

SOCIALISM AND EGALITARIAN JUSTICE

by
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I

I shall first set out what socialism is and what it hopes to achieve. I shall then weave this account in with a critical examination of James Sterba's *Justice for Here and Now*. My central effort will be to show — its genuine insights, generosity of spirit and well-meaning initiatives notwithstanding — what Sterba's account leaves out in saying what a decent and just world would be. I will also, independently of Sterba, articulate the conditions necessary for the realization or approximation of such a just world. I will end by arguing what must be done if we are to have such a world. The prospects for it are pretty dim and seem to be growing dimmer. But let us remind ourselves of Antonio Gramsci's slogan about the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will.

II

First, for socialism and its discontents. Socialism and Leftism generally have come on bad times. From being a powerful social force feared and hated by the Right and by Centrist Liberals alike, it has, particularly in North America, become something of a joke. It has no militant mass or even a broadly sympathetic mass attuned to it. There is little by way of a socialist egalitarian ethos in the rich capitalist democracies. In North America there are no Leftish parties, not even social democratic parties, with any standing. (The NDP in Canada, dwindling away as it is, is a weak exception.) And in the United States the "Left Wing" of the Democratic Party has practically disappeared. It is true that social democratic parties have recently (1998-2000) won victories in Western Europe. France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Greece have governments so formed. But with the major players at least — France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom — we have social democratic governments that, once in power, a bit of rhetoric and some band-aide policies aside, look pretty much like their neo-liberal right-wing predecessors. The Blair/Schroeder Manifesto sounds very much like, beyond some vapid remarks about social responsibility, Thatcherism recycled (Blair and Schroeder, 2000). And similar things should be said of the present (2000) governments of France and Italy. They sparked some hope when they were elected, but by now that hope is dashed. The prospects for the Left seem now very bleak. Cynicism and hopelessness about the public sphere are very widespread.

This is exacerbated by the so-called lessons of 1989. Many of us on the Left — *some* with a little ambivalence — welcomed the tumbling down of

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the old Soviet empire. We hoped that with Thermidor gone a socialist/social democratic social order, providing a thoroughly democratic middle ground, would come into being in those countries that had formerly been part of that empire: a way that was neither Soviet authoritarian statism nor capitalism. But nothing like that was wanted by most of the people in those countries. Once liberated from Soviet domination they went straight for capitalism. And in the former Soviet Union itself, it was capitalism of the crudest sort. There was for them no "middle way".

Among intellectuals in those countries the belief remained that socialism was not only inherently undemocratic but grossly inefficient as well. Remember, Frederich Hayek is a hero in those countries. You can't, it was widely believed, run an efficient economy answering to people's needs on a socialist model. In the capitalist democracies, many liberals and leftists are perfectly aware that there is nothing inherently undemocratic about socialism. Some of them (Sidney Hook, Irving Howe and Richard Rorty), convinced that a genuine socialism could not but be democratic, thought that we had now come to see, as clearly as could be, that in complex modern societies a socialist organization of the *economy* would not work. *It wasn't that socialism couldn't be democratic, it could not be efficient.* We would, they argued, have to settle for as egalitarian a form of liberal egalitarian welfare statism as is compatible with capitalism. There is simply no rational alternative to capitalism. (Rorty 1998a and 1998b) This view, however, is not without its critics.

Culturally and politically speaking, particularly in North America, and most particularly in the United States, the countervailing forces are very weak. Given the mass media and the political parties in power the near worldwide victory of neo-liberalism seems close to being total. Even with a large number of educated people aware of the evils of globalization — the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, and many people living lives of greater insecurity, greater stress and in many instances a diminished ability to meet their needs — there is little in the way of a movement to the Left. The rich, with increasing vigor and success, are ripping off the poor in the rich capitalist democracies and, when these societies are compared with the Second and Third Worlds, the rip-off is even greater. The disparity of life-conditions is simply staggering between the First World and the Third. In the Third World widespread starvation and malnutrition are rampant. The conditions of life for vast numbers of the world's population can only be accurately described as swine-ish. Thirty million people die of hunger every year and more than 800 million live in extreme poverty. Fifty million people are unemployed in Europe, one billion unemployed or underemployed in the world as a whole. And those who do work are often savagely exploited, including 300 million children working in conditions of stark brutality. All of this goes on while the productive wealth of the society, rooted in the development of its productive forces, grows and the rich get richer and the poor get poorer with more people becoming impoverished. The richest quintile of the world population has well over 90 percent of the world's income and the poorest quintile holds 0.25 percent. This yields a quintile income inequality ratio of around 400:1. If wealth is taken into

consideration the inequality is even greater (Pogge 1996). With capitalist globalization steadily marching on, things are getting worse. In 1960 the richest 20 percent of the world's population had an income 30 times higher than the poorest 20 percent. The wealth of that 20 percent is 82 times higher now (1999). Of the 6 billion inhabitants of this planet, barely 500 million live in comfort or in something approaching comfort — leaving 5.5 billion in need. “In need” puts too nice a face on it. Many of them live in truly hellish conditions with little possibility of escape. Moreover, given these disparities and the world's productive forces, it is clear enough that transfers could be made to the poor without impoverishing the rich. It is not the lack of developed productive powers that keeps us from so meeting needs. It is the way we organize social life along with the utterly uncaring attitudes and short-sightedness of the wealthy and powerful of this world. It is capitalism and the attitudes that go with it and not the world that is the problem.

That these conditions obtain is not a “necessary fact” or law of nature or of human nature, but a result of the design of the neo-liberal capitalist order that we have created and sustain. But, given the power and pervasiveness of this order, it is likely to *feel* to most of us like something to which there is no alternative. This, I believe, accounts in part for the sense of helplessness and hopelessness that many of our students feel — often the most sensitive and reflective among them. It causes political inactivity and probably does much to generate and sustain post-modernism. Moreover, and more importantly, in the general population there is a sense of powerlessness, that there is just a big political machine out there that we can do nothing about. This is how many have become attuned to the world.

Richard Rorty is right in saying that the Left is the party of hope. Without it there is no reasonable hope for justice here, now or ever, or even for a decent society (Rorty 1998b). But it also seems like there is no hope for the Left and so, unless we can play religious tricks on ourselves, we are left without hope. In the last pages of his book, James Sterba shows some awareness of this. (Sterba 1998, 174-181)

III

I will set out a normative-descriptive interpretive scenario which considers some of the possibilities for, in the face of all this, a just social order — a just world — and attempt a characterization of what it would look like. In this context I will consider how well Sterba's account satisfies this and how well his distinctive methodology works here. But first I will portray a little more fully the dismal state of affairs for socialism, and say something about what socialism and, more broadly, what the Left can and should be.

