

**In Search of the Spirit of Revolution:
Marx's Confrontation with Utopia**

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Summary

This thesis offers a sympathetic interpretation of Marx's confrontation with Utopia. It begins by suggesting that Marx condemned utopianism as a political process because it undermined the principles of popular self-emancipation and self-determination, principles deemed by Marx to be fundamental to the constitution of any truly working-class movement. As a means of invoking the spirit of revolution, it was therefore silly, stale and reactionary. With regards to Marx's own 'utopia', the thesis argues that the categories which define it were nothing more than theoretical by-products of the models employed by Marx in order to *supersede* the need for utopianism. As such, Marx was an 'Accidental Utopian'. Two conclusions follow from this. The first is that Marx's entire project was driven by the anti-utopian imperative to invoke the spirit of revolution in a manner consistent with the principles of popular self-emancipation and self-determination. The second is that, in spite of his varied attempts to do so, Marx was unable to capture the spirit of revolution without descending into utopianism himself. Such conclusions do not, however, justify the claim that utopianism has a necessary role to play in radical politics. For Marx's original critique of utopianism was accurate and his failure to develop a convincing alternative takes nothing away from this. The accuracy of Marx's original critique is discussed in relation to the arguments put forward by contemporary pro-utopians as well as those developed by William Morris, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse. In each case, it is argued, political utopianism descends into the messianic elitism ascribed to the utopian process by Marx. Rather than legitimating utopianism, therefore, Marx's failure to develop a convincing alternative means that socialists must develop a more convincing alternative. The conclusion tentatively suggests that the future of socialism lies in its ability to harness, not the spirit of utopia, but the spirit of adventure.

Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Note Concerning the Use of Translations	vi
Introduction	
The Aim of the Thesis	1
Utopia Defined	1
The Intellectual Context of the Thesis	6
Methodological Considerations	11
The Structure of the Thesis	13
Chapter 1: Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'	
1.1 Introduction	17
1.2 The Means/Ends Dichotomy Consensus	19
1.3 Some Problems With the Consensus	25
1.4 Demonstrating the 'Utopianism' of the 'Utopian Socialists'	28
1.5 Why Utopianism is Now Silly, Stale and Reactionary	33
1.6 Conclusion	47
Chapter 2: Marx's Description of the Lower Phase of Communism	
2.1 Introduction	50
2.2 The Lower Phase in the <i>Manifesto</i> and <i>The Class Struggles in France</i>	52
2.3 The Lower Phase in <i>The Civil War in France</i>	60
2.4 The Lower Phase in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme'	69
2.5 Conclusion	75
Chapter 3: Marx's Description of the Higher Phase of Communism	
3.1 Introduction	77
3.2 The 'Mundane' Aspects of Full Communism	78
3.3 Marx's Visionary Conception of Full Communism	88
3.4 Conclusion	98
Chapter 4: The Function and Failings of 'Materialistically Critical Socialism'	
4.1 Introduction	101
4.2 The Need to Set People in Motion	102
4.3 Here the Content Goes Beyond the Phrase	104
4.4 The Material Conditions for Emancipation	108
4.5 The Failings of Materialistically Critical Socialism	114
4.5.1 The Forces of Production, Historical Progress and the Classless Society	115
4.5.2 The Proletariat, Private Property and the Classless Society	124
4.6 Conclusion	134
Chapter 5: Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian	
5.1 Introduction	140
5.2 The Utopian Leap Via Teleology into 'The Dream of the Whole Man'	141
5.3 The Utopian Leap Via Structuralism into 'The All-Round Individual'	148
5.4 The Utopian Leap Via Pragmatism into 'The Ontological Necessity of Labour'	160
5.5 Conclusion	165

Chapter 6: The Limitations of Utopia as a Political Tool	
6.1 Introduction	174
6.2 Utopia as a Blueprint to be Realised	177
6.3 Utopia as a Mode of Critique	181
6.4 Utopia as a Means of Inspiring Action	188
6.5 Utopia as an Irretrievably Messianic Process	193
6.6 Conclusion	199
Chapter 7: ‘Utopian’ Marxism in Action: A Critique of Morris, Bloch and Marcuse	
7.1 Introduction	203
7.2 The Case of William Morris	204
7.3 Ernst Bloch’s Attempt to Build a Concrete Utopia	219
7.4 Marcuse and the Dictatorship of an Educated Elite	234
7.5 Conclusion	257
Conclusion	
The Aim of the Thesis Restated	265
The Key Arguments of the Thesis Summarised	266
Some Concluding Remarks: In Search of the Spirit of Adventure	273
References	287

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Note Concerning the Use of Translations

I must begin by conceding an inadequacy on my part, the inadequacy being that I cannot read German. Given that the primary aim of the thesis is to offer an interpretation of Marx, this would seem to place me at a certain disadvantage. For some people, no doubt, it would invalidate the project before it even began. Whilst, however, I readily concede that a reliance upon translations is hardly ideal, I also believe that the problems it raises are not as debilitating as they might appear. For the translations available to the Anglophone reader of Marx are now of the highest quality and are the product of a great deal of research and serious scholarship. Of course, no translation can do full justice to German concepts that have no English equivalent; the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung* being a prime example. This does not mean, however, that the Anglophone reader is unable to understand this complex phrase, nor does the lack of a satisfactory English equivalent raise insurmountable problems: the problem is easily surmounted by a careful treatment of the translated phrase 'abolition'. In any case, many of the problems facing the Anglophone student of Marx turn out to be problems engendered, not by an inadequate grasp of his native tongue, but rather by the complexities of Marx's thought itself, whatever tongue it is read in. The concept of *Entfremdung*, for example, causes just as many problems for the German scholar as the English rendering of the concept (variously translated as 'alienation' or 'estrangement') does for the Anglophone scholar. Reading Marx in the original German, it would seem, gives rise to no special revelation — his system of thought *still* remains complex and *still* lends itself to conflicting interpretations. Nor is there a problem of incommensurability here, for German speaking scholars and their Anglophone counterparts find themselves referring to the same concepts, dealing with the same issues and becoming embroiled in the same disputes. I will therefore resist the temptation to flagellate myself with my linguistic inadequacies and will concentrate instead on offering an interpretation of Marx based upon the translations that even those fluent in German rely upon anyway.

Introduction

The Aim of the Thesis

The relationship between Marxism and utopianism has become a popular field of study over recent years. These studies, almost without exception, argue that the role of utopianism in radical politics has been severely underestimated by Marxism and that, as a consequence, Marxism needs to rethink its attitude towards it. More often than not, such a line of argument is accompanied by a sense of political urgency, the implication of which is that Marxism's very survival depends upon its rethinking its attitude towards utopianism. M. Shiviah thus speaks for many when he proclaims that:

It is time Marxists (hopefully freed from the scriptural shackles of Engels' *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*) take note of the concept of utopia divested of its pejorative connotations, and project and draw upon the utopian features of Marxism in the quest for an alternative vision for our time (1994: 305).

The present thesis seeks to challenge such a view. It seeks, in other words, to defend Marxism's traditional hostility towards utopianism and to argue that the faith placed in Utopia as a political tool by many contemporary writers is ultimately misplaced. Before proceeding to discuss how such an argument is to be structured, however, the term 'utopia' needs to be defined. Before, that is, one can even begin to talk about the relationship between Marxism and utopianism, one needs to know what the latter both is and involves.

Utopia Defined

When dealing with the concept of 'utopia', the first problem is always one of definition. As is well known, Thomas More, in coining the term, satirically combined the words *eutopos* and *outopos* in order to capture the ambiguity of the Commonwealth of Utopia, the good place that is no place. This, however, does not really tell us very much and as Lyman Tower Sargent indicates, utopian studies has subsequently concerned itself with an (over-)extensive range of subject matter, including

Introduction

the positive Utopia or eutopia, the negative Utopia or dystopia, the satirical utopia, the utopia of the mind, myths of an earthly paradise, *insulae fortunata*, imaginary fantasy, fairy tales, instructions to princes, works of political philosophy, speculations on the nature of heaven, Oriental tales, tales of the future, novels of spiritualism or psychical research, stories about early man, imaginary wars, allegory, satire, romance, adventure stories, disaster stories (1975: 145n).

This quite clearly renders Utopia a nebulous and somewhat confused category. In order to avoid such confusion, one's primary task must therefore be to find a restrictive definition.

Given, however, that utopian studies *has* concerned itself with an (over-)extensive range of subject matter, the question arises as to whether a restrictive definition can in fact be found. Posing this very question, Quentin Skinner remarks that:

If an historian, for example, who studies the idea of Utopia comes to see that the uses to which the idea has been put are bewilderingly various, then it would seem little more than a very misleading fetishism of words to go on trying to make any sort of historical study out of focusing on the 'idea' of Utopia itself . . . For the persistence of such expressions tells us nothing reliable at all about the persistence of the questions which the expressions may have been used to answer, or the intentions generally of the various writers who may have used the expression (1969: 38-39).

Skinner is, in fact, correct to suggest that there is neither *one* definition of utopia nor *one* purpose for which the term has been put to use. One can, however, still say something useful about utopia as long as one stipulates both one's own definition and the purpose for which *it* will be used, accepting that there are other definitions and that *they* may be used to say something different, yet perhaps equally as useful, about utopia. Krishan Kumar, working on this basis, adds that

there is no need, here or anywhere else in the human sciences, to be dogmatic or exclusive about concepts. Their deployment is mainly a matter of our use and convenience . . . we should neither expect nor seek some universal or essentialist definition valid for all times and places (1991: 32-33).

One can thus agree with Skinner and argue that a totalising account of utopianism will arrive at an understanding only by substituting fetishised identity for real difference, and at the same time agree with Jacques Derrida (and who emphasises the importance of difference more than he?) when he says that:

If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic and an historical strategy. The justification can therefore never be absolute and definitive. It corresponds to a condition of forces and translates an historical calculation (1976: 70).

Introduction

If, that is, one adopts the pragmatic approach which sees any understanding consciously limited by its purpose, then it is possible to reach sustainable conclusions. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse and assess Marx's and Marxism's attitude towards utopianism. A definition suited to this particular purpose therefore needs to be found.

Vincent Geoghegan provides a useful starting point for this search when he remarks that:

In deciding what exactly is to be construed as utopian, two clear poles are to be avoided: the hyper-inclusive which defines as utopian any manifestation of hope, imaginative construction, or counter-factual . . . and the hyper-exclusive which seeks to reduce the utopian to a literary device invented by Thomas More in 1516 (1997: 1).

The form taken by the hyper-inclusive definition varies somewhat, from Frederik Polak's enigmatic though virtually worthless claim that utopianism is 'the art of the impossible as a long-run possibility' (1961: 426), to the more popular idea that utopianism, in Lyman Tower Sargent's terms, constitutes 'social dreaming' (1994: 9). That definitions such as these represent a pole to be avoided, especially in the context of a discussion of Marx, should become clear if we examine the definition chosen by Ruth Levitas in her book, *The Concept of Utopia*. For Levitas, 'utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being' (1990a: 8). This choice of definition is defended on the grounds that 'it allows for this desire to be realistic or unrealistic' and is therefore flexible, so that 'where such desire is expressed — and the scope for this will itself be historically variable — it will not only vary markedly in content but may be expressed in a variety of forms, and may perform a variety of functions including compensation, criticism and the catalysing of change' (ibid.). The hypothesis here is that utopia is an elusive category, and Levitas sets herself the (quite reasonable) task of identifying the axis around which the tradition turns.

By constructing a framework around a common denominator, however, Levitas only harmonises theoretical dissonance. Difference is sacrificed in favour of identity, and theoretical disputes become a sub-category of broad agreement. For

Introduction

both Marx and the 'utopian socialists' would have agreed that they were expressing the desire for a better way of being, but they would all have denied that these expressions were 'utopian'. Marx would furthermore have argued that the utopian socialists' expressions *were* utopian whilst his were not. By offering such a broad definition of utopia, however, Levitas effectively precludes a discussion of these issues — according to her definition, Marx and the 'utopian socialists' were similarly utopian, and that is the end of that. This is not to say that Levitas' approach is *incorrect*, it is merely to say that it sheds little light on the nature of the differences between Marx and the 'utopians'. In the context of this particular thesis, then, the hyper-inclusive definition certainly is a pole to be avoided.

Turning now to the hyper-exclusive definitions, these generally fall into two groups. The first insists that a vision is not 'utopian' unless it is completely *perfect* and unrealisable (Hertzler, 1923: 1-2) or completely *static* and tedious (Mumford, 1973: 3-24). In the words of M. C. Spencer: 'Utopia is an ideal society in an ideal setting, and as such it is not susceptible to change. As all is perfect, nothing can be improved, and nothing really happens' (1981: 127). The second group argues the opposite, i.e., that what distinguishes a utopia from, for example, Arcadias or the Land of Cockayne, is the fact that it is *realistic* (for an extended discussion of the criteria by which a utopia can be distinguished from other, *unrealistic* visions, see J. C. Davis, 1981: 11-40). What one eventually encounters here is an extremely restrictive definition, such as that provided by Timothy Kenyon:

utopianism may be regarded as (firstly) a literary but non-fictional medium which (secondly) defers to 'reality' in the sense of the prevailing worldview and circumstances of the human predicament, and which (thirdly) proposes to amend these conditions, so far as is realistically feasible, by institutional means, in order to (fourthly) establish an ideal (1982: 153).

Placing such restrictions on what is to count as a utopia is unhelpful, as can be demonstrated by the fact that almost all the recent feminist utopias, of which there has been much talk, would not count as utopias at all according to Mumford, Hertzler, Spencer, Davis or Kenyon. More problematic still is the fact that

Introduction

Thomas More's *Utopia* would not count as a utopia according to these definitions either! For as has often been pointed out, More's island was neither perfect nor static. Nor was realisability ever a consideration, as More himself indicates when he ends the book with the remark: 'I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-public which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope for' (1994: 135). Whether or not More's vision would, or indeed could, be realised was irrelevant as far as its status as a *utopian* vision was concerned.

The hyper-exclusivity approach to defining utopia thus brings with it at least as many problems as the hyper-inclusivity approach. A definition which manages to avoid the pitfalls of both, however, is offered by J. Max Patrick. According to Patrick:

A Utopia should describe in a variety of aspects and with some consistency an imaginary state or society which is regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which its author lives (cited in Sargent, 1975: 140).

Of immediate worth is the fact that Patrick's definition says nothing about the degree of perfection, stasis or realism required by a utopia. It thus remains open and flexible. Unlike the definition offered by Levitas, however, Patrick's allows one to identify the key elements of the dispute between Marx and the 'utopians'. For all would have agreed that this was an adequate definition of 'utopia', and all would have denied being 'utopian' in this sense; the 'utopian socialists' because the states or societies they described were not imaginary, and Marx because he could express his desire for a better way of being without having to describe states or societies at all. Marx would, however, have considered the 'utopians' to be utopian in the terms laid down by Patrick's definition because all descriptions of non-existent states and societies were, as far as he was concerned, imaginary. Patrick's definition thus serves a dual purpose — firstly, by avoiding both hyper-inclusive ambiguity and hyper-exclusive pedantry it provides us with a good basis upon which to study the concept of utopia in general, and secondly, by roughly coinciding with what Marx himself considered a utopia to be, it allows us to

Introduction

include Marx in our study of utopia without having to offer a series of qualifications and redefinitions.

We are now in a position to stipulate the meaning of the various terms that are to be used throughout the course of this study: A utopia is a) an imaginary state or society which b) is regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which its author lives, and c) is described by that author in a variety of aspects and with some consistency. Following on from this, a *utopian* is someone who creates and describes such a state or society and *utopianism* refers to the general act of creating and describing such societies. In so far as this thesis is concerned with the relationship between Marxism and utopianism, it is therefore concerned with the relationship between Marxism and the act of describing, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, imaginary states or societies which are regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the ones in which their authors live.

The Intellectual Context of the Thesis

According to Maurice Meisner, 'Marxism at once conveys the most powerful of utopian visions of the future and presents the most devastating critique of "utopianism"' (1982: 6). This apparent ambiguity in Marx's thought — what Steven Lukes has nicely termed Marx's 'anti-utopian utopianism' (1984: 155) — provides the intellectual framework around which most of the discussions concerning the relationship between Marxism and utopianism are constructed. Sadly, many of these discussions stop once they have observed the existence of such an ambiguity and present us with, for want of a better phrase, the 'nevertheless' argument. This argument involves two simple postulates; firstly that Marx refused to construct a utopia and attacked those that did, but secondly that, *nevertheless*, Marx did construct a utopia. Thus, for example, Bertell Ollman states that

Marx . . . never offers a systematic account of the communist society. Furthermore, he frequently criticises those socialist writers who do as foolish, ineffective and even reactionary. There are also remarks which suggest that one cannot describe communism because it is forever in the process of becoming . . . *Yet*, as even the casual readers of

Introduction

Marx know, descriptions of the future society are scattered throughout Marx's writings (1977: 8, emphasis added).

John Sanderson follows suit, saying of Marx that

he and Engels had little to say about the nature of the society which would succeed the transitional period of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Indeed, on occasion they evinced a certain distaste for the activity of drawing up blue-prints for the new society: *nevertheless* in broad outline, certain things may be said with some degree of confidence about communist society as it was envisaged by Marx and Engels (1969: 98, emphasis added).

