Marxism and morality

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You just about need a pass to piss. That ain't no joke. You raise your little hand if you want to go wee-wee. Then wait maybe half an hour 'till they find a relief-man. And they write it down every time too - cause you're supposed to do it in your time, not theirs. Try it too often and you'll get a week off.
General Motors worker

The other root cause of our present difficulties with the workforce might be termed a general lowering of employees' frustration tolerance. Many employees, particularly the younger ones, are increasingly reluctant to put up with factory conditions, despite significant improvements we've made in the physical environments in our plants.
Ford Director

(see *The Lordstown Struggle* Solidarity Pamphlet, 1974)

Marx spoke with contempt of morality, is said to have burst out laughing at the mention of the word, and claimed (in *The German Ideology*) 'The communists preach no morality at all'. Yet it is obvious that Marx knew capitalism to be a vicious social order, at best transitionally necessary, which would in favourable conditions be replaced by a better one, socialism and finally by a communist society. Most commentators have seen inconsistency here; even the orthodox have offered psychological explanations. Thus some say: 'Of course ethics is at the root of Marxism, but Marx's own bewitchment by a positivistic ideology of science led him to conceal it.' Others say: 'Of course moral principles have nothing in common with Marxist science and politics whose objective role is simply to advance the objective interests of the working class'. Still others say: 'Of course, as a science, Marxism is value-free; but Marxist *praxis* presupposes extra-empirical commitment to socialist ideals'. And so, scholastic refinements regularly emerging, the debate among professional Marxists goes on. [See Goldmann in *Radical Philosophy 1*]. But along lines indicated in this journal by Andrew Collier and Richard Norman [*Radical Philosophy 5, 6*] it is possible to see the strength and coherence of Marx's view - as far as it can be known, since he had little to say on the subject. As to its complete adequacy, however, I shall later suggest some questions and suggest what may themselves prove merely scholastic refinements. Hopefully, discussion will help me find out.

Unlike Kautsky (*Ethics and the Materialist Interpretation of History*) and Engels (at least in *Anti-Dühring*), Marx did not see 'morality' as a generic concept embracing the 'norms and values' of all societies, however different. For him, it seems, morality was an historically specific ideological institution functioning to mystify and discipline people in accordance with the oppressive and exploit-

ative needs of class society. The communist movement's outlook, by exposing this, 'shatters the basis of all morality' (*German Ideology*). To the class-conscious proletariat 'law, morality and religion are ... so many bourgeois prejudices behind which there lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests'. (*Communist Manifesto*)

But clearly, whether 'immature' or 'mature', Marx saw capitalism as an *evil* social order despite its 'progressive' aspects. In *Capital,1*, p645 he writes:

> Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage to a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows, therefore, that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low must grow worse.

Why is this attack on capitalism reconcilable with the rejection of 'the moral point of view'? Because morality is one of the (real) evils of class society, and especially of capitalist society. What is the nature of this evil?

Three idealist accounts

1   The first point I would make here is that it is not the specific content of specifically bourgeois moral ideas that is at the heart of the matter. I mean ideas about the sanctity of private property, the family and the state. Obviously Marxists are going to debunk such ideas as mystical masks over the inhuman face of capitalism. But if this were what is at issue we could simply strive to work out a system of moral principles which is free from the invidious imperatives of bourgeois society.

2   In a Kantian way, then, universalistic imperatives - 'treat no one as a means', 'tell the truth' might be suggested. But such left-liberal philanthropism assumes that, perhaps with Divine help, obedience to such imperatives would in fact serve a common good. However, whereas, unlike 'do not take what another owns', such imperatives do not have their invidious character stamped all over them, blanket obedience to them, here and now, supports oppression and deception. For to refrain on principle from harming or lying to the bosses or the State is for them to be open to exploitation - there is scant common interest; the good of the exploiters is typically the harm of the exploited. To believe the call for 'us all to make sacrifices in the interests of all' is to be ready to be played for a sucker. So is Kantian absolutism the target of Marx's attack?

