

The Enlightenment and Marxism

Author(s): Sidney Hook

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1968), pp. 93-108

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708467>

Accessed: 03/10/2012 17:50

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Pennsylvania Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to
Journal of the History of Ideas.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND MARXISM

BY SIDNEY HOOK

The relationship between Marxism and the Enlightenment is so tangled and complex that any general statement about it must be carefully qualified. The Enlightenment is many things. In this analysis I shall discuss only two of the things associated with it, its faith in reason or science and its belief in human rights or the natural rights of man. Marxism, too, is many things. But it is many more things. It is not only Marx but Marxist movements that span a century. There are Marxist movements which regard socialism as a means of furthering democracy and Marxist movements which regard democracy merely as a means of furthering socialism.

If we turn our backs on the different varieties of Marxism and center our attention on Marx himself we still have many things. For there are many Marxs. There is Marx the revolutionary fighter against the European Restoration or the system of Metternich, and Marx the historical sociologist and political economist, deriving from a metaphysical theory of value the scientific equations of doom of the capitalist system. There is Marx the social and moral prophet denouncing the exploitation of man by man, and Marx the radical historicist for whom all moral ideals—freedom, equality, fraternity, integrity, independence—are deceptive abstractions concealing the economic class interests at their roots. And, to make the matter even more complicated, we must distinguish all of these Marxs, embodied in what was published over a period of forty years, from the Ur-Marx, of the so-called *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*, who quietly entered the world only in 1932, and was discovered almost a quarter century later to be the most effective ally of the Communist opposition to Stalinism.

In order to reduce my subject to manageable proportions I have selected two themes of the Enlightenment which seem to me to have the most comprehensive bearing in their continuity and difference on all varieties of Marxist movements, and on some central ambiguities of the thought of Marx himself.

Whatever else the Enlightenment is associated with, its very name, as well as its typical emphasis in most of the figures of the Enlightenment, suggests confidence in the use of Reason as the test of the morally acceptable, as the method of scientific discovery, and as the

ultimate judge in resolving conflicting opinions about what is not scientifically discoverable, or in tolerating or learning to live with such conflicts where they could not be resolved. Even the Enlightenment critics of Reason like Hume and Kant do not denigrate the practical uses of Reason. They were concerned with its limits, to be sure, but in the spheres of human experience in which intelligence operated they recognized its authority, provided it did not immodestly claim to know what is beyond experience or with certainty about what is within it. Hume's thought was subversive of any conception of science that regarded it as a form of logical necessity or as completely empirical. Nonetheless despite his theoretical skepticism, like most of the Enlightenment figures he believed in the possibility of a science of human nature as well as a science of human society fashioned on a Newtonian model. To be reasonable, as distinct from being merely strictly logical, meant to be scientific.

For Marxism, too, Reason meant being not logical but scientific and therefore anti-obscurantist, hostile to both religious and metaphysical superstition. The proudest boast of Marxist Socialists was that they were *scientific* socialists. To the extent that they were critical of the Enlightenment thinking about society it was on the ground that it sought to explain social and political phenomena in terms of psychological or ideal forces, i.e. by principles of individual psychology, instead of explaining individual psychological phenomena, including ideas, as the outcome of social, political, and ultimately economic institutions. Although they were not always aware of it, insofar as their conception of science was concerned, the Marxist notion was quite different from what might loosely be called the Enlightenment view of science. The nature and cause of the difference are to be found in the influence of Hegel. What the Marxists criticized as the method of vulgar empiricism was the method of the understanding which Hegel had denounced before them. This method of the understanding, whose abstractions were suggested, shaped and criticized by experience, Hegel had rejected as inadequate to the organic unity of the systems encountered in nature as well as society. The phenomena of quality, of life, of experience itself were destroyed, not properly grasped by analytic methods. Hegel was critical of the Newtonian philosophy and approach which had been canonized by Voltaire and other Enlightenment thinkers. And it was this Hegelian conception of science which led Engels to refer to Newton with a quaint kind of arrogance as an *Induktionssel*.

