Reply to Andrew Levine and David Schweickart on Marx and Marxism

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Before I turn to the excellent set of papers examining my views on socialism and Karl Marx and Marxism, I want first to say something autobiographical. I grew up during the Great Depression and this marked me very deeply. It is not that I suffered personally. My parents were comfortably off. But it was what I saw around me. I went sometimes to play at the homes of my school chums, many of whom lived in ramshackle houses practically bare of furniture and barely heated. Their mothers were there with faces pinched with hunger. To play catch, I remember on one occasion, all we had as a ball was a roundish something made with old strings. These scenes, and others from the middle-sized Midwestern US town I grew up in, I never forget. It is as if it were yesterday. I concluded at a very early age that there must be something terribly wrong and even irrational in what we call the developed world for it to be like that. I continue to think it is wrong. I now recognize that calling the system irrational is a little more complicated, though I still think it irrational and though things for most people are better now in the rich capitalist societies, globally they are at least as bad as in "the good old days."

So socialism came early to me and remained like water to ducks. I remember as an adolescent thinking incredulously and naively, "Why isn't everyone a socialist determined to overthrow the system?" I remember later when I was a university student going through various kinds of more or less radical political thinking from Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky to John Dewey and Sidney Hook. I even read some of Joseph Stalin. Still, for all my cognitive voyages socialism in some form stuck. However, by the time I began to teach I had settled down into something like Deweyan social democracy. I thought that if we would hold on to our brains and be patient, we in North America, and eventually in the world, could in time end up like Sweden. The

Vietnam War changed that. It was an eye-opener for me. In being part at that time of the internal resistance in the United States, I became convinced that such liberal reformist measures would never work, and *slowly* I became a Marxist, or, as I would now prefer to call it, a Marxian. As I studied and learned more—much more—about such matters, I became what is perhaps natural for someone with my philosophical orientation, what is now called an *analytical* Marxist. (Some think it is a form of scholasticism. It is not that for me.)

I will, as a final remark in these general prefatory remarks, state that I am an odd kind of Marxist. I like to also think of myself as a liberal in the sense that John Dewey was a liberal and that John Rawls articulated with his political liberalism. Many of you may think "liberal Marxism" is a contradiction in terms, but I do not see why. Liberalism does not say "nay" to a socialist world or to socialist revolution in certain circumstances, even (pace Sidney Hook) in societies that are nominally democratic. Moreover, "liberal socialism" is in order, and so I believe is a "liberal communism" conceived as C. B. McPherson, Andrew Levine, and I conceive of communism, which must not be confused with the postcapitalist authoritarian statist societies that the Soviet Union and China became. Moreover, this is how Marx conceived of communism. How this is so I hope will become clear in this essay and the replies to follow.

One further preliminary: I prefer to think of myself as a Marxian rather than a Marxist for the same reason as an evolutionary biologist would think of herself as a Darwinian rather than a Darwinist. Lots of things are mistaken in Darwin—how could it be otherwise?—but most biologists think of themselves as deeply indebted to Darwin, and many of the ways they think and organize their thought result from Darwin. He sets the very way their thought patterns go, at least in this domain. I think that way about Marx, thus the term "Marxian."

I want to now turn to texts in this section. I will begin with Andrew Levine. Levine has me exactly right; he has portrayed accurately what I think about socialism, about Marx, and about Marxism (Marxianism), and the underlying motives I have for being a Marxian and the hopes I have for socialism and for what we both, following Marx, accurately call communism. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to him for this. I only hope I have been able to do some of what he says I have been doing. My resolve certainly is to continue to do so in these dark times.

I will turn to an examination of historical materialism and here I will discuss Andrew Levine's and David Schweickart's ideas together and in their interrelations. But before that, I want to remark on the middle section of Levine's essay about his characterization of analytical Marxism and about the political fate of, and prospects for, socialism. I entirely agree with what he says there and think it is a very important thing to say. However, without taking any of that back, I want to make a small classificatory recommendation. I regard "rational choice Marxism" as a *species* of analytical Marxism, *perhaps* a not-very-toward one and not definitive of analytical Marxism. I regard Levine and Schweickart (though to my knowledge they have never so labeled themselves)

as analytical Marxists, as I do paradigmatically G. A. Cohen. But they are not rational choice Marxists. There are analytical methods and analytical methods, and analytical Marxism (1) cannot be identified with rational choice Marxism and (2) is not just about reconstructing Marx—hence not scholasticism—but about thinking and of theorizing, as I have remarked, in ways that are deeply indebted to his thinking.