Even the erudite David McLellan adopts this line of approach, arguing that:

It should be noticed that Marx said comparatively little about the shape of the society he envisaged. This is not surprising; like his master, Hegel, he was extremely chary of predicting the future and often castigated more "utopian" socialists for their idealistic forecasts. For if all ideas were a product of contemporary social reality, then a detailed projection of these ideas into a distant future was bound to result in idealism — ideas that were completely imaginary since lacking an empirical reference. *Nevertheless*, the broad outlines of Marx's picture are clear enough (1969: 459-460, emphasis added).

McLellan then reproduces this passage verbatim in his well-respected book *The Thought of Karl Marx*, and even adds that: '*In spite of* his refusal to write 'recipes for the cook-shops of the future', Marx's general outline of the economic organisation of communist society is clear' (1980: 244, emphasis added).

The 'nevertheless' (or 'yet' or 'in spite of') argument is clearly not an argument at all, but a means of avoiding the question of *why* Marx constructed a vision of communism when he quite clearly stated that such visions should not and could not be constructed. One of the overarching aims of the present thesis is to confront this very question.

In so doing, various other questions arise, the first of which is whether or not Marx really did present us with a 'utopia'. This question has given rise to quite diverse responses, as the following examples illustrate:

There is no trace of an attempt on Marx's part to make up a utopia, to indulge in idle guess-work about what cannot be known (Lenin, 1968: 321).

When we consider the glimpses that we are given of the future communist society, we may be inclined to think Marx's own vision more dazzling in its utopianism than that of even the most utopian of utopian socialists (Kumar, 1987: 53).

Introduction

To some writers, then, Marx was quite clearly a utopian. To others, however, he was quite clearly not. In seeking to account for Marx's 'anti-utopian utopianism', we therefore need to examine Marx's credentials as a utopian. Now, according to J. Max Patrick's definition of 'utopia', utopians do three things — they describe a state or society which is deemed to be better than the one in which they live, they describe this state or society in a variety of aspects and with some consistency and they describe it using their imagination. If, therefore, the questions surrounding Marx's own utopianism are to be resolved, we need to consider whether or not he did these three things. This, then, is one of the questions with which the thesis is concerned.

A second question concerns the nature of Marx's 'anti-utopianism'. One interpretation of this we encountered during the course of the 'nevertheless' argument — Marx's anti-utopianism was premised upon the belief that one cannot describe the future because it is always in the process of becoming and on the concomitant claim that those who do insist on describing the future are indulging in a distasteful form of idealism which is foolish, ineffective and even reactionary. There are, however, alternative interpretations. Of particular importance is that which chapter 1 will refer to as the means/ends dichotomy consensus, the basic claim of which is that Marx did not criticise the 'utopian socialists' because they described the future but rather because they provided ineffective means of realising their descriptions. In view of the popularity of this line of argument, a second question addressed by the present thesis is whether or not Marx *really was* critical of utopian descriptions of the future.

The intellectual context of the thesis has thus far been described in terms of the debates surrounding Marx's 'anti-utopian utopianism'. Was Marx critical of utopias and those who constructed them? Did he present us with one of his own? If he was critical of utopias and did present us with one of his own then why did he do so? These are the questions which need to be answered in this context. The thesis takes its place in another context as well, however — the context of

Introduction

contemporary pro-utopian Marxism. Here, the academic debates surrounding Marx's anti-utopian utopianism are of only secondary importance. What is of primary importance is that Marxists embrace utopianism and build their own utopias *today*, irrespective of what Marx thought and did a century and a half ago. This, then, is the context of political urgency mentioned at the outset of the thesis and epitomised by M. Shiviah's anguished plea.

Of the various expositions of a pro-utopian Marxism, Steven Lukes' 'Marxism and Utopianism' (1984) and Daniel Singer's 'In Defence of Utopia' (1993) are perhaps the best. Each approach the subject from a different angle and in a sense complement each other, with Singer arguing from the side of practical politics and Lukes providing more purely theoretical considerations. Yet even Lukes, who acknowledges the problems associated with that potential oxymoron 'utopian Marxism', fails to lend enough weight to these problems or fully explore their complexities. This is a failing not of Lukes himself but of the constraints imposed by an article-length study, all of which draws attention to the fact that there is no *book-length* study dealing specifically with Marx's confrontation with Utopia: Maurice Meisner's *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism* (1982), Vincent Geoghegan's *Utopianism and Marxism* (1987a) and Ruth Levitas' *The Concept of Utopia* (1990a) devote only one chapter apiece to Marx himself.

There have, of course, been numerous articles and book chapters dedicated to the subject. The essays collected by Burke, Crocker and Legters in *Marxism and the Good Society* (1981), Geoghegan's 'Marxism and Utopianism' (1987b), and pieces by Tom Kitwood (1978) and Zhang Longxi (1995) are all good examples, although the most incisive remains an essay written long ago by Shlomo Avineri (1973). Widening our search to include works not written from a Marxist perspective, one can also find useful discussions of Marx in Melvin Lasky's *Utopia and Revolution* (1977), Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor's *The Politics of Utopia* (1982) and Krishan Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987). Yet no book-length study of Marx's confrontation with Utopia has been

Introduction

forthcoming. The nearest thing there is to such is R. N. Berki's *Insight and Vision* (1983), an excellent yet seldom referred to investigation into what the book's subtitle terms 'The Problem of Communism in Marx's Thought'. This is full of useful ideas, although Berki's attempt to ascribe Marx's 'vision' to his Judaic cultural heritage ultimately lets it down.

The major flaw in all of this literature — Lukes and Berki excepted — is that it fails to locate its discussion of Marx within the context of his overall theoretical and political project. Marx's relationship to the utopian tradition as a whole, and to the 'utopian socialists' in particular, is discussed at length, but due attention is seldom paid to the intricacies of historical materialism and the setting it provides for Marx's anti-utopian pronouncements. This, in turn, leads to some rather unhelpful conclusions being reached; conclusions to the effect that Marx was simply silly to reject utopianism, or that his anti-utopianism was premised on nothing more than a desire to insult his political rivals, for example. More unhelpful still is the semantic trickery performed by some of the pro-utopians in order to conclude that Marx did not even reject utopianism in the first place. The first five chapters of this thesis therefore offer a more extended discussion of Marx and examine his confrontation with utopia in relation to his works as a whole, referring not only to those works in which he specifically attacked 'utopian socialism' or specifically developed utopian categories, but also to those in which the theoretical bases for these attacks and categories were developed.

Not only does a more detailed consideration of Marx help to illuminate his own particular approach to utopianism, it also sheds a telling light on thinkers such as Morris, Bloch and Marcuse. This is important because it is these rather than Marx himself who form the focal point of much contemporary pro-utopian Marxist thought. Following the example set by E. P. Thompson in his 1976 postface to *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, the general line adopted in relation to these thinkers is that Marxism can — and must if it is to survive — learn something from them. The trouble is that many of these studies deal with their

Introduction

subject in isolation, rather than in the context of the project begun by Marx. It is one of the contentions of this thesis, however, that thinkers such as Morris, Bloch and Marcuse can be understood — and in a sense wished themselves to be understood — only in relation to Marx's own particular project, and that a detailed understanding of the latter highlights problems in the thoughts of the former which are often overlooked in the eulogies written to them.

A detailed examination of Marx's own hostility towards utopianism also casts a shadow on the efficacy of utopianism as a contemporary political tool. For it shall be argued here that, *pace* the contemporary pro-utopians, Marx had very good and considered reasons for rejecting utopianism. It will furthermore be argued that thinkers such as Morris, Bloch and Marcuse failed to resolve these problems and that these problems still persist today. It will nowhere be denied that *some* of Marx's vitriol was misplaced, nor that a utopian approach to politics possesses some attractive features. What will be denied, however, is the idea that utopianism, even at the present historical juncture, presents no problems as far as its *incorporation* into Marxism is concerned.

Methodological Considerations

In the preface to his study of Saint-Just, Norman Hampson states that: 'To suggest that, on the whole, the revolutionary orators said what they meant and that their audiences generally understood what they said in the sense in which they meant it, is to confess oneself a very dull dog indeed' (1991: preface). This thesis proceeds on the basis of such a dull dog assumption; on the assumption, that is, that Marx said what he meant and that his audience generally understood what he said in the sense in which he meant it.

In attempting to understand what Marx meant when he said the things that he did, three factors have been taken into account — the texts themselves, the contexts framing the texts and the particular audiences addressed by the texts. The question of audience is, of course, crucial, and that Marx would have worded his arguments differently when presenting them to different people is a fact deducible

Introduction

from common sense. Given that we know the kind of audience to which Marx directed his various works, however, this presents no problems: we know, for example, that Marx addressed the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *Grundrisse* to an audience of one, namely himself; we know that the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* was addressed to an audience of five like-minded German socialists; we know that *The Civil War in France* was written with the members of the International in mind, the *Manifesto* for the German proletariat in general, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* for the readership of *Die Revolution*, his numerous books for pretty much *anyone* who would take the time to read them, and so on. We also know the nature of the events that were taking place at the time in which Marx was writing, and Maximilien Rubel and Margaret Manale's *Marx Without Myth* (1975) helpfully locates each of Marx's major works in the relevant socio-historic and scientific-technological context. It is a truism, of course, that one cannot *know* what Marx was thinking at any one time; one cannot *know* the way in which he reacted to particular circumstances, or which particular circumstances, if any, he was reacting to at all. We do, however, have access to his personal correspondence and this, together with an awareness of context and audience, enables us to avoid blind guesswork.

With regards to the texts themselves, a critical-hermeneutic approach has been adopted here. This is a hermeneutic method in the sense that it treats Marx's works as a coherent whole and seeks to illuminate its unifying threads.¹ In order to do this, certain explicit statements have been emphasised in order to render what is implicit in other statements equally explicit. This, in effect, involved working backwards — an initial reading of Marx's works identified a thread which was then sewn back through the works as a whole. In this case, the head of the needle which draws the thread is one sentence taken from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* — 'There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase' — and the thread itself then becomes Marx's varied attempts to name the content which goes beyond the phrase (i.e., the content of socialism) without actually phrasing it.

Introduction

The approach adopted here is also critical in the sense outlined by Carol Gould when she describes her own 'dialectical method of interpretation' thus:

such an interpretation of a work not only treats the work as a totality, but also approaches it critically. In this last respect, a dialectical method of interpretation goes beyond a hermeneutic method which restricts itself to the problem of understanding the meaning of the text itself. While the dialectical method also gives a reconstruction of the meaning of the text, it does so both from the standpoint of the internal understanding of the project that the text embodies and from an external critical standpoint based on knowledge and interests that are independent of the framework of the text (1978: xxiii).

The internal understanding of Marx's texts will therefore be accompanied by a critical and external analysis, based upon the contemporary knowledge and interests used by many writers to distance the question of utopianism from Marx's original project and framework. In addition to this, however, the contemporary knowledge and interests themselves will be examined critically, in terms of Marx's original project and framework, leaving us with a three-way movement of ideas: Marx's texts will be examined both internally (in order to reconstitute his original project) and externally (in order to critically evaluate his project in the light of contemporary developments), and then contemporary projects, which seek to distance themselves from Marx, will be examined in terms of Marx's own original project (in order to critically evaluate their own claims). It is my contention that whilst contemporary developments do render certain elements of Marx's original framework somewhat anachronistic, this very framework itself — once properly reconstituted — casts an almost debilitating light upon those contemporary projects which (unsuccessfully) seek to distance themselves from it.

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1 examines the nature of Marx's anti-utopianism. What did Marx understand by the term 'utopianism' and on what basis did he criticise the original 'utopian socialists'? These are the questions to be addressed here. In answer to the first question, it will be argued that Marx understood utopianism to mean the act of describing, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, an imaginary state or society which is regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which its author lives. In answer to the second, it will be argued that Marx

Introduction

criticised the utopians precisely because they described such states or societies. It will be pointed out, however, that Marx was more concerned with the implications involved in using utopianism as a political tool. For Marx, political utopianism inevitably involved a prophetic, philanthropic, paternalistic and messianic elitism which denied the proletariat the rights of self-emancipation and self-determination. In direct contrast to many contemporary studies, then, it will be argued that Marx really did criticise the act of describing utopias.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the nature of Marx's utopianism. Chapter 2 deals with Marx's description of the lower phase of communism and argues, firstly, that the need for such a phase was restricted to certain countries in certain circumstances, and secondly that it was intended to facilitate the development of *capitalism* in these countries anyway. For these reasons, it will be suggested that the lower phase of communism should not be discussed under the rubric of Marx's 'utopia'. Chapter 3 then deals with Marx's description of the higher phase of communism and points out that Marx described its institutional arrangements only vaguely and certainly not in a variety of aspects. What he did describe in a varied and consistent manner, however, were some of the characteristics that would define the individual within communism, and these are identified as the Dream of the Whole Man, the development of the all-round individual and the ontological necessity of labour. Whilst it will be conceded that such categories and descriptions, when taken together, do constitute a 'utopia', it will also be argued that the existence of a 'utopia' in Marx's works needs *explaining* rather than merely demonstrating.

Chapter 4 lays the basis for such an explanation when it describes Marx's project thus: by means of what he termed 'materialistically critical socialism', Marx attempted to imbue the proletariat with a sense of future-optimism in a manner which avoided the need for utopian philanthropy. This he did by 'sufficiently guaranteeing' that the future state of society would be emancipatory whatever actual 'form' it took. Chapter 4 also indicates that Marx failed to provide such a

Introduction

guarantee. Chapter 5 then looks at the ways in which Marx attempted to refine 'materialistically critical socialism' so that it *could* provide such a guarantee. It is here that Marx toyed with teleological, structuralist and pragmatic conceptions of historical development and it is here, rather than in the utopian imagination, that the key to understanding Marx's description of communism lies. For it will be argued that the three 'utopian' concepts already identified — the Dream of the Whole Man, the all-round development of the individual and the ontological necessity of labour — were nothing less than the logical assumptions upon which his three historical models — the teleological, structuralist and pragmatic respectively — were based. Rather than being products of the utopian imagination, therefore, they were more the logical assumptions upon which his anti-utopian methodologies were founded. Chapter 5 will thus forward the claim that Marx was an 'accidental utopian' and will argue that a conscious and purposeful utopianism was not, irrespective of the pro-utopians' claims to the contrary, an integral part of Marx's own particular project.

Chapters 6 and 7 combine a critical analysis of Marx from the external standpoint granted by an understanding of contemporary developments with a critical analysis of contemporary developments within Marxism from the standpoint granted by a proper understanding of Marx's original project. For Marx's failure to provide a non-utopian means of imbuing the masses with a sense of future-optimism, together with developments such as the collapse of 'actually existing socialism', have led many to proclaim that Marx's anti-utopian framework should now be abandoned in favour of a conscious endorsement of utopianism. On the other hand, however, it will be argued that no conscious endorsement of utopianism as a political tool can avoid Marx's original critique of utopianism. As a means of illustrating the problem, chapter 7 discusses the work of William Morris, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, and points out that they, like everyone else who attempts to use visions of a better future as a political tool, were led down the road of paternalistic and messianic elitism so accurately described by Marx.

Introduction

The conclusion will attempt to deal with the problems to which such considerations give rise. It will concede that Marx failed in his attempt to develop an alternative to utopianism as a means of instilling future-optimism into the masses. It will also, however, emphasise the fact that this in no way legitimises utopianism as a means of instilling such optimism. Marx's original critique of utopianism was accurate and his failure to develop a convincing alternative takes nothing away from this. It will then be argued that contemporary writers often see utopianism as a source of comfort, as a substitute for the guarantees once offered by 'science'. Rather depressingly perhaps, it will finally be argued that socialism can offer no guarantees, whether utopian or scientific, and that the key to generating revolutionary hope lies in socialism being able to capture, nurture and foster 'the spirit of adventure'.

Notes

¹ There is, of course, a vast difference between arguing that a specific work should be treated as a coherent whole and arguing that a *body* of work should be treated as such. In suggesting that Marx's works should be treated as a coherent whole, however, what I am trying to get across is the idea that Marx's works each dealt with, and were in a sense framed by, the same problems. Implicit in such an idea, then, is a rejection of the young/mature Marx distinction, a distinction popularised by Louis Althusser (see, for example, Althusser, 1969: 227-239) but by no means confined to him. Whilst rejecting such a distinction, what I am not rejecting is the notion (nay the *fact*) that Marx said different things at different times. To argue that Marx remained entirely consistent throughout his life's work is simply bizarre and more often than not relies upon psychoanalytical readings of Marx's subconscious which are just as dubious in their implications as any proposed by Althusser himself (Robert C. Tucker represents the worst example of this: see Tucker, 1961: 175 and Tucker, 1970: 182 for contrived attempts to use the subconscious as a means of 'explaining away' those aspects of Marx's thought which Tucker does not want to be there). Rather than suggest that Marx's works were consistent in their content, what this thesis does is suggest that they were consistent in their aims, i.e., that they represented various attempts to deal with the same problems. The fact that Marx sometimes proposed conflicting solutions does not, therefore, mean that Marx's thought can be divided into compartments separated by epistemological breaks. It simply means that in attempting to solve the problems he was attempting to solve Marx sometimes proposed conflicting solutions. As this is something which the thesis itself is intended to demonstrate, however, no more need — or for the sake of unnecessary repetition, can — be said now.