Richard Rorty — while regarding socialism, as shown by “the lessons of 1989”, to be impossible — opts for a reformist non-socialist Left position (he calls it “Old Left”) (Rorty 1998a.) He usefully distinguishes between the Old Left, the New Left and the Cultural Left. In the following typology I expand and modify his typology and characterization into what I think yields a useful typology of the Left. Like any typology, it will have some

TYPOLOGY OF THE LEFT

I OLD LEFT	II NEW LEFT	III CULTURAL LEFT	IV ANALYTICAL LEFT
<p>A. REFORMIST 1. Social Democrats (Hook, Howe, Rorty) 2. Socialists (Bernstein, Thomas, Dewey)</p> <p>B. REVOLUTIONARY 3. Marxists 4. Anarchist Socialists (Bakunin, Malatesta)</p>	<p>C. NEO-MARXIST (Hayden, Collinicos)</p> <p>D. NEO-ANARCHIST (Chomsky)</p> <p>E. ANTI-THEORIST (Foucault, Baudrillard)</p>	<p>F. EXISTENTIALIST MARXISTS (Beauvoir, Merleu- Ponty, Sartre)</p> <p>G. CULTURAL CRITICS (Jamenson, Eagleton)</p>	<p>H. ANALYTICAL MARXISTS 5. Rational Choice Theorists (Elster, Roemer) 6. Non-Rational Choice Theorists (G.A. Cohen, E.O. Wright, Levine)</p> <p>I. ANALYTICAL SOCIALISTS/ SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (Joshua Cohen, Stuart Hampshire)</p>

blurred edges and leave some contestable classifications, and may require clarifications and modifications. Yet, I believe it provides a useful classification of socialism and the Left more generally, and a map for spotting vital options and non-vital options for the Left.

By a socialist, of any sort, I mean someone who favours the public ownership of the principal means of production in the world, which will become a world (if it becomes socialist) in which there are only workers, retired workers and children who, in due course, will become workers. Generally, these people are committed to a democratic ordering of society. Some people (in some forms of socialism) may own small enterprises of various sorts, but to do so they must also be workers, typically working in their own enterprises. No able-bodied mentally stable adult person can be sustained by the society without work. And there must be made available to every non-retired adult person work if she/he chooses to work. (Childcare and housework also count as work and should in some way be remunerated as any other work in the society.) We will, in short, have a social order of full employment. A person may choose not to work, but if she/he does, work being available to everyone, she can expect no aid from the society if she/he is able-bodied, adult and of sound mind and has not reached whatever the society fixes as the retirement age.

There will, of course, be individual private property (clothes, toothbrushes, cars, houses, tools, etc.), but *productive* property will be publicly owned except, perhaps — and no doubt desirably — for some small businesses, e.g., family restaurants, shops, small plots of land producing vegetables and the like. Without extensive public ownership we do not have socialism. This *could* mean for public property to be state-owned, but public property could also be worker-owned and controlled under various schemes. Rorty's linking of socialism with nationalization confuses a particular type of socialism (and a problematic one at that) with socialism *sans phrase*. The key here is *public* ownership, public control and democratic governance where public ownership need not at all mean state ownership and control. It may just be that workers jointly own and control the enterprises they work in, or once worked in where they are retired from.

In capitalism there are two principal classes: *capitalists* who own and, directly or indirectly, control at least the principal means of production and who may or may not, as they choose, also work for a wage (a wage even in their own firms, after all their entrepreneurial work is work); and *workers* (proletarians, if you will) who work for a wage and typically own no means of production, but, if they do, they do not own sufficient means of production to sustain themselves with that alone.¹ This status leads to Marxists classifying workers in capitalist societies as wage slaves. They are dependent, unless they can break out of their class and become small capitalists themselves, on capitalists or on the state (and thus in a capitalist society indirectly on capitalists) for their sustenance and that of their families. Moreover, only a few can break out of their proletarian condition for if a few break out they will block the exits for others. There is no reasonable choice under capitalism but for the great mass of workers to remain workers (G.A. Cohen 1983).

In socialism, by contrast, there would be no class divisions, for all able-bodied persons would be workers, potential workers (*i.e.*, children) or retired workers. In that important way it would be a classless society. However, since work in a complex society will often be very different, there will be distinctions and perhaps strata distinctions between different workers. (Marx in his mature thought gave up the ideal of an end of any division of labour.) Though these divisions of labour will exist in a properly functioning democratic socialist society, it will not be the case, where these societies are properly functioning socialist societies, that some types of workers (intellectual workers or bureaucratic workers) will be able to gain control over other types of workers such that they will gain political or economic power over them or have much greater wealth or much better life conditions than others. (Ideally, there will be no better life conditions for any group of workers than for others, but if some do arise they will be small and not inherited.) A socialist society and a socialist world (by definition, if you will) must be thoroughly egalitarian where everyone has an equal moral standing in the society and where there are no systematic differences in wealth or control of society. To be “socialist” it must have a thoroughly egalitarian ethos.

Returning to my typology, it is important to recognize that socialists are always on the Left (again, by definition if you will) but also that not all leftists are socialists. The most significant exceptions are (A1) Old Left Reformist Social Democrats (*e.g.*, Richard Rorty, Irving Howe and Sidney Hook), (E) New Left Anti-Theorists (*e.g.*, Michel Foucault) and (I) Analytical Social Democrats (*e.g.*, Joshua Cohen and Stuart Hampshire).

I shall argue the most fundamental choices to be made on the Left are between (A1), (A2) and (I) (taken as one rather differentiated group) and (H5) and (H6) (taken as another such group). (B3) and (B4) are traditional

¹ It is their ownership and control of productive property that makes people capitalists. Their entrepreneurship may remain if (for example) they were specialized workers — workers doing entrepreneurial work — in socialist firms. Their being entrepreneurs does not make them capitalists.

revolutionary socialisms, but (H5) or (H6) *may* also be analytical Marxist *revolutionary* socialisms. (My own socialism is of that sort.) The only other serious choice is between (H5) and (H6) and (D) and (E) (taken together) or (E) by itself as represented (though differently) in the work of Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault.

Richard Rorty has made a powerful case for (A1) as did Sidney Hook before him (Rorty 1998a and 1998b). Hook's case is clouded by his role in the Cold War — by what became his obsession with anti-communism, Rorty, though he goes firmly on record as supporting the Cold War and commends Hook for his Cold War campaign, is not so compromised by his anti-communism nor does it seriously mar his Leftist credentials (Rorty 1998a). All the Left positions in the typology (with the *possible* exception of *some* (G), *i.e.*, some cultural critics) are members in good standing of the party of hope. But in my view the most serious choices are between some forms of (D) and/or (E), (A1) and (A2), on one side, and (H5) and (H6) and (I) on the other.

I shall with *seeming* dogmatism set aside (B3) (Classical Marxism) and (B4) (Classical Socialist Anarchism). For some of the reasons that even some people on the Left are attracted to libertarianism, a reading of Michel Bakunin's *State and Anarchy* cannot but attract one to its vision of liberty and a stateless classless society. But, viewed more soberly, it is too utopian a vision. There is no just smashing the state anywhere, anytime and then moving directly to a classless stateless society. There is, (1) the inescapability of what Marxists call the transition period, and, (2) the fact that revolutions can be successfully made and socialism successfully established (if it can be established at all) only under certain conditions (Nielsen 1971 and 1977). Moreover, revolutions are not overnight happenings (Nielsen 1971). It is also very problematical that we could ever move in complex societies to a stateless society. Marx and Engels and the other classical Marxists thought we could, but it is very doubtful if a proper understanding of historical materialism or anything else would make that plausible (Moore 1993). It is Marx the young utopian who gave us a rationale (though a defective rationale) for believing we could eventually live in a stateless society. Sustained by his early *philosophical* anthropology, he continued to have that belief when he should have seen that his own work on historical materialism made such a belief utterly utopian (Moore 1993). Such a belief is as unjustified in Marx as in Bakunin, though Marx saw that we could not directly leap to statelessness after a successful revolutionary seizure of power. The point is that there is no reason to think that in complex societies we can get to statelessness at all.