I want now to turn to historical materialism: a major and continuing element in Marxism. Levine is one of the major articulators and reconstructors of it among analytical Marxists, and Schweickart, who is better known for his constructing of a Marxist economics along market socialist lines and for his work on workplace democracy, in the paper we have before us articulates and defends historical materialism. Levine's present paper, while only briefly about historical materialism, should be commented on in the light of his perceptive and important work in other places on historical materialism.[1]

Before the groundbreaking work of G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* (hereafter in this essay *KMTH*), historical materialism was thought by analytical philosophers to be a turgid, antiscientific, teleological, obscure, and not infrequently incoherent metaphysical theory parading as a scientific theory—an account that could not possibly be true. This, with varying degrees of subtlety, was more or less the message we got from Karl Popper, H. B. Acton, John Plamenatz, Isaiah Berlin, and Ernest Gellner, among others. This is what we, at least if we were Anglo-Saxon philosophers, imbibed as being plainly true. Historical materialism, and Marxism more generally, we were taught, was plainly false and often, worse than that, incoherent. For all its historical and political influence and notwithstanding that Marx was an icon in some parts of the world and among some people, Marxism was actually *only* of historical and actual political importance and an unfortunate one at that. Historical materialism and Marxism in general was a nonstarter. Marx, among other things, had an absurd teleological doctrine of historical inevitability that must be set aside by any rational and informed person.

G. A. Cohen changed all that, showing not that historical materialism was true or warrantedly assertable, but that it was a genuine empirical theory that might be true in a plain sense of "true" and could be plausibly stated in such a way that it met the highest analytical and scientific standards. Cohen's *KMTH* attempted to state in an analytical and scientifically plausible way what was the core—the rational kernel—of Marx's own account of historical materialism and to put it so as to free it from teleological metaphysical moonshine. History has no end or meaning in G. W. F. Hegel's sense, but there is a causal and functional trajectory of *the development of human history*. Historical materialism yields not necessarily on this reading the actual trajectory that human history as a whole takes, but at least the plausible possible trajectory that it *could* (empirically could) take.

Marx thought that historical materialism gave *necessary and sufficient* conditions for this trajectory or at least the endogenous path of this trajectory

while Levine, as I do, and by now G. A. Cohen and Joshua Cohen as well, take it as yielding only *necessary* conditions.[2] I am curious whether Schweickart takes his historical materialism to yield necessary and sufficient conditions or only necessary conditions as do Levine and both Cohens. (His account is at least compatible with the latter as well as the former.)

To make such issues clear I should make some distinctions made by Levine and lately by G. A. Cohen as well. Marx's historical materialism as well as the clarified version of it in *KMTH* was for a comprehensive (unrestricted) and strong historical materialism, while Levine's historical materialism, like mine, is a restricted and weak historical materialism in ways similar to Joshua Cohen's minimal historical materialism. What are those distinctions and what is their import?

As Levine puts it in his *Engaging Political Philosophy*, "Strong historical materialism purports to provide an account of epochal historical transformations of transitions from one economic structure or mode of production to another. For strong historical materialists, it is the contradictions between forces and relations of production that explain epochal change."[3] By contrast, what Levine calls *weak* historical materialism provides, as Levine puts it, "an account of what is *materially possible* in the way of epochal historical change, of what is on the historical agenda. . . . *Weak* historical materialism, like strong historical materialism, maintains those economic structures, sets of production relations, track increasing levels of development of productive forces."[4] Weak historical materialism, Levine adds, "provides an account (a) of necessary (material) conditions for epochal historical transformations; (b) of the direction of change; and (c) of the means through which change is achieved."[5] Weak historical materialism does not tell us what *must* happen; it only shows us what reasonably and empirically *could* happen. For strong historical materialists the material conditions at a given time causally explain the emergence of the forces and relations of production during certain epochs, conditions that are sufficient conditions for them. "Weak historical materialism turns Marx's theory of history from an organism development theory, into an account of history's necessary stages, into a theory of possible historical trajectories."[6]

