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4

Socialism

Hegel, historicism, and holism

There is, of course, another important tradition within political modernity: the tradition of socialism.¹ Just as liberalism developed in opposition to feudalism, modern socialism developed in opposition to capitalism. As Peter Self notes, “Both liberalism and socialism combined potent critiques of the existing socio-economic order with blueprints for a desirable future society. However, liberalism provides a rather more coherent body of thought than does socialism, and its theories are linked with the emergence of a dominant system combining capitalism and liberal democracy.”² *Pace* Self, we have already seen that liberalism is not so much a coherent body of thought or comprehensive doctrine as it is a broad confluence of interrelated metaphysical, moral, political, and economic ideas and concepts. We might restate Self’s basic point by noting that socialism is a somewhat messier and more muddled confluence of ideas which, unlike liberalism, has failed to manifest itself concretely in a large-scale and far-reaching socioeconomic order. (Putting aside the question of whether China or the former Soviet Union represent “authentic” socialist societies, communism has failed to spread over large parts of the globe in the way that liberal capitalism has.) Moreover, if liberalism is primarily a political doctrine with strong historical ties to capitalism, socialism, in contrast, is primarily a socioeconomic doctrine whose strongest historical ties have been to various social movements rather than to governments. This explains in large part why socialism provides a less cohesive body of ideas than liberalism.

All such caveats aside, we can claim with certainty that modern socialism emerged only slightly later than liberalism in the early nineteenth century, and that, like liberalism, it developed from a complicated array of historical precursors, some of them thousands of years old. We have already seen that certain Stoics, Cynics and various other ancient philosophers held identifiably socialist beliefs.³ According to others, the same is true of certain

ancient sects of Judaism (e.g., the Essenes) and of the early Christian church generally.⁴ The common thread uniting these and other protosocialisms is their endorsement of communal or public ownership of land, material resources, and other forms of property.

The aims of modern socialism were quite a bit more complicated, emerging as it did in more or less direct response to the Industrial Revolution and the concomitant development of a new class structure in Europe. Oddly enough, however, the earliest socialists appeared not in England, the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, but in France, where industrialization emerged somewhat later and at a slower pace.⁵ They included members of the extreme left wing of the French Revolution such as Maréchal (1750–1803), Babeuf (1760–1794), and Buonarrotti (1761–1837), all of whom distinguished themselves by advocating radical social and economic egalitarianism.⁶ As Buonarrotti writes:

What passed in France immediately after the creation of the Republic, is, in my view, only the explosion of that discord, which ever exists between the partisans of opulence and distinctions on the one hand, and the friends of equality, or the numerous class of laborers, on the other. By tracing the stream higher up, we shall find the source of the discussions which took place at that epoch, in the English doctrine of the economists, on the one side, and in that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mably, and other modern philosophers on the other . . . Rousseau proclaimed the inalienable rights of human nature. He pleaded for all mankind without distinction. He placed the prosperity of society in the happiness of each of its members, and its strength in the attachment of all to the laws . . . This social order of Rousseau is the same for which all true philosophers have sighed from time immemorial, and has had illustrious advocates in all ages, as, for example, in ancient days, Minos, Plato, Lycurgus, and the lawgiver of the Christians (Jesus Christ); and in modern times, Thomas More, Montesquieu, and Mably. The system of the economists has been named the ORDER OF EGOISM, or the ARISTOCRATIC SYSTEM [By this denomination is meant to be expressed that in this system, the only spring to sentiments and actions is the selfish one of mere personal interest, without any regard whatever to the general good] That of Rousseau—the ORDER OF EQUALITY.⁷

Partisans of the Rousseauian “Order of Equality” such as Babeuf and Buonarrotti referred to themselves as communists, as the term “socialism” did not come into general use in France and England until the 1830s. Unlike bourgeois liberals—who, in the words of Maréchal, merely desired “equality in law”—the communists sought “real equality . . . the COMMON GOOD or the COMMUNITY OF GOODS” [i.e., the abolition of private property].⁸ In France Babeuf’s and Buonarrotti’s ideas were inherited and refined by

Cabet (1788–1856) who formulated communism as “a revolutionary creed that specifically aims at the overthrow of ‘bourgeois’ institutions and the transfer of power to the industrial proletariat,” and by Blanqui (1805–1881) who created the first political organization (the *Société des Saisons*) that can be termed “communist” in the aforementioned sense.⁹

Though the early French socialists differed from their liberal counterparts on the issues of economic and social equality, they tended to share, or at least presuppose, the same set of core metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical presuppositions, including the notion of an external, mind-independent reality; the representational model of consciousness; the concept of atomic individuality; the autonomy and universality of reason; and so forth. The first sustained challenges to these doctrines came not from France but from Germany, where they were subjected to severe criticism by post-Kantian Idealists such as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Schleiermacher. In their place, the Idealists advanced various theories that emphasized the priority of subject over object, creation over representation, sociality over individuality, and history over abstraction. The example of Hegel is especially illustrative here.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the actualization of consciousness or spirit in a community involves two components: (a) the dialectic of *reciprocal recognition*, whereby self-conscious beings recognize each other as self-conscious; and (b) an “ethical substance,” which is shared in common by self-conscious beings.¹⁰ These components are symbiotic: ethical substance is constituted by the reciprocal recognition of self-conscious beings, and reciprocal recognition by self-conscious beings is made possible by their sharing ethical substance:

Reason appears here as the fluent universal substance, as unchangeable simple thinghood which yet breaks up into many entirely independent beings, just as light bursts asunder into stars as innumerable luminous points, each giving light on its own account, and whose absolute self-existence is dissolved, not merely implicitly, but explicitly for themselves, within the simple independent substance. They are conscious within themselves of being these individual independent beings through the fact that they surrender and sacrifice their particular individuality, and that this universal substance is their soul and essence—as this universal again is the action of themselves as individuals, and is the work and product of their own activity.¹¹

The shared ethical substance of self-conscious beings is none other than spirit itself, which Hegel defines as the “I that is We and We that is I.”¹² Reciprocal recognition, in turn, is the process “of directly apprehending complete unity with another in his independence: of having for my object an other in the fashion of a ‘thing’ found detached and apart from me, and the negative of myself, and of taking this as my own self-existence.”¹³

Reciprocal recognition originates in the primordial encounter of self and Other in the master–slave dialectic, wherein the slave recognizes the master as the master (i.e., as someone who has authority over him), but neither the slave nor the master recognizes himself in the other. This is because one is dependent and the other is independent. But for Hegel, self-consciousness desires something identical to itself, and it is this desire that prompts the coming together of self-conscious beings. The “coming together” that results from the realization of self-conscious reason is what Hegel calls *Volk* (a people or nation).¹⁴ The people express their reciprocal recognition and shared ethical substance through laws and customs, which in turn are the “language” through which absolute spirit “speaks.”¹⁵ In this way law and custom are actualizations of the ethical spirit of a people.

As Paul Franco notes, “at the present stage of the *Phenomenology* . . . Hegel insists that the ethical life of a people constitutes only the immediate form of spirit. The ethical disposition is one that is governed by unmediated custom and habit; for it the laws simply *are*, eternal and unquestionable.”¹⁶ In this immediate stage, spirit appears as pure facticity or being in-itself; it has not yet achieved self-consciousness as a free and self-determining subjectivity or being for-itself. Thus spirit must progress through shapes of consciousness to know itself for what it is immediately.¹⁷ The section entitled “Spirit” provides a map of spirit’s movement from customary ethical life to self-consciousness.