Classical Revolutionary Marxism should also not be taken as gospel. Indeed it needs extensive modification. I am an analytical Marxian and a revolutionary one at that. I regard Marx and Engels, and Rosa Luxemburg as well, as master thinkers of modernity. Much of my thinking has been formed and sustained by them. But I use "analytical *Marxian*" advisedly on analogy with "Darwinian" rather than "Darwinist". Modern biologists are overwhelmingly Darwinian, but they are not "Darwinists". They realize — and how could it be otherwise, with a broad ranging scientific account —

that Darwin was wrong about many things. But their very way of thinking was deeply formed by Darwin and they regard him as a scientific giant. I feel exactly the same about Marx. Moreover, I regard his account as a social scientific one and not (*pace* Kolakowski and Rorty) as philosophy, and most firmly not a speculative Hegelian teleological philosophy of history. I take historical materialism to be a scientific theory of epochal social change which, unfortunately, has probably been disconfirmed (Joshua Cohen 1993). But it is a perfectly proper empirical theory for all of that (Nielsen 1983 and 1989c; G. A. Cohen 1978; Joshua Cohen 1982; and Levine and Wright 1980).

The above notwithstanding, present day classical Marxism has become a fundamentalist Marxism rigidly holding on to the labour theory of value, to the idea of a command economy and to dialectical materialism. It has become a metaphysical theory and not an attempt at the large scale and systematic scientific theory that it was in the hands of Marx. It is, however, important to remember that it was also, and consistently with its scientific status, a revolutionary practice (G.A. Cohen 1978 and Nielsen 1989).

I turn now, referring back again to my typology, to the New Left. The New Left did some fine practical things. It brought an end to the Vietnam War, helped us to view human relations in a new way and took an insouciantly dismissive attitude to capitalist society. Rorty maintains that the Cultural Left, a continuation of the New Left after it retreated into the Academy, abandoned (for the most part) political contestation for cultural critique. Still it did, in a strikingly useful way, some important things. (Rorty 1998a and 1998b)² It helped us spotlight the life conditions of people who are marginalized in various ways and usefully (if in some instances problematically) challenged the ways things are done in universities. But the Cultural Left tended, some more so than others, to be conceptually incoherent and naïve. It does not provide a new rationale for socialism or any other kind of plausible Leftism. And, in effect if not in intention, the new academics among them ((G) rather than (F)) are deeply apolitical. They are probably, to some extent, responsible for turning many serious social thinkers, including activists, off socialism and Marxism.

IV

Taking socialism, or at least Leftism, seriously, the options are between various forms of the Reformist Left (A) and Analytical Social Democracy and Reformist Socialism (I) (*e.g.*, Joshua Cohen 2000), on the one hand, and various forms of Analytical Marxism (*e.g.*, G.A. Cohen, John Roemer, Andrew Levine) on the other. Let us pinpoint matters even further, contrast Old Left Social Democracy with Analytical Marxism to see if we can ascertain which gives us the best model of what a just and otherwise desirable socialist/social democratic world would look like.

² This is largely true of the Academic Cultural Left, but there are thousands of activist cultural leftists, some with their distinctive organizations, outside the Academy who do engage in political contestation (Cohen and Rogers, 1998).

Social democrats such as Richard Rorty reject socialism, and particularly socialism, analytical or otherwise, with a Marxian flavour. They do so on three principal grounds. One, the Soviet experiment has abundantly shown us that, in a modern dynamic economy answering to people's needs, a socialism without markets will not work. It is inefficient with a stifling bureaucracy. It cannot get the goods and services when and where they are needed. It cannot be innovative and produce things that people want. People in such a world will not adequately get either what they need or want. Two, there is a strong tendency for a socialist society to either not be democratic at all or to be minimally and insecurely democratic. Historically speaking they are not societies (to put it minimally) with a firm track record of respecting human rights. The Marxist tradition, as Rorty puts it, is a tradition "that is covered with filth because of the marks of the governments that have called themselves Marxist" (Rorty 1998a, 21). (However, we should carefully note and not forget that with respect to capitalism that is the pot calling the kettle black.) Marx, Engels and Luxemburg had good intentions alright, but they assumed too easily and naively that, after a class-based revolution, with the struggle, discipline and control that would require with a workers' victory, no doubt in the beginning an insecure victory, democracy would rather unproblematically be obtained. We could and would, they thought, move with dispatch from a socialist society victorious in a class-based civil war to a fully democratic society. But that is very unrealistic and it did not happen. Three, Marxists and Marxians, both classical and analytical, put too much trust in theory and particularly in grand social theory: a theory that would make plain the underlying structure and necessary development of society. There is no such "science of society" and belief in one leads not infrequently to arbitrariness and to dogmatism and, when things go badly, even to fanaticism. The intellectual Left generally, and Marxists in particular, are, as Rorty puts it, "dominated by the notion that we need a theoretical understanding of our historical situation, a social theory which reveals the keys to the future development, and a strategy which integrates everything with everything...." (Rorty 1998a, 45).

The Marxist idea is not to have several disparate concrete proposals for reform with a minimal ordering, but to reject such piecemeal solutions unless they are integrated into a general theoretical package theoretically sustained. Marxians, for example, aim at achieving a certain sort of society. In aiming at this society, they seek to find out exactly how it is that the rich are ripping off the poor, seek to understand what the underlying mechanisms and structures are and to make sure that one local problem isn't cleared up by making one local solution, yet creating another local problem (perhaps even a worse problem) elsewhere. They want, working holistically, to achieve a rational ordering of society. To do that they need intelligent general integrated plans, but this requires some sophisticated general theory. It is natural to believe that to know with which initiatives to press forward and in what order and how to integrate them, we need to step back to a point removed from the situation. This will give a clearer view as to what the more specific initiatives should be and how to prioritize them.

Rorty, as was Karl Popper and Frederich Hayek, is utterly skeptical

about that. He remarks, "It never worked before. Why should it work now?" (Rorty 1998a, 43). We have no "science of society" or (which is something else again) general moral theory which will give us a fix here. (Here he is at loggerheads with Sterba.) All we can do, Rorty has it, is, as reflectively and concretely as we can, introduce specific initiatives — specific proposals backed up by specific campaigns — that might relieve some specific suffering without attempting an overall theoretical understanding and integration (Rorty 1998b, 111-124). Rorty remarks, taking a resolute anti-theoretical stance, in what he takes to be a good pragmatist spirit, "All social initiatives have unforeseen, and often bad, side effects. The idea that you can step back and fix it so that your initiative won't interfere with anybody else's initiative is crazy" (Rorty 1998a, 47).