What was the difference between the Enlightenment conception of scientific method and the Hegelian-Marxist one? Briefly, the world of the Enlightenment, as of Newton, was conceived as a gigantic machine with invariant mechanical laws which determined the inter-

action of things down to the slightest detail. Knowledge of the laws governing the cosmic machine of which society and men are parts could enable men with insight and courage in principle to solve all problems, to discover or invent the social institutions required to provide human nature with the proper theatre for its fulfillment. Just as men on the basis of their knowledge of laws and the ways of things could rebuild the houses in which they lived to let in the light and air and pleasing prospect required for a healthy and happy life, so they could shatter and rebuild the institutions of a society to make them fit or worthy for men. Only ignorance, religious superstition, and selfishness stood in the way of the needed resolution and reconstruction.

For Hegel and the Marxists, on the other hand, the world was not a machine but an interconnected set of processes. To this belief they added two fateful assumptions. The laws by which these processes were grasped must reflect the development they sought to explain, so that science itself becomes historical. Second, these processes, especially the historical process, had an immanent *progressive* direction or telos, so that when we truly understand human history we see not only that it is necessary but also reasonable. In consequence human beings can rely upon the immanent processes of history despite all setbacks and defeats to bring them to a world of universal freedom. These conceptions led Hegel and many Marxists to charge that the thought of the Enlightenment was characterized by an unhistorical approach to culture and civilization, indeed, by an indifference to history—a charge that seems unjust. The thinkers of the Enlightenment were profoundly interested in history; after all the chief actors of the French Revolution, nurtured on the literature of the Enlightenment, thought of themselves as reincarnated Romans on the stage of history. To be sure they moralized about the historical rôles men played in past and present, but they also believed in a science of history whose dominant factors were geography, human ignorance, folly, and cruelty.

The important difference between the Enlightenment and Marxist thinkers lay not in their concern for history but in their conception of what it meant to have a *science* of history. For the Marxists history could only be scientifically understood in terms of laws immanent in a developing social process and more inclusive than, and therefore not derivative from, laws of physical nature. Nature can only condition history, not determine it, and history can modify *both* nature and human nature. Just as the behavior of an organism in contradistinction to a machine cannot be explained merely by environmental stimulus and an invented design, but by the immanent processes of growth in relation to an environment which, within limits, is modified by them—so the development of society is con-

ceived as being governed by immanent laws of economic production that determine the birth, development, and death of all societies until man as a truly free agent comes into his own.

What is most significant here are the consequences of these two different conceptions of science towards the *making* of history, when they are combined with different specific hypotheses about society. If you think of society as a machine, as the Enlightenment did, there is a tendency to believe you can build it closer to your heart's desire at *any* time, if only you are intelligent and resolute enough. One needs valid moral ideals, social ingenuity or inventive capacity, and the audacity to storm the centers of resistance manned by selfish lords of the manor or captains of industry and their superstitious or corrupt retainers. The men of the Enlightenment certainly had high moral ideals in profusion—the security of life, liberty, happiness, equality, fraternity; they had confidence in the power of human intelligence; and they and their descendants had courage and audacity. They therefore believed they could make revolutions any time and anywhere their ideals found a popular resonance. For them the willingness was all, the courage, the idealism, the sacrificial dedication to the public good, because there were no other determining tendencies in history outside of man himself. (This Enlightenment view still persists today among certain liberal thinkers who claim that anything can happen in history).

The Marxist approach was quite different even when it accepted the ideals of the Enlightenment. If there are laws that determine the development of society, then men are not completely free to make and remake history at will. The viable alternatives of action are determined by something outside their will, by the institutions and habits of the past. A revolution cannot be made by fiat, whether by enlightened despots, or by an intellectual élite. It must be prepared for. It is like a new birth. The violence and wrench with which new life is expelled from the womb of the mother is the final phase of the period of gestation. What the Marxists stressed was not the *willingness*, but the *ripeness*. The readiness was all.

The theory of historical materialism was developed by Marx to explain, among other things, not only when and where social revolutions do occur, but where they do *not* occur, and indeed where they should not be attempted. The French Revolution was prepared for by the growth of economic productive forces whose laws of development were hampered by restrictive feudal relations of distribution. The French Revolution to the Marxists was a complex phenomenon but *au fond* it was the act which cleared the way, as the English revolutions of the seventeenth century had done previously, for the development of capitalism.