To survey the entire terrain of this section would take us well beyond the scope of this chapter. For our purposes, I need only note a few of its more important topographic features. In general, Hegel is now interested in historicopolitical “shapes of the world” rather than mere “shapes of consciousness,”¹⁸ beginning with the immediacy of facticity (the in-itself of consciousness) in the Greek *polis* and ending with the mediation of facticity by subjectivity (the for-itself) in the modern world. Hegel analyzes Greek ethical life through a consideration of tragedy, and this along two axes: (a) human law, which corresponds to the nation or body politic; and (b) divine law, which corresponds to the family and its ancestral cult. Within this ethical order, as Hegel notes, there is initially an “antagonism” between the family (understood here as wife/husband/child) and the nation.¹⁹ Ultimately, however, the family “has its enduring basis in the nation” because the reciprocal recognition shared among members of a family can only be maintained and vouchsafed through the recognition of the ethical community at large (i.e., by having legal status).²⁰

As the dialectical progression continues, however, subjective reflection, language, and culture eclipse primitive legal status as the principal vehicles of self-consciousness. Through speech and expression, and by extension Socratic philosophy, an individual self-consciousness comes into being *for others* and in this way becomes universal: “It is its own knowing of itself, and its knowing of itself as a self that has passed over into another self that

has been perceived and is universal.”²¹ Primitive legal status gives way to the “more profound and inward notion of the human ‘subject’”—that is, the self’s recognition of its subjectivity and independence in culture as for-itself—the result is self-alienation. It is no longer natural but universal and abstract.²² This process of self-alienation and self-cultivation continues in the period leading up to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Moving from the fall of the ancient world to the rise of modernity,²³ we find in the latter “the culmination of this process of self-alienation and self-cultivation . . . under the supremely alienating sway of wealth.”²⁴ As subjectivity shifts from expression through political loyalty to economic dependence, “all stability and substance vanish” giving way to “a common thing, a plaything of whims, an accident of caprice.”²⁵ Pure culture, as expressed in the world of wealth, is the apex of alienation. It is a “disrupted condition” of the most egregious sort, insofar as subjectivity is now at its furthest distance from substance.²⁶

In the world of the self-estranged spirit and alienated culture (the background, as Merold Westphal notes, of the old modernity),²⁷ consciousness becomes aware of its alienation and, by extension, of the futility of political and economic reality. Two strategies develop in an attempt to transcend this alienation: faith and Enlightenment. Modern faith is, in the first instance, directed toward the ethereal realm of pure consciousness that lies beyond the pale of alienated culture.²⁸ It seeks to transcend the pure insight of alienated culture—the critical, negative, contentless, universalized, teleological, and utilitarian rationality of Enlightenment (what Buonarotti calls “The Order of Egoism”).²⁹ The anguish of medieval unhappy consciousness is absent in this conception because faith has become a mere projection of anthropomorphized picture content onto the spiritual world; the absolute becomes “real” in an instantaneous and unproblematic fashion by taking on the appearance of unessential being.³⁰ Yet this projection, since it arises from alienated culture, carries with it the contentless negativity of culture (i.e., pure insight) into the spiritual world, which in turn destroys the iconographic content of that world.³¹ Transcendence, in this way, is once again thwarted.

Faith is the god-haunted darkness which Enlightenment seeks to illumine. But since pure insight is the totalization of negativity, Enlightenment is shown to have no “light” (i.e., content) of its own; rather, it appropriates the content of faith solely for the purpose of destroying it.³² The problem of estrangement is overcome by rendering the absolute an unknowable and featureless “void,” which in turn negates any possibility of movement toward it.³³ Since “the nothingness that transcends pure sense” is just that—nothing—all that remains is the individual and his principal mode of awareness, namely, sense perception, the objects of which are known absolutely.

Between the predicateless absolute being of Enlightenment deism and the meaningless physical reality of Enlightenment materialism is utility—the

relegation of meaning to purely human aims and interests. Reality is reduced to the for-itself as self-consciousness enjoys “certainty of its individual self” in thorough and penetrating insight fixed upon the useful object”.³⁴ But utility is a relative concept; there is no necessary connection between my being-for-self and the being-for-other of useful objects. The only way to overcome this last vestige of objectivity is for the self to view everything as product or creation of its own will—and this is what Hegel means by “absolute freedom.”³⁵

The doctrine of absolute freedom is concretely manifested in the French Revolution, wherein every act of government is a product of the general will (or self-conscious decision of each individual).³⁶ As a result, the compartmentalization of ethical life into different socioeconomic classes dissolves: “In this absolute freedom, therefore, all social groups or classes which are the spiritual spheres into which the whole is articulated are abolished; the individual consciousness that belonged to any such sphere, and willed and fulfilled itself in it, has put aside its limitation; its purpose is the general purpose, its language universal law.”³⁷ The work of government, however, requires functional differentiation (e.g., a division of powers) even within a single state entity. Consequently, the absolutely free individual consciousness is merely represented; it is alienated from its own expression of will in the state and is thus unable to “achieve anything positive . . . either of laws and general institutions of conscious freedom, or of a freedom that wills them.”³⁸ As Franco notes, “unable to produce a positive work or deed, the only thing left for the individual consciousness characterized by absolute freedom is ‘negative action’ and the ‘fury of destruction.’”³⁹ This is the origin of the Reign of Terror, wherein the will of absolute freedom turns against itself, or rather the part of itself that is outside absolute freedom: its “abstract existence as such” within the revolutionary government.

This is Hegel’s last mention of politics in *Phenomenology*. Instead of providing an analysis of the rational state in the aftermath of the revolution, he instead discusses morality, religion, and finally absolute knowledge. In the section on morality, or “self-certain spirit,” Hegel focuses on the final shape consciousness takes before attaining absolute knowledge; in this shape, consciousness is now absolutely free and has no other object beyond its own subjective self-certainty.⁴⁰ It is manifested concretely in the “moral view of the world” articulated by Kant and Fichte,⁴¹ as well as the concept of “conscience,” which appears in the idealism of the German Romantics. Hegel’s criticism of the Kantian notion of duty, which turns on what he sees as a “dualism” between “morality and nature, duty and inclination,” is reiterated later in the *Philosophy of Right* (see below). In the Romantic notion of conscience, this dualism is overcome; the empty indeterminacy of abstract duty is no longer opposed to the reality of self, having been filled with the immediate content of contingent, individual selfhood. But this merely trades one form of indeterminacy for another. For in conscience the

content of will is now determined “by the caprice of the individual and the contingency of his unconscious natural being.”⁴² Any action can be justified relative to the subjective interests, desires, or convictions of the individual. As Franco helpfully explains, “What some might regard as violence and wrongdoing in the acquisition of property, others might justify in terms of the duty to provide for the support of oneself and one’s family.”⁴³ Conscience collapses into a pernicious relativism.

At the same time, the conscientious will is universal in its desire to be recognized by others. That is, in acting we want others to acknowledge and understand the reasons and intentions underlying our actions. Language is the mechanism by which this explanation or confession is brought about:

It is only by supplementing an action with language, commenting on it, explaining it, that the disparity between the objective deed and the conscientious intention that lies behind it can be overcome. In this way, conscience leads to a “community of consciences,” the “spirit of substance” of which is the “mutual assurance of their conscientiousness, good intentions, the rejoicing over this mutual purity, and the refreshing of themselves in the glory of knowing and uttering, of cherishing and fostering, such an excellent state of affairs.”⁴⁴

Conscience thereby leads to an emphasis on talk over action, as the “beautiful soul” shuns the finitude, particularity, and impurity of the latter in favor of the universality and purity of the former. It condemns as evil or selfish the concrete action of active conscience, but only by focusing narrowly on what is finite, particular, and self-interested in it. By confessing its guilt, active conscience causes the beautiful soul to recognize the necessity of concrete action and the error of ascetic flight from the world, and the beautiful soul forgives active conscience in turn. In this way are the universal and the particular reconciled within self-certain consciousness.⁴⁵

Much more could be said about the *Phenomenology*, but the foregoing is sufficient to illustrate Hegel’s radical critique of Enlightenment representationalism, individualism, and rationalism which, interestingly, fell prey to a number of rival and mutually exclusive political interpretations following his death in 1831.⁴⁶ As Shlomo Avineri points out, “[A]lmost every shade of political philosophy has had protagonists claiming to state its case in what they considered to be a legitimate interpretation or derivative of Hegelianism.”⁴⁷ An early example of this phenomenon is the conflict between the so-called Left (or “Young”) Hegelians and the Right (or “Old”) Hegelians in the 1840s. Whereas the latter group generally regarded Hegel as an orthodox Christian and a loyal Prussian patriot, the latter tended to view him as a bourgeois reactionary.⁴⁸ Contemporary discussions of Hegel’s theory are in many respects mere continuations of this conflict. For example, some modern commentators, following the Right Hegelians, view

Hegel as a monarchist, authoritarian, and/or crypto-fascist who believed, among other things, that Prussia in the 1830s was the actualization of the Ideal State.⁴⁹ Others, following certain Left Hegelians (e.g., Bruno Bauer) see Hegel as a “philosopher of freedom” whose system laid the groundwork for the radical philosophical tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵⁰

Perhaps such disagreements are simply a consequence of the “difficulty” of interpreting Hegel. But there are other possibilities as well. For example, it might be the case that Hegel developed a series of distinct and (more or less) incongruous theories of the state rather than a single, uniform theory. Hegel’s mature political philosophy is developed almost entirely in his later writings, most notably in the *Philosophy of Right*, and it is possible that these later writings abandon some or all of the ideas outlined in earlier works such as the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Another possibility is that Hegel intended to develop a single, uniform theory of the state—such that all the ideas contained in his earlier works are, by his own lights at least, consistent with those of later works—but failed because the theory is somehow internally inconsistent or self-contradictory.