The first objection to analytical Marxism is perhaps the most tractable. Rorty utterly ignores the possibility of market socialism. Command economies, he stresses, as have many others, do not work in complex industrial societies. We cannot, in a modern society and in a modern interdependent world, have a *market-free* planned economy — even planned with the considerable intelligence and the best will in the world — to maximally and equitably meet human needs. They work staggeringly badly. Even if we had had conscientious socially committed egalitarian planners at the top steering the society, instead of thugs or indifferent bureaucrats out to fill their own pockets, it could not be done. Allocations for a complex society, if they are to be sufficiently sensitive, cannot be made this way. It is not, as in extreme forms of *laissez faire*, that there is no need for planning. A complex capitalist society will have both market and plan. Yet markets remain absolutely essential (Nove 1983).

However, market socialism recognizes and stresses the essential nature of markets. Market socialists have worked out, sometimes with great sophistication and with attention to feasibility considerations, models for a market socialist society that would be both socialist, in the sense I characterized, and have markets as well. John Roemer's and David Schweickart's models are well known and carefully articulated examples (Roemer 1994 and Schweickart 1993).³

Most surely, as with any scientific enterprise, they can be improved on and they will need to be revised. But they have been worked out with great care and economic sophistication. Neither Rorty nor anyone else who claims that there is no feasible and attractive alternative to capitalism will have much credibility in that claim until they have carefully considered such models and shown how market socialism could not work if given a chance.

Reformist social democratic Leftists might respond that it is not the reasonability of such market socialist models that bothers them but their *political* impossibility. Given the political forms that are in play now in our society, there is no chance that in any of the rich capitalist democracies —

³ See also Nove (1983) for an important carefully empirically researched more historically oriented argument for market socialism.

the places where, if they could be put in practice, they might work — that market socialism will be given a try. Capitalists and the politicians in their service will not allow this to happen. They will not willingly transform their societies into something which is not capitalist even if a very strong case, considering the needs of people generally, is made for it. Democracy and the media are sufficiently hijacked by capitalists for it to be non-utopian to think there are forces in such societies — that is in our societies — to place market socialism onto the economic and political agenda. However good it may look on paper to a few intellectuals there are no evident political mechanisms in our societies to get it on the agenda. We simply do not know how to get from here to there.

This is a powerful argument against any form of socialism and perhaps it cannot be met. But, for all that, it is not as decisive as many think. Neo-liberalism, as its globalizing face becomes ever more evident, is working very badly — hurting many people and not yielding its rosy promises. It is generating increasing opposition, some of it radical, most of it liberal, clamoring on the radical side for the overthrow of capitalism and on the liberal side for a rather more socially responsible capitalism. However, there is a considerable reluctance on the part of the multi-nationals, ideological rhetoric aside, to become socially responsible. For example, the big genetically modified food producers such as Monsanto claim that their products are safe and that it is just ignorance for anyone to think otherwise. But they refuse to put their money where their mouth is. Their fierce lobbying has successfully blocked the passage of a bill in the European Parliament which would hold them legally liable if their food turned out to be harmful to humans or the environment. This is just one instance of repeated occurrences where multi-nationals in conjunction with conservative politicians make things worse for human beings—not just a few human beings but many human beings in different conditions in different countries and in different walks of life.

The natural thing, after this, in Europe (but not North America), is to vote social democrat, sometimes in coalition with Greens or socialists. But then, when it is seen that when in government they do not develop policies that improve things, there is considerable disillusionment. (In the U.K., for example, the gap between the rich and poor has actually increased under their Labour government from what it was under the Conservatives.) Perhaps, after repeated bumps, the electorate may be willing to give socialism a try, where the socialists present an intelligent plan for market socialism. That might produce a Rightwing coup, but perhaps that is unlikely in countries such as Britain, France, Germany, Holland and the Nordic countries. Again, we should remember Gramsci's slogan, mentioned at the end of the first paragraph, "Moreover, there will be no achieving anything without engaging in struggle".

In some instances, socialist societies were thoroughly undemocratic. More than that, some societies, running under the banner of socialism and Marxism, have been soaked in blood. This must be acknowledged and not forgotten. But, it is also important to keep in mind that not everything calling itself socialist and Marxist is. We must see clearly what Marx and

Engels stood for and as well see that these tyrannical bloodthirsty regimes have nothing in common with what Marx and Engels were about. We must also never forget how the nascent socialist countries had their backs driven to the wall by the capitalist countries. There is, to be sure, vanguardism, but there are also Marxist claims about the ill effects of the pervasiveness of bourgeois ideology and how bourgeois attitudes affect our social lives in a way that runs against the attainment of community among us. This leads to subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which workers are dominated. The militancy of socialists comes from the recognition of the need to fight back. We cannot be, as Rorty is, dismissive about this. The recognition of the need for vigilance, militancy and vanguardism is an integral part of Lenin's thought and has, whatever Lenin's intentions, led away from democratic ways of doing things. But the vanguardism is Lenin not Marx and Engels. They recognized the need for vigilance and militancy. But that is a different matter. Marx, in his seething rage (not unjustified) at the way people are treated under capitalism, sometimes became a bit fanatical. But that is not at all central to his thought and it certainly has no place in analytical Marxism or socialism properly understood.

Socialists in capitalist societies have been subject to all kinds of repression and deliberate disinformation concerning them has been, and still is, widespread. Think, for example, of the fate of Paul Robson.⁴ So it is natural for socialists to distrust the bourgeoisie and to worry about how they infiltrate socialist ranks. But socialism does not rest on that distrust of bourgeois intellectuals and related phenomena. Analytical Marxism and the socialism that goes with it is certainly non-vanguardist and it is thoroughly democratic. Moreover, where socialist revolutions have turned sour, they occurred in societies lacking in two features essential for the development and sustaining of socialism: (1) developed economic forces and (2) a tradition of liberal democracy.⁵ Marx clearly saw that socialism develops on the back of capitalism, including the democratic political forms that usually go with it, while transforming it. It didn't have a chance in Russia or China where there was little capitalist development. For it to work it must rise in the rich (economically developed) capitalist democracies which are, for reasons Marx explained well, also liberal democracies. They would remain such democracies with the transformation to socialism. Indeed, with a transition to socialism in such conditions, the democracy would actually deepen, for it would then, (a) be also some form of economic democracy and not just a political democracy, and (b) the political

4 Paul Robson was an African-American. He was a lawyer, a famous opera and spiritual singer and an equally famous actor. His work in all these domains was destroyed by black-listing and other forms of harassment as a result of his principled commitment to socialism. He refused to back down or compromise in his defense of the Soviet Union even in the most difficult McCarthy years. His persecution was so intense and so continuous that he was finally, toward the end of his life, physically and emotionally destroyed.

5 Czechoslovakia might be thought to be an exception. Prior to the imposition from the outside of socialism it was both economically developed and liberal. But it is not an exception for its socialism was imposed on it from the outside. And its socialism ended when that pressure came to an end.

democracy would be fuller, because ordinary people would have a say in how their society is ordered and class divisions would be undermined (Roemer 1994). What John Rawls calls constitutional essentials would remain in place and people, given the end of class domination, would have a greater control over their lives. *Pace* Libertarians, society would be more autonomous with socialism, not less (Nielsen 1985).