Chapter 1

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to identify the grounds upon which Marx rejected utopianism. It takes as its starting point the premise that the relationship between Marx and utopianism can be expressed almost solely in terms of the relationship between Marx and the 'utopian socialists', both those who preceded him — Fourier, Owen, Saint-Simon, Cabet — and those contemporaneous with him — Proudhon, Weitling, Dühring, and the followers of his aforementioned predecessors. This is because, as Ruth Levitas correctly observes: 'The term utopia is in fact hardly ever used by Marx or Engels other than as the adjective 'utopian', generally in the terms 'utopian socialism' and 'utopian communism'' (1990a: 35-36). The search for the grounds upon which Marx rejected utopianism thus becomes the search for the key to Marx's critique of 'utopian socialism'. If, therefore, we can identify i) what Marx meant when he used the term 'utopian' to describe a particular group of socialist thinkers, and ii) why he considered the utopianism so ascribed to be worthy of critique, then we will have identified the defining features of Marx's critique of utopianism *per se*.

Even those only vaguely acquainted with the works of Marx will, of course, be familiar with his critique of 'utopian socialism'. In this respect, the present chapter may seem superfluous. Superfluous, however, it is not, and for two principal reasons. The first concerns the need to stress the importance attached by Marx himself to his critique of utopianism. This is generally underplayed, and it is quite common to find writers suggesting, as Bertell Ollman does here, that:

Marx's objection to discussing communist society was more of a strategic than of a principled sort. More specifically, and particularly in his earliest works, Marx was concerned to distinguish himself from other socialists for whom prescriptions for the future were the main stock-in-trade (1977: 8).

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

Marx's critique of utopianism thus becomes a 'strategic' consideration, premised on nothing more than the desire to distance himself from his political rivals. In discussing Marx's critique at some length, the present chapter seeks to demonstrate that it was something more than a strategic consideration. In Ollman's terms, it will be argued that Marx's objection to discussing communist society *was* of a principled sort and that, moreover, the principles in question were fundamental to the constitution of Marxism itself.

A detailed discussion of Marx's critique of 'utopian socialism' is warranted for a second reason too. For a substantial number of writers have, over recent years, sought to challenge the idea that Marx was anti-utopian at all. None go as far as to deny that Marx *criticised* the utopian socialists, nor do they deny that Marx criticised them for what *he* considered to be their utopianism. Their point of contention, however, concerns the nature of what Marx meant by the term 'utopianism', and their basic argument is that his critique of it, however paradoxical this may sound, was not really a critique of utopias. A second aim of this chapter is to counter such claims and to indicate that Marx's principled objection to utopianism was indeed a principled objection to the construction of utopias.

The chapter itself begins (section 1.2) by outlining the approach just mentioned, the basic argument of which is that Marx did not criticise the 'ends' described by the utopian socialists but confined himself instead to criticising the 'means' by which they hoped to realise them. After highlighting some of the dubious implications of this approach (section 1.3), the rest of the chapter seeks to demonstrate that Marx criticised the utopian socialists precisely because of the 'utopian' ends they described. Section 1.4 points out that, as far as Marx was concerned, *all* descriptions of socialism were utopian and that, therefore, the utopian socialists were, in spite of their claims to the contrary, 'utopian' as well. Section 1.5, which is the main focus of the chapter, then discusses Marx's critique of the utopians proper. This concludes by suggesting that Marx's critique of

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

utopianism *was* of a principled sort because utopianism, for him, only served to undermine the principles of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination, principles which, if anything, helped to define Marxism as a distinctive kind of *ism*. With this in mind, let us now begin by discussing the approach which denies that Marx's anti-utopianism involved a rejection of utopian 'ends'.

1.2 The Means/Ends Dichotomy Consensus

I have termed the approach in question 'the means/ends dichotomy consensus', a term which reflects both the nature of its arguments and their popularity. The nature of its basic argument is this:

It was not the ends that the utopian socialists sought that made them "utopian" in the Marxist sense, but rather the inadequacy of the means proposed to achieve those ends (Meisner, 1982: 8).

The difference between Marxism and utopian socialism does not . . . rest on the existence or otherwise of an image of the socialist society to be attained, nor even on the content of that image. It rests upon disagreements about the process of transition (Levitas, 1990a: 45).

In relation to the first question posed above — what Marx meant when he used the term 'utopian' to describe a particular group of socialist thinkers — the answer is clear: because the term referred neither to the ends that the utopians sought nor to the content of their images of the socialist society to be attained, what made them 'utopian' was *not* their utopian descriptions of socialism. What made them 'utopian' was rather the means they proposed to achieve their utopian ends and their ideas concerning the process of transition. The second question — why Marx criticised the utopianism of the 'utopian socialists' — then becomes inextricably tied to the first. For the means proposed by the 'utopian socialists' were only deemed by Marx to be 'utopian' because they were 'inadequate', so that Marx in effect offered a critical definition of utopianism; 'utopian socialists' were utopian because they forwarded an ineffective theory of the transitional process and inadequate means of attaining a set of ends with which Marx himself was in broad agreement.

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

Fredric Jameson argues along the same lines when he suggests that 'the indispensable feature supplied by the Utopian socialists to the Marxism-to-be of Marx's and Engels's time was simply their vision of the *future* itself' (1976: 53). What made the utopian socialists 'utopian', however, was not the nature of their vision of the future but the inadequacy of the 'mechanism' they chose 'for implementing their vision' (ibid.). Richard T. De George offers a similar argument when he states that:

The term "communism" is used by Marx (and Engels) in three different, although related ways. The term signifies a doctrine (communism_d), a movement (communism_m), and a stage of historical development (communism_s) (1981: 11).

He then tells us that 'Communism_d consists of a description of communism, and a theory of how communism_s is to be achieved' (ibid.: 12), arguing of the latter of these that:

It is this portion of Marxist theory that, according to Marx and Engels, raises communism_d as a theory from the status of a utopian ideal to the status of science. This distinguishes scientific socialism from utopian socialism (ibid.: 15).

What distinguishes Marx from utopian socialism, then, is not that the former refused to describe the future, for such a description was an essential feature of communism_d. It is rather Marx's 'theory of *how* communism is to be achieved'. Marx's theory can be distinguished from utopian socialism, in other words, by virtue of his analysis of the *means* needed to achieve his description of communism_s.

As to *why* the means proposed by the 'utopian socialists' were inadequate and henceforth 'utopian', Levitas supplies the answer:

The real dispute between Marx and Engels and the utopian socialists is not about the merit or otherwise of goals or of images of the future but about the process of transformation, and particularly about the belief that propaganda alone would result in the realisation of socialism (1990a: 35).

According to Levitas, then, the 'utopian socialists' were utopian 'in the Marxist sense' because they believed that 'propaganda alone would result in the realisation of socialism'; propaganda alone was considered by Marx to be an 'inadequate'

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

means of realising socialism, and anyone who considered it to be an *adequate* means was 'utopian'.

Does this mean, therefore, that when one talks of Marx's anti-utopianism one is talking merely of an opposition to propaganda as a means of realising socialist visions of the future? Levitas herself casts doubt on this when she suggests that 'Marx rejected as utopian all those plans for the future which are not realisable because they are not rooted in a correct analysis of the present' (1979: 20). For here it seems that the term 'utopian' *is* used by Marx to refer to the utopians' 'ends', i.e., their plans for the future. Utopias subsequently become those plans which, by virtue of not being 'rooted' in a correct analysis of the present, are unrealisable. Vincent Geoghegan also subscribes to this view, arguing that: 'What is under attack here is not anticipation as such, but rather the failure to root this anticipation in a theoretical framework cognizant of the essential dynamics of capitalism' (1987a: 27). The implication here is that Marx *did not* reject as utopian those plans for the future which *were* rooted in a correct analysis of the present and *were* cognizant of the essential dynamics of capitalism. His dispute with the utopians thus seemed to concern the way in which their *ends* were derived. Darko Suvin reiterates this point when he remarks that:

What matters . . . is not the fact that the "utopian socialists" built a system from their head: Marx did so too. But he, as different from them, NOT ONLY used reason, his head, principles, etc., BUT ALSO took into account reality, facts, and historico-economical processes (1976: 61).

It is suggested by each of these writers, then, that Marx defined 'utopia' as a system built using 'reason, one's head, principles, etc.', and that Marx *did not* consider a system built using these things AND a correct analysis of the present based on 'reality, facts and historico-economic processes' to be a utopia. Contra Meisner, therefore, it *was* the ends that the utopians sought that made them 'utopian' in the Marxist sense.

Nonetheless, when it comes to the question of what planning for the future using a theoretical framework that *is* cognizant of the essential dynamics of capitalism

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

actually means, the answer is still formulated in terms of a means/ends dichotomy.

Thus states Geoghegan:

What emerges is that the utopian socialists are criticized by Marx and Engels for the highly abstract nature of their speculations — the lack, in other words, of any genuine connection between ends and means. Unaware of the real nature of society, overly subjective dreams are spun, detailed visions of other-worldly paradises constructed, but with no connection with any of the real tendencies at work in society. Under attack here is not anticipation of future conditions as such but rather the failure to ground this anticipation in a theory of effective political and social change (1987b: 39).

The utopians' anticipations were highly abstract and overly subjective *because* they were not connected to any of the real tendencies at work in society and *therefore* lacked any genuine connection between means and ends. The abstract nature of the utopians' ends is thus somehow *explained* in terms of the inadequacy of their means. It subsequently follows that establishing a genuine link between means and ends would rescue the ends themselves from the realm of abstraction. The key to avoiding utopian ends, in other words, lies in one's being able to find the genuine means to realise them.

When Geoghegan suggests that utopianism (in the Marxist sense) is a form of anticipation which lacks any roots in a theoretical framework cognizant of the essential dynamics of capitalism, it is not, therefore, the anticipations themselves, i.e., the ends, that he is calling utopian. It is rather the fact that the ends, which Marx and Engels shared, were unrealisable, i.e., utopian, because the utopians had yet to discover the *means* by which they could be realised. This is also what Suvin means when he argues that Marx built a system using his head AND reality, facts, and historico-economical processes. For such a system is constructed at the point where 'utopia and knowledge meet' (Suvin, 1976: 68), so that utopian ends meet a knowledge of reality which in turn produces a knowledge of the appropriate means by which the ends can be realised. Marx thus rescues his system from the spectre of utopianism by virtue of having discovered the means to realise it. For Suvin, then, as for the other proponents of the means/ends dichotomy argument, what distinguishes Marxism from utopian socialism is the fact that his project involved an adequate understanding of the means by which his ends were to be

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

realised. As such, the 'differentia specifica' between Marxism and utopian socialism is described by Suvin as 'the basis, center, and purpose of Marxist socialism: it is *revolution*' (ibid.). Similarly, although Levitas fails to develop the idea that utopias were deemed by Marx to be plans which are unrealisable because they are not rooted in a correct analysis of the present, her general subscription to the means/ends argument would indicate that she means that utopias are plans that are unrealisable, *not* because as ends they can never be realised, but once again because the utopians' incorrect analysis of the present had yet to reveal the means by which they could be realised.

This complex relationship between utopian ends and utopian means is neatly captured by Keith Taylor when he argues that:

Marx adopted the already established socialist view of the future as a stage when harmony, association, community and co-operation would be achieved; but he disagreed with his predecessors when it came to stating *how* this future stage was to be reached. He knew that his strategy could not be reconciled with what he considered to be their naive (because it was unscientific) conviction that an intensification of the class struggle could be avoided. For him the class struggle was everything, and a realistic as opposed to utopian (in the sense of impracticable) strategy demanded that the proletariat must liberate themselves *through* the class struggle and not by merely wishing it away (Goodwin and Taylor, 1982: 166-167).

Marx thus adopted the utopians' *ends* as his own, disagreeing only when it came to the *means* by which these ends were to be realised. Because the utopians had failed to take into account reality, facts, and historico-economical processes when building their systems, they lacked a framework cognizant of the essential dynamics of capitalism and thus believed that an intensification of the class struggle could be avoided. This led them to adopt a utopian (in the sense of impracticable) strategy. Marx, on the other hand, *was* cognizant of the essential dynamics of capitalism and realised that his system could be realised only *through* the class struggle. He was therefore anti-utopian in the sense that he adopted a realistic (in the sense of practicable) strategy for realising his system. Simply put, class struggle and revolution was a 'realistic' means of achieving socialism whereas propaganda alone was the 'utopian' alternative.

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

Only one question now remains to be answered, namely, why the 'utopians' opted for propaganda instead of revolution in the first place. To this question, Tom Kitwood provides the answer:

What were the grounds of the early Marxists' critique of the utopian socialists, and of their professed refusal to be 'utopian' themselves? A simple but important reason was that recent utopian thinkers had been almost all drawn from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, and therefore were in no position to understand society from the point of view of the class in need of liberation — the proletariat (1978: 26).

The socio-psychological foundation of the utopians' utopianism can be located, therefore, in the fact that they were members of the bourgeoisie and because they were unable, as a result, to understand the revolutionary needs of the proletariat.

Let us now summarise these arguments so that we can be quite clear about their implications. The arguments can be formulated as follows:

- i) Marx did not object to visions of the socialist future and did not use the term 'utopian' to describe them.
- ii) Marx used the term 'utopian' to describe people who proposed inadequate means of realising their visions of the future.
- iii) For Marx, a proposed set of means was inadequate and therefore 'utopian' if it was based on the belief that propaganda alone would result in the realisation of socialism.
- iv) The belief that propaganda alone would result in the realisation of socialism was based upon an incorrect analysis of the present and a framework lacking cognizance of the essential dynamics of capitalism.
- v) If 'utopian' means were proposed by an individual, this would most likely be because that individual was a member of the bourgeoisie and hence unable to understand the needs of the class in need of liberation — the proletariat.
- vi) Marx was anti-utopian, therefore, only in the sense that he *did* understand the needs of the proletariat, did possess a framework cognizant of the essential

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

dynamics of capitalism and was consequently able to recognise that his vision of the future could only be realised through the class struggle and by revolutionary means.

These arguments, taken together, do no less than rescue Marx's 'anti-utopian utopianism' from the spectre of contradiction. For if Marx merely advocated revolutionary (i.e., anti-utopian) means of achieving his desired goal (i.e., his utopia), then the terms 'utopian' and 'anti-utopian' are rendered harmlessly non-contradictory.

1.3 Some Problems With The Consensus

The most striking feature of the arguments contained within the means/ends dichotomy consensus is that they imply a complete misunderstanding of the term 'utopia' on Marx's part. For Marx's use of the term clearly bears no relation at all to the definition of 'utopia' offered by J. Max Patrick and accepted here. The term has been redefined to such an extent — from a description of certain ends that people advocate to a notion almost entirely divorced from any consideration of ends — that one is forced to conclude that Marx was mistaken in his choice of it.

Marie Berneri certainly reaches such a conclusion, arguing that prior to the intervention of Marx and Engels 'utopia was considered as an imaginary ideal commonwealth whose realisation was impossible or difficult', but that subsequently it 'included all social schemes which did not recognise the division of society into classes, the inevitability of the class struggle and of the social revolution' (1971: 207). As a result, she argues, one should ignore Marx and Engels in any discussion of utopianism.

Martin Buber expands upon the redefinition ascribed to Marx by Berneri:

Originally Marx and Engels called those people Utopians whose thinking had preceded the critical development of industry, the proletariat and the class war, and who therefore could not take this development into account; subsequently the term was levelled indiscriminately at all those who, in the estimation of Marx and Engels, did not in fact take account of it; and of these the late comers either did not understand how to do so or

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

were unwilling or both. The epithet "Utopian" thereafter became the most potent missile in the fight of Marxism against non-Marxian socialism (1988: 5).

'Utopians', then, were either those people who preceded the class struggle or those who ignored it. Either way, 'utopian socialism' was 'utopian in that it took no notice of the class dynamics of capitalism' (Bender, 1990a: 111). If this were indeed what Marx meant by the term 'utopian' then Judith Shklar would be right to opine that: 'One wishes that Marx and Engels might have chosen another epithet. Certainly many useless verbal wrangles over the "true" meaning of the adjective "utopian" might have been avoided' (1973: 103).

It is difficult to believe, however, that this *was* what Marx meant by the term 'utopian'. Not only because it implies that Marx did not actually understand what the term meant, but also because it implies that Marx completely misunderstood the 'utopians' themselves. For whilst some of them *were* anti-revolutionary (Fourier, Saint-Simon, Owen), just as many were not (Proudhon, Weitling, and after the 1831 Lyons uprising, all of Saint-Simon's 'disciples'). Keith Taylor hints at this when he phrases the standard means/ends argument thus:

What he [Marx] objected to in their [the utopians'] work was not so much their ultimate vision of social harmony, but their characteristic reliance (apart from the occasional exception like Weitling) on gradual reform and non-revolutionary methods of achieving this harmony (Goodwin and Taylor, 1982: 166).

What this does not explain, however, is why Marx would use the term 'utopian' to describe someone like Weitling. For Weitling displayed a degree of revolutionary commitment that scared almost everyone around him, and according to E. H. Carr he 'appears to have been the first to propose to "shoot without mercy all enemies of communism"' (cited in Lasky, 1977: 106). In addition to this, Weitling had emerged from the ranks of the proletariat and presumably, therefore, *was* in a position to understand the needs of this class. If, therefore, Marx used the term 'utopian' to mean someone who failed to recognise the importance of the class struggle and the need for revolution, then not only was this a misuse, but it was also an incorrectly applied misuse of the term. Now, once again, perhaps Marx *was* mistaken in his understanding of some of the 'utopians', and perhaps he *did*

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

use completely the wrong term to articulate a critique based on a complete misunderstanding of the thinkers he was using the wrong term to criticise. One begins here, however, to descend into the realms of farce and the means/ends interpretation begins to lose credibility as a result.¹

The truly fundamental flaw in the means/ends dichotomy consensus, however, is that its conclusions lack any basis in the writings of Marx. For if one asks Marx the two questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, namely, why he used the term 'utopian' to describe the 'utopian socialists' and why he criticised the utopianism so defined, then one finds a succinct reply in the letter he wrote to Sorge in October 1877:

Utopian socialism especially which for decades we have been clearing out of the German workers' heads with so much effort and labour — their freedom from it having made them theoretically (and therefore also practically) superior to the French and English — *utopian* socialism, playing with fantastic pictures of the future structure of society, is again spreading like wildfire . . . It is natural that utopianism, which *before* the era of materialistically critical socialism concealed the latter within itself in embryo, can, now, coming belatedly, only be silly, stale, and reactionary from the roots up (Marx and Engels, 1969: 376).