We need not concern ourselves with the specific details of Hegel’s system. It is enough to note that Hegel’s “rational” state—the living embodiment of absolute spirit—has private property, police, a class system, a bureaucratic government apparatus, a monarch—in short, many if not most of the characteristics of a prerevolutionary feudal kingdom. It is arguably for this reason that Hegel is seldom regarded as either a liberal or a socialist but rather as a kind of authoritarian or even a “protofascist.” Why, then, is Hegel such an important figure in the history of socialism? The answer is twofold. First, Hegel is one of the first modern philosophers to champion holism against the reigning orthodoxy of liberal individualism. In Hegel’s view, human communities have interests that transcend, or at least are not strictly reducible, to the interests of abstract, atomized individuals. Furthermore, all fundamental human goods and values, including those by which political practices and institutions are morally judged, are essentially social in nature. Hegel agrees with Kant that an autonomous individual wills her own freedom, but further claims that freedom is only realized in an ethical community—that is, a community of free, self-conscious individuals all of whom recognize each other as such. As such, he rejects both the personalism and atomism that characterizes much of the liberal tradition.

Second, Hegel is one of the first modern philosophers to analyze philosophical and scientific concepts through the lens of history. For Hegel, individual consciousness is an epiphenomenon of social consciousness, which is in turn an expression of the dialectical movement of spirit through history. This entails, in essence, that world-historical events must be interpreted through the lens of science and philosophy and, by extension, that science

and philosophy must be practiced through the lens of historical activity—in other words, that theory and practice form an inseparable dialectical unity (an idea that captured the imaginations of the Young Hegelians). To be sure, the *Philosophy of Right* departs from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in its suggestion that a hierarchical, centralized, and coercive system of right, which constitutes the institutional realization of the state, is a world historical necessity for the realization of freedom. The purpose of this system, however, is to enumerate the theoretical possibilities—the range of possible actions and historical potentials which are optimally conducive to reciprocal-recognition and thus to living freely. Individuals' shared desire to live freely through reciprocal recognition is therefore expressed as a kind of "general will" in the system of right. It is general in the sense that it wills both individual freedom and social freedom, where the former can only be achieved through the latter and vice versa. Just as socialism draws upon Rousseau's radical egalitarianism without sharing his pessimistic view of society, so too does socialism endorse Hegel's fundamentally social and historical conception of freedom without sharing his views on private property (*inter alia*).

The social conception of human nature

Unlike liberalism, socialism ascribes enormous value to real as opposed to *ex hypothesi* political and socioeconomic equality. Furthermore, it tends to endorse a fundamentally social conception of human nature and, by extension, a holistic view of human society. Individual natures and interests are inexorably linked to and shaped by social or communal life; what is more, the interests of the social whole are not reducible to the interests of abstract, atomic individuals in a hypothetical state of nature. (Socialism therefore vigorously denies Margaret Thatcher's infamous claim that there are no such things as societies because only individuals are real.⁵¹) Early socialists, taking their cue variously from Rousseau and Hegel, think of subjectivity as something always and already shaped, though not necessarily constructed, by sociolinguistic forces.

Characteristics such as "rationality," "self-interest," and "autonomy" are historically situated and do not attach themselves ready-made to human individuals. This is not necessarily to say that human beings are not naturally rational or self-interested or free, or that such characteristics differ substantially among individuals belonging to different societies. The point is that all such human characteristics, dispositions, and capacities are fundamentally social—that is, they can only be realized and cultivated in society. Consequently, society plays a role in determining what it means to be rational or free in practice as well as the relative value ascribed to such characteristics in particular social contexts. An individual will be more or less "self-interested," "acquisitive," "egoistic," and so forth, depending on

the extent to which such characteristics are promoted or discouraged by her community.

As Self notes, however, “The socialist tendency is towards the assumption of “moral man in immoral society” rather than its reverse, and consequently carries the expectation that basic institutional reform can release beneficial human energies.”⁵² Although the early socialists criticized liberalism for representing human beings as essentially selfish and competitive, this is not because they regarded human beings as essentially altruistic and cooperative. On the contrary, as Self points out, the socialists emphasized human beings’ *capacity* to be altruistic and cooperative provided that certain social preconditions are met. This is quite different, obviously, from postulating that human beings are naturally and essentially X and deducing from said postulate that social existence is naturally and essentially Y. For the early socialists, this is precisely what liberals such as Locke attempt to do, and it is one of their foremost errors.

The early socialists also tend to ascribe “equal moral worth,” “equal moral capacity,” and “equal entitlement to consideration” to each individual. As we have seen, liberals generally concur with this ascription, at least at the level of human nature itself. Locke, for instance, agrees that human beings have an equal moral worth in view of their equal right to life, liberty, and property. The difference is that for liberals equality of rights does not entail “equality of outcomes.” Classical liberals will tolerate gross inequalities of income and wealth as long as they are viewed as a natural consequence of the free market. Modern liberals might endorse certain political measures intended to lessen the gap between rich and poor, but they have not generally advocated large-scale redistributions of wealth, let alone the wholesale rejection of private property, in order to achieve total socioeconomic equality. Socialists, on the other hand, have consistently argued that equality means nothing if it is not actualized in real-world socioeconomic relations where this has typically been taken to mean the abolition of private property in some form or other.

Although I will examine Marx in greater detail below, the Marxian view of human nature is worth discussing in brief detail here, if only because it differs from, and is quite a bit more complicated than, other socialists’ conceptions of human nature.⁵³ In the sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx states that:

Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence is hence obliged:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment regarded by itself, and to presuppose an abstract— isolated—human individual.

2. The essence therefore can by him only be regarded as “species,” as an inner “dumb” generality which unites many individuals only in a natural way.⁵⁴

Here Marx seems to suggest that human nature is not an abstract “essence” (*Wesen*) that expresses itself in each individual, but rather the product of social relations. Elsewhere he claims human nature is “modified in each historical epoch”⁵⁵ and that “as individuals express their lives, so they are; hence what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production.”⁵⁶ Along the same lines Marx inveighs against the liberal tendency to transform certain social forms arising from a given mode of production into “eternal laws of nature and reason.”⁵⁷

In all of this Marx affirms the basic ideas of social holism discussed previously, chief among them the notion that human nature is inexorably social and that socioeconomic conditions influence, if not altogether determine, the nature of human beings within a particular social form. At the same time, however, Marx often speaks of a transhistorical human nature understood as the “totality of needs and drives which exert a force” upon human beings *qua* human beings.⁵⁸ Marx’s philosophical anthropology may be understood as an attempt to account for the basic needs, drives, instincts, functions, and so forth, of human beings and to explain how human beings satisfy, develop, and act upon them.⁵⁹ Ultimately, he argues that humans have a “species-being” (*Gattungswesen*), an innate capacity to engage in purposive, self-conscious activity directed toward the production of the social environment as well as of individual forms of life.⁶⁰

The object of human activity is therefore species-being itself, not only insofar as we seek to express our species-being through self-activity (making our own lives the objects of our activity), but also insofar as we seek to improve the life of the human species in general.⁶¹ (Here again we can see how Marx dialectically relates individual life with social life.) Labor is an important, albeit intermediate, aspect of our drive toward self-actualization. The idea that capitalism estranges our labor from our drive toward self-actualization is one of the fundamental elements of the Marxist critique.

Morality versus science

As men of the Revolution, early French communists such as Babeuf and Buanarotti conceived of communism as being first and foremost an *ethical* doctrine with various political, social, and economic ramifications.⁶² The same is true of Cabet’s later theoretical formulation of communism as well Blanqui’s theory of revolutionary praxis. Taking their cue from Rousseau and kindred thinkers, the early communists conceived the ethical content of communism in terms of rights—chief among them, the rights to life and

liberty. What distinguished them from contemporary liberals was their insistence that (a) rights cannot rely upon a conception of abstract, egoistic individuality and (b) that equality, far from being an abstract property of natural rights, is itself a political and socioeconomic right—indeed, the most important right of all, insofar as equality is necessary for the protection and promotion of life and liberty.