Weak historical materialism is easily joined with *restricted* historical materialism.[7] What is *restricted* historical materialism? It must be contrasted with the *inclusive* historical materialism of Marx. Levine puts it: "Inclusive historical materialism implied the pertinence of class analysis to *all* questions bearing on political and 'ideological' affairs."[8] Restricted historical materialism argues that "class analysis is strictly prescribed only for what affects the underlying historical materialist dynamic; otherwise, its explanatory pertinence is an open question."[9] Is a parliamentary system or a presidential system such as Germany has a more adequate system for a modern democracy, or is the choice of a system of government purely and contextually dependent on local traditions, or is it a matter of "you pays your money and takes your choice?" It is reasonable to believe that an answer here, if we can get one, is of some significance, but it is questionable that historical materialism in any form has much,

if any, relevance to it or that historical materialism in any form tries to explain the occurrence of particular events. It rather is set to explain epochal social change, but not all change or all superstructural phenomena. Still, such superstructural phenomena sometimes affect the underlying historical materialist dynamic. Historical materialists will predictably disagree on when this obtains, but it is reasonable to believe they will, unless blinded by doctrine, believe that in some cases it does and in some cases it does not and in some cases the effect of superstructural phenomena is indeterminate. It is, however, not even remotely plausible to say that every superstructural occurrence has an economic explanation. Is it at all plausible to say everything is explained by its having a role in stabilizing and reproducing the economic base? Is "it even remotely plausible," as Levine asks, "that there is an economic explanation for why Kant formulated the categorical imperative in five versions rather than, say, in two or seven? Is there an economic reason why September has thirty days while October has thirty one?"[10] These questions seem to me to answer themselves. Levine, with exaggerated caution, perhaps tongue in cheek, answers them as follows: "In all likelihood, there is not. Thus, while it is possible that anything is susceptible to an economic explanation, it is plainly not the case that literally everything actually is."[11]

Restricted materialism, to slightly amplify my characterization, is the thesis that economic structures taken functionally *and* causally explain those noneconomic phenomena that have effects on social relations of production and therefore on the endogenous historical dynamic that historical materialism identifies.[12] The explanatory claims of weak and restricted historical materialism—*minimal* historical materialism, if you will—are not as great as those of traditional—orthodox, if you will—historical materialism. It no longer claims to explain all noneconomic phenomena by economic phenomena, to explain what was traditionally called by Marxists the superstructure by the base. Weak and restricted historical materialism does not assume that and it no longer assumes that in all class societies, in all class formations, the productive forces endogenously determine what the economic relations and political formations will be. *Sometimes* exogenous material forces as an alternative mode of production overwhelm the productive forces of a given society at a particular time so that it is the productive relations and/or the state formations that determine the productive forces. This happened for several centuries in China, which then had at least as developed productive forces as did Europe at that time, and similar things, though to a lesser extent, happened in India. The productive forces had stagnated in China and India at that time and only began to develop again when they were imported from Europe. (This *may* be false, but it could have been—empirically could have been—true. There is nothing ideological or metaphysical about this claim.) So the neat picture of the traditional theory has been at least infirmed. But when we look at human history as a whole we still see that *the productive forces tend to develop throughout human history but not at every place at every time.*[13]

There are strategic state phenomena and often it is the religion or the type of morality of a society that are largely determined or at least deeply affected by productive forces such that even weak and restricted historical materialism still has considerable explanatory force. They provide necessary but not sufficient conditions for why the production relations are as they are and through them the state *is as it is*: has the general form and functions that it has. Levine concludes that weak and restricted historical materialism, but not strong and inclusive historical materialism, yields a probably true trajectory of human history and, I believe, what probably functionally comes to much the same thing, it yields a warrantedly assertable trajectory of human history. Nothing is firmly established here; fallibilism is inescapable, but this is a reasonable thing to claim. Perhaps (very likely perhaps) it is the most reasonable game in town as far as explaining epochal social change is concerned.

I want now, after all this detour, to ask Schweickart if we should on his account be claiming something like that, or should we continue to claim a strong and inclusive historical materialism or claim something that in some other way (if there is another way) is more minimal? Or should we abandon such enterprises, believing, as most historians do, that there is nothing sensible one can say about history's trajectory?