I turn now to the third Old Left social democratic point against analytical Marxism and Marxism more generally — a point stressed particularly by Rorty — namely its alleged *overtheoreticism*. When Rorty thinks of theory in the context of Marxist social theory he thinks of grand philosophical theory seeking to integrate everything: a dialectical and historical materialism that will show us how societies must develop and, with this historical inevitability teleology, what the end of history and the destiny of human beings must be. While most analytical Marxists are historical materialists, their historical materialism is not such a grand philosophical teleological theory replete with a philosophical anthropology. It is not a philosophical theory, grand or ungrand, at all, and it is not a teleological theory. It is, rather, an integrated cluster of empirical — and thus falsifiable — hypotheses about epochal social change (G.A. Cohen 1978 and 1988; Satz 1989; Nielsen 1983 and 1989c). So here we have Rorty versus strawman.

However, this does not end the matter about overtheoreticism. That grand “meta-narratives” are blather is tolerably evident. What is crucial, even when taking Marxist social theory in such a non-teleological, non-metaphysical way, as analytical Marxists rightly do, is to determine whether we can have useful theories of general scope (as analytical Marxists, and Marxists generally, Durkheim, Weber and contemporary Durkheimians and Weberians believe we can) or whether with Rorty and Peter Winch we must stick with contextual practice-dependent piecemeal approaches to social life and to social problems. The anti-Marxian claim is, whether philosophical, empirical, normative or some amalgam, that we should not trust in general theories. We should (*pace* Sterba) no more trust in general ethical theories than in general empirically oriented interpretative-empirical theories. They (*pace* Marxists) are of no use in guiding practice; they are not warrantably assertable and their very coherence is problematical. We are not going to get such a theoretical understanding of our historical situation or indeed any historical understanding; we are not going to get in any way such a systematic integrated understanding. Leftism, as the argument goes, to be defensible must be a pragmatic atheoretical, piecemeal, reformist, social democracy or perhaps a pragmatic socialism without theoretical danglers, at least the grand theoretical danglers of the classical sociological tradition.

I do not want or need in my articulation and defence of socialism here, and particularly with my juxtaposition of it with Sterba’s account of justice, to take sides on this issue, though it is, I believe, a very important and very contestable issue. But for my purposes here even a rather atheoretical socialism will do. What we need to see is that without it Rorty is not going to be able to realize his utopian hopes for a classless, casteless, non-sexist, non-homophobic, non-racist egalitarian world (Rorty 1999, xii). He cannot

possibly realize it in a capitalist world no matter how social democratic. A capitalist society without classes is a contradiction in terms. If there were no capitalists there would be no capitalism. And where there are capitalists and workers, there will be at least some inequalities; perhaps justifiable or, at least, unavoidable inequalities, but inequalities all the same. If, as Rorty thinks — and as social democrats generally think — some form of capitalism is functionally or rationally inescapable in complex modern societies, then he cannot have his classless egalitarian society, or a classless egalitarian world, unless perchance he would have us return to a situation where we live in stateless hunting and gathering societies. He cannot have it even as a utopian hope, for it makes no sense to hope for what one firmly believes not to be achievable. If we are stuck with capitalism, as Rorty believes we are, and indeed reasonably so, then we cannot coherently hope for a classless egalitarian society. I do not think such a hope is unreasonable, but then I do not think that socialism is unreasonable, undesirable or impossible.

V

I now turn to a consideration of a case that could be made for a classless egalitarian society in the context of comparing it with the account Sterba gives of justice.

I want to say initially, that I am in strong agreement with Sterba's conception of "a peacemaking way of doing philosophy". Philosophers too often go around like game cocks spoiling for a fight. They see themselves as engaging in a philosophical battle in which the aim is to demolish their opponents, to shoot down their arguments and to destroy their conceptions. But that is infantile. The model should not be that of the Lone Ranger out to gun down "the errants", but C.S. Peirce's image of philosophy as an impartial co-operative inquiry where philosophers, assuming a fallibilistic orientation, seek to learn from each other. Together, working cooperatively, they construct the best account they can of whatever is at issue and are prepared, in most cases, to expect to modify or even to abandon their account as the inquiry proceeds. The cases of such macho-childish behaviour on the part of philosophers that Sterba cites in his first chapter are unfortunately perfectly accurate and bring shame on our profession. "Philosophy as war-making" is not philosophy — to engage in justified *persuasive* definition — but something like a silly verbal battle. If that is what philosophy is, philosophy surely should come to an end. I would only add that avoiding and detesting that is perfectly compatible with a philosopher of integrity sticking with something that she genuinely and reflectively thinks is so and is of central importance even in the face of universal opposition. She surely in such a circumstance should think twice (to very much understate it) about that opposition and to honestly consider and take to heart their objections. In the face of universal opposition, if she is reasonable, she will think that it is very likely — indeed almost certain — that she is mistaken. She must take their opposing views, with such a massive opposition to her own, as something that (again to understate it) is very likely well-taken. But after

non-evasively doing that, she still might believe that her views are a telling-it-like-it-is and not crazy and thus stick with them trying to articulate them more adequately so that they might fairly answer the objections directed at them.⁶ In the process of doing this she might come to agree with her critics, but still she might instead stick with her views. But what she cannot do, and yet still act reasonably, and indeed, still do philosophy, is to persist in her views “at the expense of fairmindedness, openness or self-criticism” (Sterba 1998, 10). Not to proceed in a deliberately biased manner just goes with the job, or at least with a genuine sense of one’s vocation as a philosopher and intellectual. Sterba is right in claiming that we should do philosophy in such a way that we maximize the possibility of coming up with genuinely justified views (Sterba 1998, 3-9).

Sterba not only argues that a commitment to morality is rationally acceptable — one can act rationally in acting in accordance with the moral point of view — but more than that, morality is rationally required of us. There is, he believes, no rational alternative to acting from the moral point of view. There must be some failure in rationality if a person does not act on moral principle. Hobbes’s foole is indeed a fool. It is not only immoral (or at least amoral) not to so act (or at least sincerely strive to so act), but irrational as well. I have argued at length against Kurt Baier, David Gauthier, Alan Gewirth and others that such a moral rationalism cannot be sustained. What can be sustained instead is that it is rational to be committed to the moral point of view, but it can be rational as well to be an egoist or an amoralist. Reason does not decide things here, rather, it is permissive (Nielsen 1989a; 1996a, 207-271; and 2001).

Sterba’s articulation and defence of what I shall call moral rationalism — the view that rationality requires a commitment to morality — is developed, sophisticated and original, and well aware of the pitfalls of such accounts. If he is right, it is a very important claim in moral philosophy. I am, perhaps not seeing the mote in my own eye, inclined to think that this part of his view has not been made out. Where others have failed, from Plato to Gauthier, he fails too. I wish it were my mandate to examine his account here. It is not and in setting out his relation to socialism, I shall *assume* (what I actually do not believe) that this part of his account — his morality as compromise — is basically sound and I will limit myself to examining his claim, “that even when Morality as Compromise is given the minimal interpretation of a libertarian ideal of liberty, it leads, not as libertarians claim to the practical requirements of a minimal or night-watchperson state, but to the practical requirements of a welfare state and beyond”

6 Given Rorty’s anti-representationalism and perspectivism, both of which I am partial to, how do I get off talking about telling it like it is? Since I believe that there can be no one true description of the world or a way the world is in itself, then (the claim goes) I cannot coherently talk about telling it like it is. But just as Rorty can and does speak of truth without thinking truth is correspondence, so he and I can speak of telling it like it is without believing there is a one true description of the world. Telling it like it is is having what for the time is the best justified cluster of beliefs that we can gain. And that is certainly possible. Indeed, there is nothing more compelling that we can gain. Here the ‘we’ does not refer just to Rorty and myself but to people more generally (Nielsen 1999).