Considered as a basic good or value, however, radical equality of this sort is not something that can be merely “honored” as a right; on the contrary, it must be actively promoted as an end. As such, most of the major non-Marxist schools of socialism throughout the nineteenth century tended to endorse teleological conceptions of normativity. All such theories shared in common the idea that social justice—understood as the realization of the greatest possible maximization of both liberty and equality—was the fundamental goal of political practices and institutions as well as the moral benchmark according to which all such practices and institutions are to be judged. (Certain schools of social democratic theory constitute a qualified exception inasmuch as they placed greater emphasis on the protection of individual rights as a safeguard against state-sponsored tyranny.)

Nineteenth-century Marxism took great pains to differentiate itself from other forms of socialism on the question of ethics.⁶³ As a self-described “scientific” doctrine, Marxism attempted to ground its critique of bourgeois society in empirical observation and historical analysis rather than on ethical suppositions.⁶⁴ Marx himself tended to dismiss morality, along with law and religion, as “bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.”⁶⁵ Much of his opprobrium is directed specifically against what Marx called the “pompous catalogue of human rights,” which serves to conceal the true motivation for liberal reforms (the appeasement of the proletariat and the suppression of revolutionary agitation).⁶⁶ Nonetheless, it is clear that scientific Marxism, like Machiavellian political theory, adopts a kind of “pseudonormativity” based on strategic hypothetical imperatives. Political practices and institutions are judged according to their conduciveness to revolutionary goals, chief among them the abolition of capitalism.⁶⁷ Such judgments do not operate by means of moral reasoning in the strict sense so much as scientific, historical, and/or pragmatic analysis.

The social holism that serves to distinguish socialism from liberalism also contributes to another characteristic feature of the former—namely, its emphasis on historicity. This may not be surprising; after all, a theory that holds that normativity is irreducibly social in nature will perforce be concerned with the variety of human social forms that have emerged in various historical contexts. More specifically, it is a testament to the enormous influence of German Idealism in general and Hegelianism in particular upon socialism, the most visible expression of which is Marxist-Leninism.⁶⁸ In order to understand this influence, we must briefly consider

the relationship of Marx's thought to that of Hegel—an ambitious task, to be sure, as the nature of this relationship is famously complex and remains a point of contention among scholars.⁶⁹ Because a thoroughgoing attempt to disentangle it would far exceed the aim and scope of this work, I will instead present Marx's critique of Hegel, as well as the view of human nature that emerges from it, in abbreviated and general form.

As we saw above, Hegel construes the history of spirit (the whole or totality of human consciousness) as a series of dialectic stages or moments, each of which is marked by a distinctive conflict between the positive content of spirit's previous moments and its coming to see itself as alienated from, or in contradiction with, that content. Spirit's reflective recognition of the collision of thesis and antithesis results in a synthetic reconciliation (*aufheben*) that comes to be contradicted in turn. The process continues until it reaches a point of maximal consistency. In political life, this point is achieved through the institution of the so-called rational state, which resolves the contradictions inherent in the ethical life of civil (or bourgeois) society—especially those stemming from familial and class relations—and in this sense is necessary for the expression and sustenance of freedom. The state, as the “actuality of concrete freedom,” negotiates the “battlefield of private interest.” In his *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State* (1843) and *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), Marx formulates a critique of those sections of the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that pertain to the state.⁷⁰ On his view, Hegel needlessly mystifies dialectic by inverting the relationship between “actual existents” or “real subjects” and “predicates of universal determination.”⁷¹ In other words, he treats individual subjects and institutions, including the state, as “vehicles” or “manifestations” of the “mystical Idea,” and not the other way around.⁷² Moreover, although Hegel recognizes the process of human “self-creation,” whereby human beings construct themselves through labor within “forms of estrangement,” the labor in question is only “abstract, mental labor” that produces mere “entities of thought.”⁷³ Thus, although Hegel agrees with Marx that civil society is contradictory, “estranged from man,” and “alien to a truly human life,” the recognition of this estrangement and alienation only comes about for him in “abstract, philosophical thought.”⁷⁴ For Marx it is material labor rather than the movement of spirit that is fundamental in explaining both individual human nature and human history as a whole, where the former shapes and is shaped by the latter.

The politics and economics of socialism

The word “socialist” first appeared in the November, 1827 issue of the *Co-operative Magazine*.⁷⁵ Long before this term came into general use, there were, as I mentioned, several philosophers who endorsed common

ownership of land and resources and public control over the production and distribution of goods, which were the central commitments of both the socialism of the 1820s as well as the various strands of French communism that preceded it. The latter, however, emerged as an offshoot of the French Revolution in a preindustrial society of craftsmen, artisans, and peasants. As Lichtheim notes:

France had not yet undergone the industrial development which across the Channel was creating an entirely different kind of society. In Britain, where the small farmer had been swept away and the artisan was being transformed into a wage laborer, democracy signified the rule of the propertyless majority and hence terrified the new entrepreneurial class, which had staked its all on the success of the industrial revolution. In France, "bourgeois democracy" was still possible because the bourgeoisie had the mass of the peasantry on its side and could, if necessary, play it off against the nascent proletariat.⁷⁶

By the 1830s, socialists in France and Britain alike could be distinguished from the communists vis-à-vis the latter's endorsement of radical equality. This in turn demanded "the leveling of civilized institutions and a return to an egalitarian (and therefore natural) state."⁷⁷ The socialists, in contrast, were not generally opposed to civilization—that is to say, industrialization—so much as capitalism and the doctrine of liberal individualism that accompanied it. By 1840, the only major socialist thinker who continued to oppose industrialization and to champion the disappearing peasant and artisan class was Proudhon who himself was born of peasant stock.⁷⁸

Like their liberal peers, the socialists of the early nineteenth century were not initially committed to any particular form of government. As Lichtheim notes, "It was possible for a democrat to be either a liberal or a socialist depending on whether or not he accepted the institution of private property in the means of production, the establishment of a self-regulating market economy, and the transformation of labor into a commodity."⁷⁹ While both liberals and socialists accepted the Industrial Revolution, the latter rejected the "unrestrained rule of capital or the introduction of a self-regulating market economy."⁸⁰ In both France and Britain, moreover, many if not most socialists shared the liberals' general commitment to rights and liberties, though, as we noted earlier, their conception of rights and liberties was often based on very different assumptions about human nature. To this extent it is fair to say that the socialists desired many of the same political ends as the liberals. Even the notoriously antiliberal Henri de Saint-Simon, who advocated centralized rule by technocratic elites and balked at the idea of representative democracy, nonetheless looked forward to the gradual disappearance of organized coercive force as a means to maintain social order.⁸¹

That said, many of the early socialists were “utopians” who simply ignored extant political institutions and looked instead to the future. For men like Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, the ultimate goal was to establish small, self-sufficient, and self-governing communities whose members would enjoy plentiful and equal material wealth as well as the freedom to work, play, and marry according to their individual desires, dispositions, and tastes.⁸² In general, it was simply taken for granted that the rights and liberties of individuals would be realized in such communities and/or that the small size of such communities would not require a rigorous legal system to protect the rights and liberties of their members. Unlike the French liberal Benjamin Constant who went to great lengths to articulate a workable political and legal model for post-Revolutionary France,⁸³ the utopian Charles Fourier envisioned an ideal community called the “phalanx” whose 1600 or so members would not require elaborate legislative or judicial procedures to secure their freedoms. As I mentioned previously, liberals were greatly concerned with the question of what legal rights citizens must have in order to remain free and, by extension, what political measures must be taken to preserve and protect these rights. To the extent that the early socialists entertained such questions at all, they generally did not endorse democracy in the way the Jacobins did in theory or the Tory Chartists did in practice.⁸⁴ When not engaged with the founding of experimental “utopian” communities, Owen and Fourier favored the gradual establishment of “enlightened” (but not democratic) rule in Europe. Saint-Simon, in contrast, argued for authoritarian rule by technocratic elites who would be drawn from the emerging entrepreneurial classes. By and large, then, the socialists of the 1820s and 1830s were not revolutionaries so much as reformers. Though their proposed economic reforms were generally more radical than those of the liberals, they did not favor revolution as a means to institute these reforms.