Let us look, with these questions in mind—but not only with them in mind—at some portions of Schweickart's "Does Historical Materialism Imply Socialism?" Schweickart rightly points out that what has been called the *development thesis*, namely, the claim that *productive forces tend to develop over time*, is a crucial claim of historical materialism. At first blush, at least for those of us growing up in capitalist societies, it might seem to be a truism that is indeed true. But taken as a claim about particular societies and their development it has been disconfirmed. For aboriginal societies in Australia for example or for the Ming and Ting dynasties in China, they stagnated rather than developed. It does, however, seem to be at least plausible *for human society taken as a whole*.[14] Still, the claim is that for any period of time human society as a whole only *tends* to develop. There is no reason to believe there is a *continuous* development in all societies or even in the world as a whole.

Schweickart grants these things but still claims (not implausibly) that historical materialism is coherent and plausible. G. A. Cohen, he believes, has done much to show that. But is it *true*; does it stand up to the best evidence and best theoretical elaborations that we have? And most importantly, what we who care about politics want very much to know if we can, do we have good and sufficient reasons to predict or even reasonably conjecture that capitalism will be supplanted by a higher, more humane form of society? Schweickart thinks that we do, while I think we cannot confidently make such a prediction—that we do not know that we will get such a society (more accurately a federation of societies) but that we, not unreasonably, can *hope* that we will and that we can reasonably struggle to bring such a world into being. I agree with G. A. Cohen, and indeed lots of other people, that the productive forces

of our societies are not now rationally deployed, given the needs of the great masses of people, and that they could be rationally deployed so as to meet the needs of people. I do not know how probable such a thing is, but it is reasonable to believe that only in a stable socialist world will this happen.

Schweickart thinks that the time will come when the productive forces will be rationally deployed and that this will take a socialist form: the only way, he believes, as I do, that socialism can be realized. I certainly hope he is right. Let's look at his argumentation. Schweickart argues that the *means to species solidarity tend to develop over time*. When I first read that, I thought, "That is grossly Panglossian," thinking of the horror and the pigsty that our world is. In varying ways, given our first, second, third, and fourth worlds, how could anything like that be even remotely so? Nazis murder Jews, Jews murder Palestinians, Muslims murder Christians, Christians murder Muslims, Hindus murder Muslims—it goes on and on. The world is awash with hate and brutality as well as poverty, starvation, and exploitation. Moreover, this, or at least most of this, certainly seems not to be necessary. I'll not go further on that line. It is all too obvious.

Suppose it is also true, as Adam Smith and David Hume thought, that our capacity to identify deeply with other members of our society, let alone the human species as a whole, is a contingent biological matter. It can be, and indeed often is, overwhelmed by exogenous factors. But it is also arguably true that without a felt sense of something like a common identity there is no possibility of a common human project, and, for those of us committed to such a project, the way the world is actually going is a source of great bitterness and sometimes even of despair. Schweickart rightly remarks, "I doubt that there are many people today who, when thinking seriously about the future, don't feel a sense of foreboding." But he in effect tells us that before we set aside the claim that species solidarity tends to develop over time, we should take a longer view. He assembles some reminders in support of this. He reminds us that technological developments have, over time, given this innate capacity to identify ourselves with others even greater scope, though we should also recognize technological developments have given our capacity to turn our fear and our hate into the concrete and to brutalize, torture, and murder great numbers of people, as the Nazis did, as the Soviets did, as the Serbs did, and as now the United States is doing. Still "the size of communities with a real (as opposed to merely abstract) sense of identity has been growing steadily." There has been and continues to be a lot of conquest and exploitation but, Schweickart tells us, "identity has come to trump difference. It is more difficult today, surely, than at any time past to perceive the others as *radically* other and thus subhuman." As I read that, I said to myself, "Tell this in the Balkans, in the Middle East, or in Indonesia." Schweickart, of course, realizes there are countervailing forces. But again, he reminds us, we need to *take a long view* and consider whether there is also a growing tendency—whether, as he puts it, there is a "tendency to enlarge one's identity to include an ever larger segment

