

ON THE CHOICE BETWEEN REFORM AND REVOLUTION*

I

Given the history of this century it is understandable that there should be both an extensive fear of revolution and a distrust of the efficacy of reform. Yet when one considers such countries as the United States, Rhodesia, and South Africa (not to mention the poorer and savagely exploited parts of the world), it is also becoming increasingly obvious to any tolerably well informed person who is also humane that a fundamental social transformation of these societies is humanly speaking imperative. And, this, of course, thrusts one back on the suspect ideas of revolution and far-reaching social reform. This in turn raises questions about what one is committed to in believing in the moral necessity of radical social transformation. Is one committed to revolution or only to some form of very fundamental social reform? And this in turn naturally provokes the question: What exactly is the difference between them and what is one asking for when one advocates a progressive fundamental or radical social transformation?

Such questions were debated by Kautsky, Bernstein, Lenin, and Luxemburg in another context, but, without even remotely suggesting that what they had to say is irrelevant for us today, I want to look at this cluster of questions afresh. Is the assumed distinction between revolution and fundamental or radical reform only a distinction concerning the means, the instrumentalities, of social change, or does it refer to what is aimed at as well, e.g., *the kind* of change and the extent of change? Is the putative distinction between fundamental or radical reform and revolution a spurious one? And if the distinction is a genuine one, are they on a continuum? And more fundamentally still, if one is committed to seeking and advocating a fundamental social transformation, is one necessarily for revolution? Or, contrariwise, is the working for reform the only reasonable alternative for a humane human being? This cluster of questions in turn raises a bevy of more specific questions including such overtly conceptual questions as what is meant by 'revolution' and 'reform'.

To gain some purchase on these issues, it is well to begin by asking: What

* Reprinted from *Inquiry*, Vol. XIV (1971).

are we asking for when we ask for a fundamental social transformation or a transformation of society?

If we are committed to a progressive transformation, we are surely asking for an end to human oppression and exploitation. Even if this is only a heuristic ideal and in fact we can only realistically hope to diminish the extent and severity of oppression and human degradation, it still remains a fundamental guiding ideal: it tells us to what we are aiming as far as possible to approximate in any progressive transformation of society. To achieve this transformation all forms of racism, ethnocentrism, chauvinism and rigid social stratification with its built-in privileges would have to come to an end. Class divisions and alienated labor would have to disappear. This would involve the abolition of the bourgeoisie; that is to say, there could no longer be a capitalist or any other kind of corporate ruling class, a bureaucratic or technocratic élite or establishment. The modes of production in the society would have to be thoroughly socialized so that their underlying rationale is to serve the interests of everyone alike. To be morally acceptable, specific privileges, when they are necessary at all, must be such that they further (typically in an indirect way) this underlying ideal.

The above characterization of what is involved in a progressive transformation of society is for the most part negative. Positively, our characterization will be vaguer. As we know from Dante, evil is much easier to characterize than positive good. It is difficult, in talking about such a transformation, to say anything general which is not vague or platitudinous or (what is more likely) both. A progressively transformed society would give men a fuller and more human life. This quasi-tautology unpacks into the claim that people in such a transformed society would attain a liberation in which their full human powers and their creative capacities would be developed in a many-sided way. They would not be one-sided, emotionally or intellectually stunted men or academic *Fachidioten*, but would be men capable of managing their affairs, helping in the management of society in the interests of everyone alike and capable of a wide range of enjoyments and creative activities. And they would not only have these capabilities, they would also be anxious to exercise them. In addition, there would be an end to possessive individualism and a commodity accumulation which goes beyond what humans need and would want when their wants are not artificially stimulated to enhance capitalist enterprise. Rather, there would be a commitment to social equality and to a fair and nearly equal distribution of the available goods and services. In different concrete situations these different notions, positive and negative, would of course take different specifications and amplifications. But the elasticity of

these specifications is not endless since they are bounded by these general but non-formal conceptions. In transforming society our aim should be human freedom (the liberation of human creativity), equality and the enhancement of human happiness and the avoidance of misery. In our present historical circumstances this is best achieved in (a) a society founded upon common ownership of the means of production and (b) a society in which all men participate in the running of their society. To fully exercise our human agency, we need a common culture with a maximum of human participation. Here we have the leitmotif for a progressive transformation of society.

For societies to be transformed so that this would be a reality, we would need, even in the most progressive societies, a very considerable institutional change, and in such powerful advanced industrial societies as the United States and Western Germany, the changes would have to be structural and very profound indeed. Could such a transformation be achieved without a revolution? Before trying to answer this we need to gain some clarification about what we mean by 'revolution' and how it contrasts with 'reform' and what the conceptual links are between revolution and violence, for on *some* employments of 'revolution' our question would be nearly as silly as "Are all emerald things green?" That is to say, on some readings of 'revolution' it may be analytically (or at least in some sense necessarily) true that to be committed to seeking and advocating a fundamental progressive social transformation is to be for revolution.

II

So let us first get some purchase on what is meant by 'revolution' and 'reform'. In doing this it is important to keep in mind that it is only against the background of a belief in progress that it makes sense to speak either of revolution or of reform. To reform is to convert into another and better form; it is, as the O.E.D. puts it, "to free from previous faults or imperfections". We speak of reforming institutions and social arrangements and by this we mean correcting them or improving them by amending or altering them through removing faults, abuses, malpractices, and the like. This implies that one social arrangement or set of social arrangements, or a practice or institution or set of practices or institutions, can be an advance or an improvement over another. But to believe in this is to believe that progress is possible within a limited time span at least, though this is not sufficient to commit one to the fullfledged conceptions of progress found in Condorcet, Hegel or Marx. A belief in the viability of revolutionary activity, as is well known and frequently

remarked on, is even more obviously linked to a belief in progress. And if a belief in progress was one of the great and persistent illusions of the nineteenth century, then belief in either reform or revolution is belief in an illusion.¹