Why didn't the French Revolution acquire a socialist character despite the existence of Babeuf and other socialist thinkers of the time? How did the Marxists explain this? Quite simply with the statement that the time was not propitious for it, i.e. the capitalist mode of production wasn't sufficiently developed to make possible the realization of the socialist ideals of organization and distribution. And according to Marx, "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed." That is why not only Marx but Engels and all the Founding Fathers of Social Democracy down to 1917 expected socialism to come first in England or the United States.

There was one great insight and one great oversight in this Marxist approach. The insight was the recognition of the importance of the principle of social continuity or social maturity, which recognizes the constraints of rhythm, timing, and objective possibility, in proposals to reform or remake the human estate. Without it we would be hard put to draw the line between responsible and irresponsible social action, or distinguish between social sanity and insanity. The great oversight was a failure to realize that the principle of continuity was not sufficient as a guide to action, that without a moral point of view, or a set of explicit moral values, autonomous in relation to economics and politics, which barred at least some alternatives of advance, certain actions could be easily rationalized as appropriate to the times, actions whose consequences could call into question the validity of historical materialism.

This is in effect what the latter day Marxists, who called themselves Bolshevik-Leninists, did. Despite their acceptance of the theory of historical materialism, these disciples of Marx seized political power in the most backward industrial region of Europe and then proceeded to build the economic foundations of a new order under it. The Marxists had refuted Marx. They had shown that with respect to the greatest social revolution of all time, naked will and force without stint or limit, and not the disparity between productive forces and property relations, provided the fuel to power the locomotive of history.

The apparent indifference to moral values that characterized traditional Marxism, which asserted that the real content of demands for justice reflected only the level of economic need of society, avenged itself on the entire humanistic and libertarian tradition of Marxism. Historical materialism taught that where social conditions are unripe, a new economic order cannot be introduced. Why not? Because among other things it would require that human beings be treated like things—like so much steel, iron, coal, and cement—and

certainly not as fellow human beings, as ends in themselves. But to treat human beings in this way, or to change the metaphor, as so much fertilizer for the soil of history was beyond anything Marx dreamed would be undertaken on a systematic scale or be successful if anyone was mad enough to undertake it.

Lenin and Stalin and Mao did precisely what Marx never expected socialists would do or need do. The costs and horrors of capital accumulation under socialism have transcended the costs and horrors of primitive capitalist accumulation, and made them appear all the more onerous because on the classical Marxist scheme they were historically gratuitous. If we take seriously Marx's and Engels' repudiation of "barracks communism," it would not be unfair to say that they would have had the last indignant words: the socialization of all instruments of production under primitive conditions by measures that respect no human rights can only develop another form of Asiatic despotism. The outraged moral sensibilities of those faithful to the ambiguous legacy of Marx is reflected in the emergence of a new form of Marxist revisionism according to which the real secret of Marx is not to be found in the *Manifesto* or *Capital* but in the early unpublished writings aptly characterized by Professor Lewis Feuer as the Dead Sea Scrolls of Marxism.

Nonetheless, even if we regard, as I do, the Bolshevization of Marx as a betrayal of the Marxian ethos, there was something in Marx's attitude towards the philosophy of the Enlightenment which prepared the way for it. This was Marx's interpretation of the doctrine of natural or human rights as pure ideology, his attempted reduction of them to mere expressions of personal and class egoism in civil society, despite his implicit and sometimes explicit invocation of them in the struggle for a society in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." This opens the complicated and largely unexplored relationship between the conceptions of human rights in the Enlightenment and in Marx.

For the thinkers of the Enlightenment the existence of the rights of man was a common article of belief however they differed in their definitions, enumerations, and justifications of the belief. To be human meant that one was morally entitled to a certain mode of treatment, formally positive, concretely negative, at the hands of one's fellows. Whether human rights were ultimately grounded in God, nature, or human nature, whether they were justified by reason or utility, were matters of dispute; but there was no dispute that all individuals possessed these rights, that they were not created or granted by any society or state or government, whose moral right to existence could and should be judged by whether it furthered them or not. Where enumerated these rights expressed the moral conscience of the time revolted by injustices and cruelties.