of humanity." You can see here in Montreal ever more frequently mixed black and white couples and families. Among people of university age, we see Francophones, Allophones, and Anglophones mixing, intermarrying, and switching back and forth between both French and English. This was not as true fifty years ago. There are tensions, of course, particularly between Jews and Arabs, but that is due to *exogenous* factors. Otherwise there is no reason to believe that would obtain. Given the population as a whole, there is a growing sense of common identity mixed with all kinds of differences (the sort of thing Salman Rushdie and Jeremy Waldron celebrate). We can see the peaceful integration of people with very different backgrounds going on particularly in our great metropolitan centers (e.g., Turks and ethnic Germans in Berlin, whites and Chinese in Vancouver). We see people with very different backgrounds being integrated into very different societies than the societies from which they came. We see, for example, young black people in the metro in Stockholm speaking Swedish fluently and integrated into Swedish society. The times they are a-changing. My Danish grandfather, who fought in the war over the Keil Canal, said to me when I was a little boy, "There is nothing I hate as much as a German." But there is little of that between young Danes and Germans now. And so it goes along, at least in the wealthier and securer parts of the world, though it helps for the peoples involved to be reasonably wealthy, secure, and educated. The tendency to be nonfanatical is largely explained by the factors just mentioned. This is not just utopian dreaming on Schweickart's part. There is, I think, some reason to believe that his *tendency* statement is true.

But I also agree with Schweickart about what he says about development thesis D3, namely, *that the forces of destruction tend to increase over time*. I agree with him concerning that and for the reasons he gives and so I will not discuss it. I further agree with him about the development thesis D4, namely, that the means by which a minority elite can effectively control a majority tends to develop over time, and this, I think, takes us to the heart of the matter. Can we, we should ask, given the mechanisms contained in D4, control or contain the positive potential of D1 and D2, namely, that the productive forces tend to develop over time and that the means to species solidarity tend to develop over time? Michel Foucault and Hans Enzensberger were the first on the Left to theorize, and penetratingly so, on such a containment of D1 and D2. Schweickart resists and does so reasonably. Again I would hope that what he says is so, and it may well be so. But I have my doubts, which I will now articulate.

Most of the time—as things are now—the means of control over the majority by the elite minority are sufficient to keep them in line but not always. "When," as Schweickart puts it, "the controls break down in a particular society, and a new, more productive mode of production comes into being, the example tends to be contagious. Latent conflicts become open; suppressed classes become emboldened. We enter an epoch of social transformation." Sometimes these attempts are successful; sometimes they are crushed, as was the Paris Commune, which came too early. But we on the Left live by

their hopes and learn from the mistakes that were made as we learn from the early times of the Bolshevik Revolution before the Soviet Union turned into a statist, postcapitalist tyranny. One of the things we have learned, as both G. A. Cohen and Andrew Levine have pointed out, is that if the Russian Revolution had succeeded it would have been a refutation, not a confirmation, of historical materialism. But to stick with Schweickart's question, "Why have the mechanisms of control, over the long term, been unable to prevent changes in relations of production, changes bitterly opposed by existing ruling classes? Why have the technical developments in mechanisms to which D4 refers been unable to keep pace with those of D1 and D2?" This, I think, begs the question *that they have been unable to keep pace.* It looks like D4 may have overwhelmed and swamped D1 and D2. Concerning this at least putative development of elite minority control of the great masses of people, will it, if indeed it is so, be able to continue for the indefinite future, or is it only something that obtains for our troubled times? If the latter, it is indeed politically horrible for us, but nothing that would refute historical materialism or Schweickart's claim about how D4 is related to D1 and D2.

Schweickart believes that it may very well be that D4 is not even true, for the technological developments that have enhanced the ability of a minority to control a majority have gone hand in hand with the *declining effectiveness* of older mechanisms of control. When referring to a general development in means of control, we have to consider the whole portfolio. But then it is "not so clear that advances tend to outpace declines." Consider in times past those mainstays of capitalist control: the patriarchal family, authoritarian religion, systematically cultivated racism, and unquestioning patriotism. These things always had their critics—skeptics and naysayers—who were sometimes listened to. All tribes, even the big ones we call civilizations, have always had those few who would not warm themselves around the tribal campfire. But for most it was their often-unquestioning allegiance to their tribe, culture, their traditional belief systems, and their class that kept them in line. And when some got out of line there were rather primitive means of repression to force them back in line. But those sorts of things are becoming increasingly unstable and unreliable. Now we have more powerful and sophisticated mechanisms, as Foucault and Noam Chomsky (in different ways) have taught us and as we learned as well from George Orwell, that can deeply control people sometimes without giving people even the feeling that they are being controlled. We have a media following a government following capital—our current hegemon being the worst in that respect (among others) of the rich capitalist democracies—that tells us that we have a society dedicated to freedom, equality, democracy, and global justice when nothing like this is even remotely so. For the more cynical, who won't take any of that, there are more sophisticated alternatives. We have people, like those depicted in the film *The Invasion of the Barbarians*, who are not only well inoculated from any commitment except to their own pleasure and to the pleasure of their small circle of friends, but who,