It is clear from this letter that Marx used the adjective 'utopian' to describe socialists who 'play with fantastic pictures of the future structure of society'. Now, simplistic and unrefined this definition of utopianism may be, but a *redefinition* it is not. Moreover, if one reads 'description' for 'picture', 'imaginary' for 'fantastic', and 'a state or society' for 'the future structure of society', then its resemblance to the definition offered by Patrick becomes clear. More importantly still, it is difficult to read this statement and agree with the conclusions reached by the means/ends dichotomy consensus — that Marx's understanding of utopianism was divorced from the question of 'the ends that the utopian socialists sought' or from 'images of the socialist society to be attained'. For on the contrary, it seems that 'utopian socialism' was understood by Marx *solely* in terms of the ends sought and the images constructed by the 'utopian socialists' — what was 'utopian' were the pictures themselves, not the means proposed to realise them.

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

As to why utopianism so defined was considered worthy of critique, Marx provides the answer here too; utopianism was 'silly, stale and reactionary' because it had now been superseded by 'materialistically critical socialism' (the meaning of this enigmatic term will be explored in chapter 4). In other words, the 'utopian socialists' were reactionary *because* they were utopian (in the traditional sense), and they were not utopian (in some redefined sense) because they were reactionary, anti-revolutionary or whatever.

To summarise, then: firstly, the 'utopians' were not utopian because they were anti-revolutionary — they were utopian because they played with fantastic pictures of the future structure of society; secondly, they were not criticised because their proposed means were 'inadequate' — they were criticised because they were *still* playing with these pictures in 'the era of materialistically critical socialism'. If we remind ourselves of the arguments forwarded by the means/ends dichotomy consensus, we can see that i) Marx *did not* use the term 'utopian' to describe people who hoped to achieve the realisation of their visions by means of propaganda alone, and ii) that Marx *did* object to visions of the socialist future and *did* use the term 'utopian' to describe them.

Nonetheless, because selective quotation is the first analytical tool that any Marxologist acquires, rejecting a position forwarded by a number of writers on the basis of a single passage from Marx is wholly unsatisfactory. For this reason, the rest of the chapter will attempt to reveal the consistency of Marx's anti-utopianism.

1.4 Demonstrating the 'Utopianism' of the 'Utopian Socialists'

Shlomo Avineri rightly remarks that:

To Marx the main trouble with the utopians is ultimately epistemological. It is not that their schemes are unrealizable, impractical, or rooted in never-never land. It is because the utopians concoct systems at all that they are wrong (1973: 323-324).

That this is the case can only be demonstrated if one understands something of the thought of the 'utopian socialists' themselves. What needs to be stressed in

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

particular is the fact that the 'utopian socialists' did not consider themselves to be 'utopian'. On the contrary, they considered themselves to epitomise the very opposite. Thus asks Fourier:

What is Utopia? It is the dream of well-being without the means of execution, without an effective method. Thus all philosophical sciences are Utopias, for they have always led peoples to the very opposite of the state of well-being they promised them (cited in Spencer, 1981: 126).

Utopia, for Fourier, was an unrealisable dream. His vision of an alternative reality, on the other hand, was eminently realisable because it was based upon the precise mathematical science of passionate attraction. Because Fourier had discovered a science of society, and with it 'the truth', his vision of Harmony, founded upon this scientific truth, was not a 'utopia'. Fourier claimed to have discovered the existence of twelve passions, each of which is distributed differently in each of the 810 different types of man and woman that he had also discovered exist. He then claimed to have discovered how each of these passions is linked to the rest of the world — to colours, shapes, minerals, everything — and to have calculated the optimal combination of these colours, shapes, passions and people. Thus, although Roland Barthes (not altogether unfairly) described him as a 'logothete', inventing a language 'precisely in order to say nothing' (1977: 6), Fourier considered his vision of Harmony to be *scientifically* grounded.

The same applies to Robert Owen. His alternative reality, i.e., a collective happiness induced by a rationally reorganised society based around the principles of sexual restraint, temperance, frugality and obedience to the Christian dictum 'do unto others', was no mere whim or imaginative fancy. On the contrary, these were 'uniformly consistent principles, derived from the unvarying facts of the creation; principles, the truth of which no sane man will attempt to deny' (1963: 46-47). Indeed, Owen directly contrasts his empirical science to others' imaginative abstraction:

In this inquiry [into the nature of the 'good society'], men have hitherto been directed by their inventive faculties and have almost entirely disregarded the only guide that can lead to true knowledge on any subject — experience. They have been governed, in the most important concerns of life, by mere illusions of the imagination, in direct opposition to existing facts (ibid.: 94).

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

With regards to Owen's own particular 'Good Society', however, 'as it is a deduction from all the leading facts in the past history of the world, so it will be found, on the most extensive investigation, to be consistent with every fact which now exists' (ibid.: 70).

Saint-Simon was even more convinced than either Fourier or Owen that he had founded his 'utopia' upon scientific principles, proclaiming that:

My object is to discover whether there is a form of government which is intrinsically good, founded upon reliable, absolute and universal principles, valid for all times and places . . . I will use the only two principles which can be relied upon to produce absolute proof: reason and experience (1976b: 87).

He thus sought to *prove*, through the use of reason and experience, the intrinsic worth of his industrial system. As Ghita Ionescu remarks:

Saint-Simon's avowed aim was to provide the *scientific analysis* of the interrelation and the functioning of the entire *industrial system*; indeed, to form a 'science of mankind' and to grasp the ultimate reality of modern and future mankind as transformed by industry (1976: 30).

Saint-Simon sought, in other words, to scientifically prove that his system *was* the future. Nor did he see this as a difficult task, convinced as he was that:

The future consists of the last items of a series of which the first composed the past. When one has properly examined the first terms of a series, it is easy to postulate those following. Thus, from the past, deeply observed, one can with ease deduce the future (cited in Durkheim, 1959: 102).

One can see, therefore, that the 'utopian socialists' were as anti-utopian as any anti-utopians could be. They categorically denied, and this repeatedly, that their societies of the future were derived from imaginative abstraction. And it was *because* they denied that their societies of the future were derived from imaginative abstraction that Marx criticised them.

Marx criticised them, in fact, because he disagreed with their assessment of what science could do; for the 'utopians', science enabled one to know the form that the future will take, whereas for Marx it did not. One need not ascribe to Marx any particular epistemology here, for the idea that one can scientifically ground a vision of the future can be criticised on the basis of virtually any theory of

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

knowledge. All one need do is point out that, for Marx, because one cannot know the form that the future will take, the 'scientific' derivation of it by the utopians was not scientific at all but 'utopian'. As Steven Lukes quite rightly puts it, in attempting to scientifically derive the future form of society the utopians 'laid claim to a type of knowledge, social forecasting, that could not be had *now*' (1984: 157). This, I would suggest, is the founding principle of Marx's critique of 'utopian socialism'. This is why, in the *Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels take pains to emphasise that the utopians' 'new social science' was nothing more than 'an organization of society specially contrived by these inventors' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 115); this is why, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), Marx emphasises that the utopians 'seek science in their minds' (Marx, 1976b: 177); this is why, in his obituary to Proudhon (1865), Marx tells us that 'the utopians are hunting for a so-called "science" by which a formula for the "solution of the social question" is to be excogitated *a priori*' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 188); this is why, in an article of 1873, Marx refers to utopian systems as 'idealistic fantasies' concocted by 'doctors in *social science*' (Marx, 1974d: 329), and so on and so forth.

Most tellingly of all, it is this conclusion which lies behind the most famous of Marx's anti-utopian soundbites, namely, his assertion that he does not write 'recipes for the cookshops of the future'. For the full quotation — from the preface to the second German edition of *Capital* (1873) — has Marx telling us that he is 'confining [him]self merely to the critical analysis of actual facts, instead of writing recipes (Comtist ones?) for the cook-shops of the future' (Marx, 1976a: 99). And one of the reasons why Marx does not write 'Comtist' recipes (in addition to the fact that he was responding to a Comtist critic) is that Comte was precisely the type of person who disguised his utopianism beneath the cloak of science. For Comte was very fond of saying things like this:

it is quite in accordance with the nature of the human mind that observation of the past should unveil the future in politics, as it does in astronomy, chemistry and physiology. The determination of the future must even be regarded as the direct aim of political science, as in the case of the other positive sciences. Indeed, it is clear that knowledge of what social system the elite of mankind is called to by the progress of civilization —

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

knowledge forming the true practical object of positive science — involves a general determination of the next social future as it results from the past (cited in Kumar, 1986: 23-24).

Statements such as this are *exactly* the kind of statements that Marx used the word 'utopian' to criticise. Comte, like Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen, claimed to be able to *know* what the society of the future will look like, and he claimed to base this knowledge upon scientific principles. For Marx, on the other hand, one *cannot* know what the society of the future will look like, and *any* vision of it *must* therefore be 'utopian', i.e., simply conjured by the imagination.

It is in this context that one can best understand Engels' notorious critique of the utopians in *Anti-Dühring* (1878) and *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880). For in these works, Engels says of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and Weitling that: 'To all these socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice and has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power' (Engels, 1978: 28-9, 1968c: 404). Engels recognises, in other words, that the utopians each regarded their systems as the scientific expression of 'the truth'. He adds, however, that:

The solution to the social problem, which as yet lay hidden in undeveloped economic conditions, the utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain . . . These new social systems were foredoomed as utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting into pure phantasies (1978: 311, 1968c: 398).

In contrast to the utopians' own claims, therefore, their systems are derided as utopian. They represented, not the discovery of the truth, but fantasies of the human brain. Like Marx, then, the term 'utopian' was used pejoratively by Engels because he was trying to point out that, despite their 'scientific' claims, the 'utopian socialists' were, in fact, 'utopian'. The term did not need to be redefined in order to become an insult because its traditional meaning was insulting enough: describing the nature of socialism was 'utopian', and this meant that a group of socialists who considered themselves to be 'scientists' were, no doubt to their utter dismay, 'utopians'.

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

Engels, in fact, compounds this critique by mocking the ahistorical nature of the utopians' systems thus:

If pure reason and justice have not, hitherto, ruled the world, this has been the case only because men have not rightly understood them. What was wanted was the individual man of genius, who has now arisen and who understands the truth. That he has now arisen, that the truth has now been clearly understood, is not an inevitable event, following of necessity in the chain of historical development, but a mere happy accident. He might just as well have been born 500 years earlier, and might then have spared humanity 500 years of error, strife, and suffering (1978: 28, 1968c: 398).

The utopians are caricatured here as individuals who simply do not understand that concrete theory needs to work *with* history rather than above it in the supra-historical ether of the detached human brain. Marx says much the same thing in his 'The *Débat Social* of February 6 on the Democratic Association' (1848). For there he argues that 'German communism is the most determined opponent of all utopianism, and far from excluding historical development in fact bases itself upon it' (Marx, 1976d: 538). The distinction is therefore clear; utopians exclude historical development whereas Marx bases his brand of communism upon it.

Superficially at least, this lends support to the argument forwarded by Suvin, in which the utopians are criticised by Marx for building systems using **ONLY** their heads whilst Marx builds his using this **AND** a knowledge of reality, facts and historico-economical processes. Such support is, however, only superficial. For in basing their communism upon historical development, what Marx and Engels were attempting to do was *avoid the need to construct systems altogether*. In order to understand that this is what they were attempting to do, one needs to be aware of their 'political' critique of utopianism. It is with this that the following section is therefore concerned.

1.5 Why Utopianism is Now Silly, Stale and Reactionary

Marx's critique of the doctors of social science had two broad aims; firstly, to demonstrate that the self-professed scientists were actually utopian (the epistemological critique of concocting systems), and secondly to demonstrate that they were also, by virtue of being utopian, *politically dangerous* (the subsequent

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

political critique). Behind this latter conviction lay Marx's belief that the progress of history had rendered utopianism redundant, and underlying this belief was the following premise, put forward in Volume 2 of *The German Ideology* (1846):

All epoch-making systems have as their real content the needs of the time in which they arose. Each one of them is based on the whole of the antecedent development of a nation, on the historical growth of its class relations with their political, moral, philosophical and other consequences (Marx and Engels, 1976b: 462).

When applied to the 'utopians' themselves, this premise gave rise to the conclusion that their 'systems' had as their real content the needs of an undeveloped proletariat:

as to the systems themselves they nearly all appeared in the early days of the communist movement and had at that time propaganda value as popular novels, which corresponded perfectly to the still undeveloped consciousness of the proletarians, who were just then beginning to play an active part (ibid.: 461).

One finds exactly the same point being made in the *Manifesto*. Because, in the early stages of capitalism, the proletariat remained 'a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 115), this initiative had to be imported in the form of utopianism, the 'fantastic' and 'instinctive' nature of which adequately represented the 'fantastic' and 'instinctive' nature of the proletariat's own undeveloped consciousness:

Such fantastic pictures of future society, painted at a time when the proletariat is still in a very undeveloped state and has but a fantastic conception of its own position, corresponded with the first instinctive yearnings of that class for a general reconstruction of society (ibid.: 116).

In both *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*, therefore, Marx and Engels argue that 'utopian socialism' was relevant to, because it was a product of, the early stages of capitalism; a period during which capitalism itself, the class struggle, and proletarian class consciousness were each in their formative stages. In both works again, however, it is argued that 'utopian socialism' is no longer relevant to the 1840's, i.e., to a period in which each of these things are maturing:

In proportion as the modern class struggle develops and takes definite shape, this fantastic standing apart from the contest, these fantastic attacks on it, lose all practical value and all theoretical justification (Marx and Engels, 1967: 117).

As the party develops, these systems lose all importance and are at best retained purely nominally as catchwords (Marx and Engels, 1976b: 461).

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

One should note here that it is the utopians' 'systems', i.e., their ends, that lose all importance, practical value and theoretical justification as history progresses. One should note also that whilst Marx allows them to retain the status of 'catchwords', he is by no means either endorsing them or suggesting that they are wrong merely because they lack a genuine link with some appropriate means. On the contrary, he is suggesting that utopian system-building has lost all importance and theoretical justification because, quite simply, the proletariat no longer needs such systems.

Marx is clearly referring here to Utopia's *source*. Utopianism, as a political phenomenon, has its source in 'the first instinctive yearnings of the proletariat for a general reconstruction of society'. It finds its source, in other words, in a certain historical period (the early stages of capitalism) and 'corresponds' to the needs of a certain class (the nascent proletariat). In 'Political Indifferentism' (1873) Marx makes this link very clear:

The first socialists (Fourier, Saint-Simon, etc.) since social conditions were not sufficiently developed to allow the working class to constitute itself as a militant class, were necessarily obliged to limit themselves to dreams about the *model society* of the future (Marx, 1974d: 329).

A 'utopia' is thus *defined* as 'a dream about the model society of the future' and 'utopian socialism' as a political movement — i.e., as a movement of socialists who dream about such model societies — finds its *source* in social conditions which, by virtue of their insufficient development, do not allow the proletariat to constitute itself as a militant class. The implication here, of course, is that social conditions which *do* allow the proletariat to constitute itself as a militant class also enable it to supersede the need for socialists to dream about the model society of the future on its behalf.

Turning to the question of Utopia's *function* now, Marx was in no doubt that this had *once* been positive; utopias had had 'propaganda value as popular novels, which corresponded perfectly to the still undeveloped consciousness of the proletarians'. Marx was in no doubt either, however, that contemporary

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

utopianism no longer served such a positive function; utopias were now '*at best*' mere catchwords because they had lost all importance, practical value and theoretical justification. There were, I believe, three reasons why Marx considered contemporary utopianism devoid of any positive function.

The first Marx announces in his letter to Domela-Nieuwenhuis of February 1881. There he suggests that: 'The doctrinaire and necessarily fantastic anticipation of the programme of action for a revolution of the future only diverts one from the struggle of the present' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 410). Utopias, as necessarily fantastic anticipations of the future, are nothing more than irrelevant diversions which serve no purpose other than that of wasting valuable revolutionary time. What Marx means here is that socialists could all too easily get bogged down in discussions concerning the relative merits of various utopian proposals (arguing passionately about every detail of Cabet's vision of Icaria, a day in the life of a *phalanstère*, or whatever), and that such discussions would more than likely descend into obscurantism and thus prove utterly fruitless.