Communism, which by the 1830s had come to accept industrialization, remained self-consciously revolutionary at both the theoretical and practical level. The followers of Blanqui, for example, advocated proletariat revolution on the Jacobin model. Their political and economic goals were, at least in principle, robustly democratic and egalitarian. Proudhon, who was the first socialist to identify himself as an anarchist, shared the Blanquists’ goals for the most part but rejected the notion of “proletariat dictatorship” as a means to securing them. Meanwhile radical communism had spread to Germany where the customary concerns of Anglo-French liberalism were ignored or rejected outright by the left wing of the Young Hegelians, chief among them Karl Marx. Far from being indifferent to the state, radical Hegelians like Marx came to regard it with unabashed contempt and outward hostility.

In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel offers an extended criticism of both Lockean “abstract right” and Kantian *moralitat*, arguing that both fail to provide sufficiently objective moral principles. Broadly speaking, this is

because Locke and Kant base their theories on an abstract, ahistorical, and asocial concept of “the individual” that ignores the role that the community plays in ethical life.⁸⁵ For Hegel, the content of morality remains abstract and indeterminate until it is actualized in the ethical life of a community. As the fullest expression of communal ethical life, the state provides the principles according to which individual conscience becomes capable of realizing the good.⁸⁶ Properly speaking, these principles are coextensive with the “laws” of the state.

Various aspects of social living—in effect, social laws—provide a sense both of subjective individuality as well of objective moral principle. Individuals living together in society not only act in ways that are conducive to their own particular life plans (i.e., self-interestedly) but also in ways that acknowledge and honor the freedom of others (i.e., ethically). Because “the rational is the Real,” and because the Real is always a synthesis of the universal and the particular, it is, strictly speaking, irrational to reduce or subordinate the social to the individual, or vice versa. The social dynamic is required to keep individual self-interest and universal morality in balance.⁸⁷ It is this dynamic that forms the basis of civil society, especially as it appears in work life and associations.

In Hegel’s view, work life is derived from the system of needs. Society comes into existence in the private lives of families, which are themselves units of a larger social whole. Within a family context, one not only develops an idea of himself as individual, but also as a member of a family who acts in the interest of said family with all its independent needs, projects, aspirations, and so forth. This, in turn, compels individuals to enter work life.⁸⁸ In this context workers become mutually dependent on one another, like members of a family. An individual worker acquires what he or she needs through working, and the others get what they need through his or her work. Work life, as such, provides the individual with a kind of social “education” (*Bildung*).⁸⁹ As the individual begins to view him/herself as part of this larger social context, individuality is universalized.

In civil society, people who freely work in various occupations not only associate or identify themselves with said occupations but also develop a division of labor—the classes or estates.⁹⁰ Insofar as work within the estates conduces to the fulfillment of particular ends, it becomes efficacious for individual workers to promote the “honor of [their] estate.” The interconnectedness of people within work associations culminates in citizenship, whereby an individual comes to see his life as coextensive with the life of society as a whole.⁹¹ The life of the state subsists in individual subjective wills and reflects them through its laws. The state protects individuals, families, and work associations precisely because the state recognizes itself in and through these forms of life. Society, as such, is regarded as an end in itself and so is valued for its own sake. Whereas in work life one pursues his or her private interests with a view to his or her

interconnectedness with other workers, the ethical life of the state involves the identification of private interests with social interests. That is, insofar as society is an end to be valued in itself, the work of building up society entails promoting the interests of all individuals.⁹² The objective will and the subjective will collide as individual morality recognizes the universal life of society. In this way, the state is the “actuality of the substantial will.”

For Hegel, laws are independent, subjective interpretations or constructions, but they are also rooted in the universalized “ought principle.” Through laws, therefore, the good and conscientious action are united in a *social* (rather than individual) conscience. Here, Hegel is not suggesting that all people in a given society agree on everything in practice but rather that they share a common conscience or “fundamental spirit” which is actualized in their actions.⁹³ This fundamental spirit is like the good, but it is a real as opposed to abstract force—the realization of absolute spirit mentioned in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There, spirit is at first only passively experienced in the ethical community; it is something that “happens” or “comes about” as opposed to something that is brought about by communal decision making.⁹⁴ What is more, the individual only recognizes itself as *in-itself* (i.e., in the being of ethical spirit) and not as *for-itself*.⁹⁵

The concept of state that appears in the *Philosophy of Right* circumvents this alleged shortcoming by positing a dual self-consciousness in the ethical community: individuals in the state are (a) conscious of themselves *as* self-conscious *and* autonomous *and as* individual actualizations of ethical spirit, and (b) conscious of the absolute dependence of ethical spirit on their own actions (e.g., the formulation of laws and customs). This change is more than a mere shift in emphasis. On the contrary, whereas the *Phenomenology* presents primitive ethical community as an early moment in spirit’s dialectical journey toward self-consciousness that is soon supplanted by other moments, the *Philosophy of Right* articulates a related but different dialectic: one in which primitive ethical community, with all its attendant problems, is ultimately replaced and cured through the realization of the rational state.

The state is the actuality of the ethical Idea. It is ethical mind *qua* the substantial will manifest and revealed to itself, knowing and thinking itself, accomplishing what it knows and in so far as it knows it. The state exists immediately in custom, mediately in individual self-consciousness, knowledge, and activity, while self-consciousness in virtue of its sentiment towards the state, finds in the state, as its essence and the end-product of its activity, its substantive freedom.⁹⁶

In both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right*, the state is not merely the “system of right” (i.e. the government) but a community of individuals who share common laws and customs. The institutions of family

and civil society are the realization of a common ethical spirit. This spirit, in turn, both constitutes and is constituted by a self-conscious community of self-and-other-conscious individuals. The most crucial difference, of course, is that in *Philosophy of Right* the state as ethical community is realized and maintained through the institution of a coercive, hierarchical “system of right.”

Against Hegel, for whom the state constituted the realization of freedom, the young Marx viewed the state as an organ of class rule, or the oppression of one class by another. Its sole purpose, he claimed, was to legitimize and perpetuate oppression by arbitrating class conflict.⁹⁷ Relations of exchange and private property, which liberals took to be foundational for freedom, equality, and all other bourgeois values, actually undermined such values; and the state, rather than existing to reconcile the contradictions inherent in bourgeois political economy, was instead a tool both for the mystification and maintenance of these contradictions. Marx initially contended, furthermore, that the state is unnecessary for the overcoming of alienation and the realization of freedom. Such ends could only be realized in “full communist society”—that is, a society with no hierarchical, centralized state apparatus, no privately owned means of production, and no socioeconomic classes wherein all property is communally owned and all individuals have equal social and economic status.⁹⁸ Unlike the so-called utopian socialists, Marx and his earliest disciples were outspoken and unapologetic revolutionaries. In the 1840s, however, and certainly for a long time thereafter, Marxian communists distinguished themselves by embracing a unique model of revolutionary theory and praxis, the salient characteristics of which were later enumerated by Lenin as follows:

1. Marxists have tended to argue that all social ills can be reduced to a singular source—namely, the oppression of one class by another under capitalism.
2. Furthermore, Marxists “demand that the proletariat be prepared for revolution by utilising the present state.” In other words, the proletariat should participate in bourgeois electoral politics by organizing revolutionary political parties, labor unions, etc.⁹⁹
3. Although Marxists aim “at the complete abolition of the state, [they] recognise that this aim can only be achieved after classes have been abolished by the socialist revolution, as the result of the establishment of socialism which leads to the withering away of the state.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, the initial goal of the socialist revolution is the replacement of the liberal bourgeois state by a transitional “worker’s state” or “dictatorship of the proletariat.”
4. Lastly, Marxists realize that “class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only outside

of the economic struggle, outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers.”¹⁰¹ Furthermore, “the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class . . . It can be exercised only by a vanguard . . . Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism . . . for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation.”¹⁰² In other words, socialists should organize a revolutionary vanguard party which aims to (a) organize the working classes; (b) incite revolution and seize power on behalf of the working classes; and (c) establish a worker’s state or “dictatorship of the proletariat” in which all power is centralized within the vanguard party.