(Sterba 1998, 40). I shall be particularly concerned with “the beyond,” and whether Sterba’s account leads us to socialism. If it does, then to what kind of socialism and, independently of Sterba, to a consideration of whether socialism of any kind can be sustained.

Libertarianism appears at least to have minimal practical requirements and so he reasonably starts there in articulating his theory of justice (Sterba 1998, 7). He believes that he has established that the libertarians’ ideal of liberty has the “same practical requirements as the welfare liberals’ ideal of fairness....” (Sterba 1998, 7). The claim is, despite what libertarians claim, that the same rights to welfare and equal opportunity that are usually associated with a welfare liberal ideal are actually entailed by libertarianism (Sterba 1998, 8). He further argues “that these two rights lead to something like the equality that socialists endorse” (Sterba 1998, 8).

Libertarians operate with a pared down conception of liberty and rights as negative liberties and negative rights only. Liberty is centre stage for libertarians of any sort. But it is a negative liberty. People are not free, on their account, when they are kept from doing what they want to do or are entitled to do by the *positive* actions of others. Their rights are violated when they are prevented from doing, by the positive acts of others, what they are entitled (and legitimately free) to do. They take it as a fundamental political ideal that each person should have the greatest amount of liberty commensurate with the same liberty for all. If a starving stranger to whom I owe nothing — or at least, I in libertarian terms, owe nothing — comes to my door begging for food when I have more than enough and am, in fact, enjoying a sumptuous feast, if I am a kind and charitable person I will give him something. But if I turn him away without giving him anything, I have, libertarians maintain, not wronged him. I have not violated his rights or limited his liberty or kept from him anything to which he is entitled. I have done him no wrong, though I have certainly not been kind or charitable. This remains true even if as a result of my omission he dies a few hours later. I may not make him worse off than he already is, but I am in no way *required* to aid him. Nice people, of course, will help him, but I am in no way morally required to be nice. People, of course, may contract to engage in mutual aid, but there is no antecedent duty or obligation to mutual aid.

Sterba thinks that libertarians fail to understand the logic of their own position. People in such circumstances (*e.g.*, a starving person) implicitly have legitimate claims on others, the self-understanding of libertarians to the contrary notwithstanding, given the very logic of the libertarians’ own account. Consider conflict situations between the rich and the poor where the poor, through no fault of their own, lack the goods and resources to meet even their most basic needs while the rich have more than enough goods and resources to satisfy their basic needs. Libertarians argue, as we have seen, that the rich are at liberty to ignore the poor and to use their own goods and resources to satisfy their desires for various luxuries if that is what they want to do. This liberty can be rightly enjoyed by the rich even at the expense of the poor meeting their most basic needs. Liberty, libertarians believe, always has *priority over other political ideals*. The liberty of the poor — it is claimed — is not at stake here. Nobody is depriving them of

their liberty. Nothing that is theirs is being taken from them; they are not prevented from exercising any of their own liberties. It would be a kind thing to help them, but such charitable acts cannot be morally, or otherwise, required, because the poor have not been prevented from doing anything they are free to do.

However, Sterba responds, their liberty has been affected. It is affected in this way: the poor are not free to take from the surplus of the rich what is needed to satisfy their own basic needs. Libertarians will, of course, say they have no such liberty. But on what grounds? The poor need not be appealing to a positive liberty, but only to the very same negative liberty that libertarians are appealing to; the liberty of the poor is not being treated as a “positive right to receive something but a negative right of noninterference” (Sterba 1998, 45). We have here a genuine conflict of liberties — negative liberties — between the rich and the poor. Either,

the rich should have the liberty not to be interfered with in using their surplus goods and resources for luxury purposes or ... the poor should have the liberty not to be interfered with in taking from the rich what they require to meet their basic needs. If we choose one liberty, we must reject the other. What needs to be determined, therefore, is which liberty is morally preferable: the liberty of the rich or the liberty of the poor.” (Sterba 1998, 45-46)

We could, of course, say that there is no moral resolution possible in such circumstances and we just have to fight it out. We are just faced with a naked power struggle. But that is hardly a desirable course to take if there is any reasonable resolution in sight. And, Sterba claims, there is something reasonable that can be said. We moral agents have two very fundamental principles of morality which are widely shared and are reasonable and they can be reasonably used in such conflict situations. They are: (1) the “Ought” Implies “Can” Principle and its contra-positive; (2) the Conflict Resolution Principle. (Sterba 1998, 46-48) The first principle reads,

People are not morally required to do what they lack the power to do or what would involve so great a sacrifice that it would be unreasonable to ask them to perform such an action and/or, in the case of severe conflicts of interest, unreasonable to require them to perform such an action. (Sterba 1998, 46).

The second principle reads,

What people are morally required to do is what is either reasonable to ask them to do or, in the case of severe conflicts of interest, reasonable to require them to do. (Sterba 1998, 48)⁷

The situation here — the conflict described between the rich and the poor

⁷ It seems to me plainly false to say that whatever it is reasonable to ask me to do is morally required of me. It is reasonable to ask me to have better table manners but that is not morally required of me. Only a manners fanatic would think it so.

— is an extreme conflict of interest situation and, given the above principles, it is clearly more reasonable for the rich to relinquish their liberty here than for the poor to do so. For the poor to relinquish their liberty here is to bring starvation to their door or something very close to that. We cannot reasonably expect them to do that while for the rich no such dire prospect obtains. If the conflict is resolved in the other way, the rich will lose some opportunities to acquire luxury goods, goods which they would like very much to have. But the Conflict Resolution Principle is a reasonable principle to invoke here. It requires everyone affected to accept it and it favours, in situations of the type described, the liberty of the poor over the rich. But, Sterba claims, the Conflict Resolution Principle, as well as the “Ought” Implies “Can” Principle, are principles libertarians must accept if they would be reasonable. These principles require libertarians to have moral commitments, *e.g.*, to accept negative welfare rights that they did not think they were committed to. (Sterba 1998, 49-50)

Sterba also argues that libertarians, if they think things through reasonably, will be led from purely negative welfare rights (as in considering the poor) to the richer positive liberal welfare rights espoused by welfare liberals and socialists. Sterba argues,

[I]n recognizing the legitimacy of negative welfare rights, libertarians will come to see that virtually any of their surplus possessions is likely to violate the negative rights of the poor by preventing the poor from rightfully appropriating (some part of) their surplus goods and resources. So, in order to ensure that they will not be engaging in such wrongful actions, it will be incumbent on them to set up institutions guaranteeing adequate positive welfare rights for the poor. Only then will they be able to use legitimately any remaining surplus possessions to meet their own non-basic needs (Sterba 1998, 55-56).