The second links utopianism's contemporary function to its historical source; because utopian socialism had emerged as the result of the proletariat's inability to emancipate itself, the idea that the proletariat *is* unable to emancipate itself formed an integral part of the utopian mindset. It is worthwhile emphasising here just how important the notion of proletarian self-emancipation was to Marx. For not only was the principle that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves' the first of the 'Provisional Rules' of the First International drawn up by Marx in 1864 (Marx, 1974a: 82), it was also a principle that Marx and Engels were willing to alienate themselves from the leadership of the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party in order to defend. Thus, in their 'Circular Letter to Bebel, Liebknecht, Bracke, *et al.*' (1879), they declared:

When the International was formed, we expressly formulated the battle-cry: the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself. We cannot ally ourselves, therefore, with people who openly declare that the workers are too uneducated to free themselves and must first be liberated from above by philanthropic big

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

bourgeois and petty bourgeois. If the new party organ assumes a position which corresponds to the opinions of those gentlemen, which is bourgeois and not proletarian, then nothing remains, much though we should regret it, but to declare publicly our opposition to it and to abandon the solidarity with which we have hitherto represented the German party abroad (Marx and Engels, 1974b: 375).

It is also worth emphasising here just how pompous, patronising and elitist the 'utopian socialists' actually were. As Manuel and Manuel rightly remark:

With utter faith in their election, they stepped into the age-old roles of saviours and messiahs. They sometimes imagined that in their persons the Messiah himself had already arrived. Saint-Simon thought he was the reincarnation of Socrates and Charlemagne; the disciples evoked the analogy with Jesus; Fourier, though not given to historical learning, demonstrated from Scripture that his appearance had been foretold; Owen identified himself with both Jesus and Columbus (1979: 583).

If this sounds a little unfair, then listen to Fourier when he proclaims that: 'The people need to be dazzled, not enlightened . . . they want visions of Apocalypse, miracles and mysteries, to provide nourishment and support for their feeble intelligence' (1996: 200). With regards to the provider of such visions, he modestly points out that 'this is not the first time that God has made use of the humble to put down the proud and mighty, nor the first time that he has chosen the obscurest man to bring the most important message to the world' (ibid.: 105). Owen too felt compelled to disclose that 'the mission of my life appears to be, to prepare the population of the world to understand the vast importance of the second creation of humanity' (cited in Oliver, 1971: 181). Not to be outdone, Saint-Simon's last work proudly announced itself as *The New Christianity*.

For Marx, the messianism which accompanied the original utopians' 'systems' was understandable — because the proletariat lacked any initiative of its own, it did indeed need visions of Apocalypse to inspire it. What was beyond comprehension, however, was that such messianic utopianism continued to thrive *now*, at a time when the proletariat was able to emancipate itself without the aid of Messiahs. For thrive it did; so much so in fact that Bazard and Enfantin, Saint-Simon's 'disciples', turned Saint-Simonism into a formal Church, replete with hierarchy of Priests and a spiritual leader, the 'General Priest', whose appointment was mysteriously 'revealed' by Divine intervention; so much so that Cabet turned his

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

hand to writing tracts preaching 'The True Christianity According to Jesus Christ', and so much so that Weitling inherited the mantle of Messiah incarnate, a role he cherished and played with true conviction ('Wilhelm Weitling had long advocated a messianic dictatorship with him as the messiah, and in 1848 he openly advocated a dictatorship with a "single head"', says Hal Draper, 1987: 15).

Is it any wonder then that Marx found utopianism somewhat antithetical to the spirit of proletarian self-emancipation? For all the utopians, both original and contemporary, saw themselves as evangelical missionaries destined to save the world by virtue of a vision granted them by divine fiat. When Marx met Weitling at a meeting in the spring of 1846, one can thus understand the hostile welcome he gave the utopian. According to Paul Annenkov:

The gist of his sarcastic speech was that to arouse the population without giving it firm and thoroughly reasoned out bases for its actions meant simply to deceive it. The stimulation of fantastic hopes that had just been mentioned — Marx observed further on — led only to the ultimate ruin, and not the salvation, of the oppressed. Especially in Germany, to appeal to the workers without a rigorous scientific idea and without a positive doctrine had the same value as an empty and dishonest game at playing preacher, with someone supposed to be an inspired prophet on the one side and only asses listening to him with mouths agape allowed on the other (1968: 169).

The stimulation of fantastic hopes by means of fantastic visions was for Marx the essence of utopianism. This took the form of 'an empty and dishonest game', with the utopian playing the inspired prophet and the oppressed masses assuming the role of gaping asses. The game was empty and dishonest because the prophet's vision could never be anything more than a fantasy grounded in abstract speculation. One cannot know the form that the society of the future will take and those who claim to possess such knowledge are deceiving the population with their empty and dishonest visions, arousing fantastic hopes devoid of any reasoned content. More importantly still, the utopian-prophet occupies his exalted position by virtue of the existence of only 'asses' beneath him. Utopians such as Weitling assume the masses to be nothing more than ineffectual vacuums, gawping into space with mouths agape, waiting for redemption to arrive in the form of a utopian Messiah whose vision of Jerusalem will act as the cattle-prod which rouses them into action.

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

Given Marx's deep-seated faith in the ability of the proletariat to emancipate itself, and given also his conviction that the emancipation of the proletariat could *only* be effected by the proletariat itself, one can quite clearly see why utopianism of this kind disturbed him. One can also see that it was because the utopians were prophets-cum-philanthropists who assumed that the masses were too uneducated to emancipate themselves that they were 'silly, stale and reactionary from the roots up'.

Those who forward the means/ends dichotomy argument could, however, still defend their position here. For if one phrases Marx and Engels' attack on utopianism as Edmund Wilson does when he suggests that 'they saw that the mistake of the utopian socialists had been to imagine that socialism was to be imposed upon society from above by disinterested members of the upper classes' (1972: 170), then a distinction between means and ends could still apply — the utopians were correct in their description of socialism's 'ends' but failed to recognise that these ends could only be realised by the proletariat itself. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson make a similar point when they argue that utopian socialism was 'faulted for its failure to understand the active and revolutionary part to be played by the proletariat in its own emancipation' (1996: x), but not for its conception of what socialism will look like.

As we have already seen, however, Marx and Engels went to great lengths to criticise the utopians' *ends*, which were said to have lost *all* importance and *all* theoretical justification. Whilst, therefore, Marx did fault utopian socialism for its failure to understand the active and revolutionary part to be played by the proletariat in its own emancipation, this is not all it was faulted for. Indeed, the argument being forwarded here is that Marx's attack upon utopianism was nothing less than an attack upon 'the utopian mindset' as a whole. The utopians were not criticised, that is, because they proposed inadequate means of realising their ends, nor were they criticised because their visions were not rooted in a correct analysis of the present; they were criticised because utopianism *as a whole* operated on a

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

set of assumptions which had become reactionary. Because the utopians proclaimed that the emancipation of humanity lay in the realisation of their utopias — which Marx elsewhere describes as 'the cerebrations of the individual pedant' (Marx, 1979: 123) — they were deceiving the masses at the same time as they were heralding themselves as prophets. And such prophetic messianism was simply, as far as Marx was concerned, reactionary.

The key to understanding the reactionary nature of the utopian mindset can, in fact, be found in Marx's rejection of the means/ends dualism itself. For in *The Class Struggles in France* (1850) he condemns the 'party of *Anarchy*' for

proclaiming itself the *means of emancipating the proletariat* and the emancipation of the latter as its *object*. Deliberate deception on the part of some; self-deception on the part of others, who give out the world transformed according to their own needs as the best world for all, as the realisation of all revolutionary claims and the elimination of all revolutionary collisions (ibid.: 122).

Marx thus rejects in its entirety the dualistic approach which posits an *end* towards which one seeks the appropriate *means*. For in formulating a system which corresponds to one's object, one is prophetically claiming for one's own pedantic cerebrations the status of 'the best world for all'.

The picture thus becomes somewhat more complex than the means/ends dichotomy consensus would have us believe. For it was not simply a case of Marx rejecting certain means toward a certain end, it was more a case of Marx rejecting the means/ends dualism itself. This becomes clearer still if one closely examines the text which seems to lend most support to the means/ends argument — the 'First Draft of *The Civil War in France*' (1871). Arguing against those who suggest that the Commune was not socialist because it did not 'try to establish in Paris a *phalanstère* nor an *Icarie*' (Marx, 1974c: 262), Marx here begins by pointing out that:

All the socialist founders of sects belong to a period in which the working classes themselves were neither sufficiently trained nor organized by the march of capitalist society itself to enter as historical agents upon the world's stage (ibid.).

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

Utopian socialism belongs, in other words, to the early stages of capitalism, when the proletariat lacked any political initiative of its own. Marx continues thus:

The utopian founders of sects, while in their criticism of present society clearly describing the goal of the social movement, the supersession of the wages system with all its economical conditions of class rule, found neither in society itself the material conditions of its transformation, nor in the working class the organized power and the conscience of the movement. They tried to compensate for the historical conditions of the movement by fantastic pictures and plans of a new society in whose propaganda they saw the true means of salvation (ibid.).

So, the utopians, *in their criticism of society* rather than in their utopias, described the goal of the social movement, i.e., the supersession of the wages system. The undeveloped state of both social development and the proletariat, however, meant that this goal could not as yet be realised. In order to compensate for the undeveloped state of society and the proletariat, therefore, the utopians devised fantastic pictures of a new society in which the wages system had been superseded. In spite of the fact that the wages system could not as yet be superseded, they then began to try and realise their fantasies by means of propaganda. Now comes the important part:

From the moment the working men's class movement became real, the fantastic utopias evanesced, not because the working class had given up the end aimed at by these utopians, but because they had found the real means to realize them, and in their place came a real insight into the historic conditions of the movement and a more and more gathering force of the militant organization of the working class (ibid.).

What Marx is saying here is *not* that the working class had found the appropriate means of realising the utopians' utopias, but rather that they had found the appropriate means of realising the goal *aimed at* by the utopians, which was the supersession of the wages system. What the working class had discovered once it had constituted itself as a militant class was that a *real* insight into the movement of society, rather than a fantastic one, together with their own growing militancy, were the appropriate means of superseding the wages system. And what this meant in turn was that the need for utopias evanesced once the proletariat had found something better to put '*in their place*'. Marx goes on:

But the last two ends of the movement proclaimed by the utopians are the last ends proclaimed by the Paris revolution and by the International. Only the means are different, and the real conditions of the movement are no longer clouded in utopian fables (ibid.).

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

The last two ends to which Marx refers had earlier been described as 'the emancipation of labour, and the transformation of society' (ibid.: 261), so that once again when he argues that the means towards these ends are now different he is not referring to the utopians' *utopias*, which were merely fantastic descriptions of these general ends. What he is saying is that the means towards the emancipation of labour and the transformation of society have now been found in the real conditions of the movement of society, so that this movement no longer needs any fantastic fables to hurry it along.

In fact, the whole point of this section of the draft had been to indicate that socialism was no longer synonymous with establishing utopias. In response to those critics who had argued that the Commune had not attempted to establish an *Icarie* and was therefore not 'socialist', Marx was emphasising the fact that establishing *Icaries* was no longer what socialism was about (although, as we shall see in chapter 2, pages 60-69, Marx did not think that the Commune *was* what socialism was all about). Indeed, what Marx was arguing had nothing at all to do with what the means/ends dichotomy consensus has him arguing. For rather than propaganda being the 'utopian' means of realising socialist utopias, Marx was indicating that the socialist 'utopias' themselves, together with their propagation, were the 'utopian' *means* of realising the emancipation of labour. The pictures of a new society, far from being the 'ends' aimed at by the proletariat or the International, had been the *means* deployed in order to compensate for the lack of sufficiently developed material conditions. Once these conditions had developed, however, the appropriate means had become discernible, and an increasingly militant proletariat armed with a real insight into society took the place of utopias as a means of realising the emancipation of labour.

Speaking of those who still believed that socialism meant establishing *Icaries*, Marx concludes this section of the draft by remarking that:

It is not the fault of the Paris proletariat, if for them the utopian creations of the prophets of the working men's movement are still the 'social revolution', that is to say, if the social revolution is for them still 'utopian' (ibid.: 262-63).

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

This remark is instructive, for Marx quite clearly defines here what he means by the epithet 'utopian' — an understanding of the social revolution is utopian if it bases itself on the utopian creations of prophets. Not only, therefore, does Marx specifically use the term 'prophets' to deride the utopians, thus supporting the argument to that effect being forwarded here, he also uses the term 'utopian' to refer to their creations, i.e., their utopias, failing altogether to mention anything about the means proposed by their creators.

The whole discussion in the First Draft is nonetheless saturated by references to 'means' and 'ends', and one might therefore be tempted to argue that, whatever the conclusions reached by Marx, he reached them by embracing a means/ends dualism. Such temptations should, however, be firmly resisted. For what Marx is saying is that 'a real insight' into the conditions of the working class movement reveals that the means *are* the ends, that the two exist in a dialectical unity tied to the movement itself. The ends to which Marx refers, the emancipation of labour and the transformation of society, are to be realised *by* the transformation of the material conditions of society and *by* the self-emancipation of labour made possible by such a transformation. Marx is not suggesting that historical development has allowed him to grasp a genuine link between the utopians' descriptions of socialism and the real tendencies at work in society, thus rendering the descriptions non-utopian and shedding light on the means required to realise them; he is suggesting that real insight into the tendencies at work in society have allowed him to grasp how and why society will be transformed and labour emancipated *without the aid* of descriptions of socialism — the ends are *contained within* the means and simply do not need (and cannot be) described.

In Marx's critique of utopian socialism one therefore finds a critique of both the utopians' means *and* their ends. This having been said, however, one can perhaps understand why it has been misconstrued as a critique solely of their means. For it just so happens that many of the utopians whom Marx criticised were openly anti-revolutionary, and it also happens to be the case that their anti-revolutionary

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

strategies were founded, as far as Marx was concerned, on theoretical frameworks which failed to understand the essential dynamics of capitalism. As a consequence, Marx often criticised them for being anti-revolutionary and for failing to understand the essential dynamics of capitalism. This was not, however, why Marx criticised them for being 'utopian'. Marx criticised them for being utopian because they constructed utopias and because the entire utopian approach was premised on a means/ends dualism which was *in and of itself* reactionary. It was the whole process of constructing an end — any end — towards the realisation of which one proposed some means — any means — that Marx was criticising. For in the very construction of their 'pictures and plans of a new society' the utopians were proclaiming themselves the prophets of the working class movement, blessed with a visionary gift denied to the masses. In constructing pictures of a world in which all revolutionary collisions are eliminated, the utopians were deceiving both themselves and everyone else into believing that this was the best world for all, when, in fact, it was nothing more than the world transformed according to their own needs and by their own pedantic cerebrations. Now, some of the utopians were so naive as to believe that their world could be realised by peaceful persuasion, and Marx criticised them for their naiveté. Others, however, believed that their visions could be realised only by means of a revolutionary cataclysm, and yet Marx *still* criticised them for their naiveté. For in continuing to present their visions as the best world for all, these utopians had yet to understand that visions of the best world had now become irrelevant. As fantasies which compensated for the fact that the material conditions for the emancipation of labour had yet to exist, the need for utopias evanesced as soon as these material conditions had come into existence. As far as the needs of the socialist movement were concerned, therefore, pictures and plans of the society of the future were evanescent, ephemeral, transitory, things which, by definition, evanesced, i.e., vanished, once their time had passed.

Final confirmation of Marx's trenchant rejection of utopianism comes in *Herr Vogt* (1860). *Herr Vogt* is a text which is seldom referred to. This is a shame

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

because in it Marx defends himself against his bourgeois denigrators and offers a personal historiography in which he explains exactly what he was trying to do at certain times and in certain texts. With regards to his involvement in the Communist League, Marx begins by explaining that 'we argued in popular form that it was not a matter of putting some utopian system into effect' (Marx, 1981: 79). Note here that Marx was *not* arguing that it was a matter of putting utopian systems into effect by means that were somehow 'adequate' to the task — it was simply a matter of not putting such systems into effect full stop. In response to a criticism made by a certain Herr Techow, in which Marx is accused of creating his own system, Marx then draws his critic's attention to 'the *Manifesto* which criticises and, if he likes, "ridicules" socialist and critical utopianism of every kind' (ibid.: 90). If this message were not clear enough, Marx goes on to state that 'I rejected systems of *every* kind' (ibid.). Marx rejected systems of *every* kind. The emphasis is Marx's own and indicates the passionate disbelief with which he greets the claim that he himself is a system-builder: has not Techow read the *Manifesto*, does he not realise that I rejected systems of *every* kind? Faced with Marx's response to such a claim, then, one finds it difficult to agree with Levitas, Geoghegan and Suvin when they suggest that Marx criticised the utopians because they built their systems using ONLY reason and their heads instead of using these AND a correct analysis of the present. For Marx rejected systems altogether, irrespective of what they were built with.

For Marx, the utopian process looked like this; one builds a system, declares oneself a prophet and then proclaims that the emancipation of humanity depends upon the realisation of one's system. It matters not whether the realisation of one's system is to be effected by peaceful or revolutionary means, for either way one's basic assumptions are 'silly, stale and reactionary from the roots up'. In arguing that the emancipation of humanity depends upon one's system being realised at all — and Fourier, Owen, Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians, Cabet and Weitling each argued this — one is implicitly assuming that the oppressed masses cannot devise their own emancipatory strategy and therefore need a prophetic

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

system to guide them. Marx, on the other hand, 'ridicules' utopianism of *every* kind and rejects systems of *every* kind. Holding no truck with either the utopians' means or their ends, for they are each a part of the same problem, Marx rejects them both outright. For Marx, proletarian self-emancipation is both the means and the ends and this is a concept which utopian system-builders of every kind fail to understand; it is not a part of their language or mindset. Such is the second element of Marx's critique of utopianism.