As we have already seen, thesis (1) constitutes a crucial aspect of Marx’s critique and so is scarcely controversial. On the other hand, the so-called doctrine of complicity outlined in (2) did not become a more or less universally held article of Marxist faith until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Prior to that point, the Marxian communists were somewhat divided on the question; while some were altogether opposed to the idea of creating communist organizations, others disagreed over the form such organizations should take (e.g., political parties versus trade unions). There can be no doubt, however, that the notion of the “vanguard” described in (3) was very much in place among Marxian communists by the 1850s, as was the concomitant idea of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” described in (4).

By the time that the International Workingmen’s Association held its first congress in Geneva in 1866, the two main factions within the group consisted of Marxians, on the one hand, and the followers of Mikhail Bakunin, on the other.¹⁰³ Bakunin represented a strand of socialism, which, from its inception in the 1840s among followers of Proudhon, rejected both vanguardism as well as the dictatorship of the proletariat. The anarchists, as they came to be known, believed firmly that the workers and other oppressed classes must organize and act for themselves without the mediation or representation of a bourgeois vanguard. They were also radically opposed to the state in any form, and for this reason balked at the idea of transferring political power from one group to another, a course which they believed would only perpetuate tyranny. Instead, Bakunin and his followers favored the spontaneous, violent, and *total* overthrow of the state—in other words, the immediate transition to collectivism or communism without the establishment of any transitional government, even one controlled by workers. Disagreements between these factions eventually led to the expulsion of the Bakuninists at the Hague Congress of 1872.

In the 1860s, a third group of socialists evolved, which adopted party politics, rather than violent revolution, as the preferred means for initiating the transition to full communist society. Though many Marxian communists remained revolutionary, the so-called social democrats favored the establishment of socialist political parties and the election of socialist politicians with a mind to gradually and nonviolently introducing communism into Europe.¹⁰⁴ The social democrats were mostly comprised of German Marxists such as Ferdinand Lasalle, August Bebel, and Wilhelm Leibknecht, all three of whom were instrumental in founding the Social Democratic Worker's Party of Germany in 1869.¹⁰⁵ Social democracy was also influential in France among the followers of Louis Blanc and in Britain among the members of the Fabian Society.¹⁰⁶

Social-democratic Marxists and their revolutionary peers remained more or less united under the Second International until the outbreak of the First World War, at which time they underwent a spectacular parting of the ways.¹⁰⁷ Because reformists in the SADP, such as Heinrich Cunow, actively supported the war, whereas revolutionary communists such as Rosa Luxemburg actively opposed it, the result was a bitter fractionalization of the party culminating in the wholesale defection of the revolutionary contingent in 1917. After Marx's death in 1883, the loose ends of his thought were gradually woven together—some would say almost single-handedly by Engels—into what many considered a self-contained and completely uniform doctrine. This “orthodox Marxism,” as it has since been termed, took root among Eastern European revolutionaries such as Luxemburg, Martov, Pehkanov, Trotsky, and Lenin.¹⁰⁸ From 1917 on, Social Democratic parties in Europe became increasingly distanced from revolutionary orthodoxy (which was eventually termed “Marxist-Leninism” after the Bolshevik Revolution in order to distinguish it from other forms of socialism) and many accepted the “revisionism” of Eduard Bernstein and Jean Jaurés. Though Social Democracy was from the beginning highly influenced by liberalism, it became even more so during and after the First World War, with many of its most important advocates eventually converting to Keynesianism and embracing the idea of the “mixed economy.”

Now one of the most important features of orthodox Marxism is the doctrine of economic determinism, according to which changes in the economic base engender mechanical changes in the social and political superstructure of a society. In his later writings, Marx argues that capitalism contains certain structural deficiencies, which, when coupled with the development of proletarian class consciousness, will inevitably lead to the collapse of capitalism and the concomitant rise of an intermediary socialist state. This entire process, as Engels particularly stresses, is dictated by a kind of scientific—or, more specifically, logico-dialectical—necessity. It is precisely this emphasis on historical and economic determinism that led Bakunin to famously ask, “Why bother trying to organize and revolutionize

the workers when they shall do so of their own accord, just as beasts in nature inevitably order their affairs?"¹⁰⁹

As we have already noted, the solution to Bakunin's problem for Marxists like Lenin is vanguardism: the uprising of the proletariat must be incited, if not altogether spearheaded, by a revolutionary political party. (The extent to which the evolution of the vanguard is itself produced dialectically is, for Lenin at least, a complicated one that we shall not discuss here.) By the early twentieth century, however, certain Western Marxists had serious misgivings about vanguardism. Rosa Luxemburg, for instance, argued that the forcible imposition of socialist ideas upon workers at the expense of their spontaneous desires would merely recreate the most nefarious aspects of bourgeois society.¹¹⁰ Although Luxemburg and her confreres were all agreed that the working class is essentially revolutionary, they tended to seek alternate explanations for and solutions to the persistent lack of widespread revolutionary activity in its ranks.¹¹¹

Lukács, for example, argued that the reification and commodification of the worker and his labor has created an incongruity between individual appearance and social reality: "The atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society."¹¹² The mechanisms of reification and quantification in capitalist economics conceal dialectical totalization (the "interwoven social relationships behind the manifestations of things"). Because the proletariat is the principal object of this process, it is particularly amenable to discovering the illusion of reification; when it does, Lukács thinks, it will restore totality in "a world where things have their place in a unified whole rather than appearing in the disparateness of the commodity form. Essence will unite with appearance, and with that what ought to be will become what is."¹¹³

Like Luxemburg, Lukács emphasizes the necessity of working class spontaneity in the emergence of revolution. In doing so, however, he merely resurrects Engels' old hope in the scientific inevitability of proletariat insurrection. The critical theory of Gramsci, Horkheimer, and Adorno agrees with Lukács that capitalist culture has reified, commodified, and quantified everything, but it remains resolutely skeptical about whether this process could be resisted with a mind to eventually abolishing it.¹¹⁴ On their view, the rationality of Enlightenment creates a new totality—one to which all must conform on pain of being excluded or marginalized as "irrational." With this conformity, however, comes alienation—from others, from nature, from the fruits of their labors, and even from themselves.

For Horkheimer and Adorno it is precisely the culture industry which allows people to alienate themselves and, in so doing to perpetuate the new bourgeois system of totalization.¹¹⁵ Prior to the evolution of this system, culture operated as a locus of dissent, a buffer between runaway materialism on the one hand and primitive fanaticism on the other. In the wake of its

thoroughgoing commodification, culture becomes a *mass* culture—movies, television, newspapers, and so forth—the sole goal of which is to subordinate everyone and everything to the interests of bourgeois capitalism. The logic of Enlightenment reaches its apex precisely at the moment when everything—including resistance to enlightenment—becomes “yet another spectacle in the parade of culture.” Whatever forms of resistance cannot be appropriated are marginalized and relegated to the “lunatic fringe.” The culture industry, meanwhile, produces a constant flow of “pleasures” intended to inure the masses against any lingering sentiments of dissent or resistance.

By expanding the Marxist-Leninist analysis of capitalism to cover the entire social space, Gramsci, Horkheimer, and Adorno severely undermined the possibility of meaningful resistance to it. As Adorno notes, “In effect, positive intervention was impossible: all resistance was capable either of recuperation within the parameters or marginalization . . . there is no outside to capitalism, or at least no effective outside.”¹¹⁶ Absent any program for organized, mass resistance, the only outlet left for the revolutionary is art: the creation of quiet, solitary refusals and small, fleeting spaces of individual freedom.¹¹⁷

For many later Marxists, the question raised by Bakunin—and the bleak situation which it ultimately forecasts—ceases to be problematic if we reject, or at least radically rethink, the notion of dialectical necessity. Most of the major schools of “revisionist” Marxism take for granted that history is not predetermined and that humans are, in some sense or other, essentially free beings. At the same time, the fact that human beings are essentially free does not imply that they always have complete and unfettered control over the direction their lives take. Habermas, for example, argues at length that cooptation only seems inevitable when we undertake our analysis from the standpoint of subjective consciousness and, by extension, the empirically constituted experience that forms the content of consciousness.¹¹⁸ In order to locate genuine sites of resistance, we must look beyond the content of consciousness to the *structure* of consciousness, which, for Habermas, is constituted by linguistic activity (“communicative action”).¹¹⁹ Within the framework of communicative action are various forms of rational discourse that determine the content of consciousness and define the “lifeworld” within which we act.¹²⁰ Capitalism operates by “colonizing” the lifeworld with its own structures, thereby distorting the various modes of rational discourse and subjugating them to its own ends. The result is the *ostensive* disappearance of any exterior vantage or “outside” from which capitalism can be assessed and critiqued.