3   Trotsky in *Their Morals and Ours*, makes these points and puts forward in place of Kantian principles, a set of moral imperatives supposed to be geared to revolutionary politics. He advocates, in fact, a socialist utilitarianism - advocating duties sacrifices etc subservient to the end of 'increasing the power of man over nature and

abolishing the power of man over man'. Thus what
is altered is the content of moral ideas - social-
ist principles instead of bourgeois principles.
(See also Lenin's address to the Third All-Russian
Congress of Communist Youth 1920 - an important
biblical source of Soviet Moralistianity).

But as has been indicated, Marx did not suggest
this road. Marx called the whole established notion
and practice of 'morality' into question. He regarded
it, as he regarded religion, as inherently ideological,
mystifying and repressive. In 1, 2 and 3, moral
systems are rejected in favour of others. We need
to clarify what they typically have in common.

The Bureaucrat in the Psychopath

The Dualism of Moral Theory

Moral thought characteristically rests on an assumed
'individualism' - egoism, selfishness, anti-
sociability, at the core of human nature. Morality's
function, then, is precisely to inhibit this natural
selfishness and guide us in some sort of *modus vivendi*
with 'others'. By virtue of our conscience we have
a power to regulate our naturally rampant lower self.
As Profess Peters puts it: 'A person's character
represents his own achievement, his own manner of
imposing regulation on his inclinations'. (*Ethics and
Education*, p57)

Since 'individualism' is the basic characteristic
of human beings, 'the individual' is seen as what
morality has to control. Thus the psychic split in
moral theory typically has as its secular corollary
in a split of 'Individual' and 'Society'; for it is
as 'Society's' agent that the conscience whispers to
us (it speaks louder when representing a Higher
Authority). There is evil in the world, we are to
believe, because there are un-moralised individuals
in the world - inside agitators and evil will be kept
down to the extent that these bad agents are
suppressed or caused to suppress themselves (reformed).
Thus is the social location and background of people's
lives taken for granted. At whatever level, state,
factory, party, family, the existing social order is
the implicit framework in whose official but unspoken
terms people's actions are understood and assessed -
as criminal, disruptive, disloyal, naughty or what-
ever. Thus social institutions' validity, let alone
their role in producing the sinner and his sin, is
not at issue - there are good bosses and there are
'some' bad bosses; the exceptions prove the rule that
bosses as such are all right.

Thus it is 'up to the individual' to measure up
to 'what is required' and to control himself accord-
ingly. If he is guilty of failing to do this, it
signifies a fault in him; that is, it is his fault,
and he is to blame. As the cause of his own short-
coming he must change himself so that he might deserve
a fair day's reward for a fair day's virtue. So we
have the whole voluntaristic claptrap that amounts to
a terroristic demand that people are 'responsible
[answerable] for pulling themselves up by their own
spiritual boot laces.' In other words the high tone
of moral language masks the social mobilisation of
fear, (this mobilisation becomes quite explicit in
backwoods calls to end 'permissiveness' etc where
'morality' becomes reduced to meaning external con-
formity - all that can be expected of the lower
orders.) The moralist educator says: 'the child
must be *held* responsible before he *is* responsible
so that he may come to *attain* responsibility.'
Removing the puns on 'responsibility' we might say
that the individual is punished before he understands
what is going on so that he will come to obey volunt-
arily. As Nietzsche said: 'men were treated as
'free' so that they might be judged and punished -
so that they might become guilty'. (*Twilight of the
Idols*)

