is minimized (pp. 14-15). In so reasoning Skillen comes very close to taking a position identical with that of the good-reasons theorists. It is in terms of such a conception of cooperation that the good-reasons approach understands the underlying function of morality. (It is, of course, stated more self-consciously and thus more precisely in the accounts given by the good-reasons theorists.) If such an account succeeds or even partially succeeds in articulating correctly the underlying rationale of what it is to take a rational moral point of view, a Marxist morality will have found rational underpinnings without falling into what Skillen shows are the real evils of moralism. This is one alternative that needs to be carefully investigated and reasoned through.

However, the approach is thought by many to be in one way or another inadequate. (I shall not here, as I have elsewhere [1968, 1957], try to assess the justifiability of these criticisms but simply, as a sociological comment, note that they are widespread.) Others have tried to show how other conceptions of morality are at the basis of Marxism. Richard Norman (in press) has argued, as have others, that a self-realizationist account is at its base and has stated a self-realizationist account in such a way as to free it from the incoherencies that plague many self-realizationist accounts, though there still remains the problem of

whether such an account could be a complete account of the foundations of morality.⁴ (We should also worry about whether we have any tolerable understanding of what it would be like to have a complete account here. Maybe we are looking for the color of heat.)

Derek Allen (1973), by contrast with Norman, and running against the stream, has argued that Marx's account is best understood as a utilitarian one and that the self-realizationist motifs can be subsumed under a general utilitarian account. But even if this claim is correct, we are faced with the powerful critique of utilitarian accounts of morality given by John Rawls (1971). If Marx's ethics is a utilitarian one, then it is far from clear whether it provides us with a justification of our socialist moral commitments.

The general problem is an old one in moral philosophy. Marx's account is clearly not normatively neutral and seems at least to commit one to a certain moral point of view and a certain moral assessment of life. But it is not clear that there is any theoretical conception of morality or indeed any intellectual construction at all that can show that this point of view is rationally justified and indeed is the point of view that we should take.

There is, however, a challengeable assumption embedded in my above remarks — an assumption Lerner and Allen also make — namely, the assumption that unless there is some sort of general philosophical ethical theory justifying the taking of a moral point of view or at least justifying the holding of fundamental evaluations such as those that Marx makes, that we are not justified in believing that this moral point of view or these evaluations are objectively justified. But this assumption — particularly since the work of Wittgenstein — ought to be challenged. It is not evident that rational morality requires such *philosophical foundations*.

Allan Wood (1972) has argued something very like that. Marx, he agrees, did condemn capitalism in moral terms. But it is a mistake, Wood tells us, to see Marx's critique of capitalism as rooted in any moral theory or particular moral or social ideal. He should not be understood as being fundamentally some kind of utilitarian or as some kind

4. This essay is in part a response to Nielsen (1973). I there try to show how the classical treatments of self-realization, as suggestive as they sometimes are, have not received a coherent statement. While acknowledging the force of much of my case, it does seem to me that Norman has given a coherent and suggestive account of self-realization.

of Kantian or self-realizationist. Rather, Wood argues (p. 281), Marx appeals to quite unproblematic moral conceptions, 'accepted by the "common man", with whose moral view nearly every moral philosopher claims to be in agreement'. They are such conceptions as the claim that disguised exploitation, unnecessary servitude, economic instability and declining productivity are ills (and indeed the first two are evils as well) to be ended as soon as possible. But there is no serious challenge to this on the part of bourgeois thinkers be they conservatives or liberals. If (in fact) capitalism has, quite unavoidably, these features and another social system could avoid them without bringing on still graver ills, then we have good moral grounds for condemning capitalism. Moreover, there is no doubt that these are ills or evils to be avoided if it is possible to do so without creating still graver ills. Apologists for capitalism only have challenged whether they can in fact be avoided without these results. These moral beliefs are in sum quite unproblematic, and we can have greater confidence of their truth than we can have of any moral theory or meta-moral theory. Marx does not need any challengeable philosophical moral theory to underpin his critique of capitalism.