The third element is, in comparison, quite straightforward: Given that the creation of the emancipated society is to be the work of the proletariat, the task of defining it will also be the work of that class. Thus remarks Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884):

What we can conjecture at present about [what will take place] after the impending effacement of capitalist production is, in the main, of a negative character, limited mostly to what will vanish. But what will be added? That will be settled after a new generation has grown up . . . Once such people appear, they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do. They will establish their own practice and their own public opinion, conformable therewith, on the practice of each individual — and that's the end of it (Engels, 1968d: 508).

Neither Marx nor Engels could lay claim to a knowledge of the form that the future would take. Nor were they even going to conjecture on the subject, for the form that the future will take will, as it should, be decided by the individuals who inhabit that future. This element of Marx's critique wins the approval of Lawrence Crocker:

The chief and best reason that Marx had such a low opinion of utopianism was his deep-seated belief that the task of designing and constructing the socialist society belongs properly to those who will create and live in it (1981: 34).

It is also recognised by Geoghegan when he argues that:

One of Marx and Engels' principal objections to utopianism was precisely that it would foreclose the future by substituting past and present obsessions for the creative novelty of the proletariat (1990: 64).

'The creative novelty of the proletariat' is a nice phrase and it serves to underline Marx's critique of utopianism as a whole. For it was precisely because the proletariat now possessed a creative novelty of its own that it no longer required

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

utopian prophets to inspire it, and it was precisely because it possessed such a creative novelty that it could determine for itself the shape of the society it would itself bring forth.

1.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to identify the grounds upon which Marx rejected utopianism. In so doing, it has also sought to challenge two alternative interpretations — the idea that Marx's critique of 'utopian socialism' was 'strategically' determined and the claim that it did not involve a critique of the utopians' 'utopias'. With regards to the first of these interpretations, Barbara Goodwin argues that 'the critique of utopian socialism appeared largely in the early works of Marx, written while disciples of the utopians were still active . . . while the later Marx quotes More approvingly in *Capital*. There is therefore no reason to think that Marx saw himself as offering a universal analysis or indictment of utopianism' (Goodwin and Taylor, 1982: 73). Goodwin is, of course, correct to argue that Marx was not offering a universal indictment of utopianism, because, for him, utopianism had *once* been revolutionary. As the findings of the present chapter hopefully demonstrate, however, she is incorrect to imply that Marx was not offering a universal indictment of *contemporary* utopianism.

In order to defend their positions, both Goodwin and Ollman, whose claims we encountered at the start of the chapter (see page 17), point to the fact that Marx's anti-utopianism was more pronounced in his 'early' works, when utopian socialism was a serious political rival. From this they conclude that Marx's anti-utopianism was part of a strategic attack upon his political rivals. When the popularity of these waned, so too did Marx's objection to them, indicating that this objection was 'more of a strategic than of a principled sort'. The logic of this argument is, however, feeble to say the least. For Marx's anti-utopianism took on a more vitriolic guise during the periods in which utopian socialism was a serious political rival simply because there was a more pressing need to stress the flaws in the utopian approach. This does not mean that at other times Marx was *not* a

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

principled anti-utopian. It simply means that the need to stress this principle had diminished. By way of a simple comparison, when the Anti-Nazi League disbanded itself in the wake of the demise of the National Front, did this reveal that its objection to fascism 'was more of a strategic than of a principled sort'? Of course not. And when it was re-established in response to the growing support of the B.N.P, did this reveal the same? No it did not. It simply revealed that people who object to fascism on principle tend to voice these objections more strongly when fascism is seen to be gaining popular support. This is an obvious point which also applies to those who object to utopianism on principle.

With regards to the second interpretation being challenged here — the means/ends dichotomy consensus — our critique can best be expressed in terms of a summary of Marx's principled objection to utopianism. This takes the form of five propositions:

- i) Marx understood the utopian socialists to be utopian in the sense that they painted fantastic pictures of the future structure of society or dreamed about the model society of the future.
- ii) In spite of their scientific claims, the utopians were utopian because all pictures of the future structure of society are fantastic and all descriptions of the model society of the future are dreams. One simply cannot know the form that the society of the future will take and descriptions of it are therefore always utopian.
- iii) Utopian socialism as a movement corresponded to the early stages of capitalism, when the proletariat lacked any initiative of its own. Because the proletariat could not constitute itself as a militant class, socialism had to be introduced 'from above'. Thus emerged a group of utopian prophets whose fantastic pictures reflected the fantastic conception the proletariat had of itself.
- iv) Utopian socialism as a movement became a political anachronism once the proletariat *had* gained an initiative of its own and *could* constitute itself as a

Marx's Critique of 'Utopian Socialism'

militant class. More than this, in fact, utopian socialism became silly, stale and reactionary in proportion as the class struggle developed.

v) Utopian socialism was silly and stale because playing with fantastic pictures, precisely because they are fantastic, only diverts one from the struggle of the present. Those who continued to paint these fantastic pictures did so from within a utopian mindset which claimed for the utopian the exalted role of prophet and claimed for his or her pictures the status of humanity's only hope of salvation. Such naive political elitism ignored the fact that humanity's salvation, or what amounts to the same thing, the emancipation of the proletariat, rested solely in the hands of the proletariat itself. Such elitism was therefore reactionary. Furthermore, by suggesting that the emancipation of humanity depended upon the realisation of such and such a fantastic picture, the utopians were foreclosing the future and depriving the proletariat of the right to determine for itself what the future holds. This too was reactionary.

Such was Marx's critique of utopian socialism, a critique directed neither at the means proposed by the utopians nor at the manner in which they constructed their systems, but rather at the activity of constructing systems and describing the future altogether. This, then, is the first element of Marx's 'anti-utopian utopianism'. It is time now to discuss the second — his 'utopianism'.

Notes

¹ John Torrance offers a more sophisticated version of the means/ends argument. For whilst he accepts that Marx's critique is centred around the utopianism (in the traditional sense) of the utopians' ends (1995: 270), he suggests that this critique itself should be understood in light of Marx's absorption of the Jacobin 'myth of proletarian revolution', a myth which the utopians consciously rejected (ibid.: 406-7). Again, however, this fails to account for someone like Weitling, who had absorbed the myth of proletarian revolution like a sponge but whom Marx nonetheless described as a 'utopian socialist'.

Chapter 2

Marx's Description of the Lower Phase of Communism

2.1 Introduction

Did Marx describe, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, an imaginary state or society which he regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which he lived? This is the question to which our attention shall now turn. As Bertell Ollman remarks: 'Marx divides the communist future into two halves, a first stage generally referred to as "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and a second stage usually called "full communism"' (1977: 9). Following Marx himself, therefore, we shall divide our discussion of his vision of the communist future into two halves, with this chapter focusing on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the following chapter focusing on full communism.

With regards to how one differentiates between the two, it will be assumed here that whenever Marx talks about communism or socialism he is referring to its higher stage, unless, that is, he *specifically* states that he is referring to its lower stage. This is because Marx himself never made a distinction between communism and socialism as historical 'stages' — the idea that 'socialism' refers to the lower stage and 'communism' the higher postdates Marx and is generally attributed to Lenin. By assuming that Marx used the terms communism and socialism to refer to the same stage of historical development, unless he specifically stated otherwise, one can avoid the difficulties which arise from reading Lenin's distinction back into Marx. Stanley Moore provides a good indication of what these difficulties are when he agonises over the content of *Capital* thus:

Nowhere does Marx clearly separate the transition to socialism from the transition to communism. The passage predicting expropriation of the expropriators — in the section entitled "Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" — is his nearest approach to predicting a transition from capitalism to socialism. Yet the language of that passage is so vague that it can be read as predicting transition to either socialism or communism. The passage predicting disappearance of commodity fetishism — in the section entitled "The Fetishism of Commodities and Its Secret" — is his nearest approach to predicting a

The Lower Phase of Communism

transition to communism. Yet the context of that passage indicates that this prediction could be fulfilled by either communism or socialism (1980: 52).

Such agonising will not form a part of this thesis. When Marx talks about the transition to socialism or communism in *Capital*, he is talking about the transition to full communism. This goes for all of Marx's other works as well, except those in which he tells us that he is not talking about full communism.

There were, in fact, four such works — the *Manifesto*, *The Class Struggles in France*, *The Civil War in France* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. This in itself seems rather odd. For if Marx *always* thought that a transitional lower phase was a necessary precondition for the development of 'full communism', then why did he mention it in only four of his works? Why, in other words, did he not mention it in *all* of the works in which he talked about the transition to communism? The answer to be forwarded here is that Marx *did not* always believe that a transitional phase was necessary because the model of a transitional phase was only ever utilised in the context of his theory of 'permanent revolution'.

Although this theory remained nameless until the 'Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League' of March 1850 — talking of the German workers, Marx and Engels ended the Address by proclaiming that: 'Their battle-cry must be: The Permanent Revolution' (Marx and Engels, 1973: 330) — its substance can be traced back to the *Manifesto*.¹ The substance of the theory itself is now so familiar that it seems rather simplistic: applied to societies which have yet to complete their bourgeois phase of revolution, the theory argues that when the bourgeoisie have completed this phase and want to stop the revolutionary process in its tracks, the proletariat must take the helm and ensure that the revolution continues to proceed as far as socialism. As Marx and Engels remark in their Address of March 1850:

While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned ('welfare measures' and 'an extension of state employment'), it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until . . . the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers (ibid.: 323-24).

The Lower Phase of Communism

The theory of permanent revolution was specifically designed to deal with imperfect revolutionary situations — situations in which Marx had to explain the transition to communism in a society which had yet to complete its bourgeois phase of development. The present chapter argues that the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ was also part of this theory; indeed an indispensable part. For it was by means of the dictatorship that the bourgeois phase of development was to be completed in those societies in which it was as yet incomplete, and the purpose of the dictatorship was *nothing other* than to complete this phase of development. Rather than being the first stage of Marx’s vision of communism *per se*, the dictatorship of the proletariat was therefore nothing more than a transitional measure required under special circumstances (i.e., the lack of fully developed capitalism). As such, the dictatorship of the proletariat was more a stage of capitalism than a stage of communism — a stage required *only* in societies lacking a developed capitalist framework and *precisely* in order to develop this framework itself.

In order to support this claim, the four works in which Marx specifically talks about the lower stage of communism will be discussed in turn. Section 2.2 will deal with the *Manifesto* and *The Class Struggles in France*, section 2.3 with *The Civil War in France* and section 2.4 with the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’. The basic purpose of the chapter is to argue that Marx’s description of the lower phase of communism cannot really be seen as a part of that which is referred to as his ‘utopia’. This, in turn, is part of the wider argument — to be continued in chapter 3 — which suggests that Marx’s ‘utopia’ was hardly a utopia at all. With this in mind, let us now discuss those works in which Marx talks about the lower phase of communism.

2.2 The Lower Phase in the *Manifesto* and *The Class Struggles in France*

The *Manifesto* is framed by the theory of ‘permanent revolution’, or as it finds expression there, by the claim that ‘the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution’ (Marx and

The Lower Phase of Communism

Engels, 1967: 120). In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels were dealing with a country which had yet to experience its bourgeois revolution, and its purpose was to demonstrate the immanence of this revolution and to argue that, when it occurs, it will act as the catalyst for a proletarian revolution. Underlying this argument was the following claim:

The bourgeoisie finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times, with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena (ibid.: 90).

The proletariat is thus politicised during the course of the bourgeois revolution, and with this comes 'the first step in the revolution by the working class', which 'is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy' (ibid.: 104). This notion of 'the proletariat raised to the position of ruling class' is the first formulation of that which was to find a name in 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', and Hal Draper neatly explains its relationship to the theory of 'permanent revolution' in the following way:

A German revolution would have to be pushed forward and still forward, from stage to stage, pressing leftward, until power could be taken by the extreme left, the revolutionary proletariat. This is the process which Marx summarized as 'permanent (that is, ongoing or continuous) revolution,' a revolution which does not come to a halt until the proletariat had taken power. It is this conclusion that introduced the question of proletarian power (or, same thing, proletarian 'dictatorship') into Marx's writings (Draper, 1990: 294; 1987: 17).

As Draper himself goes to great lengths to point out, the nineteenth century understood by the term 'dictatorship' nothing more than 'an emergency management of power, especially outside of normal legality' (1990: 290). The process described in the *Manifesto*, therefore, sees the proletariat being dragged into the political arena during the course of the bourgeois revolution, and this revolution itself then being pressed continually leftward until the proletariat wins the battle of democracy and assumes dictatorial powers.

Once the proletariat had raised itself to the position of ruling class, it was to introduce a ten-point programme which the *Manifesto* famously describes thus:

1. Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.

The Lower Phase of Communism

2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Abolition of all right of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of wastelands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to labour. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries . . .
10. Free education for all children in public schools . . . (Marx and Engels, 1967: 104-105).

In an excellent article, Y. Wagner and M. Strauss emphasise the curious fact that 'the plan does not include several important socialist measures which were accepted — not least by the authors of the programme themselves — as essential to the completion of a socialist structure. The plan does not include the total socialization of the means of production. It does not demand or necessitate the abolition of hired labour or the elimination of the profit derived by the employer from its use. Finally, the plan does not include the nationalization of commerce' (1969: 471). Surely, however, the elimination of wage-labour and the profits derived by the capitalist from it were fundamental to Marx's conception of socialism. Surely, indeed, the antagonism between capital and labour was seen as a very function of the system of wage-labour itself. Why, then, would a proletariat which had raised itself to the position of ruling class not aim to eliminate the source of its own exploitation?

The only possible answer to this question can be that Marx considered it practically unfeasible for the proletariat to do so (one can assume, that is, that if the abolition of exploitation had been deemed feasible, then Marx would have advocated the measures required to abolish it). If, however, the conditions were not ripe for the abolition of wage-labour or for the elimination of private production, then what was the function of the dictatorship going to be? Well, as the ten-point programme clearly demonstrates, the function of the dictatorship would be to foster conditions that were ripe *for* the development of socialism

The Lower Phase of Communism

rather than actually introduce socialism itself. This is, in fact, what the ten-point programme in the *Manifesto* was all about; its proposals did not define any socialist 'goal' but described instead, in circumstances where conditions were not yet ripe for the abolition of capitalism, the measures to be taken in order to make these conditions ripe.

Of particular importance is the fact that the dictatorship would ripen the conditions for socialism by facilitating the development of *capital*. As Wagner and Strauss rightly indicate, points 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the *Manifesto*'s programme were each intended to rationalise *capitalistic* production rather than replace it with some socialistic alternative — point 1, for example, still allowed for the private use of land and for the employment of wage-labour, and merely sought to stabilise the agricultural production process by eliminating the unpredictable forces generated by rentiers and speculators (Wagner and Strauss, 1969: 471); point 6 had the railways specifically in mind, and their centralised ownership would prevent the disruptions to the production process which resulted from unequal transportation tariffs for competing firms (*ibid.*: 471-472); point 7 envisioned a public sector developing *alongside* the private sector, rather than in place of it, in order to extend the remit of productive capital, and point 8 sought to utilise the full labour force in order to facilitate increased production (*ibid.*: 472).

For Wagner and Strauss, however, the key to understanding the programme as a whole lies in point 5, behind which one finds the distinction made by Marx between the spheres of circulation and production and his emphatic belief that the former only hinders the development of the latter. Thus says Marx:

The credit system, which has its focus in the so-called national banks and the big money-lenders and usurers surrounding them, constitutes enormous centralization, and gives to this class of parasites the fabulous power, not only to periodically despoil industrial capitalists, but also to interfere in actual production in a most dangerous manner — and this gang knows nothing about production and has nothing to do with it (Marx, 1959: 532).

Citing this passage, Wagner and Strauss indicate that point 5 was designed to remove the credit system from the hands of 'this gang' in order to prevent them

The Lower Phase of Communism

from interfering in production. Indeed, they go on to argue that the aim of the programme *as a whole* was to reform the sphere of circulation by placing it under state control whilst leaving the sphere of production well alone. They thus conclude by saying that ‘the removal of the circulation mechanisms from private ownership and their transfer into the hands of society will not only not harm productive capital but is even calculated to help it’ (Wagner and Strauss, 1969: 478).

What needs to be emphasised here, then, is that the ten-point programme in the *Manifesto* was designed to rationalise capitalism and render the productive sphere more efficient. Whilst, therefore, points 2 and 3 sought to rid the present system of its most grotesque inequalities, there is no doubt that the proletariat raised to the position of ruling class would rule over a system that was still in essence capitalistic. The burning question, of course, is *why*? Why, that is, would a programme designed to facilitate productive capital pave the way for socialism? Given that the time was not yet ripe for the abolition of capitalism, why would its further *development* make these conditions ripe? F. L. Bender provides the basis for a solution to these riddles when he argues that:

Marx was writing for the proletariat of economically under-developed Germany, so that many of the measures advocated in the *Manifesto* are supposed to bring the economy through industrialization stages similar to those already attained under bourgeois rule in the more developed countries (1990b: 364).