The reasonable thing to do, he claims, is to:

[S]et up institutions guaranteeing adequate positive welfare rights. For these reasons, recognizing negative welfare rights of the poor will ultimately lead libertarians to endorse the same sort of welfare institutions favored by welfare liberals and socialists. (Sterba 1998, 56).

Sterba extends what he says about how a reasonable libertarian would come to accept not only negative welfare rights but positive welfare rights as well to a conception of equality of opportunity (Sterba 1998, 63-64). We have a right to welfare and a right to equal opportunity, for both are required for meeting people’s basic needs and without the meeting of basic needs liberty is undermined (Sterba 1998, 64). “What these arguments show,” claims Sterba, “is that libertarianism or a libertarian conception of justice supports the same practical requirements as welfare liberalism or a welfare conception of justice” (Sterba 1998, 65).

In pursuit of Sterba’s reconciliation project, he argues that equal welfare rights and equal opportunity rights usually “associated with a welfare lib-

eral ideal lead to something like the equality that socialists endorse, once distant peoples and future generations are taken into account.” (Sterba 1998, 172-73)

Sterba has summarized his own basic argument well in the following passage:

In sum, pursuing peacemaking as a model for doing philosophy, I have argued that, not only does rationality require morality, but even a minimal morality like libertarianism requires rights to welfare and equal opportunity that lead to socialist equality and feminist androgyny. In this way, I have brought together the moral ideals of libertarianism, welfare liberalism, socialism, and feminism into what could be called a reconciliationist conception of justice. In addition, I have argued that the pursuit of this reconciliationist conception of justice, especially in its feminist dimensions, is theoretically and practically connected to the pursuit of racial justice, homosexual justice, and multicultural justice and is further constrained by specific principles of environmental justice and just war pacifism. (Sterba 1998, 174)

VI

I applaud Sterba's reconciliation project as far as it can be plausibly carried out without blurring the edges between different conceptions and positions which may well need, for the very justified view he rightly seeks, sharper articulation and differentiation. But when this sharper articulation has been carried out we may have lost our reconciliation. I further think that a good case can be made that morality — (*pace* Gauthier) the very full-bodied morality that Sterba believes is crucial for an adequate social and moral life — is in *accordance* with rationality, and that (*pace* Sterba) it is not *required* by the norms of rationality. (Nielsen 1989, 269-283) I further believe, like Rawls, that we should distinguish between reasonability and rationality. (Nielsen 1996a, 427-450; Nielsen 1998a; Rawls 1993) Sterba repeatedly makes great play with reasonability which he, unfortunately, does not clearly distinguish from rationality. His criticism of libertarianism, taken on its own terms, is that it commits us to things that are unreasonable. But in many situations — and particularly in situations where Sterba uses “reasonable” and “unreasonable” — it is itself a moral notion often meaning roughly “fair” or “impartial” and (for “unreasonable”) “unfair” or “not impartial”. There is, of course, no deriving morality from it for we are already in the moral domain. Moreover, “reasonable”, if not “essentially contested”, is a deeply contested notion. And it is not clear that in appealing to it in arguing against Hobbesian libertarians such as Jan Narveson that he has not begged the question (Sterba 1998, 72-76).

I think because of these difficulties, Sterba's reconciliationist project would be better served, particularly over distinctive moral and political matters, if he would stop trying to derive moral norms from the norms of rationality and distinguish clearly between reasonability and rationality. As well, recognizing that reasonability is itself in many of its contexts a moral notion, he should abandon what is, in effect, his ethical rationalism and uti-

lize instead a coherentist approach like that of Rawls deploying the methodology of appealing to considered convictions in wide reflective equilibrium.⁸

I do not argue this here, though I have argued for such a methodology elsewhere (Nielsen 1996a, 12-19, 159-272). To repeat what I said earlier, in what follows, I shall *assume* that Sterba is right about deriving morality from “the norms of rationality”. That indeed there are such norms, that there is nothing problematic about his appeal to reasonability and that he is right in thinking that libertarianism, properly understood, leads to welfare liberalism and *perhaps* even to something like a socialist equality.

“Perhaps” is too wishy-washy. Part of the trouble is that Sterba does not say what he means by “socialism” or “the equality that socialists endorse”. I think he is really talking about social democracy and the egalitarianism of social liberals such as Brian Barry and John Rawls. What they say is for the most part socialism friendly, but they do not endorse socialism and, though their egalitarianism is robust, it is not distinctively socialist and does not take us beyond welfare and fair-equal opportunity liberalism. Socialist equality, rightly or wrongly, is still more robust (Nielsen 1985 and 1996b; G.A. Cohen 1992, 1996 and 2000). I shall specify something of what this comes to. Beyond what Sterba argues for, though starting there, socialists want, where this can be had, not only the setting of the conditions for a genuine equal opportunity for an equal meeting of basic needs, but, as well, for the meeting of all needs. Moreover, they also desire a world where everyone will be able, as fully as possible, to satisfy the wants that they would continue to want on reflection and with a good understanding of the causes and of the consequences of their being satisfied, so long as those wants are compatible with others being able to satisfy their wants where they meet the same conditions. In short, they would want a world where everyone could satisfy those compossible wants that they as individuals would reflectively endorse. The aspiration of socialist egalitarians is for there to be a world in which it would be possible for everyone to have the best life that is possible for human beings to have. That is the equality of condition that socialists take to be a *heuristic ideal*. This goes a long way beyond, though of course it involves, a commitment to seeking an equality in the meeting of the *basic* needs for everyone.

Furthermore, we should ask what are socialist egalitarian aspirations? What are the utopian hopes of socialists? What sort of world would they ideally like to see? It is to have a world of equals — a world without any bowing and scraping — where the life of everyone matters and matters equally. We socialist egalitarians want a classless, casteless, genderless,

⁸ How, on such an approach, do we deal with libertarians? Quite shortly and bluntly. An approach which entails saying that if I let a child drown in a shallow pool when I can easily save him I have not wronged him, have not done anything that I ought not to do, can be just rejected out of hand. That we do not let a child drown whom we can easily save is a deeply engrained considered conviction (judgment) of ours that fits well in a wide reflective equilibrium. We cannot find our feet with someone who thinks we have no obligation here. For an argument that we cannot either in moral reflection or in doing moral philosophy bypass considered convictions see Nielsen 1996a, 261-272.

non-racist, non-homophobic world where an egalitarian ethos prevails (G.A. Cohen 1992 and 2000). Socialist egalitarians aspire to a world of equals, people with equal effective human rights, equal in power, equal in access to advantage, equal in whole life prospects. But they also want a world in which people have a sense of community with the common commitments that go with it. Socialist egalitarians want, as well, as far as that is possible, that well-being be something that everyone has at the highest level it is possible for them to attain. Such an egalitarian hope is not just to make the badly off well off, or, if that is not possible, to make them as close to being well off as possible, but to have a world in which there are *no badly off individuals or groups of people*, a world that is not hierarchically stratified (if that is not a pleonasm) along the lines of “the worst off”, “the next worse off”, “the middlingly situated”, “the well off”, “the better off” and “the best off”. (Nielsen 1996b) Put in political terms, socialist egalitarians are socialists and not welfare state social democrats.