Such talk about 'morality without foundations' and without skepticism will cause many moral philosophers to balk. They wish to have something systematic such as we have in Kant, Mill, Sidgwick or Rawls. And it is understandable enough that moral philosophers would have such a wish. However, there is a kind of realism in Wood's remarks which should appeal to Marxists. Is it not the case that we can be more confident that these things are genuine ills and evils, than we could be of the truth of any moral theory or philosophical account of morality? After all philosophical accounts of any interest are complex and the grounds for their assessment seem at least to be essentially contested. At the very least there are deep and persistent disputes about them with no clear methodological guides for their resolution. But moral beliefs like those of Marx mentioned above are beliefs all of us would hold in a reflective equilibrium when we were reasonably informed. Moreover, they are the sort of beliefs we would have to appeal to in testing the adequacy of any philosophical statement of a normative ethic. Marx need not have worked out a moral theory to be in a position to defend the objectivity of his moral condemnation of capitalism or to reject charges of relativism or arbitrariness.

Remembering what Gramsci said about common sense being the

ideology of the ruling class, if we claim that such common valuations are ideologically skewed, we must keep in mind that this will, if true, effect moral theories resting in part on such common valuations and not just those very fundamental valuations themselves. And if we try to cut free our normative ethical theories altogether from such appeal to common and deeply entrenched valuations, it is difficult to see how these theories are to be assessed.

I, as much as any other moral philosopher, am interested in trying to discover and set out the underlying structure of morality — if such there be — so as to gain a clear understanding of its rationale (if any). I also agree that such an account, if we had it, would be of value in arguments about the viability of different forms of life and different ideological postures, but I think it is entirely unrealistic and unjustified to think that we must resolve such foundational questions before we can make rational moral assessments of the evils of capitalism and the desirability of socialism.

One final point. I agree with Lerner, and thus disagree with Skillen and Wood, that we on the Left need to make such assessments of capitalism and socialism. However, I believe that Wood is quite right in stressing that Marx believed that a 'historically potent demand, a genuine and effective *need* for emancipation arises in an oppressed class only under certain conditions' (1972, p. 279). This emancipatory interest arises only where there is a disharmony between the productive forces within a given social system and its existing relations of production. Wood is also justified in claiming that this emancipatory interest (need) 'does not appear *merely* as a social ideal, but always as an actual movement within the existing production relations toward concrete historical possibilities transcending them' (1972, p. 279; italics mine). But to say that this need does not appear *merely* as a social ideal is not to deny that it does appear as an ideal; my claim and Lerner's is only that there is embedded in Marx's critique of capitalism such an ideal and that if that ideal is not justified his critique of capitalism is undermined. This is not at all to deny the claim of Marx and Engels (Marx, 1967, p. 426) that 'communism is . . . not a *state of affairs* to be brought about, an *ideal* to which reality must somehow adjust itself. We call communism the actual movement which is transcending (*aufhebt*) the present state of affairs. The conditions of this movement results from presuppositions already existing'. That is to say, to argue as I have and as Lerner has is not to claim foolishly that if philosophers and a few

enlightened people, or indeed even many enlightened people, attain a proper moral understanding, we will then be able to adjust social reality to the ideals embedded in this understanding. It is rather most fundamentally the dominant mode of the forces of production which determines the general nature of social reality. There cannot be an end to the evils — the servitude and domination and the alienated labor — of class-divided societies until productive forces exist which could make possible a classless egalitarian society of sisterhood and brotherhood and of human solidarity. Servitude is an essential ingredient of the capitalist system and was essential for the development of capitalism to the stage where socialism becomes a real possibility. This needs to be recognized, but the recognition of this is compatible with a recognition that there is a state of affairs to be achieved, where the productive conditions are right, which has the earmarks of a truly human society — a society far better than the inhuman ones which we have known under the yoke of capitalism.

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Résumé

Le point de vue des 'bonnes intentions', est-il soutenu, n'a pas les implications idéologiques conservatrices que lui attribue Michael Lerner et il peut en fait être utile à la constitution des fondements conceptuels d'une éthique socialiste. Après une critique de la tentative de Lerner de donner un fondement intuitionniste à une éthique marxiste, on passe à l'examen d'un problème central concernant le marxisme et la morale. Marx, d'un côté, démasque le moralisme et met à jour les fonctions idéologiques de la moralité et, de l'autre, effectue une critique du capitalisme et une défense du socialisme qui requièrent objectivement de véritables normes morales. Une manière de considérer Marx et le marxisme est proposée qui fait apparaître comment ces deux éléments apparemment contradictoires dans le Marxisme forment un ensemble cohérent.