We shall return to the question of what morality
'amounts to in practice' later. What I am now
emphasising is the double split that is basic to
moralistic thought: the split among people and the

split within the person. What human nature pulls
asunder it is Morality's mystical function to join
together; Morality, rational, disinterested, univers-
al, enters as a *Deus-ex-machina*, as That-Which-
Overcometh our arbitrary selfish, particularistic
defects, as a mysterious internal cement which holds
all together by holding each down. (From Kant to
Warnock this pattern is clear despite Warnock's
sound criticisms of Kantianism). Only some of the
more economistic utilitarians, Hume (to a degree),
Bentham, Paley and Baine, with their businesslike
contempt for nonsense on spiritual stilts were
consistent enough to see that if people *are* selfish,
their conscience has to be seen, not in its own
mysterious contrary-to-nature terms, but in terms
of the same selfish principle - i.e. in terms of
sanctions. Bentham himself was concerned, on behalf
of the general interest, that the masses remain un-
conscious of this, lest the morality's secret should
leak out and away. And Hume, whose discussion of
chastity should be familiar to all young ladies,
writes of the need to instil sexual 'repugnance' in
'the ductile minds of the fair sex in their infancy.'
(Treatise III, 2, xii). Bernard Harrison has por-
trayed the shamefaced egoism of other British Moral-
ists (*Radical Philosophy* 6). And from Burke to Devlin
and now Hampshire, British Letters boast an honourable
tradition of 'realists' emphasising the legal and
'constitutional', i.e. politically enforced, character
of morality - as the inner barrier, sustained by fear,
against the natural rapaciousness and/or corruptibi-
lity of the human individual. Liberals, on the other
hand, emphasising that 'enforced morality' is a
'contradiction-in-terms' (T H Green), but excepting
children from 'the principle of liberty' (J S Mill),
are precisely those who emphasise education to instil
voluntary self-subjection in the people during child-
hood. On the whole, then, the British philosophers
have done their duty; it was left to poets, such as
Blake and Lawrence, to penetrate the temple courts of
official ideology.

Critical-Critics of Moral Ideology:

'Wheels in the Head'

German moralism received its metaphysical crown from
Kant who exposed the bejewelled isolation of the moral
life: '... if none of us ever did any act of love or
charity but only kept inviolate the rights of every-
man, there would be no misery in the world except
sickness and misfortune, and other such sufferings
as do not spring from the violation of rights.'
(*Lectures on Ethics*). Kant tried to validate morality;
to do so he had to elevate the human will above the
crass sweaty causal order; to split man into a celes-
tial bureaucrat and a capricious psychopath, to
postulate an individual dignity, freedom and ration-
ality quite independent of worldly 'contingencies',
and to postulate a divine wage and penalty structure
in the afterlife.

Kant's strained dualism, highlighting the contra-
dictions in moral ideology itself, came under attack
from Hegel. In his early writings he compared the
loyal subject of the state with the conscientious
paragon of virtue: 'the former have their lord out-
side themselves, while the latter carries his lord
within himself'. Whereas morality involves a legal-
istic heteronomy, love, 'the spirit of Jesus', 'is
a spirit raised above morality.' (*Early Theological
Writings*). The young Hegelian, Max Stirner, depicted
moral precepts as 'wheels in the head'. For Stirner
morality was a secular by-product of religion - the
internalised residue of the Divine Father's command-
ments. As such its oppressiveness is greater than
overt religion since, through morality, authorit-
arian commandments 'entwine themselves all the more
inextricably with me.' 'To expel God from heaven
and to rob him of his 'transcendence' cannot yet
support a claim of victory, if thereby he
is only chased into the human breast and gifted
with indelible immanence.' (*The Ego and its Own*).
But as Marx pointed out, Stirner accepted the

abstract dualism of moralistic thought and simply asserted morality's antithesis, egoism.

It was left to Nietzsche and Freud to explore this intra-psychic subordination more deeply. Nietzsche regarded moralism, with its 'intercourse between imaginary beings' - God, the soul, the ego, the will etc, as 'mere symptomatology', the deceptive surfacing of anti-life forces deeply embedded in society. Freud largely followed this view (see, for example, 'Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness', 1908). Considered as authoritative Knower of Right and Wrong, the conscience is an illusion. Scientifically described, what we have here is an internalised, socially formed force funded by the spontaneous love and hate the little child feels for his needed but frustrating and humiliating parents. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud came to focus on basic aggressive rather than libidinal forces - aggressive competition is now 'human nature'.