One further preliminary. If the usage recorded in current dictionaries is focused on, it is evident enough that 'revolution,' or 'revolutionary', has a negative emotive force while 'reform', or 'reformer', has a positive emotive force. Given the conventional criteria for 'synonym' and 'near synonym', 'correct', 'improve', 'restore', and 'better' all, in certain types of sentence, count as synonyms or near synonyms for 'reform' when 'reform' is a verb; when 'reform' is a noun 'correction', 'progress', 'reconstruction', and 'reformation' count as synonyms. Here we clearly see that by definition 'to reform' is to do something which at least the reformer takes to be desirable, and, more generally, in many (perhaps most) contexts 'reform' is so employed that something would not as a rule be said within a society to be a reform unless it was thought to be desirable, though 'stupid and undesirable reforms' is not a contradiction in terms. The latter are reforms which have somehow misfired and misfired *as reforms*. Furthermore, if the word 'reform' is to continue to have a use, reforms regarded as stupid or undesirable must be exceptions and not the rule. If I assert that I have made a reform, I give you to understand that I have done something good. There is, in short, a pronounced positive emotive force to 'reform'. Only on some uses of 'reform', conspicuously where a reformer is equated with a zealot, crusader, or do-gooder, does the term acquire a negative emotive force. By contrast, given the usages assembled in dictionaries, it is evident enough that 'revolution' and 'revolutionary' typically have a negative emotive force. I approach this in an indirect way.

We are interested in revolution as a socio-political concept, but the word 'revolution' has other uses too and in attempting a very general characterization of 'revolution', one dictionary tells us that we are talking about 'a complete or drastic change of any kind'. And when we keep in mind that 'revolution' has this wide range of uses, it is worth noting that sometimes 'revolution' is equated with 'spasm', 'convulsion', 'revulsion', and 'cataclysm'. Here we have words which have negative emotive force. This emotive force is evident again in those contexts where 'revolution' is equated with 'rebellion', 'insurrection', 'subvention', 'destruction', or 'disruption', and we have adjectives such as 'radical', 'extreme', 'catastrophic', and 'intransigent' linked with revolution and revolutionary. And while it is true that the meanings of 'revolution' and 'reform' are not yoked to their emotive force, their emotive force is such that, unless one takes pains to account for it and neutralize it in argu-

ments about the justification of revolution, one is at an initial disadvantage in defending revolution.

In order to know what the actual substantive claims of the reformers are, we must consider what their criteria for improvement, bettering, and the like are. Political reform involves legal, educational, economic, and generally institutional correction or improvements. Faults and abuses are corrected. Here what is crucial is to gain some clarity about the actual criteria for improvement, correction, amendment, or making better. In speaking of reforming West Germany's archaic university system, for example, are we talking about altering it to respond more efficiently to the needs of a modern industrial state, or do we primarily have in mind altering it so as to extend, sharpen, and systematize critical awareness among the Western German population, or do we mean something else again? What in such a situation is the amplification of 'reform'? But whatever we mean, we are also saying, when we defend educational reform, that we are for improvement in the existing educational structures and not for sweeping them away and replacing them by utterly new structures of a radically different nature. In talking more generally of socio-political reform, which typically would include as one of its crucial components educational reform, we are talking of amending or improving the fundamental institutions, practices, and social arrangements of a society so as to correct and remove, as far as possible, its faults, abuses, or malpractices.

Very typically, in speaking of reform we have in mind changes which apply to specific amendments or alterations of existing social arrangements. They are the type of reforms, aimed, as they are, only at the elimination of specific ills, that Karl Popper regards as the sole admissible reforms. They can be handled by intelligent piecemeal social engineering without a challenge to the basic ideology of a culture, and they do not require argument about fundamental human ends or Utopian blueprints for the improvement of man's lot. Commitment to reform here makes a ready contrast with revolution. But when we speak, as we do, of 'far-reaching political reforms', 'fundamental reforms', 'sweeping reforms', or 'radical reforms', the contrast with revolutionary change is not so clear. I shall return to this point after I have characterized revolution.

Political theorists have given us typologies of revolution and many have stressed that there is a single type of socio-political revolution which is of the greatest critical interest when we ask about revolution and reform and about the justification of revolution.² This conception of a socio-political revolution is a more specific characterization and specification than the related characterization given in the dictionaries. In the dictionaries the characterization of

the relevant sense of 'revolution' is that a revolution is a complete overthrow of a government or social system by those previously subject to it, and the substitution of a new government or social system. Paradigms of revolutions are the expulsion of the Stuart dynasty and the transfer of sovereignty to William and Mary, the overthrow of the French monarchy and the establishment of republican government during the French revolution, the American, the Russian, the Chinese, and the Cuban revolutions. But it is of some consequence to see that these are a mixed bag of examples. In particular, the French, Russian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions are very different – and indeed particularly different in at least one important respect – from the American revolution and the English revolution of 1688. The former revolutions – indeed the revolutions sometimes called 'the Great Revolutions' – are distinguished from the others in that they *Altered in a profound sense the social structure of the societies in which the revolution occurred*. When these revolutions were consolidated, the social structure of the societies which were so revolutionized (and sometimes some others as well) were radically altered. But this was not so when the Stuart dynasty was overthrown and William and Mary became the English sovereigns, and it was not true of the American revolution. In the last example there was an overthrow of a government and of colonial rule, but the rebellious colonists only established a government of a slightly different sort. There was no change in basic social structure. The change was quite unlike that from Batista's Cuba to present-day Cuba. With so-called great revolutions there is what has been called a 'shock to the foundations of society'.³ Such revolutions, as Karl Kautsky has pointed out, do not come from nowhere. They are like births, sudden in occurring but only possible after a complex development. When they occur there is "a sharp, sudden change in the social location of power", but this change is not one that can occur without certain tolerably determinate conditions obtaining.⁴ For there to be a revolution, it is often claimed, there must be widespread misery, deprivation, and exploitation followed by a brief period of rising expectations which, after some minor improvements in the oppressed people's condition, are in turn dashed by a turn of events for the worse. Where there is a despair over the system coupled with a sense that things could be better, the ground of revolutionary activity is being broken; where there is a widespread despairing dissatisfaction with the present social order linked with a conception – often nebulous – of a new social order, where in Fanon's phrase, we 'set afoot a new man', we have conditions – though indeed not sufficient conditions – for revolution.