Against the deterministic thesis, however, Habermas argues that communicative action always presupposes freedom and responsibility. Neither colonization nor liberation from colonization are historically guaranteed because both are always and already embedded within discourses, and discourses, in turn, are always and already produced by

the communicative activity of free and responsible agents. As such, the first and most important goal of radical politics is the liberation of subjugated discourses and communicative activities. This liberation does not avail itself mechanistically in consciousness but must be actively pursued. Indeed, it is precisely the goal of Marxist theory to analyze how and to what extent human freedom affects and is affected by the economic substructure of social existence. Sartre, for example, describes capitalism and other oppressive social structures as “practicoinert”—that is, as products of free human activity that subsequently take on a life of their own, divorced from the motives and responsibilities of the original actors and, indeed, reacting back upon them in harmful ways.¹²¹ As a result social structures become mystified, as does the responsibility of individual human actors in creating and maintaining them. The Marxist intellectual seeks, in the first instance, to demonstrate the contingency of these structures, which in turn enables people to recognize their freedom and responsibility anew. This recognition, which is the true “revolutionary consciousness,” is a precondition for radical intervention—but, as in the case of Habermasian decolonization, its emergence is not guaranteed by necessity. It must be actively promoted.

In addition to the rejection of economic determinism—which one also finds in the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser¹²² and the autonomist Marxism of Cleaver, Dunayevskaya, Holloway, Castoriadis, and Negri¹²³—most latter-day Marxists have roundly repudiated the idea of vanguardism. Drawing upon Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, autonomists have argued at length that the concept of alienation is much broader than orthodox Marxism-Leninism has conventionally recognized.¹²⁴ For thinkers like Negri, alienation occurs whenever the individual is separated from the decision-making processes that affect his or her life. Workers are alienated from their own economic power via the capitalist exploitation of surplus value, but they are also alienated from their political power via the monopolization of authority—whether by elected representatives or members of a communist vanguard.

Autonomist Marxists expand the definition of “proletariat” to include all those whose subjectivity is circumscribed by homogenization, the process by which capital becomes “the totality of labor and life” and the entire social sphere is transformed into a factory for the extraction of surplus value.¹²⁵ On the orthodox Marxist view, only members of the working classes are subjected to, and harmed by, this process. Everyone else somehow stands outside it and benefits from it. Autonomism argues, in contrast, that capitalism “proletarianizes” anyone and everyone whose life and labor is commodified—that is, relegated to a product whose value is determined solely on the basis of profitability.¹²⁶ Obviously this would include all sorts of people—from teachers to doctors to housewives—who have not been conventionally regarded as members of the proletariat.¹²⁷

This implies, furthermore, that “class consciousness,” far from being a vehicle of revolution, is instead a symptom of homogenization. Capitalism compels people to think of themselves as members of distinct classes with uniform interests and needs.¹²⁸ One goal of autonomism, consequently, is to break down homogenization—including the homogeneity of class—and to reintroduce the multiplicity of needs and interests that constitute individual peoples’ lives.¹²⁹ Another goal, which follows from the first, is solidarity among people at the level of individuals rather than of classes or other collectivities.¹³⁰ What matters in this context is not *how* people are being exploited so much as *that* they are being exploited.

Although autonomism and other revisionist schools of Marxism reject determinism, vanguardism, and traditional class analysis, they all retain what was previously referred to as a “strategic” emphasis. In other words, they continue to hold—as do Marxists of all stripes—that power *as such* is reducible to economic power. As May points out, for the autonomists “the focus remains capitalism, and the proletariat . . . *as such*, remains the revolutionary force.”¹³¹ Because exploitation is first and foremost an economic category, all of the various forms of exploitation are ultimately economic and so differ in degree rather than kind. Thus, even if one rejects the idea that economics is destiny, one must still admit that political analysis depends on economic analysis because power is ultimately economic in nature. An economic system that is alienating and exploitative by definition requires a political system that actively supports, or at least permits, alienation and exploitation. If it is impossible for one to have political power that is not reducible to economic power, then it is impossible to implement a system of government that does not already presuppose specific economic goals.¹³²

It comes as no surprise, then, that some Marxian socialists favored centralized economies that are planned and implemented by the government.¹³³ In principle, what matters most is the equal allocation of economic power, thus legal and political powers will be determined according as they conduce to this goal. This has led some to conclude that socialism requires, or at least permits, flagrant violations of human rights, the idea being that the protection of individual rights is at odds with the goal of equal economic power.¹³⁴ We must recall, however, that socialism does not necessarily reject the concept of rights and liberties outright; it simply denies that rights and liberties can be conceived independently of social existence. Many if not most socialists would agree with Marx that social existence is coextensive with economic existence—in other words, that economic activity is the foundation of social life. From this it follows that rights and liberties must be understood in terms of their economic ramifications, and indeed, democratic socialists have long argued that most of the rights and liberties cherished by liberals would be necessary in order for a socialist economic system to function properly.¹³⁵ Putting

the point another way, others have claimed that nothing in the idea of socialism itself (where socialism is understood minimally as the public ownership of the means of production) entails the abridgment of civil liberties. Strictly speaking even the right to property is preserved, albeit in the form of a positive entitlement (“To each according to his need”) rather than a purely negative freedom.¹³⁶ Only those rights that would allow for economic exploitation (e.g., the right to hire another for a wage, the right to loan money at interest, the right to rent land or property, etc.) would go unrecognized.

Public ownership of the means of production does not by itself necessitate a specific economic system such as centralized planning.¹³⁷ In the strict sense, larger-scale production outlets under socialism would “belong” to everyone in general and no one in particular. Clearly, however, the workers of a particular factory would have a greater stake in the management and operation of said factory than workers in other production facilities. In practice, these workers would “control” the factory, but they would not “own” it. Then again, because the factory would have no *raison d’être* beyond producing its goods, and because those goods will be distributed solely according to need, the very concept of “ownership” becomes moribund. The question of how goods are to be produced and distributed, on the other hand, is very much open to question. For example, many theorists have argued that a socialist economy is compatible with a market-based system of production and distribution.¹³⁸ What is clear in all cases is that a socialist economic system would eliminate the extraction and accumulation of surplus value vis-à-vis public ownership of major production outlets.

Having examined socialism along our four trajectories, we can now see quite clearly how it differs from liberalism. First, socialist theories generally rely on a holistic view of human nature according to which the properties and interests of human beings are always defined and constituted within a social context. Second, socialist theories deny that goods can be identified independently of social contexts. Third, socialist theories ascribe enormous moral value to equality, understood not as an abstract condition but rather a concrete state of affairs. The protection and promotion of other values, such as individual rights and liberties, are only possible within a state of substantive equality. Fourth, socialist theories tend to endorse historical rather than transcendental conceptions of normativity, whether deontojuridical or teleological in nature. Fifth, socialist theories are not generally committed to any particular form of government, nor to any particular strategy for creating a socialist state, though they agree that the most important function of government is to promote the public good as a condition for protecting rights and liberties. Sixth, and finally, socialist theories repudiate the extraction of surplus value and endorse the public ownership of the means of production.

From modernity to anarchism

In the first chapter, I argued that politics is best understood as a kind of “social physics”—that is, an analysis of power relations at the level of social practices and institutions. Having analyzed liberalism and socialism at length, we are now in a position to understand political modernity as a sociophysical phenomenon. At bottom, political modernity is founded upon a very specific conceptualization of power—one which gives rise, in turn, to the theories and praxes we have discussed. Simply put, power is understood as an *archē*—that is, a force that coalesces within, and emanates from, a unitary center. It radiates outward from that center and, like the force of gravity, draws everything outside itself into or under itself, weighing down upon it like an anchor. The fundamental questions of political modernity, therefore, are whether, how, and to what extent this essentially coercive power can be rightfully invested in institutions and, by extension, exerted over individual subjects. For liberals, this amounts to asking with Rousseau why “man is born free but everywhere is in chains”—in other words, how and why do naturally free individuals submit to political powers which curtail their liberty? From there the question becomes whether such submission can be justified and, if so, under what conditions. For socialists, the question is only slightly altered. How and why, they ask, do human societies submit to unjust economic powers that create both conceptual and concrete inequalities? What can be done, in turn, to eliminate such inequalities without inadvertently damaging the common good?