> *What means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggressiveness which opposes it, to make it harmless, to get rid of it perhaps? What happens in the history of the development of the individual to render his desire for aggression innocuous? Something very remarkable which we should never have guessed but which is nevertheless quite obvious. His aggressiveness is introjected, internalised ... directed back towards his own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego, and now, which, in the form of 'conscience', is ready to put into action against the ego the same harsh aggressiveness that the ego would have liked to satisfy upon other extraneous individuals.*

Thus we 'feel' guilt and seek punishment.

Despite the criticism that Freud's 'natural' man seems peculiarly tailored to the needs of the internal sovereign, Freudian theory shatters the illusion of the autonomy of the mature conscientious man (Kant-Kohlberg) - shifting our perspective from a rationalist, voluntarist and idealist one to one which is psychopathological. The morality-compelled man relates to his fellows because he 'must'; he is estranged from them, from himself and from his activities and achievements. The unquestionable character of his conscience merely echoes the authoritarian character of the social demands he has grown up to embrace. As Marcuse says of western morality:

> *Duty, work and discipline serve as ends in themselves, no longer dependent on rational justification in terms of actual necessity. Renunciation becomes an integral part of the individual's mental household, (part of his constitution as it were) transmitted from generation to generation through education and the social climate.* (*Soviet Marxism*, p263)

Morality in this sense then, is a sort of suppression, rationalized as the necessary subjection by a higher power of what is base - whether the enemy is presented as 'the flesh', 'the self', 'the false self', 'impulses', or 'petit-bourgeois tendencies'. The moral 'must' is the individualistic form of socially inculcated demands. To act 'rightly' then, is to relate to human beings through the institutional medium of duty - the direct interactions of sympathy and antipathy will be alien to one's second nature.

Cheap Government!

The Political Economy of Bourgeois Virtue

In examining morality's critics, I have so far focused on the psychological structure of traditional morality. Generally speaking this is as far as the non-Marxist critics go. Stirner, for example, seems to have thought that sheer insight could roll the wheels out of the head. Nietzsche, though he stressed

in *The Genealogy of Morals* the social labour which produced, over time, the calculable and docile moral man, tended to divide the human race into the strong and the weak. And Freud saw neurotic guilt and repression as necessary to advanced culture.

Now Marxists, following certain vulgar remarks of their patrons, have often poured scorn on psychologism, to the extent, as Sartre says (in *The Problem of Method*), that they tend to think as if workers were born at the factory gate. But Marxists need not deny psychology; as Wilhelm Reich saw, the problem is to locate it. Thus we should examine now, although it constantly generates 'immorality', capital needs morality in the sense outlined. Further, since morality doesn't function in practice as a body of 'ideas' but as an institutionally produced structure, we should examine these institutional productive forces, especially the family and the school.

Capitalism is a repressive social system in which the mass of the people are forced to work at hard, boring, debilitating and oppressive jobs to create surplus value for the monopolists of the means of production - the capitalist class. The principal mechanism of this domination and exploitation is the market and particularly the labour-market. This necessarily functions not only to force people to offer themselves for work at a price, but to compete for work. Since this work is, in general, drudgery, this competition is, to the worker, a means of obtaining commodities whose value lies outside and in contrast to the work activity itself.

To the extent that capital dominates society, social forms of life are broken up. Co-operative relationships, patterns of reciprocity, are destroyed and commodity - relationships replace them - the cash nexus imposes itself on all activity; ('... their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them' (Marx, *Capital* Vol.I, p75). Thus capitalism divides and rules. To the extent that capital dominates, then, market-orientation is the norm - and the egoistic, envy dominated, mutually hostile, competitive personalities that go with it. Crudely, the bourgeois compete for aggrandisement, the proletarians for a 'decent' standard of existence, that is a standard in accordance with the worker's ideologically formed and 'workerist' conception of his 'worth' - 'I'm only a common old working chap'.