The *Manifesto*’s programme was written with economically under-developed Germany in mind and its aim was to ‘bring the economy through industrialisation stages similar to those already attained in the more developed countries’. Rather than a better alternative world, then, the first stage of communism becomes a means of reproducing developments that have already taken place in the economically developed countries of the existing one. In the *Manifesto* itself, of course, Marx says that ‘in the most advanced countries’ the ten-point programme ‘will be pretty generally applicable’ (Marx and Engels, 1967: 104), thus implying that it has universal applicability. Given the context in which it was written, however (i.e., the reality of a bourgeois revolution), it would be more reasonable

The Lower Phase of Communism

to conclude that when Marx referred to 'the most advanced countries' he was talking of those that were themselves on the verge of a bourgeois revolution and whose bourgeois revolution could, therefore, like Germany's, be hijacked and rendered 'permanent'. He was not referring to 'advanced' countries like England or the Netherlands, whose bourgeois revolutions had taken place long ago, but rather advanced countries like Germany (as opposed to, say, India) who were now ready to undergo the process of 'permanent' revolution.

This now draws us into the main contention being made in this chapter, which is that Marx only ever talked about the lower phase of communism in the context of countries which had yet to complete their bourgeois phase of development and whose economy was therefore relatively under-developed. The function of the lower phase in this context was then to develop the foundations of capitalism itself, as indeed the *Manifesto's* ten-point programme was intended to do. A further contention, however, is that the *Manifesto's* programme for the first stage of communism was designed to *develop* capitalism's productive forces and social relations, *benefit* the industrial bourgeoisie of economically under-developed Germany, and speed up the process of industrialisation, so that German capitalism could reach the point at which, as was already the case in economically developed nations, it was ready to give birth to 'full' communism. This, indeed, is the real heart of the matter: Marx believed that full capitalism would give birth to full communism and the purpose of the dictatorship was to ensure that the economically under-developed countries reached the stage of full capitalism sooner rather than later.

Such a line of argument enables one to understand the seemingly bizarre link made in the *Manifesto* between the lower and higher phases of communism. For Marx tells us that the ten measures in the *Manifesto's* programme will, 'in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 104). He then says that:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation,

The Lower Phase of Communism

the public power will lose its political character . . . In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (ibid.: 105).

What Marx is saying, then, is that the ten point programme will 'outstrip' itself and 'necessitate' further developments. *In the course* of these developments, class distinctions will disappear and production will be concentrated in the hands of the whole nation, such that the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all. There is, therefore, a *necessary* relationship, based on the idea of natural development, between the ten point programme and the characteristics of full communism he outlines.

There is, was, and could never have been any such necessary relationship, however, and the strange thing is that Marx never attempts to demonstrate its existence. Instead, as Stanley Moore succinctly puts it: 'Pronouncement takes the place of reasoning' (1980: 30). This has led many writers to become quite perturbed about the whole thing. R. N. Berki, for example, cannot contain his bewilderment as he remarks that 'Marx does not appear to be arguing (let alone demonstrating) that *if* there is a lower phase, *then* the higher phase will and must follow . . . The relationship between the lower and higher phases of communism is . . . remote, tenuous, wispy, uncertain and in the last resort unintelligible' (1983: 156-157). The relationship *does* become intelligible, however, if one adopts the approach being forwarded here: if Marx believed that a fully developed capitalism would give birth to full communism, and if the function of dictatorship of the proletariat was to facilitate the development of full capitalism, then the link between the two phases becomes quite clear.

Such an understanding also sheds light on Marx's discussion of the dictatorship in *The Class Struggles in France*, in which he states that:

Socialism is the *declaration of the permanence of the revolution*, the *class dictatorship* of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the *abolition of class distinctions generally*, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations (Marx, 1979: 123).

The Lower Phase of Communism

The dictatorship does not *itself* abolish class distinctions; it does not *itself* abolish capitalist relations of production or their corresponding social relations; it does not *itself* revolutionise the ideas resulting from these social relations; it merely represents the *necessary transit point*. The dictatorship prepares the way for the abolition of capitalist forces and relations, and it prepares the way for a revolutionising of ideas, but it does not do any of the abolishing or revolutionising itself. Why not?

Well, as was the case with the *Manifesto*, Marx was writing for the proletariat of an economically under-developed nation — a nation whose economic foundations could not as yet support the development of full communism. As Engels candidly remarks in his 1895 Introduction to *The Class Struggles in France*: ‘the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production’ (Engels, 1979: 15). In that work, therefore, Marx had to concede that: ‘The struggle against capital in its developed, modern form, in its decisive aspect, the struggle of the industrial wage-worker against the industrial bourgeois, is in France a partial phenomenon’ (Marx, 1979: 41). Because of this, it was now the proletariat’s task ‘to consolidate the shaky bourgeois relationships’ (ibid.: 47) and to achieve communism by means of the dictatorship that would emerge from the permanence of the bourgeois revolution. To *consolidate* the shaky *bourgeois* relationships was what the dictatorship of the proletariat was going to do, and it was going to do this because the bourgeois relationships *had to be* consolidated if they were ever to become impregnated with the seeds of communism.

In both the *Manifesto* and *The Class Struggles in France*, then, Marx is talking about societies which are not yet fully bourgeois, and which cannot, therefore, be expected to produce full communism without a great deal of mediating help. This help Marx supplies in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the function of which is to develop the *capitalist* forces and the *bourgeois* relations of

The Lower Phase of Communism

production. Only by means of such a dictatorship could full communism hope to gestate within the womb of an incomplete and immature capitalist framework.

2.3 The Lower Phase in *The Civil War in France*

Frank Jellinek was probably correct to write on its centenary that:

The continuing importance of the Paris Commune of 1871 in revolutionary history and to the revolutionary movement is almost entirely due to a single pamphlet written in London before the last shots of the repression had been fired. This was Karl Marx's address to the International Working Men's Association, published as *The Civil War in France* (1971: 10).

As true as this may be, however, many writers have detected a niggling ambiguity in Marx's attitude towards the Commune. For on the one hand, in *The Civil War in France*, Marx specifically states that:

Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish class-property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour — But this is Communism (Marx, 1968e: 290-291).

On the other hand, however, in the first draft of this Address, Marx claimed that: 'The principal measures taken by the Commune are taken for the salvation of the middle class' (Marx, 1974c: 258). More ambiguous still is the fact that that Marx, in a letter written ten years after the event, remarked that 'the majority of the Commune was in no wise socialist, nor could it be' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 410).

These ambiguities have been explained in various ways: Alistair Horne, for example, argues that Marx deliberately misrepresented the facts in *The Civil War in France* and thus 'distorted the Commune to create a myth portraying something it never was' (1981: 352); Richard Adamiak suggests that Marx did not really support the Commune at all and was forced into singing its praises by the popularity it enjoyed within the Left as a whole (1970: 11); Monty Johnstone claims that his talk of the Commune being communist but not socialist, proletarian but for the salvation of the middle-class, etc., was part and parcel of 'Marx's concept of proletarian hegemony', which sought to unite the workers, petty-

The Lower Phase of Communism

bourgeoisie and peasantry in order to build the platform on which communism would be constructed (1971: 448); and Shlomo Avineri argues that, for Marx, the Commune 'as it actually was', '*in actu*', was in no wise socialist, but that '*in potentia*', 'as it could be', it was the harbinger of communism (1968: 240).

Whilst each of these explanations contains some element of truth (there is no doubt, for example, that Marx *had* to praise the Commune, whether he wanted to or not, and there is no doubt either that an element of mythologising crept into his account), Avineri's seems to me to be the most convincing. What is lacking in Avineri's account, however, is an explanation for the gulf which existed between the Commune *in actu* and the Commune *in potentia*, and for why, therefore, Marx felt the need to distinguish between the two. If, however, one interprets the Commune in terms of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat being forwarded here, then (hopefully at least) the reason for this gulf (and thus for the apparent ambiguities in Marx's analysis of the Commune) should become clear.

This interpretation begins by accepting that Marx equated the Paris Commune with the dictatorship of the proletariat. For although he did not specifically use this term in *The Civil War in France*, Engels, in his 1891 Introduction, did: 'Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat' (Engels, 1968b: 259). More importantly, as Hal Draper helpfully points out, Engels, in making this remark, was merely repeating what Marx had said at the London meeting of the International in September 1871 (Draper, 1990: 306; 1987: 31). Now, given that the Commune, *qua* dictatorship, was the first stage of communism, it was obvious, to Marx at least, that its *aim* was full communism. Hence the famous remark to this effect noted above, and hence the language of this passage — the Commune *intended* to abolish class property, *aimed* at the expropriation of the expropriators, and so on. Given also, however, that the need for a dictatorship only arises in circumstances of economic under-development, and that its purpose is to facilitate the development of *capitalism*, it almost goes without saying that the measures it effects will be to the advantage of the middle

The Lower Phase of Communism

class. Given finally that undeveloped capitalism is unlikely to produce a developed proletarian consciousness, it should come as no surprise that the majority of the Commune were not, nor could they have been, socialist. In this way, one can make sense of those apparent ambiguities and render them, whilst maybe not completely unambiguous, certainly less so. Let us now look at Marx's analysis of the Commune and see if this interpretation can be supported.

Marx begins his analysis with the events of September 4th 1870, when Paris, in response to Louis Napoleon's surrender to Bismarck, declared itself a Republic. Now, whilst in *The Civil War in France* he considered the seeds of the Commune to have been sown by these events, the view of the Republic he had held *prior* to the existence of the Commune had not been so magnanimous. In fact, the Second Address to the General Council of the International, which he had given just five days after the Republic had been proclaimed, makes for rather depressing reading. When compared to *The Civil War in France*, moreover, it seems to confirm the existence of those ambiguities we are trying here to avoid confirming.

For in the Second Address he had described the Republic 'not as a social conquest, but as a national measure of defence' (Marx, 1968d: 269), whereas in *The Civil War* he termed it 'the revolution of the 4th of September' (Marx, 1968e: 279); in the Second Address, he had warned *against* an insurrection — 'Any attempt at upsetting the new Government in the present crisis, when the enemy is almost knocking at the doors of Paris, would be a desperate folly' (1968d: 269) — whereas in *The Civil War* he heralded the 'glorious working men's Revolution of the 18th March' (1968e: 280); in the Second Address, he preached gradualism to the workers — 'Let them calmly and resolutely improve the opportunities of Republican liberty, for the work of their own class organisation. It will gift them with fresh Herculean powers for the regeneration of France, and our common task — the emancipation of labour' (1968d: 269) — whereas in *The Civil War*, he had seen the workers 'discover', *through* insurrection, 'the political form under which to work out the emancipation of labour' (1968e: 290).

The Lower Phase of Communism

Examined in the light of his *The Civil War in France*, then, it seems that Marx, in his Second Address, had been wrong about everything. Was this just a mistake on his part, or had he been forced to change his tune in response to the popular support the Commune had established? I think that neither is the case, and would suggest instead that in the seven months which separate the two Addresses Marx had rediscovered the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a concept which had lain abandoned since 1850.²

That the concept had lain abandoned is hardly surprising, for a lot of things had happened since 1850 to warrant exactly that. We may recall here that in *The Class Struggles in France* Marx had been advocating, nay predicting, a dictatorship to 'consolidate the shaky bourgeois relationships' that had been established by the unfinished bourgeois revolution of February 1848. By the end of 1851, however, his hopes had been shattered and he penned *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Writing in the wake of Bonaparte (aka Louis Napoleon aka Napoleon III)'s coup d'état of December 2nd, Marx despairingly opined that:

On December 2 the February Revolution is conjured away by a card sharper's trick, and what seems overthrown is no longer the monarchy but the liberal concessions that were wrung from it by centuries of struggle. Instead of *society* having conquered a new content for itself, it seems that the *state* only returned in its oldest form, to the shamelessly simple domination of the sabre and the cow1. This is the answer to the *coup de main* of February 1848, given by the *coup de tête* of December 1851. Easy come, easy go (Marx, 1968c: 98).

Rather than a dictatorship of the proletariat completing the unfinished bourgeois revolution of 1848, the French workers had allowed society to regress. Rather than dispensing with the remnants of feudalism, they had resurrected them. 'Society now seems to have fallen back behind its point of departure', said Marx (ibid.: 99).

With the events of 1848 having told him that 'the German workers cannot come to power and achieve the realization of their class interests without passing through a protracted revolutionary development' (Marx and Engels, 1973: 330); with the events of 1851 having dashed his faith in the French proletariat; with

The Lower Phase of Communism

capitalism now entering an extended period of prosperous stability; with all the movements of the European Left in disarray as a result of this and their subsequent dwindling support; with all of this, is it any wonder that Marx abandoned the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and refused to entertain even the prospect of its appearance for the next twenty years?

Is it any wonder too that when Paris declared itself a Republic in 1870, Marx proceeded to examine it with caution? He had played with fire once, in 1850. Then he had predicted the permanence of the revolution of 1848 and the immanence of the class dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1851, however, his fingers had been well and truly burned by the victory of Louis Bonaparte and the Royalist counter-revolutionaries. In 1870, therefore, he regarded the new flame of the Paris Republic with suspicion: 'Is the Republic, by some of its middle-class managers, not intended to serve as a mere stopgap and bridge over an Orleanist Restoration?', he asked, wary of the fact that Restorations have a habit of following revolutions (Marx, 1968d: 269). For this reason, he, unlike many on the Left, preached patience. Speaking of the German workers for whom the Republic signalled the end of Bonaparte's Second Empire, he said: 'Like them, we hail the advent of the Republic in France, but at the same time we labour under misgivings which we hope will prove groundless' (ibid.). These misgivings were that the hopes of 1870, like those of 1850, would be dashed against a counter-revolutionary coup.

These misgivings were, however, much to Marx's delight and probably even more to his surprise, to prove groundless. For on the 18th March 1871 the National Guard took control of the Government offices, and on the 28th the Commune was proclaimed. More than this, the Commune seemed to bear out Marx's theory of permanent revolution and truly represent the dictatorship of the proletariat he had spoken of twenty years earlier. It was 'the form at last discovered under which to work out the emancipation of labour' (Marx, 1968e: 290). One can almost hear the sigh of relief as Marx wrote those words — 'the form *at last* discovered'. At

The Lower Phase of Communism

last! This is what he had been waiting twenty years to see, and he could hardly believe his eyes.

With hindsight, Marx could now see that the Republic of September 1870 had been the first stage in the process of permanent revolution. He had not *changed his mind* since the Second Address. Instead, what he had *hoped* would happen, but dare not say for fear of burning his fingers once more, had happened. For the Republic, which *was* initially, as Marx had said, a purely defensive mechanism, mutated into a revolution as Thiers repeatedly demanded that Paris disarm itself. At first, the revolution was of a bourgeois nature — a revolution of ‘kindly-minded liberals’ as Alistair Horne has termed it (1981: 97) — as can be evinced by the fact that Trochu, the ‘people’s’ choice for leader, would only accept the position on condition that the Republic aimed to uphold religion, property and the family, a condition with which most people were happy to comply (see *ibid.*: 83). And the revolution remained essentially bourgeois in nature until January 28th 1871, when Favre signed the armistice with Prussia.

In contrast to 1848, however, the revolution did not end here. Quite the contrary: for a number of reasons — the humiliating terms of the armistice, dismay at the prospect of having to face these terms after the hunger, cold and heavy bombardment the Parisians had experienced over Christmas, and the fact that many of the bourgeois Republicans had fled Paris after the armistice — the Parisians voted in favour of the Republic, and against peace, in the forced elections of February 8th. When Thiers, in response to this, allowed the Prussians the benefit of a victory march through Paris, when he suppressed the powers and abolished the paid status of the National Guard, when he placed a reactionary puppet at its helm, and when he passed a death sentence on Blanqui and all the other potential leaders of subversion he could identify, the National Guard seized two hundred army cannons. When Thiers then attempted to suppress the Guard, they took over the government offices and ten days later proclaimed the Commune.

The Lower Phase of Communism

This brief historical digression — gleaned from the accounts of the Commune given by Alistair Horne (1981) and Frank Jellinek (1971), neither of whom are at all sympathetic to Marx's own account — reveals just how much Marx must have thought that the Commune had confirmed his ideas; the revolution of bourgeois liberals had become 'permanent' as the workers, personified in the National Guard (a democratic army of workers created by the bourgeoisie during the course of their own revolution), took command, won the battle of democracy, and raised themselves to the level of ruling class.

With regards to Marx's interpretation of the Commune itself, critics tend to pounce on two distinctive paragraphs. The first we encountered at the beginning of this section (see page 60), and in it Marx tells us that the Commune aimed at the abolition of class property and the socialisation of the means of production. The second, which immediately follows the first in Marx's text, reads thus:

The working class . . . have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historical processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant (Marx, 1968e: 291).

In both these paragraphs Marx is quite clearly talking about 'full' communism, and his critics tend to respond by pointing out that the Commune *did not* intend to abolish property, nor was it aiming to free the elements of the new society with which the collapsing present one was pregnant with. It was, instead, a petty-bourgeois, Proudhonist ensemble whose radical achievements were noticeable only by their absence. Because Marx was seemingly oblivious to this fact, people such as Alistair Horne make it their business to claim that Marx 'distorted' the facts 'for his own dialectical ends' (1981: 15).

We must distinguish here, however, between Marx's analysis of the immediate aims of the Commune and his long-term projections. For whereas the paragraphs in question represent the latter, the rest of *The Civil War in France* deals only with the former. Marx's critics are right, of course, to highlight an incongruity

The Lower Phase of Communism

between the two, for there is no causal link between what Marx describes as the Commune's *immediate* aims — the suppression of the standing army and the police (1968e: 287), the reduction of all wages down to workmen's levels (*ibid.*), the disestablishment of all churches (*ibid.*: 288), the provision of universal education (*ibid.*: 288), the use of universal suffrage (*ibid.*: 289) and the abolition of nightwork for bakers (*ibid.*: 294) — and what he describes as its *ultimate* aim, namely, to usher in full communism. It is nonetheless unfair to accredit this incongruity to Marx's sinister dialectical distortions.