in spite of their education, are quite without a critical sense, making out as best they can with what they can obtain of the fat of the land—something they do adroitly to their felicitation and comfort. However, that is not the only alternative. There are in most societies, and for some strata, alternative voices, but they are muted and in most societies when they start to become effective they are repressed. The Internet has helped, but it too is in the process of being controlled. There are bread and circuses for the masses and cynicism, fear, and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness for many people across strata.

In the dialectic of the sometimes inescapable conflict between the forces and relations of production, we Marxians have assumed, as Schweickart points out, that the "set of economic relations that 'fetters' the development of means of production will yield to a set that does not." But this, I think Schweickart thinks, presupposes the imminent possibility of a *favorable* set. There must, he claims, exist a viable alternative to the existing production relations. "Viable" is a weasel word here. What is one person's "viable alternative" is another person's "iron cage." And so why must we get a favorable set? And favorable to whom, and for what purposes? We socialists have believed, and still not implausibly hope, that the end of capitalism will yield socialism. Well, it may, and we will struggle to make it so. But looked at purely rationally, why may it not yield instead a technocratic authoritarian scientifically ordered mode of production: a situation where an elite continues to control the masses? Schweickart thinks that it will not in the long run. He in his last three pages provides some reasonable, perhaps even sound, grounds for thinking that is so. I think they are reasonable and I *hope* they are sound and prove to be so, but can we be reasonably confident that they are not only *reasonable but sound: something we think with good reason is warrantedly assertable?*

I agree with Schweickart that capitalism—including presently global capitalism—squanders human capital and is irrational from the point of view of a system geared to equitably meeting human needs. I also agree that the neoliberal project has failed. I am amazed that anyone (even people with capitalist commitments) ever thought it would succeed. By now the wreckage is almost everywhere on display. Certainly with many, capitalism no longer inspires hope. I do not think it should inspire hope with anyone, but I do not believe that it does not continue to inspire hope for considerable segments of the population and sometimes for people with the capacity to affect how things will go. The ANC in South Africa, after valiantly struggling and winning against apartheid, now has a prime minister (a former Communist)—and a government following him—who has embraced many neoliberal policies, just as some time ago a Social Democratic prime minister in New Zealand did, throwing that country into a spin. I do not know enough to accuse these leaders of bad faith. I suspect they very well have honestly thought that that was the only way to go in their circumstances. Certainly that must be so with Nelson Mandela. I only allude to this to show that capitalism still inspires, even with some progressive people, hope—even if a hope chastened by what

they regard as economic necessities. But I take it that Schweickart is claiming, reasonably and realistically, I think, that capitalism is inspiring less and less hope with more and more people. The very rise of the antiglobalization movement attests to that, as does the much greater sense of cynicism and general discontent in our societies at large. The fervent political beliefs of the fundamentalist Religious Right are the beliefs of an ill-educated minority. And they may well be unstable. And I agree, at least generally, with Schweickart concerning what ails capitalism and why.

I also agree roughly about what kind of socialism we would have to have to have a viable socialist alternative. But I am far less confident than Schweickart is that it is the only, or even the most likely, viable alternative, if we mean by "viable" (*persuasively* defining it) only what could stably come into existence and for a while persist. The specter of a technological modernizing scientistic authoritarianism arising and stably sustaining itself into the indefinite future seems to me unfortunately (to understate it) also to be a plausible alternative. I do not see how Schweickart has given us good reason to think that using good historical materialist reasoning, socialist productive relations are more plausible as something that would come into existence and sustain themselves than such a cleverly designed authoritarian capitalist state of affairs. I, to repeat, very much hope I am wrong and have missed something in Schweickart's account.