In Marx and Marxism, the practical strategy of natural rights is at war with the theory of natural rights. By this I mean that Marxism as a movement of social protest, reform, or revolution talked a language which made no sense in the light of the doctrines of historical materialism. In the Enlightenment tradition the language of natural rights is the natural language invoked to curb the excesses of power. It was this language that Marxism invoked where it voiced the demands of the suffering and oppressed for relief as well as for justice. But according to the theory of historical materialism all talk of the rights of man was simply an ideology, a rationalization of the needs of a burgeoning capitalist society. It denied the existence of any component of independent moral validity or autonomy in the appeal to human rights. If the issue was merely one of power or interest there is no more reason for one class or party in the social conflict to prevail than another, "right" should be a synonym of "might" and "wrong" of "weakness," a view which no Marxist can consistently hold when he speaks of exploitation of labor or protests against the suppression of human freedom. To say that the principle of freedom for which so many human beings willingly died during the French Revolutionary Wars was merely a slogan whose real content was the demand for freedom to buy cheap and sell dear, for freedom of contract, mobility, accumulation of capital, despite and against feudal restrictions, sounds utterly cynical. And it actually does a profound injustice to those Marxists whose ethical sensibilities are revolted by some proposed methods of achieving relief from social injustice. I know of few Marxists who escape incoherence and inconsistency when they speak of natural or human rights from the standpoint of historical materialism.

Here is a typical passage from the writings of an English Marxist, H. M. Hyndman; speaking of the ideas of the French Revolution, he says:

Never in human history were great ideals prostituted to baser ends. "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" is the glorious motto still inscribed on the buildings and banners of the French Republic. But what did those noble abstractions mean to the class triumphant in the French Revolution, the class whose members were its leaders throughout? Liberty to exploit by wage slavery and usury. Equality before laws enacted in the interest of profiteers, and justice administered in accordance with their profiteering notion of fair play. Fraternity as a genial brotherhood of pecuniary exploitation. The "Rights of Man" was deliberately perverted to the right to plunder under forms of equity.¹

But it makes no sense to charge that moral ideals have been betrayed or perverted unless we believe that they have a meaning and validity independent of the historical activities with which they have

¹ *The Evolution of Revolution* (London, 1921), 236.

been identified. It is amusing to note that when Hyndman justified the support by the British workers in 1914 of the war against Germany, which "in spite of her tyrannous militarism and Junkerdom took more care of the physical and educational condition of her people than the governing classes of England did of their wage workers and dependents," he falls back upon implicitly ethical principles.

Nonetheless there was a supplementary reason which led at least the more revolutionary wing of Marxism to treat the concept of "the rights of man" gingerly. The exigencies of the struggle for power reinforced the reluctance to face up to the ambiguities of "the economic reduction" of the rights of man. For the latter profess to state in universal form certain bounds or limits of what man or state can do to man. Those, however, who set out to overthrow a social order by revolution must in the nature of the case violate, overturn or recast laws whose customary character is invariably sensed to be fitting or natural or just by those who have benefited from their operation. From this point of view the Revolution may be imperilled by too faithful a respect for the rights of man of those opposed to it. The frank acknowledgment by Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* that the Revolution cannot proceed except by "despotic inroads against property" indicates that even if property was considered—and it was so considered by Locke and the philosophers of the Enlightenment—a human right, it would not be held sacred. But what if it is necessary to make "despotic inroads" against freedom of speech and press, against privacy and security, against life itself, if this is necessary for revolutionary victory? The problem of course is not unique to Marxism. It confronted Robespierre, the priest of reason and freedom, and even Jefferson, whose softer and more compassionate version of Deism was free from any trace of the stern fanaticism of virtue. Whoever proclaims that "the health or welfare or safety of the republic or the people" is above all law, positive or natural, or that it is the supreme natural law, must be prepared to sacrifice any or all of these sacred and inalienable rights of man whose exercise threatens the triumph of the Revolution. Once we make absolutes of any human right and under no circumstances justify its modification, then we cannot escape the Kantian, otherworldly position: "Let the right prevail, though the heavens fall." Morality would then become something too good or exalted for man!