Capitalism involves competition and repression - dividing and ruling. It is not simply a contest among self-asserting individuals; in different ways it requires repression of the bourgeoisie as well as of the proletariat (capitalism is a structured system of relations, it is not the recurrent brain-child of a number of pig-gods). Marx emphasised the asceticism of the capitalists - they had to forego consumption, lest they squander their surplus- value, fail to invest, fail to accumulate, and go to the wall. More recently, the ambitious executive has to restlessly advance the corporation by restlessly advancing himself to rest in an early grave. And it is even more obvious that workers have to learn to submit to the 'natural' rules of the 'free' market in which their 'bargaining position' is so weak.

By its very logic capitalism generates the threat of mutual strangulation among competing capitalists and capitalist groupings and non-participation and rebellion among the exploited and oppressed. The wage system plays a key maintenance role, but clearly what is crucial is the state, as the guardian of private property, the atomiser of society whose 'common functions' it appropriates as its own speciality - in 'the general interest' - and the conflict-manager among capitalist sectors and between antagonistic classes. But schematically we can see, as Hegel did (not to mention Thrasy Machus) that the moral conscience's role (and hence moral training's role) is analogous - as the internal suppressor of untoward tendencies, as an imposer of 'lawful' pacification (hence passivity) in the soul. Thus morality, like the external state institution and in general subordination to it (and when most successful, seen as its validation and voice) represents an alienated

enforcer of community in a social order devoid of real community - an order which needs external and internal cops. (If the State is the march of God on earth, Morality is His parade on the spirit). The two aspects of moralistic *theory*'s individualism mentioned earlier are thus seen in a practical context: morality is the missionary advance party of capitalism's divide and rule attack.

Morality, then, gets its driving force from antagonistic (and literally hate-generating) relations in society, the very relations it is ordained to order. But one of its functions is precisely to conceal these social antagonisms through the ideological form of an antagonism between 'individual' and 'society' and between 'inclination' and 'duty'. It thus buries class struggle in a fog '*self*-denial' and concern for 'fair play'. ('The better off are having to make sacrifices too'). Thus moralism defines and even helps to generate the conflicts it is morality's appointed task to heal - a structural hypocrisy. In the absence of co-operative ties embedded in the very structure of relationships, centrally in the 'mode of production', the capitalist division of labour dictates specialist forces of control: 'bodies of armed men' and the scary spiritual 'voice of conscience'. Morality, then, is such a specialized alien power (for an historical study, see for example Chapter XI of Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*).

The Production of Morality: the Vanishing Hand

Morality rests on and reinforces human isolation. Social virtue is a means of avoiding a guilty conscience - the earthly wages of sin. The production of this conscientiousness, in turn, is the specific function of the family and the school, as well as the old mother church. Parents and teachers are the judges of 'acts' and the administrators of rewards for goodness and punishments for naughtiness - the conscience and the whole servile habit surrounding it is their introjected shadow. In the monogamous nuclear family, however liberal, the child is at the mercy of her family, deprived of responsibility (determining agency) or choice of friends, and denied the opportunity for full, wide and many-sided relationships with peers and older people. Thus are reinforced the isolated, anxiety-ridden, competitive character structures of the boureoisie and as well, the tamed law-aspiring proletarian. (See Vajda and Heller's 'Family Structure' in *Telos*, Spring 1971 and also Maria Rosa Della Costa's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Falling Wall Press). Isolation, egoism and submissiveness are structural consequences of the family unit. Such is its grip that even the child's anti-authoritarian rebellion is typically trapped within the family perspective, remaining 'oedipal' and lacking a wider politics; hence the family medium acts as both channel and buffer for the capitalist order.