Where under these conditions a revolution is actually sustained so that a

government topples and a new social order is brought into being, we have the type of revolution — a social and political revolution — that is relevant to our discussions of revolution and reform. This sense of ‘revolution’ is properly caught by two political theorists on the Left: C. B. Macpherson and Herbert Marcuse. Macpherson characterizes revolution as

a transfer of state power by means involving the use of threat of organized unauthorized force, and the subsequent consolidation of that transferred power, with a view to bringing about a fundamental change in social, economic and political institutions.⁵

In a similar vein Marcuse writes that a revolution is

the overthrow of a legal established government and constitution by a social class or movement with the aim of altering the social as well as the political structure.⁶

If we mark the distinction between violent and non-violent radical activity around the refusal of the non-violent radical to injure or (where he can help it) tolerate injury to his antagonists, we can see that there is no *conceptual* reason why a revolution must be violent, though there may very well be substantial empirical justification for believing that all revolutions of the type characterized above by Macpherson and Marcuse will *in fact* be violent. (It is important to remember here that there are degrees of violence. Revolutions can and do vary here.) Thus on these terms it is a mistake to characterize a social and political revolution in such a way as to make ‘a non-violent revolution’ a contradiction in terms, and thus it is a mistake to define ‘revolution’, as Carl Friedrich does, as “a sudden and violent overthrow of an established political order”.⁷

In the extant typologies, the kind of revolution Macpherson and Marcuse have characterized is contrasted with (1) *private palace revolutions*, e.g., the murder of Duncan by Macbeth followed by Macbeth’s succession to the throne, (2) *public palace revolutions*, e.g., a *coup d’état* such as the typical South American revolution, (3) *systemic revolutions*, i.e., a change usually through a series of civil wars in the system of state organization (e.g., a city-state system) effecting a wide-ranging cultural community. (Examples are the change in the state system at the time of Pericles to that of the time of Augustus and the fall of the Roman Empire.), (4) *colonial revolutions* (rebellions) against rule by the government of another country. (The American revolution is a good example. But when, as in the Algerian revolution, there is also a considerable alteration of social structure, we have not only a colonial revolution, but also a socio-political revolution.) It is this latter kind of revolution — the socio-political revolution — that I am interested in when I ask

about the contrast between reform and revolution. It clearly marks off revolutions from military *coups*, palace revolutions, colonial rebellions, and preventative counterrevolutions. It in effect limits 'true revolutions' by a reasonable *persuasive* definition to the great social upheavals which bring about lasting and extensive socio-political change.

III

Given this construal, what exactly is the difference between revolution and radical reform? Typical reforms seek to amend, correct, and improve what we already have; they do not seek to destroy it and replace it with something new. In the United States, redistricting, lowering the voting age, guaranteeing an annual income, and a weakening of the filibuster rule would be reforms, though certainly not sweeping reforms. What would count as radical reform? Suppose — to take a fanciful but instructive example — the constitution of the United States was, through the normal channels, so changed that (1) the United States like England and Canada adopted a parliamentary system, (2) the division between federal and state government was abolished and newly drawn federally administrated districts were created, (3) capitalism was abolished and all the major means of production came to be socially owned, and, finally, (4) the new government, together with the educational apparatus of the State, officially declared its support for atheism and socialism. Would such a set of changes in the United States constitute a radical reform or a peaceful revolution?

Surely such a change would be like a reform in that it was accomplished by 'going through channels' and by using the legal and political apparatus of the State which was subsequently to be radically transformed. But it is unlike a reform in that, rather than simply improving or correcting the extant institutions and social arrangements, something quite new and different would be brought into being. Moreover, it is like a revolution in that there would have resulted a "radical transformation of the process of government, of the official foundations of sovereignty or legitimacy and of the conception of social order".⁸ Yet here we have something which admits of degrees, for in the hypothesized change in the form of the government of the United States we still have a parliamentary system with political parties and the like. *From a certain point of view*, the change could be said to be not very deep — certainly not deep enough to constitute a radical transformation of the official foundations of sovereignty or legitimacy. At this point we have something which is so essentially contested that there is no objectively correct thing to say here.

There are paradigms of revolutions and revolutionary acts which could not properly be called 'radical reforms', e.g., the Chinese revolution and the Cuban revolution. But, as with so many quite useful concepts, there is no exact cut-off point. There is no exact point where we can show that here there is an end to reformist activity and here the beginning of revolutionary activity. As Wittgenstein in effect points out, we could by stipulation *set up* such a conceptual boundary, but this would settle nothing, for others with equal legitimacy could set up boundaries at other points.

Someone might resist at this juncture and assert that my above example is plainly only an example of radical reform, because there is in it no use or threat of organized unauthorized force, and the use of threatened use of such force is a necessary condition for revolutionary change. There is — it might be claimed — a natural boundary; we need not just draw one. But so to argue is in effect to emasculate the concept of radical reform, for surely what it would be natural to characterize as a radical reform would typically — in actual fact perhaps always — involve, through strikes (illegal or otherwise), demonstrations, disruptions, the seizure of factories, or riots, some form of unauthorized pressure to bring about the change in question. The radical reform would come about at least under the threat of the use of unauthorized force, and such deep structural changes as characterized in my example never in fact occur without the threat of force or extreme social disruption. It could, logically speaking, be otherwise, but it isn't. So it still remains true that my hypothesized change in the State apparatus and social structure of the United States could with equal legitimacy be called 'a radical or fundamental reform' or 'a revolution' or both. We have a *continuum* here and not a clearly demarcated boundary.