As we shall see, Marx's recognition that one could not reasonably accept the absolutist conception of human rights contributed to the readiness with which he embraced an historical-economic monism that reduced human rights to rhetorical masks of economic class interests. But before showing this, one must explain the puzzling fact that many who accepted the doctrine of natural and human rights on moral grounds not only welcomed the Marxists as allies in the

common political struggle against despotism, but even accepted their criticisms as illuminating. How was this possible? For two allied reasons. First, the Marxists claimed that human rights were abstract and formal unless certain institutional economic changes were introduced to make the expression of that right possible. If I have the right to life it means little if I have no right to the means of subsistence on which that right depends. Marx was keenly aware that property as a social relation is not merely a form of power over things but especially over men. Therefore ownership of the means of production by whose use men must live—an ownership which legally means the right to exclude others from the use of things owned ultimately by the arms of the state—carries with it real power over the life of anyone who must work in order to live. As Marx put it, the worker is “the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can only labour by their permission and hence only live by their permission.”² This would make the workers the slave of any group, independently of the forms of ownership, that has the power to exclude them from the productive process on which their lives depend. Socialism without democracy for its workers, on Marx’s own analysis, would be a new form of enslavement.

Secondly, the Marxists pointed out that although equality of rights is a necessary condition for social justice, by itself equality is not sufficient, for it was compatible with many different modes of treating human beings, some of which are experienced as intolerable. The prophets of the Enlightenment declared that all men are or should be equal before the law. Article V of the French Constitution of 1795 reads: “Equality means that the law is the same for all, whether it protects or punishes.” The nub of the Marxist position is that where economic disparities are substantial the law cannot and does not protect or punish equally. The burden of a fine which represents one man’s income for a week and another’s income for a day, even assuming the absolute incorruptibility of the judge, is not the same burden for the same offence. The case is no different even if equality is defined in terms of equality of opportunity, for inequality of economic status and economic power spells inequality of opportunity.

All this is good sense even where exaggerated claims are made. These exaggerations can be trimmed away. The position is at least intelligible. Every right, according to the Marxists, is affected by the conditions of its operation, whether it is the right to a fair trial, or to an adequate education, or to freedom of speech and press. Therefore commitment to equality of rights in a stratified economically privileged class society carries with it a mandate for continuous social

² *Critique of the Gotha Program* (New York, 1933), 22.

reconstruction. The upshot of this critique is that political democracy—conceived as respect for the cluster of human rights—is *incomplete* without some form of economic democracy. Economic democracy would abolish the vast gulfs in living conditions or wealth between man and man which ultimately reflects itself in a different status between citizen and citizen. When Marx claims that “every right is in general a right of inequality in its *contents*” he is not denying the validity of the principle of equal rights. He is merely saying that given different individuals with different or varying needs, the application of an equal standard will result in treatments that are not identical but which for all their differences are equally just. A physician who treats all his patients with equality of consideration and concern does not prescribe identically for all of them. Once we understand this, we can also interpret Marx’s contention that “right can never be higher than the economic structure and cultural development of society conditioned by it” as a common sense restriction on the scope and number of the human rights we can at any moment reasonably demand, e.g. there is no right to leisure if there is no surplus available, etc.

If only Marx, and especially the Marxists, had stopped at this point! But often when political rights were criticized as bourgeois rights, as formal and abstract, they were regarded not as partial and incomplete, but as unreal and mythical. In the struggle for an economically classless society, which presumably would provide social and economic democracy, compliance with the forms of political democracy was deemed unnecessary. Rights were formal, therefore inconsequential, unimportant, and hence if they interfered with concrete social progress, they could be ignored or violated. The Marxists of the Bolshevik-Leninist persuasion turned their backs on the democratic political means to achieve socialist goals and attempted to impose them by the dictatorship of a minority political party. When Fascism in its different varieties appeared on the political horizon, the significance of political rights in terms of natural or human rights was reasserted, but by that time the Marxists had thoroughly demoralized themselves with their semantic double-bookkeeping about human rights, and aroused the deep suspicion of their possible allies. How could one consistently appeal to human rights in the struggle against Fascism and at the same time dismiss them as outworn bourgeois notions or prejudices, irrelevant to the practices of the Communist minority one party dictatorship?