The universal school carries on the family's general task; indeed one of its purposes was to compensate for the transmissive incapacity and unwillingness of 'many parents'. Barry Sugarman, in a recent revealing book, *The School and Moral Development* (1973), emphasises the depth-character of the school's function:

> Impulse- control and deferred gratification is
> highly institutionalized in the school, which
> therefore plays an important part in further
> developing these patterns of control in the
> children on top of the beginning which their
> families may have made. In school the pupil is
> usually required to spend most of his time sitting
> in an assigned seat, most of the time not allowed
> to talk or freely interact with his peers,
> required to wait his turn before joining in a
> discussion in the lesson, and so on. Intrinsi-
> cally attractive activities are supposed to be
> put aside in favour of others whose purpose is
> hard to see, but which are demanded by teachers.
> (p13)

The child, then, is isolated and taught to be 'good' by being taught to be 'responsible' to adult authorities as the source of evaluation and retribution. Thus the intensely anxious self-surveillance and self-preoccupation of the conscientious: (Item: a child hits and hurts her friend. Parent turns on the offending child and scolds her, ignoring meanwhile [and hence teaching the 'naughty' child to ignore - save as a signal of guilt], the distress of the other.) Moral Education takes the focus away from a direct concern with the good or harmful social consequences of actions. In what can well amount to a wholesale rat-race of virtue, children are encouraged to compete for praise. Hence they acquire a profound concern for telling tales and putting each other down. Forbidden to co-operate in school on pain of 'cheating', their budding moralism precisely takes the form of cheating or putting themselves in the right against others in order to appropriate privately the badges of goodness. Thus an uneasy self-righteousness becomes the pathetic payment, eagerly sought from their disarmers, by children deprived of real solidarity, power, or productive agency.

'The political economy of ethics is the opulence of a good conscience, of virtue etc; but how can I live virtuously if I do not live?' (1844 Manuscripts) Morality then, like the State, is part of the bourgeois market system of 'civil society'; it does not stand disinterestedly 'above it all', but operates on the same principle. Morality is a medium of social exchange, relations are mediated through it and for the specific rewards and punishments it represents; it rests on and enforces a break-down of directly motivated relations of co-operation and reciprocity. The moral man acts for the sake of a 'good conscience', not for the sake of his fellows. (In general, then, the critique of the 'superego' must entail a critique of the 'ego'.)

'Contradictions among the People':

Virtues and Limits of the 'Amoral' Perspective

This analysis, I suggest, enables us to see how Marx could scorn morality yet assail the evils of capitalism. (It is outside the scope of this paper to enquire into Marx's underrating of the superstructure in general and moralistic culture in particular.) At no time has any fact/value dichotomy been mentioned; indeed its absence has been assumed. Nonetheless, it seems to me, something is lost in the drift of what has been said so far; most immediately, it appears as if morality has been defined and objected to in excessively narrow terms - 'Kantian' terms, it might be suggested.

I have already indicated that, from a psycho-political viewpoint, I do not see such a contrast between the practical dynamics of Kantian ('deontological') and Benthamite ('teleological') morality, the differences are in their way of grounding their content, and in their *interpretation* of moral motivation - they 'interpret the world in different ways'. Nonetheless, there is a point to the objection and to doubts about handing over 'the (which?) language of morals' to the bourgeoisie. (These doubts would also hold for the accounts of Collier and Norman). For, if we start from a different point, it is possible to see 'morality' in the sense I've discussed it, as a kind of alienation or perversion of what socialists might want to call 'morality'. (Compare my 'The Statist Conception of Politics' in *Radical Philosophy 2*).