In turn it might be replied that actually a qualitative and important difference does reveal itself in my example, namely that with revolution in contrast to radical reform there is and indeed must be an overthrow of a legally established government. And since this cannot be so with a radical reform, it is a mistake to claim that there is no principled difference between radical reform and revolution. But I should reply that where there is extensive breakdown in the functioning of institutions and established ways of doing things, and where a government under the dire threat of violence and total chaos radically *alters itself*, so that we have a radically different government and set of social arrangements, it is hardly a deviation from a linguistic regularity to say that the legally established government has been overthrown. With Nixon out under such extreme pressures, the power of state governments and (consequently) of the South broken, and a self-consciously atheistic and socialist

group of leaders firmly in control, with federal administrative districts rather than States, it would not be unnatural to speak of 'the overthrow of the United States government'. At the very least, the distinction between 'an orderly but radical change in government' and an 'overthrow of the government' would not in such circumstances be a clear one.

IV

What I have been concerned to establish so far is that reform and revolution are on a continuum and that, while there is an evident difference between typical reformist activities and revolutionary activities, there is no principled difference between a commitment to a set of radical reforms and a commitment to a socio-political revolution. (I say nothing here of the weaker notion of 'a systemic revolution', the difference between it and at least some types of radical reform is even less pronounced.)

It is the rather pervasive but mistaken assumption that 'a violent revolution' is a pleonasm, that is the principal cause of the belief that there is a principled difference between radical reform and revolution and that if one is committed to one, one cannot consistently also be committed to the other. Moreover, to maintain that a 'violent revolution' is not a redundancy is not to use 'revolution' – as indeed it often is used in current political discussions – loosely.

Having said this, I do not mean to leave the impression that I believe that the question "Revolution or Reform?" is a pseudo-question. What is sensibly at issue when such a question is raised is whether it is more reasonable to adopt the moderate and piecemeal reformist tactics of liberal reformers or whether a commitment to a more radical political stance is in order. Among present-day political theorists – to amplify this question by giving it a local habitation and name – is the more reasonable course to adopt the general strategies of a Karl Popper, Ralf Dahrendorf, or Isaiah Berlin, or are the more radical positions of a Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, or Alasdair MacIntyre more plausible? Note that within this liberal/radical division there is considerable room for technical philosophical differences yoked together with practical and theoretical political affinities. Surely MacIntyre is closer to Berlin philosophically than he is to Marcuse, but in political orientation he is closer to Marcuse. What I want now to do is to compare and assess some arguments of Popper and Marcuse which, I believe, sharply and paradigmatically, bring out many of the core substantive issues that should be argued out when we ask about the justification of an allegiance to either revolution or

reform. Both Popper and Marcuse have a considerable corpus of influential theory and they have both been widely commented upon. But I want to focus on a single short but typical essay by each which, particularly when they are juxtaposed, dramatically and succinctly bring out what I take to be some of the central issues in the sometimes choice: reform or revolution. The essays in question are Popper's 'Utopia and Violence' and Marcuse's 'Ethics and Revolution'.⁹

Popper stresses that besides disagreements in factual belief – in opinion about what is the case – people also disagree because 'their interests differ'. Where interests clash there is, Popper maintains, no way – where the clash is a fundamental one – of proving or establishing that one interest or set of interests is right and the other or others mistaken. Where there is such a clash an agent must either seek a reasonable compromise or attempt to destroy or at least undermine the opposing interest (p. 357). Popper is convinced we should always resort to compromise here rather than to violence. Over questions of fact, by contrast, we must be guided by the weight of empirical evidence, and where there is a divergence concerning the assessment of that evidence, we must all be open-minded fallibilists prepared to listen to argument and prepared to be convinced by an argument that goes contrary to our beliefs. We must eschew all intellectual imperialism and dogmatism. Violence in human affairs can be avoided if people develop and practice an attitude of reasonableness in human affairs. That is to say, in coming to decisions, we must be willing to hear both sides, to realize and take into consideration that one is not likely to make a good judge if one is party to the case, to avoid claims of self-evidence, and to be willing, where interests conflict, to make reasonable compromises.

In adopting this attitude of reasonableness, we must give up all Utopianism, which Popper takes to be a persistent and disastrous rationalistic attitude which is found again and again in political theory from Plato to Marx.

We should not forget that Popper means something rather special by 'a Utopian'. A Utopian believes that an action is rational if it takes the best means available to achieve a certain end, and that we can only judge an action to be rational relative to some given end. Thus to determine whether a political action is rational, we must ascertain the final ends of the political change the actor intends to bring about. His political actions will be rational only relative to his ruling ideas of what the State ought to be like. For this reason, as a preliminary to any rational political action "we must (the Utopian believes) first attempt to become as clear as possible about our ultimate political ends . . ." (p. 358). The Utopian then plausibly but (on Popper's view) mis-

takenly concludes that to act reasonably we need first to determine the State or society we consider the best and then determine the means by which we can most efficiently realize or at least approximate that situation. The rationally mandatory thing to do is first to get clear about our fundamental political ideals. Only in this way, the Utopian believes, can we be reasonable about political actions. We must have, if we would act rationally, "a more or less clear and detailed description or blueprint of our ideal state" as well as "a plan or blueprint of the historical path that leads towards this goal" (p. 358). But it is Popper's belief that it is this political rationalism of Utopianism that we must decisively reject, if we would avoid irrationality and violence in human affairs.