It was not only Marx’s disciples who were at fault, but Marx himself for the ambiguous legacy he left behind concerning the nature and meaning of human rights, human freedom, and political democracy conceived as resting on freely given consent. For he shifted be-

tween two different conceptions—one which regarded human rights as precious and which sought to preserve and strengthen them by extending their sway to economic and social relationships; the other which regarded talk about human rights as an expendable because anachronistic ideology. Had he taken the first view seriously and consistently, he would have recognized that the difference between ancient and modern conceptions of democracy had less to do with conflicts of economic classes than with the preservation of the rights of minorities as a restriction on the power of majority rule. If democracy is defined only as rule by the majority without any curb on the power of the majority, then society is always in a state of potential civil war. If a democracy recognizes the limitations on majority power set by firm observance of a Bill of Rights, minorities can by peaceful means become majorities and modify the operation of the economic system itself. Here Marx seems to have fallen behind Hegel who stressed the category of *Wechselwirkung* or reciprocity among the various factors that constituted the life of objective mind or culture. Although here and there, Marx acknowledged the existence of this reciprocity, and admitted that political democracy could make a difference to the mechanics of the road to power, he did not realize why and how it could make the difference, or how powerfully political democracy could affect the operation of the capitalist system of production. In short, Marx's political economy was not politically sophisticated enough because of his underestimation of the democratic process undergirded by respect for human or natural rights.

Political democracy, conceived as the institutionalization of the rights of man without which there can be no freely given consent on the part of a majority, led the state to intervene in the economy, not only on behalf of the dominant class, but on behalf of the working class acting in concert with other groups and classes. It made collective bargaining a powerful countervailing force, sanctioned by law, which protected the worker against arbitrariness. It diverted into the public sector large amounts of goods and services. Through taxation it has already affected to some extent a redistribution of wealth—and it could do more, much more. It gave birth to the welfare state whose horizons can be progressively expanded. And it explains why so many of Marx's economic prophecies proved to be false.

Where did Marx go wrong? If I am right, quite early in the development of his thought—in some of the earliest of his publications. In his *Zur Judenfrage*, published in Herwegh's *Einundzwanzig Bogen aus der Schweiz* (1843), and also in *Die Heilige Familie* (1845) Marx delivers himself of a well justified and soundly argued criticism of the views of his erstwhile teacher, Bruno Bauer, on the question of Jewish

emancipation. In the course of his argument, he also criticizes the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1791. On the European continent this document has always been taken as the classical expression of the Enlightenment philosophy. Marx launches a strong attack on the assumption that the rights of man are the rights of citizens. It is the rights of man which draws Marx's fire in contradistinction to the rights of citizens. Why? Because Marx identifies the "man" of the Declaration with "the member of bourgeois society." On what ground? On the ground that these rights are individually and egoistically conceived, that they are rights *against* others rather than with others.

Who is this *homme* who is distinguished from *citoyen*? None other than the member of bourgeois society. Why does the member of bourgeois society become "man," simply man, why are his rights called human rights? How do we explain this fact? By the relation between the political state and bourgeois society, by the nature of political emancipation.

Above all let us note the fact that the so-called rights of man, the *droits de l'homme*, as distinguished from other *droits de citoyen*, are none other than the rights of a member of bourgeois society, i.e. of egoistic man, of man separated from man and the community of men.³

Marx cites the various natural and imprescriptible rights of man and shows that their very definition presupposes that the person who enjoys these rights exists as an atom or monad separated from others. For example, liberty is defined as "the power of each man to do anything that does not infringe on the rights of others"; property is defined as "the right belonging to each citizen to enjoy and dispose as he pleases of his goods and income, the fruits of his labor and industry." What is wrong with these conceptions? What is wrong with "liberty" defined this way? Marx tells us:

The human right of liberty is based not on union between man and man but on their separation. It is a right to separation, a right of a limited individual to his limitation.⁴

And what is wrong with property thus defined?