In practical terms (and aside from *ideal theory*), even in the better off and more progressive of our societies (*e.g.*, Denmark, Holland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), socialist egalitarians will, *vis-à-vis* equality in such a world, opt for very much the same things that social democrats will opt for: to make the worst off strata of society as well off as they can be. We should redistribute until no further redistribution would leave the worst off better off. A socialist and social democrat underlying aim, utopian though it may be, is to create and to sustain in a world of equals: a classless, genderless, non-racist world where the necessary strata hierarchies (if such there must be) are as minimal as they possibly can be, compatible with a *reasonably* efficient ordering of society. (This is not to say that efficiency generally trumps justice, but it is to say that efficiency remains an important consideration in the proper ordering of our social world.) Most essentially, any strata differentiations that may remain or arise must not be as such as to be a source of some people having power over others. *Perhaps* that is an ideal impossible to even reasonably approximate, as the radical historian Eugene Genovese and others would insist, but, for socialist egalitarians, it is there as a heuristic.

This is the ideal for a perfectly good and just world. It is, of course, wildly utopian, but it gives us a standard against which to measure our actual societies and actual world.⁹ Our world is indeed very distant from that. In our world, to speak of global justice is such a joke as to make one want to cry and sneeringly laugh at the same time (Nielsen 1998b). Even the best of our societies (say, Sweden or Iceland) are very distant from “the socialist ideal”. But measured against its standard, Iceland and Sweden come off much better than the United States or the United Kingdom. And they, in turn, come off much better than Burma and Saudi Arabia. So the standard, however utopian, helps us in some way to guide conduct.

⁹ There are legitimate Deweyian worries here about the necessity of a means-ends continuum. I cannot pursue the issue here, but I believe Dewey’s sound sense about the entanglement of means and ends can be made compatible with what I say here. If it can’t then I have to go back to the drawing board.

Should Sterba extend his welfare-state equal opportunity liberalism to such a socialist egalitarianism? He should, for without it he cannot get, as he wishes, to a classless society, let alone a classless world that he shares with socialists in wanting. Moreover, given his commitment to moral equality (the life of everyone matters and matters equally), and to a world of equals (equal moral standing), he cannot get either without socialism for without it, as we have seen, there will be classes and power differentials rooted in the very structure of our social world. And they undermine moral equality and a commitment to a world of equals. It makes an egalitarian ethos, and the sense of community that goes with it, very hard to attain and sustain.

It might be responded that I am ignoring Sterba's "Ought" Implies "Can" Principle. If socialism is impossible, period, or impossible as a reasonable option, then the fact that a classless society or a hierarchically unstratified society cannot be achieved in a capitalist society is not a legitimate criticism of capitalism or of an egalitarian conception of justice compatible with liberal social democratic capitalism. If socialism (as Rorty, for example, believes) cannot be had, or cannot be reasonably had, it is irrational to keep going on about it. Sterba, if this criticism stands, should not endorse socialist egalitarianism.

I argue that it does not stand. This takes us back to the first part of my essay. A socialism without markets is not a feasible option, but there remain market socialist alternatives. Here we have well-worked out feasible models for market socialism — models that could be applied in existing developed societies and eventually could have worldwide application. The crucial problem, as we have seen, is not socio-economic coherence and plausibility, but baldly *political*. People in the developed capitalist societies, where it arguably could work, are not willing to give it a try; and in poor societies where people are willing to give it a try, their modes of production are not sufficiently developed to make socialism possible. But this is a weak "impossibility". For sometimes things — important big things — change very rapidly and unexpectedly. For example, think of the sudden collapse of the Soviet Empire or the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Socialism is a non-starter now, but a decade down the road, with neo-liberalism and globalization taking their toll in all sorts of ugly and really harmful ways in the First, Second and Third Worlds (though somewhat differently in these worlds), socialism may well become a reasonable possibility. This may be wishful thinking on my part, but again it may not be. There is obviously work for socialist intellectuals and activists here. (They sometimes are the same.)

Centrally, for them, it will be a matter of making clear and compelling arguments that socialism can work, that the horrible world we live in now is not inevitable and forever, and that there is an alternative that will yield the *possibility* of a decent life for everyone. Social democracy, if it can continue to exist with globalization and if it can eventually come to be applied globally, will carry us part of the way. Imagine Sweden being the world. (There are also some reasons to think that that may not be a feasible possibility. The Swedish condition of life is not causally independent of what

goes on in the rest of the world.) But, even if it is a feasible possibility, it cannot carry us all the way. It cannot give us as egalitarian and as free a social world as it is possible and desirable to have, for it cannot give us a classless society, economic as well as political democracy, and it cannot equalize power as fully as can obtain in (to be pleonastic) a democratic socialist society. (Nielsen 1985) Socialist intellectuals need to make this plain not only in the Academy but more generally. The opportunities to do this in our societies are limited, but there are enough cracks in the wall to give us some opportunities. If truth is on our side here, we, if we seize the day, if we throw ourselves into the task with vigor, integrity and all the intelligence we can muster, we can perhaps have some effect. If we have any sense of our vocation here, we must set out the case for socialism clearly, informedly, compellingly and repeatedly. It may not be spitting into the wind. And remember, we are agents and not just neutral observers, for we are involved in the very practices we describe.

To gain the thoroughly just world that we egalitarians seek we must replace capitalism with socialism. (We may do this and still not gain it, but it is a necessary condition for gaining it). A very real worry for people is over the manner of its replacement. It would, of course, be desirable if the replacement could come by the ballot box. But given the way things have gone historically, and how reasonable from *the capitalist point of view* it is to try to make them go, it is very unlikely that capitalists would so relinquish power. (Remember Chile). That means somehow toppling capitalists from power, and that means some sort of revolution.

Some people might pull back here not because they think revolution in such a circumstance is morally wrong in itself but because they fear all the death and destruction that a protracted war would bring about. The forces supporting capitalism have awesome means of control, repression and destruction and would clearly use it, if necessary, to protect their turf.

However, we must gain some perspective here. We must remember there are different revolutions. Some are short and decisive with minimal amounts of killing and destruction (Nielsen 1971 & 1977). It is also important to recognize that the military and the police are people too, capable of seeing the situation for what it is and changing sides. The rank and file and the lower ranking officers suffer like everyone else and they have people near and dear to them who suffer from repression. Why assume it is impossible for them to see through the ideology and change sides? They also know that if they act together they have a considerable amount of power.

At least two things are involved here. First, to make a clear and compelling case for an egalitarian socialist conception of justice. Sterba has nudged us in this direction and I, as has G.A. Cohen, have here tried to indicate something of what it would take to complete that task. Second, we must show that socialism is not *just* a utopian moral ideal — mere pie in the sky — but could be, and reasonably so, a way of organizing our social life. That is by far the more demanding task. I have gestured at what needs to be done, but Sterba has done nothing in this respect. He sticks close to the standard philosophical preoccupations. But without engaging in this task there can be no serious talk about socialist justice. It would be just the

self-indulgent or self-deceptive moralizing that Marx repeatedly inveighed against (Nielsen 1989b). Marx famously said, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it.” As his life’s work makes abundantly clear, he did not think we could sensibly change it — or indeed successfully change it — without understanding it. We need all the understanding we can get, but what we very much need now as well — particularly in the rich capitalist democracies — is a new revolutionary militancy.

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