The issue here is not simply a verbal one; not even a matter of saying 'this creates a lot of verbal confusion in practice'. We have emphasised the way morality functions to batter people into acquiescing in their own oppression and impoverishment, and the way it domesticates people into a subjected kind of 'sociability'. But if we started in another way; if we began, not with the moralist's myth about 'human nature' but with the necessity for human co-operation in conditions of at least relative scarcity, we could

prevent a conception of morality as the mode of this co-operation seen in terms of good and bad. For 'scarcity' means that some human dispositions are restrained or underdeveloped; it entails 'limits', 'organization'. And it is possible, it seems to me to understand this, and the 'contradictions among the people' connected with it, even in conditions of communism in terms acceptable to socialists and libertarians (Compare Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*), so that the critic of Morality is not left helplessly mouthing platitudes about the natural goodness of man in opposition to the misanthropy of the Moralists.

To talk of morality in this 'non-moralistic' sense, it seems to me, would not be to talk, in terms of a 'higher power' controlling our inclinations etc (and this model includes I think the 'true' and 'false' self that Richard Norman was inclined to counterpose). Rather it would be to talk in terms of the relations *among* our activities ('inclinations'/ 'impulses'/'passions'/'dispositions') as embodied in, formed and 'disciplined' by our way of life. Thus, for example, 'restraint' would be understood simply, not as the actions of a 'higher' being on another but as the 'blocking' of one activity by another stronger tendency with which it is incompatible. And 'socialist restraint' - and even 'communist restraint', would be, very crudely and generally, the preponderance of communal productive loving and communicative motives over divisive, *including moralistic!* ones. But in any case we would not be out to reduce all conflict to a 'society versus individual' model, recognizing all kinds of conflicts at all levels, some 'antagonistic', some not.

We may then need a radical-materialist 'conception of morality'. And if we are to get beyond a moralistic philosophy, we have to make sense of the sorts of activity that moralism mystifies. (I would suggest, for example, that in Bernard Harrison's illuminating article 'Fielding and the Moralists' in *Radical Philosophy 6*, we get no social critique of what seems to me Fielding's very nativist and individualistic moral theory, a theory which is therefore trapped within the moralists' frame of reference) In this attempt I rely heavily on John Anderson's philosophy, especially 'Determinism and Ethics', 1928 (in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*).

In *The German Ideology* Marx writes, 'This mode of production ... is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce'. (p42, Arthur's Edition).

Forms of social life can be ethically, or if you like 'morally', characterized; they can be, for example, co-operative or divisive and exploitative, free of compulsive/authoritarian/oppressive, open-hearted or envy-ridden, communicative or repressive. And generally we can argue that there are disjunctions between good and bad ways of living. Moreover, these terms point to characteristics of our ways of life that are 'independent of the individual will'; or rather they characterize our individual wills and can be contrasted with the way we see ourselves and 'resolve' to be (with idealist, rationalist and voluntarist ideology). Thus for example, Marx stresses the viciousness of the bourgeois life and hence of bourgeois people, especially in *The Holy Family*. But it is not merely a quibble to question whether he is 'moralising'. For Marx's critique realistically locates these vices in a different way from the upside-down perspective of the moralist; and so it is also for Marx's beliefs about the brotherhood and class solidarity that he saw as developing in the proletariat.

The materialist view of this is well outlined in Marx's famous description of the French peasants in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*. He locates their mean reactionary and authoritarian narrowness in their constricted form of agriculture. A form whose stagnation their 'morality' in turn reinforced.