The human right of private property is the right arbitrarily (*à son gré*) to enjoy and dispose of one's wealth without relation to other human beings, independently of society; it is the right of private use (*Eigennutz*). Individual freedom, like this particular application of it, is the foundation of bourgeois society. It permits every man to find in other men not the *realization* of his freedom but its *limit*.⁵

Down the line Marx goes on to show that "human rights" are

³ *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* I, Vol. 1, p. 593.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 594.

⁵ *Ibid.*

precisely the powers and privileges which separate man from the community since they reflect only private interest, individual need, selfish desire. We must look to the rights of the *citizen* to establish a political community. We must avoid the error of considering membership in the political community as "a mere means" to preserve the so-called "human rights" whose exercise destroys genuine political community. This is the theoretical error the French Revolutionists made which their practice, according to Marx, happily nullifies.

It is interesting to observe that Marx does not list the "rights of the citizen," and it would indeed be difficult to list rights of citizens without finding at least some rights of man among them. Further, however a right of a citizen is defined, it cannot avoid implicit reference to the limits of actions of others. If I am politically free to vote this means that others are legally not free to prevent me from voting. Bentham saw more clearly than Marx that every law which bestows a political right is a restriction of the freedom of some possible actions by others. And despite Marx's attempted reduction of human rights to masks of interest, individual need, and selfish desire—surely this goes too far—even in civil or bourgeois society there are some *shared* interests, *common* needs, and *compassionate* or disinterested desires that can support a schedule of human rights.

There are at least two misconceptions of the nature of human rights by Marx that were to have fateful consequences on Marxist theory and practice. The first was the view that because under some circumstances the specific rights of man could be reasonably abridged, they therefore need not be taken seriously, and had no more moral authority than any other legislative enactment, and sometimes less. Marx quotes from the Declaration of 1791, Article 2, "The end of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man." But he complains that the French Revolutionists could not have meant this since some of these rights were on occasions abandoned. If secrecy is a human right, how could the right of the secrecy of correspondence be violated? If Article 122 of the Constitution guarantees "unabridged freedom of the press," how could Robespierre proclaim that "freedom of the press cannot be permitted when it compromises public liberty." If property is a human right, with what justification are hoarded stores seized to feed a famished town? In each case the justification of the violation of some human right was offered in terms of other rights. This does not prove that there are no human rights but that they often conflict, and that when they do, the decision, although not arbitrary, cannot be deduced from a second order rule but expresses a judgment about the relative weights and priorities among human rights—all relevant things considered here and now. What is true for human rights would be just as true for political rights or the rights of citizens. If they are con-

ceived as absolutes, we cannot live in safety with them if there is more than one absolute right.

Secondly, Marx seems dissatisfied with "human rights" because they do not go far enough. For example, the right to be religious, to worship God according to one's conscience, the right to property, to speak freely, etc. are human rights and he urges that they should be extended to all citizens. But Marx also warns that these human rights are not enough. Men receive religious freedom properly but they are not freed from the sway of religion: they have a right to speak freely, but they speak nonsense. Man has freedom to trade but he is not free from the egoism or selfishness of commerce.⁶

Those who deplore these possibilities, instead of accepting them as part of the necessary risk of freedom, are tempted to curb or abolish human rights once they have reason to believe that they can prevent what they deplore by other and more vigorous means. Whatever the dangers deplored are, they can be better met as a rule by strengthening and extending human rights rather than by abolishing them. Freedom of religion is more precious than either salvation by indoctrination or irreligion by prescription. The right to *seek* the truth is more basic than the right to speak the truth. Error has no rights, but the right to freedom of inquiry carries with it freedom to test the consequences of erroneous hypotheses on which progress in science depends.

There are certain obscurities and difficulties in Marx's conception of the "rights of a citizen" which neither he nor any of his followers adequately clarified. I should like to conclude with a few exploratory suggestions.