We must reject it because we have, Popper would have us believe, no way of rationally ascertaining which set of these focal ends is the most reasonable, or even which to choose reasonably, "for it is impossible to determine ends scientifically" (pp. 358–9). This means, according to Popper, that there is no rational way of choosing between Utopian blueprints for a truly human society. Because of this, a reasonable man will abandon all forms of Utopianism and will avoid 'choosing ideal ends of this kind'. He will not have any Utopian blueprint — any conception of a truly human society — at all. It is not that he is criticizing the kind of political theorizing and organization that would lead to the holding of any ideals of this type at all. They are to be avoided (1) because they cannot be decided on rationally and (2) because the holding of them leads to violence and tyranny and not, as their proponents believe, to human happiness. Thus Popper in effect argues for an end to all ideology and Utopianism. And he counterposes against this a reformism which takes as its procedural rationale: "Work for the elimination of concrete evils rather than for the realization of abstract goods. Do not aim at establishing happiness by political means. Rather aim at the elimination of concrete miseries" (p. 361). Do not try to construct systematic normative blueprints for human liberation, but engage instead, without articulating ultimate social and political ideals, in practical piecemeal social engineering. "Choose what you consider the most urgent evil of the society in which you live, and try patiently to convince people that we can get rid of it". This means that we should fight for the elimination of hunger, disease, racism, and the like by direct means, e.g., by improved distribution of farm produce, by establishing medicare, by voter registration in the South, and by establishing non-discriminatory practices in housing and employment. We should work at these problems directly and forget about trying "to realize these aims indirectly by designing and working for a distant ideal of a society which is wholly good" (p. 361). We can reach

agreement "on what are the most intolerable evils of our society and on what are the most urgent social reforms", but we cannot reach agreement about Utopian ideals for the radical transformation of our society (p. 361). We must steadfastly recognize and take to heart the poignant fact that "we cannot make heaven on earth", though we can, if we put aside Utopianism and reason realistically, reasonably hope "to make life a little less terrible and a little less unjust in each generation" (p. 362). We must accept man as he is and not try to set a new man afoot.

Marcuse is, in Popper's terms, an arch-Utopian. Unlike Popper, Marcuse believes that objective moral assessments can be made of what Popper calls Utopian blueprints for society, and he argues for an overall normative conception of society. Marcuse believes that the governing criteria here are whether or not a given set of social arrangements make for the greatest possible freedom and greatest possible happiness for man. And it is important to note, *vis-à-vis* Popper, that in talking of happiness in political contexts, Marcuse has in mind primarily the task of the avoidance of misery. He takes it to be the case that the role of government in the advancement of human welfare and happiness should primarily be to insure "a life without fear and misery, and a life in peace" (p. 134). So here, in terms of what should be aimed at, the difference between Popper and Marcuse is verbal rather than substantive. Marcuse is also one with Popper in believing that such a radical change as would be involved in a socio-political revolution would bring with it violence, but Popper denies that this revolutionary violence is ever justified, while Marcuse argues that it is *sometimes* justified and asks about the conditions under which it is justified. In this context, it should first be noted, so as not to raise spurious issues, that Marcuse, like any sane and humane man, shares Popper's detestation of violence and with him takes it as one of the foremost human tasks to work for "its reduction and, if possible, for its elimination from human life" (p. 335). This attitude toward violence is, or at least ought to be, a commonplace in the moral life. Radicals and liberals, revolutionaries and reformers, are not divided on this issue. They are not always or even typically divided over the use of violence in the settling of social issues, for Popper sanctions the use of counterviolence against the threat of revolutionary violence. What does divide them is the issue of whether violence is ever justified "as a means for establishing or promoting human freedom and happiness". Popper denies that it is, while Marcuse argues that it is justified when and if certain conditions prevail. (He also argues that as a matter of fact they sometimes prevail.)

What is likely to be forgotten here is that while socio-political revolutions

of the type we have been describing have almost invariably involved violence, and that while they permit and, as Marcuse puts it, sometimes even demand "deception, cunning, suppression, destruction of life and property and so on", if there is a demand *prior* to a revolution for fundamental reforms which will substantially increase equality and alleviate misery and degradation through a substantial redistribution of wealth and privileges, then this peaceful demand for fundamental reforms, if it shows promise of gaining momentum, will be met by the privileged classes with violence and attempted suppression. But without persistent advocacy and pressure for such basic reforms, we still have the day-to-day and year-to-year rather unspectacular yet extensive and persistent violence of any exploitative and repressive society. It does not make headlines, as do terrorist bombings, but it is usually more persistent, threatening, destructive, and pernicious. We surely should join with Popper in his detestation of violence, but the issue he fails to face, and one Marcuse squarely faces, is that in such situations violence cannot be avoided. The central relevant question is whether the use of revolutionary violence will, rather than the available alternatives, make for less misery and human degradation all round. The alternatives to violent revolution are (1) pressure for radical reforms or even revolution — since it is not a conceptual truth that a socio-political revolution must be violent — which deliberately always stops short of using violence as a policy, (2) trying to preserve the *status quo*, or (3) advocating and seeking to implement the type of mild, small-scale reforms that are not likely to offend or threaten the bureaucratic establishment sufficiently to provoke counter-revolutionary violence.¹⁰ We certainly, at least on the general ground he appeals to, cannot rightly claim, as Popper in effect does, that revolutionary violence is never justified, or indeed never something that reasonable and moral men ought to advocate and defend. We must go case by case and look at each situation as it comes before us. It may very well be that in some situations the use of violence as a political instrument will minimize misery and injustice and thus be morally mandatory or at least morally in order.