Concerning my initial question, I do not think there is any way of telling from his text whether Schweickart is a strong and inclusive or a weak and restricted historical materialist. Both are compatible with his text, but I think the latter, for reasons Levine, G. A. Cohen, and Joshua Cohen have given, is the more plausible version, and Schweickart could adopt it without any weakening of his distinctive claims.

I want in closing to say something briefly about the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will. I think one can articulate socialism and even a Marxian vision of things without assuming that one has truth by the tail and that this is just the way things must go. Of course one wants to "get things right," or at least as nearly so as one can plausibly believe that we can get them. However, over such large-scale social matters and over such a fundamental theory and practice it is reasonable to be skeptical, no matter how carefully one has reasoned and how important the matter is to one. One may have in important ways gone wrong. Again, fallibilism is the name of the game. But that shouldn't cripple one from acting or trying to reason things out.

Perhaps it is my pragmatism (something I believe is not in conflict with my Marxianism), perhaps it is my earlier study of anthropology, perhaps it is the influence on me of Wittgenstein or some Wittgensteinians such as Peter Winch and Rush Rhees, but whatever the combination of these reasons and causes, I am all the way down a fallibilist who thinks that everything is contingent and that even if W. V. O. Quine or Donald Davidson are wrong about so-called a priori knowledge and Michael Friedman and Rudolf Carnap have it right, or are

closer to being right, a priori sentences still are a priori only in the sense that they are so structured in certain language games: certain practices structured in a certain way. That they are so structured in these language games is itself an historical empirical matter and something through and through contingent. We should not go, as Friedman and Carnap well recognize, on the quest for certainty and universality. That some philosophers do so, feel compelled to do so, shows they are still after a will-o'-the-wisp. A fallibilist is not a radical skeptic; she only denies that you can get certainty and claims that you do not need so-called certain knowledge. All knowledge claims are revisable, but some are sounder than others for all of that. We have no coherent notion of "absolute soundness" and don't need one. My kind of fallibilist is also a historicist, denying that we can overleap history and affirming that all significant beliefs are historically conditional. We have clusters of practices that give significance to our beliefs, many, perhaps all, of which have arisen in and are sustained by certain determinate historical circumstances. None of them are just "products of reason," but without some such historically contingent social practices we could not think or speak at all. They provide our context of choice.

With such conceptions we will be very suspicious as to whether we can get grand and systematic social theories that can tell us what is "really real"—as if we had any idea what that means—anymore than we understand what just is in accordance with reason. This makes us skeptics over some things: in an important way, over grand social narratives. But it doesn't make us skeptics, *full stop*. We are Hume's mitigated skeptics. So we will be very skeptical concerning what anthropologists call "just-so stories" and will try to avoid coughing up any ourselves. This is very hard to avoid doing and here skepticism has a real bite. But this is very distant from a wholesale skepticism or the "epistemological skepticism" of traditional philosophy. Both are nonsubjects that are creatures of philosophical constructions that we are better off without. But there is religious skepticism, in *certain ways* moral skepticism, and skepticism over certain kinds of social theories. Over religion and certain kinds of social theories, I am both skeptical and fallibilist. Hume's "mitigated skepticism" and fallibilism, I believe, come to very much the same thing. This, of course, makes me cautious concerning historical materialism. But that doesn't make me think it is not plausible and not crucial to articulate, and it does not make me think that socialism is not to be defended with all one's energy and commitment. But surely not as an unconditional commitment. We are on earth. As one of Samuel Beckett's characters said, "There is no cure for it." We as socialists taking this as given, starting from where we are, are after a better world, if one can be had.

Am I optimistic or pessimistic? Well, I am a fallibilist and I don't think it is very important whether you are optimistic or pessimistic. The thing is to struggle for a better world, and to oppose the pigsty we have.

NOTES

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2. G. A. Cohen, *History, Labour and Freedom: Themes from Marx* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); and J. Cohen, "Minimalist Historical Materialism," in *On the Track of Reason: Essays in Honor of Kai Nielsen*, ed. Rodger Beehler, David Copp, and Béla Szabados (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992).

3. Levine, *Engaging Political Philosophy*, p. 264.

4. Ibid., p. 265.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 267.

8. Ibid., p. 259.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 257.

11. Ibid., pp. 256–57.

12. Ibid., p. 257.

13. Kai Nielsen, "On Taking Historical Materialism Seriously," *Dialogue* 22 (1993): 319–38.

14. Ibid.