If one denies that the "rights of man" are literally natural rights, rights men have outside of society, *a fortiori* there are no rights of a citizen except in a community. But one can live in a community in various ways—as a citizen or as a subject, or as a free citizen or as a slave or serf. And one can live as a citizen with his nose to the grindstone, narrowly limited in possibilities of development, or as a free citizen able to live a life rich in possibilities of variation. Marx writes: "Only in association with others has each individual the means of cultivating his talents in all directions. Only in a community therefore is personal freedom possible."⁷ Yes, but whence comes the right to be free and not to be enslaved, the right to cultivate one's talents in all directions rather than in some, to be more free rather than less free? If these are not natural or human rights, what are they and how can they be justified? Marx does not tell us.

What is impressive about Marx's critique of the thought of the

⁶ *Ibid.*, 598.

⁷ *Die deutsche Ideologie*, MEGA. 1/5/p. 634.

Enlightenment is his refusal to counterpose the individual and social as if they were fixed, separable, polar concepts applicable to different entities. Using a modern idiom, Marx could have said that "individual" and "social" are adjectival not substantive distinctions. The social relations into which a man enters as child, sibling, and parent, wife or husband, friend or lover, student or teacher, townsman or countryman, worker or employer enter constitutively into his personality. They are not additions to a hard kernel of natural individuality, any more than the thoughts and notions that language alone makes possible are additions to an original stock of ideas in the pristine mind of the individual. Only the biological capacity for language and organic activity is given—minds, personality, and everything else are consequents of the processes of acculturation.

All this may be granted as a necessary condition for a community in which "the rights of citizens" are not the "rights of man" but represent organized and harmoniously functioning social powers in "daily life and work"—the classless society of the future. But it is not a sufficient condition. Even if we attribute to Marx the view that human emancipation can be achieved only when society is organized on the model of a family, we cannot derive the "rights of citizens" from it. There are families and families. The "rights of citizens" are based not on universal love but on universal respect, self-respect and respect for others, courage, and the sense of independence.

When Marx makes explicit the values he regards as central to the life of the free citizen, what is suggested is not Christianity or the fraternity of the Enlightenment but rather the life of the free man in the Greek *polis*—Aristotle rather than Christ or Rousseau. Marx sounds this note at the very outset of his career, and its overtones can be heard in all his subsequent writings. In his correspondence with Ruge, which opens the campaign for revolution in Germany, in 1843, he writes:

The self-respect (*Selbstgefühl*) of man, his freedom, must still be awakened in the breasts of these men. Only this feeling of self-respect, which disappeared with the Greeks from the world and into the blue haze of the heavens with the Christians, can make out of society once more a community of men in pursuit of their highest end, the democratic state (*MEGA*, 1/1/561.)

A year later in his *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Law*, Marx writes:

The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man, therefore with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, an enslaved, a forsaken, a contemptible creature. . . . (*loc. cit.*, 615)

A few years later in a passionate criticism of the social philosophy of Christianity, Marx writes that "the proletariat will not permit itself to be treated like *canaille*; it regards its courage, its self-respect, its pride, its sense of independence as more necessary to it than its bread." (MEGA, 1/6/278.)

Of course, Marx is here speaking for himself, and only of his hopes for the proletariat. Nonetheless, his writings and his life are eloquent evidence of the fact that for all his dedication to social reform and revolution, he was not a utilitarian. He speaks of Bentham's philosophy as a shopkeeper's morality in the same unjust way as does Nietzsche. It is not the happiness or welfare of mankind which inspires Marx to hail and support the socialist revolution. Otherwise he would have had to reckon the costs of revolution more carefully and consider the claims of religion more sympathetically. His conception of "the rights of citizens" is a conception of a society of morally autonomous men. In the end, he is committed to the same moral postulate as the men of the Enlightenment. As distinct from them, he tries to support his choice by an obviously circular appeal to history. In the end, I believe, we must trace his ideals to his own personality rather than to his philosophy of history. This is not surprising considering the options in the theories of human rights which were closed to Marx because of his other views. The rights of man cannot be derived from the nature of man *qua* man because human nature is an historical variable in "progressive transformation." Nor can they be derived from the nature of society, since societies are even more obviously historical and diverse than human nature. What society is to serve as the matrix of human, universal rights? It is no objection to a schema of human rights that they are projections of personal values, if reasonable grounds can be offered for universalizing them. But Marx himself does not offer any grounds, and few among those whom he has influenced, unfortunately, have concerned themselves with the problem.

New York University.