A standard argument here is that while sometimes revolutionary violence is justified, it is never justified in a democracy, because in a democracy we have fair procedural means for making the needed social transformation through elections, lobbying, uncoerced public advocacy, and the like. But such a response reflects an extraordinarily idealized and naive picture of how bourgeois democracies work. The realistic, and indeed the most reasonable, moral stance is again to keep (1) to the above principle, i.e., that the underlying rationale for political action is to seek a society which will most likely enable all men

to achieve the fullest "possible satisfaction of needs under the priority of vital needs and with a minimum of toil, misery and injustice", and (2) to go case by case (p. 145). We need to ask whether, in the long run, less misery, degradation, and injustice will result by going through channels, by playing the game according to the rules the bourgeois democracy sets, rather than by using revolutionary violence. If the answer is yes or even probably yes, then revolutionary violence should not be used, but if resort to revolutionary violence will lessen the total misery, degradation, and injustice, then revolutionary violence is justified and ought to be advocated. There are, as far as I can see, no conceptual barriers or moral barriers which turn this last *prima facie* possibility into either a conceptual or a moral impossibility. And it might very well actually be something which we are morally required to do. Much would depend on the particular bourgeois democracy. What should be said about Sweden might very well not hold for the United States. Much depends on the present level of social equality and justice, on corruption in the society, on ruling class intransigence, and on the extent to which the democratic procedures actually work or can, by reasonable effort on the part of the oppressed, be made to work, so as to enhance social equality, help achieve liberation for everyone, and lessen misery and injustice.

It is fairly obvious that in capitalist countries such as the United States and West Germany the outlook for such a transformation by going through channels and working within the system is very bleak indeed. But it is also true, loud alarms to the contrary notwithstanding, that these countries are hardly in a revolutionary situation, though there has with some segments of the population been an increase in class consciousness. What the outlook for change here is can hardly be settled in a philosopher's armchair, but once this is recognized, and if my above arguments are sound, it should also be recognized that it is equally arbitrary to rule out on general and aprioristic grounds, as Popper and many others do, the use of revolutionary violence as something which cannot be justified.

Marcuse wishes to show not only that in certain circumstances revolutionary violence is justified, but also that in certain of the great revolutions in the past it was justified. He believes, as Popper does not, that "there are rational criteria for determining the possibilities of human freedom and happiness available to a society in a specific historical situation" (p. 135). Marcuse argues that what constitutes human freedom and the possibilities of human freedom and happiness varies with the historical epoch. "Obviously", Marcuse remarks, "the possibilities of human freedom and happiness in advanced industrial society today are in no way comparable with those available, even

theoretically available, at preceding stages of history” (p. 139). But, given this partial historical relativity of what the particular fettering and degrading conditions are from which man needs liberation, it remains the case, according to Marcuse, that the great revolutions have, everything considered, reduced toil, misery, and injustice, and so, since none of the historically possible alternatives could match this, these revolutions are on the whole justified.

In thinking about the justification of revolution, we are forced here into admittedly rough historical calculations. On the one hand, we must take into account both the likelihood of Bonapartism or Stalinism in the successor State after a successful revolution and the likelihood that this State, whether Stalinist or not, will be brutal and authoritarian and actually harm more than it helps human liberation. On the other hand, we must “take into account the sacrifices exacted from the living generations on behalf of the established society, the established law and order, the number of victims made in defense of this society in war and peace, in the struggle for existence individual and national” (p. 140). In addition, we need to ask questions about the intellectual and material resources available to the society and the chances of the revolutionary group being able to utilize them in reducing the sacrifices and the number of victims. Finally, we must keep in mind the very value of the professed values originating in revolutions, e.g., the conception of the inalienable rights of man coming out of the American and French revolutions and the conception of the value of tolerance emerging from the English revolutions.

Popper makes utilitarian calculations too, but he limits them to the more immediate and palpable sources of misery and injustice and deliberately resists taking into account more distant and less easily calculable phenomena. This surely has the advantage of giving us more manageable materials, but it also cuts off morally relevant data which, to the extent that they are determinable at all, should be taken into consideration. In our calculations concerning what we ought to do, we should take it as a relevant consideration that some phenomena are less readily determinable than others, but this does not justify our ignoring the less easily assessable data. By skewing what we will take as relevant material in the way he does, Popper cuts off the very possibility of discovering (1) systematic interconnections between human ills and (2) any (if indeed there are such) deeper causal conditions of the ills he would alleviate. Thus his theory unwittingly plays into the hands of conservative defenders of the *status quo* with which he would not wish to align himself. Marcuse’s wider ranging utilitarian calculations are perfectly capable of taking into account and giving due stress to the

phenomena Popper would account for, but they also hold out promise for attaining a more complete, and thus more adequate, account of the relative harm and relative human advantages accruing to different social arrangements.

For Marcuse, and for the revolutionary tradition generally, when violence is justified it is justified by reason in accordance with the overriding end of revolutionary activity, namely "greater freedom for the greater number of people". Popper, too, in spite of his distaste for Utopian blueprints, holds this as a guiding rationale, but he never establishes that violence can never be the means to its attainment or that the great revolutions did not extend and enhance human freedom.

It should not be forgotten that the English and French revolutions attained "a demonstrable enlargement of the range of human freedom". There is, as Marcuse points out, a general agreement among historians that the English and French revolutions brought about an extensive redistribution of social wealth, "so that previously less privileged or unprivileged classes were the beneficiaries of this change, economically and/or politically" (p. 143). Even when we take the subsequent periods of reaction and restoration into the reckoning, it remains true that these revolutions brought about "more liberal governments, a gradual democratization of society and technical progress". When the extent and permanency of this are taken into consideration in our historical calculations, it outweighs the terror and the excesses of these revolutions, though to say this is not to condone all the actions carried out in their name, for it is a correct grammatical remark with moral overtones to say, as Marcuse does, that "arbitrary violence and cruelty and indiscriminate terror" cannot possibly be justified by any revolutionary situation (pp. 140-1).