Returning to the earlier remarks about the function of morality in class society, I think it is now easier to see their one-sidedness. For in stressing the *official* morality and *its* hidden meaning, we did not bring out the kinds of conflicting forces it is opposing. Even in the best regulated nations the dominant order is threatened; and official morality is itself one mark of that threat. The oppressed associate, organize and resist. Certainly, as is so clear in the case of trade unions, these organizations can incorporate precisely what the oppressed classes are up against - thus the puritan politics of 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work'. But people organize at a more spontaneous level, on the job and in the neighbourhoods, through the experience of common suffering and resistance rarely glimpsed or understood by the bourgeoisie (see G A Cohen's 'Bourgeois and Proletarians' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* for a discussion of Marx's treatment of this). No wonder the bourgeois paternalists are so concerned to rescue the decent individual workers from mob rule (when, that is, they aren't concerned to rescue the moderate majority from the few 'politically motivated' extremists!). Nor are the even best regulated families or schools the seamless moral webs they are sometimes held to be. To the extent, for example, that there are affectionate and communicative relations within the nuclear family - positive 'moral education' goes on through the informal medium of sympathy and example - as for instance when the child is aware of 'something wrong' between her officially 'happy' parents and seeks to understand it and intervene. As for example when the child becomes aware of the gap between her parents' sermons and their actual way of living. And since similar bonds develop in the school the same can be said. But in both cases and especially in the latter, the fact that children develop active relations with each other (especially hard with the more circumscribed and controlled bourgeois family) independent of and often critical of adult hegemony, means that direct social experience evolves a more or less autonomous (but often more or less compensatory) 'morality' - and one which the herdsmen of Big-M Morality with their divide and rule onslaught on 'bad company' etc have to contain and crush. (Ironically, this preoccupation with breaking up groups sits uneasily with the official theory of the need to 'socialize' 'the individual'). This 'problem' is especially great in working-class schools where more and more kids are refusing to accept the rules of a competitive game in which they have to play the role of the failures, the losers. And it is no longer an easy task to raise pillars of society among the children of the 'upper' classes, the moral blinkers of both capitalism's 'heroic' period and its 'corporate team' period having been jolted loose as students consider alternatives to the lonely obedience-career path their parents and teachers have sweated to lay down.

We are told 'we' are going to have to tighten our belts and roll up our sleeves for Britain. The working class, like the miners after the war, are being informed of 'their' social contract with the labour government. 'You've never had it so good' and 'Swinging London' are in the record library. But it was the post war consumer boom and the consequent erosion of the 'die now live later' philosophy of the moralists of bourgeois scarcity that played a crucial role in undermining working class quiescence and law and order among 'the young'. (For a prophetic discussion of this, see Marcuse's 'On Hedonism' in *Negations*). Now the ruling class needs to cut back living standards and reassert control precisely at a period when the British masses' aspirations in all directions are higher than ever. It is certain in this situation that Morality is going to be re-charged for an assault, into the homes and into the schools. It seems to me important that socialists confront this and do not repeat the economistic-moralistic errors which Reich attacked in the '30s.

The dominant 'moderate' 'modest' and 'moral' culture of British society is an insurance policy

great faith in the power of education as a liberating
force as opposed to an agent of domestication.
However, to achieve this end, the dispossessed
require their own pedagogy. It is through such
suggestions and through positing other models of
teaching and learning that Freire advances radical
alternatives to existing narrative forms of educa-
tion. His thesis may indeed be interpreted as
utopian. However, those who reject Freire's perspec-
tive in that it is naive and unrealistic, might
perhaps consider the substance of the nature and
faith upon which their own optimism and idealism
rests. For to argue that his views are acceptable in
theory but not in practice is to admit one's own
failure to exercise control over such relationships.

Notes

My thanks to Edwine Connell for her help in preparing
this paper.

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Sellers

Cont. from page 15

against economic breakdown; a warranty that everything
precious will be looked after for the future. A
revolutionary oppositionist culture is necessary,
not in the sense of a number of subscribers to New
Left Books or Radical Philosophy, but in the sense of
a materially subversive movement with positive open
bonds of socialist friendship and solidarity. For
this reason at least, it seems to me very important
that the left does not over the coming period go right
over to an exclusive and opportunistic preoccupation
with wages, but promotes, develops and spreads
socialist *forms* of struggle, forms which already
have an obvious 'spontaneous' basis. After all, the
mere erosion of bourgeois morality is compatible with
lumpen cynicism - a passive precondition of fascism.