In the first instance, then, political modernity is defined and distinguished by the problematic, or rather the problematization, of “archic” power. By disavowing naturalism, political modernity opens up a chasm between an individual or social subject, the nature of which is already defined and independently constituted, and the politicoeconomic power that acts upon it. The investment of that power in political and economic institutions, coupled with the exertion of that power upon subjects external to it, becomes a problem precisely because it appears alien to what these subjects are by nature. Political modernity, in consequence, involves the ongoing struggle to close, or at least bridge, this chasm by way of ethicopolitical justification. Put another way, the modern concept of power may be seen as emerging coextensively with the modern concept of the subject as an antagonistic “monstrous double.” In response, philosophy conjures up new concepts—of rights, liberty, equality, the social contract, and so forth—which attempt to reconcile the subject to power. Again, the entire enterprise only becomes possible and necessary when politicoeconomic power becomes the aberrant “other,” a hypostasized force outside and alien to human nature—in short, a problem. Political modernity just is the struggle to solve this problem.

As I previously suggested, however, there is no reason why political philosophers ought to define the boundaries of the problem in this way rather than some other way. Nor, in fact, is there any reason why political philosophers should treat political theory as a problem-solving enterprise. For example, what happens if we claim that the very concepts of subjectivity presupposed in political modernity are themselves problematic? One immediate consequence would be the vitiation of the power problem, which, as I have claimed, is only a side effect of subjectivity. Another consequence is that the entire range of derivative concepts that were invoked as solutions to the power problem would cease to be solutions; instead they would become problems in their own right. Concepts do not simply vanish when their genealogy becomes polluted, when their connection to other concepts are severed or changed. Even if the modern concept of the subject is problematized, it remains an open question whether another concept of subjectivity can take its place. This, in turn, leaves open the question of whether and how derivative concepts (e.g., rights and liberties) are to operate.

Political modernity is not simply defined in terms of problems, but also by the “solutions” that it poses to said problems. Despite their variety, all such solutions share in common two features that are themselves distinctive of political modernity. First, they are *universal* solutions. In other words, their justification *qua* solutions follows from general claims about man and world *as such*. They are regarded as valid solutions irrespective of particular social and historical circumstances. Second, they are *transcendent* solutions. In other words, they stand above and apart from the real-world exigencies they are meant to address. For example, when Locke claims that human beings have a natural right to property, which in turn necessitates the institution of government in order to enforce contracts, the concept of natural right combines with the concept of the social contract to form a joint solution to the problem of power. The concept of a natural right, however, is universal: natural rights are ascribed to humanity as a generic whole. It is also transcendent: the possession of a natural right does not depend upon particular circumstances or contingent states of affairs. Its source is universal nature, a transcendent totality that stands apart from and outside history. The same is true of Marxian concepts such as “species being” and “historical materialism.” To be human just is to have species being; to be part of this world just is to be determined by the dialectical force of history. This is not to play down the considerable differences between liberalism and socialism we have catalogued; the point is that both traditions developed in response to the same problem, the various solutions to which share a common philosophical foundation.

Above all, it is worth reminding ourselves that modernity begins with the concept of representation—the substitution of the one for the many, the general for the particular. Modern concepts of the subject are representational: the subject represents the world to itself as an object of knowledge in

consciousness; the individual represents the nature of human beings as such or else the nature of a social collectivity; the state represents the collective interests of individual citizens; the proletariat represents the cooperative consciousness that corresponds to the socialized nature of productive forces; and so on and so forth. In all cases, what is represented is a complex multiplicity of differences—of things and people, of goods and interests, of desires and experiences, and so forth. Representation operates, therefore, by subsuming these myriad differences under a totalized, homogeneous identity. Particular experiences of particular woody plants are subsumed under the concept of “tree.” Individual human beings are subsumed under the concept of “mankind.” The multifarious interests of individual citizens are subsumed under the concept of “the common will” or “the public good,” and so forth. To represent, in short, is to relegate difference to the same.

Representation is scarcely a “product” of modernity. If human beings are anything, we are creatures who represent and have always represented. What defines modernity, rather, are particular forms of representation marshaled in the service of particular ends. For example, when Locke represents human beings as naturally free, he automatically alters the representation of political power. If human beings are naturally free—which means among other things that political power belongs to all human beings equally—then the sovereign can no longer be represented as the embodiment of political power. The sovereign must be re-represented as one who has expropriated political power for himself at the expense of his subjects’ freedom, thereby giving rise to the problem of power. In order to solve this problem, the power of the sovereign must be reconciled with the freedom of the citizens, which for Locke is accomplished through the concept of the social contract. Through this concept, the sovereign’s power is vindicated, but only to the extent that its exercise represents the common good of the people.

Political modernity, I submit, is constituted by representational theories and practices that are underwritten by universal, transcendent concepts, conceived as solutions to political problems. Even the most cursory survey of Western history since the seventeenth century (and probably earlier) bears out this definition. It has expressed itself in most every election, revolution, war, and social movement up to and including the present moment. Consequently—and with apologies to Bruno Latour—we have never been *postmodern* in any real sense. Although I will say more about this later, I should note provisionally that the very idea of a “postmodern condition” as articulated by Zygmunt Bauman, Frederic Jameson, and Jean-Francois Lyotard is mostly chimerical. While there is no doubt that the world we inhabit has undergone radical and far-reaching changes over the past three centuries, it is nonetheless clear that we remain, in the deep and important sense articulated above, inexorably modern. The logic that governs contemporary life is founded on the very same axioms in response to the very same problems; if anything has changed, it is the solutions, and

even then the change is of degree rather than of kind. The world is smaller and faster and more complicated, to be sure, but this has not altered the nature of our representational practices nor the problems they seek to solve.

None of this is to say that political modernity has gone unchallenged. Indeed, those recent French philosophers known—usually to their chagrin—as “postmodernists” have distinguished themselves by systematically attacking its foundations and dismantling its presuppositions. They were not the first to do so, however, and this by their own admission. Well over a century ago Nietzsche and Kierkegaard both offered, each in his own way, the first salvoes against certain aspects of modernity. Yet neither man was particularly engaged with distinctively political problems. (Nietzsche in particular disdained politics and reserved some of his most fiery vitriol for political theorists.) This has led some to believe that genuine postmodern political critique wasn’t initiated until the mid-twentieth century by the likes of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

As it turns out, this belief is completely mistaken. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard were not the only nineteenth-century thinkers to face off against modernity, nor were they even the first. That distinction belongs to a little-known and grossly underappreciated Frenchman named Pierre Joseph Proudhon who, unlike Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, was as deeply invested in political critique as he was in moral, cultural, and religious critique. Though he could scarcely imagine it during his lifetime, Proudhon unwittingly inaugurated an entire tradition of political theory and revolutionary praxis that survives to the present day—the tradition of anarchism. Like Proudhon, moreover, the men and women who populate the anarchist tradition were dedicated body and soul to an unrelenting critique of political modernity. Anarchism, as such, is rightly called the first postmodernism. Just like Foucault and Deleuze, the anarchists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries distinguished themselves by calling into question the entire conceptual framework of modernity—not just in its political dimensions, but in its philosophical, scientific, moral, cultural, and religious dimensions as well.

Why is it, then, that anarchism has tended to be so roundly overlooked in the history of political philosophy? There are many possible answers to this question, some of which I will take up below. For the time being, it suffices to note that anarchism has never been an intellectual movement so much as a social and political movement. For all its sagacity and prescience, most of the texts that have come down to us from key anarchist thinkers were written as political propaganda. Their goal was not to describe the world, but rather to change it—in other words, to *present* what could be rather than *represent* what is. This underscores an important point that I hope to defend in the next chapter: namely, that anarchism is not a movement against authority, or not *just* that, but rather a movement against representationalism. As we shall see, the anarchists did not make

hard and fast distinctions among various types of representation; instead, they tended to regard all representation—whether in science, religion, culture, or politics—as symptoms of a common disease. The problem of power, as understood by the liberals and socialists, was a false problem that only succeeded in generating further problems. For the anarchists, power outstrips its concrete manifestations, though it is immanent to them all. Power is life itself; it is movement, becoming, and the creative possibility of change. Far from seeking to abolish power, the anarchists sought to liberate power. Far from seeking freedom from oppression, they sought freedom to become, to go elsewhere, to do otherwise.