To the argument that the same changes would have come about more gradually but without terror and violence, it should be replied that while this is an empirical *possibility*, it is also only an unfounded speculation. We do not have comparable situations in which the ruling élite of an *Ancien Régime* voluntarily gave up its privileges and desisted from exploitation and repression where it was not true that there were no previous successful revolutions in similarly situated countries to serve as a warning prod that extensive reforms must be made. What we can say with confidence is this: there is the fact of the moral advance of mankind brought on by these great revolutions, and no adequate grounds have been given for believing that in those circumstances — those great turning points of history — advances would have occurred in anything like a comparable way without the use of force against the old order.

V

What we can conclude from our discussion so far is that there have been circumstances in the past and there will no doubt be circumstances in the future in which violence is a morally legitimate instrument for promoting radical transformations in society toward a greater degree of human freedom and happiness. It is toward this conclusion that a critical comparison of Popper and Marcuse leads us.

If what I have argued in the previous section has been for the most part sound, Popper could only defend himself by laying very considerable stress on, and indeed by establishing the soundness of, what I shall call, 'the sceptical side' of his thought. Marcuse assumes, and I do too, the correctness of what should be the morally important truisms that human freedom and human happiness are very great goods and that misery and injustice are plain evils. Popper indeed makes the same assumptions himself; his very passionate rejection of Utopianism is fueled by emotions rooted in these assumptions. But he does not believe that such value judgments are rationally supportable since they are not scientific claims. (This note is perfectly general: it applies to any fundamental value judgment simply by virtue of its being a fundamental value judgment.) Thus, on Popper's view, if someone has a Utopian blueprint in which the above moral truisms are not held (respectively) to be very great goods or manifest evils, there is no way of showing that that Utopian blueprint is mistaken or unreasonable and that a blueprint in which these truistic moral considerations have the weight Marcuse, Popper, and I give them is right in this regard, or at least is a more reasonable moral point of view than a moral point of view which rejects or ignores them.

This is hardly the place to argue the general question of moral scepticism and/or some kind of radical non-cognitivism in meta-ethics. Suffice it to say for this occasion that the main developments in analytic ethics since World War II have put such conceptions very much on the defensive. Popper, pulling against the stream of contemporary ethical theory, writes as if moral scepticism and non-cognitivism were plainly true, though he does not provide any extended argument for them.

Moreover, as MacIntyre has pointed out, *in practice* Popper assumes the objectivity and rationality of certain ideals – general moral ideals very close to Marcuse's and my own – which, if he would consistently apply them, would hardly allow him to shun all ideology in the way he does.¹¹ That is to say, for Popper the importance of relieving misery and developing the reasonable attitudes of human give and take, the stress on freedom and on the equal

right of "every man . . . to arrange his life himself so far as this is compatible with the equal rights of others", are all leading moral ideas which inform many of his political judgments, and together they commit him to a general set of political and moral ideals in accordance with which particular practices, institutions, governments, and societies can and indeed should, if these principles are to mean anything, be appraised. But this is precisely to utilize a Utopian blueprint, and it is this Popper would avoid. Moreover, if he continues to apply this blueprint, the Marcusean arguments for the rational justification of revolution seem at least to be inescapable; and if he rejects reasoning in accordance with these general moral principles and holds steadfastly to an 'end of ideology approach', he gets himself into the position where he could have no grounds for rejecting as barbarous and irrational ideologies which he indeed rightly believes to be barbarous and irrational, namely Nazi and other Fascist ideologies.

Surely this is a conclusion that Popper does not wish to embrace, and his grounds for not accepting such ideologies turn on some commitment to something very like a form of negative utilitarianism. But this saddles him with a set of abstract moral principles which he should, in consistency, regard with distaste as Utopian.

Some tougher 'end of ideology' political theorist may really take this 'moral-scepticism-side' to heart and argue that even if avoidance of misery and attainment of happiness are great goods, he sees no rational grounds for adopting some principle of equality or fairness and extending such teleological considerations to all men. Whether, he reasons, we should opt for such a universalistic ethic as underlies both Marcuse's and Popper's thinking, is an utterly non-rational matter resting on human preference.

If such a moral scepticism is rationally mandatory, then the very assumptions of progress essential for even Popper's commitment to mild reform are undermined. There can be no justification of reform or revolution, or any other normative principles. It may indeed not be easy to defend any system of overall normative principles, but if it is not possible to do so, the whole program of moderate reform and a commitment to reasonableness is undermined. It is only because Popper himself has an unacknowledged but reasonable set of general political moral principles that his 'end of ideology approach' does not appear immediately to be an abandonment of any kind of reasoned defense of a set of normative standards or even of the taking of any principled stand at all.

Popper aside, what can we conclude about reform or revolution? There is plainly much injustice and unnecessary misery in the world and the level of

human liberation is hardly what it could be. Without even remotely assuming that we can make a kingdom of heaven on earth, a perfectly good society, or anything of that fanciful Utopian order, it is not Quixotic to hope, and rationally work, for a transformation of society in which these ills are greatly lessened and perhaps some of them even altogether eliminated. Such a social order may never come into being, but there is nothing unreasonable about struggling for its achievement.

I have suggested that there can be no reasonable, unequivocal, non-contextual answer to the question. In struggling for a better social order should we be reformers or revolutionaries? In the Scandinavian countries the needed transformation might very well come about gradually through a cluster of small reforms which, taken together, might add up in time to a considerable transformation. In Brazil, the United States, and Argentina, to take some striking examples, this hope would seem to be unrealistic. And while there is a moral need, and a considerable material base, for revolution in Brazil, the United States — the linchpin imperialist power in the Western social system — is at present at any rate hardly a country in which there is a material base for revolution. Morally speaking, however, the United States is surely in dire need of radical transformation; whether this should be by radical reform or revolution is, if my earlier arguments are sound, an empty question, more a matter of political rhetoric than anything else. What is evident, particularly when one considers the United States in relation to the rest of the world, is that it becomes increasingly obvious the closer one looks, that very deep structural changes need to be made. It is surely better, everything else being equal, if they can be attained without a violent revolution. But if one considers Vietnam, the Blacks, and America's imperialist policies in the poorer parts of the world, the level of violence is already very high. It is also true, however, that actions which would trigger off or even risk a nuclear war are insane. And to work to bring about in a decade or so a revolution in America which would involve something comparable to the Russian or Spanish civil wars is also something morally equivocal (to understatement it); but, as we have seen, there are revolutions and revolutions, and there are various levels of violence. What Marcuse has given us are general criteria in accordance with which we can reasonably answer when, humanly speaking, revolutionary violence of a certain kind and at a certain level is justified and when it is not. In many situations it is difficult to tell, though in others (present-day Iran, Zaire, South Africa, and South Korea, for example) it is quite evident that, when revolution has a reasonable chance of success, it is morally justified.

