

his way of obviating the "victories of an excessive relativism" was to resort to the possibility of explaining diverse views. But if 'explanation' is to be understood as legitimisation, he is no better off. The 'relativist' is perfectly prepared to admit differences of legitimisation and characterisation co-ordinate with differences in moral view.

Has Warnock any alternative ways of arousing interest in programme (c) and so, possibly, of keeping the 'relativist' at bay?

He might say that a characterisation of the particular conception of morality was interesting because that conception was in some way superior. But, independently of the actual characterisation, he has given absolutely no grounds for believing this to be true, or for thinking (if it were true) there could not be a better one.

He might say that it rested on objective grounds: that is, Warnock's beliefs about the 'human predicament' are true, whereas the tribesman's beliefs about the supernatural (for example) are not. But this would only be of interest if indeed the respective beliefs constituted an adequate explanation of the respective moral views. This Warnock has made no attempt to show.

Finally, he might say that the particular conception was interesting because it was curious. But this is like saying that I should be content with my own rationalisation of an action because the action is, after all, mine. The point is: the effort to understand and explain one's own behaviour, or views, as opposed merely to rationalising or legitimating them, may always be a prelude to (perhaps even a necessary condition of) changing them.

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The echo in the last sentence is intentional. Warnock's theme is, as he says himself, not a new one, either from the point of view of characterisation or from that of explanation. The explanation, however, need not be functionalist (which tends to legitimisation). Marx is one philosopher who took up the theme in a non-functionalist way. Nietzsche is another example. But their approach is not quietist in the way that Warnock's is - and for the very reason that it is a non-functionalist approach. For to explain a particular conception of morality which is a feature of one's own society and to explain it in a non-functionalist way, is to condemn it. To assume its functionalism is to legitimate it. Warnock has therefore, only interpreted his particular conception of morality; the point, however, may be to change it.

## Remarks on Revolutionary Perspectives

### G. A. Cohen

To be revolutionary in a capitalist society entails holding at least the following beliefs: (1) that it is both desirable and possible to abolish the wage-system, the circumstance that the majority of people live by the sale of labour-power to others who employ it in a manner alien to the interests of the sellers and their dependents; and (2) that those with a stake in the wage-system, the employers of labour, are so powerful and so well-protected by established institutions that militant methods must be used to abolish the system. These two beliefs comprise what may be called the fundamental revolutionary creed.

Among subscribers to the creed we can identify contrasting attitudes to the wage-system. Two attitudes will be distinguished in the sequel.

For one attitude, the revolution represents a rupture with all earlier human history. For the other, it represents a continuation of that history. I shall argue in favour of the second attitude.

For those who have the first attitude the condition of being a wage-labourer is just the most recent form that slavery, in a broad sense of the word, has taken in history. Other forms have been slavery proper and serfdom. The differences between these conditions are largely juridical and incidental. They do not mean that a proletarian enjoys a status superior to that imposed on members of previous labouring classes. The roles of master and men have been articulated differently, but they have remained the same in essence. The mass of mankind has always been enslaved. The object of the revolution is to abolish slavery forever.

One who embraces the second attitude will respond as follows to the above formulation of the revolutionary position.

The transition from slavery to serfdom, and from serfdom to wage-labour, entailed important accretions of dignity, freedom and welfare for the masses of the people. The series of subordinate class roles constitutes a progress, which to a significant extent has been brought about by the oppositional struggle of the people themselves. To adopt the first attitude is therefore to slur their historic achievements. It is, moreover, implausible to suppose that men who have always been complete slaves are now going to be made completely free. The best reasons for thinking that men can escape proletarianhood is that they have already escaped other conditions. To regard earlier escapes as having accomplished no substantial change is to nourish the suspicion that any future revolution will result only in the invention of yet another form of subordination.

Advocates of the second attitude, who conceive the revolution as an extension of victories already gained, face a difficult question. Why is it supposed that men can become completely free, that a society of equals without subordination is possible? Does not history teach that while it is possible to increase further the rights and liberties of ordinary men, it is gratuitous to hope for their total emancipation?

One reply to this challenge is that one need not know that complete liberation is possible in order to be a revolutionary. One need know only that more freedom than now prevails is possible, and that the ruling class is now, as ever, concerned to inhibit and arrest the growth of freedom. These things have always been true, and they have meant that struggle, sometimes involving violence, has been necessary for progress, and there is no reason to believe that they have become false. A revolutionary posture is therefore defensible even if the socialist ideal cannot be fully realised. And if it is realisable, the first step in approaching it is to increase the amount of freedom presently enjoyed. One can therefore pursue a revolutionary policy while being agnostic about the feasibility of socialism.

A different and more ambitious reply to the challenge is to argue that a relationship which has made subordination (in decreasing measure) necessary now enables the elimination of subordination. The relationship is that between human needs and the apparatus of production (technology) employed to satisfy them. When the apparatus is relatively undeveloped, men must spend the major part of their energy and time in labour. Because of the state of the apparatus in history, the types of labour men have had to perform to secure their existence have been so onerous that a class division has been necessary between those who carry out unattractive tasks and those who see to it that they do so. Improvements in the status of the labourers were made possible by developments in the apparatus which reduced the amount of drudgery required by the labour imperative, though the possibilities of improvement had to be actualised through struggle, since they always entailed an assault on the existing privileges of the supervisory class. When productive power becomes so extensive that labour need no longer be the focus of men's lives, subordination in any form becomes unnecessary. The exploitation of man by man recedes as the curse of Adam is lifted. Therefore the view that the anti-capitalist revolution continues rather than begins the emancipatory process, when combined with an explanation of that process in terms of progress in productive power, supports the hope that the revolution will not only continue the process but complete it. But the completion must await the accumulation of massive productive power which liberates men from toil. This is what Karl Marx envisaged when he insisted that abundance was an indispensable requisite of a fully socialist society. For the essence of abundance is not a maximum of goods, but a minimum of unpleasant effort required to produce a sufficiency. The bias of capitalism is to check labour-reduction and promote goods-expansion (hence planned obsolescence, feverish product-innovation, huge investments in advertising, etc) since only the latter option preserves profitability. The ruling class continues to have an interest in resisting the further extension of freedom.

I personally believe in the doctrine expounded in the last paragraph, but I should like to emphasise that the first reply, which is far more modest, suffices to render the revolutionary intellectually respectable. It is important to see that one can be a consistent revolutionary without advancing ambitious claims which are difficult to prove about the possibilities for men in society.