We have also seen that reform and revolutions are on a continuum and that

there are contexts in which the choice of labels for description of the transformation in question is — ideology and expediency aside — quite immaterial. Moreover, it is important to see, as Rosa Luxemburg did and stressed in the opening paragraphs of her *Reform or Revolution*, that a revolutionary should not oppose piecemeal reforms, though he should seek to give them a direction which will lead to a socialist transformation of society. But a vital means for the attainment of a socialist revolution is the attainment of reforms. It is true that reforms have bought off the working class, but they have also raised their level of expectation, given people of working class and peasant origins the education and consciousness to escape the bondage of prejudice and ignorance, and, with the rising new working class, reforms together with the transformation of the working force through technology have gradually given this new white collar working class the capacity to govern themselves.¹² Moreover, since I lack the orthodox faith that history is necessarily on the side of socialism, it seems to me that where it is evident that certain reforms will appreciably improve human conditions, they should be worked for. They are at least small gains in an uncertain world, though this should not freeze us into being satisfied with them. Apocalyptic and quasi-apocalyptic moves are dramatic but rarely politically or morally sound. That is to say, use of the *nach-Hilter-wir* slogan is to be avoided. Working for Hitler's victory over the Social Democrats, even granting they were ersatz socialists, was a suicidal way of attempting to build socialism and a truly human society. Similarly rationalized tactics in working for the victory of Reagan — to turn to a much lesser villain — while not suicidal, were counterproductive for progressive forces. Our ability to make long range social predictions is so slight that it is irrational to develop any long range confidence about how things must be, and thus it is irrational and indeed morally irresponsible to accept, where we can avoid them, extensive human ills in the hope of realizing long range social achievements. Noam Chomsky was realistic and responsible when he remarked: "Surely our understanding of the nature of man or of the range of workable social forms is so rudimentary that any far-reaching doctrine must be treated with great scepticism."¹³ This does not mean that revolutionary hopes should be abandoned as an opiate of intellectuals, but it should warn a reasonable and humane person away from the dangerous game of hoping for reaction to help produce revolution. Sometimes extremism on the Left paves the way for moderation, but victories for reaction seldom pave the way for socialist revolution. The thing to be done is to work persistently for a socialist transformation of society. Day by day this means supporting all genuinely progressive reforms, even in those contexts in which this will strengthen

liberals against conservatives, while working for a broader structural transformation of society by radical peaceful reforms where possible, and by violent revolution where necessary and where the cure is not likely to produce worse ills than the disease. The rub, of course, is to tell in a particular historical situation whether the cure is worse than the disease. This surely takes more than just philosophical sophistication and moral sensitivity; it requires historical, sociological, and economic understanding in depth of the situation that confronts us.

University of Calgary

NOTES

¹ I have tried to give a kind of minimal and de-mythologized defense of the idea of progress in my 'Progress', *The Lock Haven Review*, No. 7 (1965).

² Eugen Rosenstock-Hüssy, *Out of Revolution* (1938); Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Vintage Books, New York, 1952; George S. Pettee, *The Process of Revolution*, Harper & Row, New York, 1938, and 'Revolution-Typology and Process', in Carl J. Friedrich (ed.), *Revolution*, Atherton Press, New York, 1966. See also C. B. Macpherson, 'Revolution and Ideology in the Late Twentieth Century'; Eugene Kamenka, 'The Concept of a Political Revolution'; and Richard A. Falk, 'World Revolution and International Order'; all in Carl J. Friedrich, *op. cit.* See also Peter A. R. Calvert, 'Revolution: The Politics of Violence', *Political Studies* 15 (1967), No. 1.

³ Paul Schrecker, 'Revolution as a Problem in the Philosophy of History', in Carl J. Friedrich, *op. cit.* p. 35.

⁴ Eugene Kamenka, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵ C. B. Macpherson, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

⁶ Herbert Marcuse, 'Ethics and Revolution', in Richard T. De George (ed.), *Ethics and Society*, Anchor Books, Garden City, New York, 1966.

⁷ Carl J. Friedrich, 'An Introductory Note on Revolution', in Carl J. Friedrich, *op. cit.*

⁸ Eugene Kamenka, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁹ Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London (3rd ed.) 1969, pp. 355-63 and Herbert Marcuse, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-47. Subsequent references to these two works are made in the text.

¹⁰ For a defense of a revolutionary but principled non-violent stand see Barbara Deming, 'Revolution and Equilibrium', in Eleanor Kuykendall (ed.), *Philosophy in the Age of Crisis*, Harper & Row, New York, 1970.

¹¹ Alisdair MacIntyre, 'Breaking the Chains of Reason', in E. P. Thompson (ed.), *Out of Apathy*, London 1960.

¹² Serge Mallet, *La nouvelle classe ouvrière*, Seuil, Paris 1962; and Norman Birnbaum, 'Is there a Post-Industrial Revolution?', *Social Policy* 1, No. 2 (July/August 1970).

¹³ Noam Chomsky, 'Notes on Anarchism', *The New York Review of Books* 14, No. 10 (21 May 1970), p. 32.