The incongruity only emerges, in fact, because Marx believed (as I argued in section 2.2, pages 57-58) that the lower phase of communism would automatically lead to the higher phase. Whilst he was wrong to think this, the implications of the fact that this is what Marx *thought* are enormous, at least as far as his analysis of the Commune itself is concerned. For if the hypothesis being forwarded here is correct, and Marx only ever talked about the lower phase in relation to economically under-developed countries and as a means of developing capitalism, then it implies that Marx *did not* think that the Commune itself was going to realise full communism — it implies instead that he considered it 'the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions'. In the sense, therefore, that the long-term economic development resulting from the existence of the Commune would *lead* to a situation whereby class property could be abolished, Marx could talk of this abolition being the Commune's intention. But because the Commune *itself* could not abolish class property, Marx quite sensibly declines from saying that this represented its *immediate* aim.

Indeed, Marx specifically described the purpose of the Commune *qua* dictatorship of the proletariat, and this purpose was *not* the realisation of full communism — it was 'the revolutionary overthrow of the political and social conditions that had engendered the Second Empire, and, under its fostering care, matured into utter rottenness' (Marx, 1968e: 280). Its purpose was, in other words, to overthrow the remnants of the feudal relations which had supported the Second Empire since

The Lower Phase of Communism

1851, relations which had been ripe for overthrow in 1848 and which now, over two decades later, had become 'utterly rotten'. In this sense, the Commune differed from the ten-point programme outlined in the *Manifesto*. For that programme was designed to further the advance of full capitalism *directly*, by removing various obstacles to the optimal development of productive capital. The Commune, however, at least as Marx saw it, had neither the time nor the opportunity to effect any major economic changes. What it did do, however, was further the advance of full capitalism *indirectly* by striking at the broader social relations which fettered it; the church, army, police, electoral system and so on. This is why Marx later describes the Commune's purpose as the 'incubation of a new society' (ibid.: 296). Not the *realisation* of a new society, nor its *creation*, but its incubation. The Commune's purpose was, in other words, to free France of the feudal baggage preventing communism from gestating within capitalism. Reverting to the metaphorical language of the womb so beloved by Marx, the Commune, as with all proletarian dictatorships, was to act as a surrogate mother, bearing the child that economically under-developed capitalism could not conceive. The Commune, that is, and again like all other proletarian dictatorships, resembled a capitalist mother far more than it did any communist child.

A final indication that this is what Marx meant can be found in his letter to Kugelmann of April 17th 1871, in which he states that: 'With the struggle in Paris the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class and its state has entered upon a new phase' (Marx and Engels, 1968: 671). Note here that the struggle is not deemed to have 'ended', nor does an end seem in sight; it has merely 'entered a new phase'. This phase had begun with the Commune's completion of the bourgeois revolution (which had itself begun in 1848), and it would eventually *lead to* a situation whereby the struggle could be ended.

The Paris Commune thus served the same function in *The Civil War in France* as 'the proletariat raised to the position of ruling class' had done in the *Manifesto* and 'the class dictatorship of the proletariat' had done in *The Class Struggles in*

The Lower Phase of Communism

France — it offered a brief glimpse of that which was to serve as the *necessary transit point* to the abolition of class distinctions. It was necessary because, as was the case with Germany in 1848 and France in 1850, capitalism was not sufficiently developed to give birth to full communism directly. It was a transit point because it would itself conceive full communism, and die whilst giving birth.

2.4 The Lower Phase in the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’

We must turn our attention now to the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, the final instalment of Marx’s tale of communism’s lower phase. Of it he says:

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges (Marx, 1968f: 319).

What we have to deal with *where*? Well, what Marx was dealing with was the Lassallean-inspired programme for the Gotha Unity Congress. What he was dealing with in particular, however, was Lassalle’s conception of socialism, and more importantly still, with how, in formulating it, Lassalle had misunderstood the *Manifesto*. Herein lies the key to understanding Marx’s talk of the lower phase in the *Critique*.

Beginning with the 1872 Preface to the German edition of the *Manifesto*, we find Marx and Engels stating that: ‘However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in the Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever’ (Marx and Engels, 1967: 53). As we know, these ‘general principles’ concerned the need for a permanent revolution in Germany. We can read from this, therefore, that Marx and Engels *still* deemed the German bourgeois revolution incomplete, *still* deemed the German economy too undeveloped to give birth directly to full communism, and *still* deemed the German proletariat too immature to forge a revolution without the aid of the bourgeoisie. They still believed, that is, in the need for a transitional phase of communism in the case of Germany. Turning now to the *Critique*, we can see that its purpose was to defend the *Manifesto* and to reprimand Lassalle for having

The Lower Phase of Communism

misunderstood it: 'Lassalle knew the *Communist Manifesto* by heart', remarked Marx, but 'he has falsified it so grossly' (Marx, 1968f: 322). It is in understanding how the Lassalleans had falsified the *Manifesto* that we can also understand Marx's claims concerning the lower phase of communism.

The first thing the Lassalleans had falsified was Marx's analysis of the bourgeoisie. For in the programme, this class, together with all other non-proletarians, had been described as 'one reactionary mass' (ibid.: 322). In the *Critique*, therefore, Marx saw it as his duty to remind them that in the *Manifesto* the 'bourgeoisie is here conceived as a revolutionary class — as the bearer of large-scale industry' (ibid.). Engels expands upon this point in a letter to Bebel which also deals with the Gotha Programme:

In the first place Lassalle's high-sounding but historically false phrase is accepted: in relation to the working class all other classes are only one reactionary mass. This proposition is true only in a few exceptional cases: for instance . . . in a country where not only the bourgeoisie has moulded state and society in its own image but where in its wake the democratic petty bourgeoisie, too, has already carried out this remoulding down to its final consequences. If in Germany, for instance, the democratic petty bourgeoisie belonged to this reactionary mass, how could the Social-Democratic Workers' Party have gone hand in hand with it — with the Peoples' Party — for years? (Marx and Engels, 1968: 333).

This passage tells us almost all we need to know. For Germany is quite specifically *not* deemed to be a country where bourgeois dominance has reached its 'final consequences', the final consequence being that it is ready to give birth to full communism. For this reason, the bourgeoisie are still considered a revolutionary class, and a class with which the Workers' Party *should* be working hand in hand.

As we have already seen, in the 1872 Preface to the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels still believed that any revolution in Germany would have to be a permanent one, i.e., one in which the proletarian revolution *follows* the completion of the bourgeois revolution and takes on the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Because this bourgeois revolution has yet to be completed in Germany, the proletarians need to work with the bourgeoisie until they are in a position to 'win

The Lower Phase of Communism

the battle of democracy'. That the Gotha Programme ignores this fact indicates that it has misunderstood and subsequently falsified the findings of the *Manifesto*.

The second falsification follows from this first. For the Lassalleans had failed to make a distinction between the lower and higher phases that communism will have to go through in Germany. In the *Manifesto*, Marx had argued for the existence of a lower phase in order to facilitate the gestation of communism within capitalism. In the Gotha Programme, however, the Lassalleans were talking of a *direct* transition to a society based around 'equal right' and 'fair distribution', blissfully ignorant of the fact that 'defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society', and that, therefore, '*equal right* here is still in principle — *bourgeois right*' (Marx, 1968f: 320). When, therefore, Marx begins his famous proclamation with the words, 'what we are talking about here', what he is talking about is the practical impossibility of Germany witnessing a direct transition to anything other than the first stage of communism.

Incidentally, what he is *not* talking about is the practical impossibility of *any* bourgeois society witnessing a direct transition to 'full' communism. For he devised various models, each of which will be discussed in chapter 5, according to which a *fully developed* capitalism *could* give birth to 'full' communism. What he is talking about instead is the practical impossibility of *Germany* witnessing such a direct transition *now*. Because of the attention it has received from Marxologists over the years, it is easy to forget that the *Critique* was a *private* letter addressed to *five* German socialists, which dealt *specifically* with *one* German programme drawn up by a group of Germans for a Conference which aimed to tackle *specifically* German problems. If one cares to remember that this is all the *Critique* was, then its claims to universal validity seem somewhat dubious.

In order to highlight the practical impossibility of Germany directly witnessing the transition to full communism, Marx emphasised the preconditions required for this transition. In so doing, he produced that glorious passage concerning the 'higher phase' of communism:

The Lower Phase of Communism

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly — only then can the narrow horizons of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs! (ibid.: 320-321).

This most famous of passages is often seen as some spurious utopian nonsense, which, for some obscure reason, had managed to escape from the depths of Marx's subconscious, where it had been resting since his 'early' utopian days, and land on the page. It was, however, far from spurious, for it was intended to reveal all the preconditions required for full communism — when 'this', 'that' and 'the other' have taken place, '*only then*' can 'this' happen — in order to demonstrate that Germany was in no position at all to see its realisation.

For Marx, the Germany of 1875 had no more satisfied the preconditions required for the realisation of 'full communism' than had the Germany of 1848. In order to satisfy these conditions, a transitional phase would therefore be required. This lower phase would, indeed, be a protracted affair, for when it emerged from the womb of capitalism it would be virtually *all* birthmark — the proletariat will have won the battle of democracy and declared the dictatorship of the proletariat *in the course of* effecting the bourgeois revolution, so that communism's first stage will have been conceived the very minute that its capitalist host had reached puberty. As a result, capitalism itself will hardly have had chance to 'develop on its own foundations', leaving the dictatorship with a lot of work to do before the preconditions for 'full' communism are met. The Lassalleans had simply no idea that this was the case, and this is why Marx went to such lengths to tell them.

With regards to the actual proposals outlined in the 'Critique', these are rather more esoteric than those proposed in the *Manifesto* primarily because they are defined in relation to the Gotha Programme's statements and because they often involve tangential digressions concerning the theoretical ineptitudes underlying the latter. The similarities between the *Manifesto*'s programme and the Critique's

The Lower Phase of Communism

proposals are nonetheless quite clear, especially when it comes to the relationship between the spheres of production and circulation. For once again, Marx nowhere defines the production process as a centralised activity confined solely to the organs of the state. Instead, he tells us the ways in which the state will administer the circulation and distribution side of the economy with a view to increasing the capacity and the efficiency of productive capital. Hence the fact that each economic unit will have deducted from its output 'cover for replacement of the means of production used up' and an 'additional portion for expansion of production' (ibid.: 318). What Marx has in mind here is something akin to the idea put forward in the *Manifesto*, according to which private production would be supplemented by state production in order to facilitate the development of productive capital in general. It is true that deductions will also be made for the provision of schools and hospitals, and it is true also that no one will receive back more than the equivalent of that which they have themselves produced. As was the case with the *Manifesto*, however, these measures were intended to rid capitalism of its more grotesque features, not to *replace* it. Indeed, the whole point being made by Marx was that capitalism was in no fit state to be superseded and that, therefore, a transitional phase was required during which capitalism would be rendered fit.

In addition to his ignorance concerning this issue, Lassalle's idea of 'full communism' was nothing like that set down in the *Manifesto*. For much to Marx's amusement and consternation, the programme stated that 'the German workers' party strives for "the free state"' (ibid.: 326). It is this idea which prompted another famous proclamation by Marx:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat* (ibid.: 327).

The state, in other words, to the extent that it will exist at all in communism, will not be 'free'. It will not be the embodiment of full communism itself because it can be *nothing but*, and nothing more than, the transition point to it. As Engels

The Lower Phase of Communism

remarks in his letter to Bebel, 'the Lassalleans certainly have something to learn from our party . . . above all that the universal panacea of state aid should be, if not entirely relinquished, at any rate recognised by them as a subordinate transitional measure' (Marx and Engels, 1968: 332).

Subordinate transitional measures. This is what the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* was all about. It was designed to show that, in the case of Germany at least, full communism could not be reached without them. The Lassalleans failed to understand the need for them and subsequently failed to distinguish between communism's lower and higher phases. In failing to make this distinction, they failed to realise that 'defects' would still typify the immediate post-revolutionary future and that the state would not embody freedom in the long term future referred to as communism's higher phase.

In a strong sense, then, the *Critique* was a defence of the *Manifesto*. Its aim was to repeat the general schema elucidated there and to argue that the Lassallean programme was an inferior replacement. As Manuel and Manuel remark: 'Fundamentally, Marx in 1875 felt that a new party program was supererogatory; the *Manifesto*, cogent and lucid, had been around for popular consumption since 1848, and the publication of another statement of principles was likely to be obfuscatory' (1979: 697). More than this, in fact, the principles stated were simply *wrong*, and they were wrong in one principal respect — they failed to realise that an economically under-developed country like Germany needed to go through a transitional phase before it could proceed to full communism. They failed to realise, that is, that the Germany of 1875 represented one of those instances where a dictatorship of the proletariat was required. And this is what the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a whole meant for Marx and Engels: it was not a universal theory but a model which applied to *certain* situations, and the Germany of 1875, like the Germany of 1848 and the France of 1850 and 1871, was one of them.

The Lower Phase of Communism

2.5 Conclusion

A utopia should describe in a variety of aspects and with some consistency an imaginary state or society which is regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which its author lives. It may appear odd, then, that the present chapter has sought to argue that Marx's description of the lower phase of communism was not a utopia in this sense. For Marx did describe the lower phase in a variety of aspects and with some consistency and he did regard it as better, in some respects at least, than the society in which he lived. What this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, however, is that the lower phase of communism was the solution to a different kind of problem than that which utopias are used to solve. For the lower phase was in no sense regarded by Marx as a desired 'end', nor was it the result of cerebrations concerning the nature of alternative forms of society. Instead, it was the solution to a very specific problem, namely, how best to bring economically undeveloped countries through industrialisation stages similar to those already attained under bourgeois rule in the more developed countries. Confronted with this problem, Marx reasoned that the best solution would be for the proletariat in those countries which were presently undergoing their bourgeois phases of revolution to declare the permanence of these revolutions by raising themselves to the position of ruling class and by establishing a dictatorship. Once this had been achieved, the proletariat could speedily destroy the vestiges of feudalism and swiftly eliminate the fetters to productive capital, thus achieving a state of economic development that would otherwise have taken decades.

The lower phase of communism was thus the product of reasoned judgements concerning the best way to achieve rapid economic development in those countries still bound by feudal fetters. So little was this phase of development 'utopian', in fact, that its principal aim was to emulate developments that had already taken place elsewhere. Rather than serving as an *alternative* model of society, that is, the dictatorship was designed to develop the *existing* one. As to *why* the development of the existing world would facilitate the development of

The Lower Phase of Communism

communism to such a degree that Marx could term the dictatorship 'the lower stage' of communism, it has been suggested here that Marx believed that a fully developed capitalism would somehow become impregnated with the seeds of communism. The dictatorship would serve the interests of communism, therefore, and constitute its lower stage, in the sense that it would plant the seeds of communism itself and thereby take control of the germination process.

Any defence of such an explanation will, of course, need to discuss the germination process itself and establish that Marx did believe that a fully developed capitalism would give birth to a fully developed communism. This will, in fact, be the task of chapter 5. The task of chapter 3, however, will be to explore Marx's description of the *higher* phase of communism and thus complete our examination of his 'utopia'.

Notes

¹ Although the theory is best known today as 'the theory of permanent revolution' (primarily because Trotsky later popularised it under this name), the phrase favoured by Marx and Engels was 'the revolution in permanence'. It was thus really Engels who first gave the theory its name, using this very phrase in his article on 'The Magyar Question' of January 1849 (Engels, 1973: 213).

² Marx did in fact use the concept in his famous letter to Weydemeyer of March 1852, in which he stated that:

What I did that was new was to prove 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production, 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society (Marx and Engels, 1968: 669).

There is, however, a very particular story behind its use here. For Weydemeyer had just written an article entitled 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat', which sought to summarise the arguments of the *Manifesto*. Marx, in response to this, wrote the letter in question with the aim of clarifying those arguments which he felt Weydemeyer had misrepresented (see Draper, 1990: 303-304; 1987: 28-29).

Chapter 3

Marx's Description of the Higher Phase of Communism

3.1 Introduction

When people talk of Marx's 'utopia', it is to his description of the higher phase of communism that they invariably refer. It was to this that Kumar was referring when he said that Marx's utopia is 'more dazzling in its utopianism than that of even the most utopian of utopian socialists' (1987: 53), and it is Marx's description of the higher phase of communism that E. K. Hunt describes as 'the grandest and noblest vision in human history' (1984: 97). In order to complete our discussion of Marx's 'utopianism', we therefore need to examine his description of the higher phase of communism and assess whether or not it really does occupy the status of a 'utopia'. Whilst the conclusion reached at the end of this chapter will be that it does, it will also be argued that the fact that it does needs *explaining* rather than merely demonstrating.

With regards to how the discussion itself is to be structured, I follow R. N. Berki in distinguishing between the descriptions we are given of a 'mundane, heterogeneous, pedestrian communism' and those we are given of a 'visionary' and almost eschatological version of the same (1983: 126). Section 3.2 will subsequently deal with the former set of descriptions, which concern the institutional and organisational aspects of full communism, and section 3.3 will deal with the latter, which focus on the truly human character of the individuals that will inhabit it. Not only does such a distinction impose a clear structure upon our discussion, it also forms part of the argument of the chapter itself. For I will suggest that the term 'utopia' can only really be used in relation to Marx's 'visionary' descriptions of communism, whereas the descriptions he provides of its more 'mundane' aspects are so vague and nebulous that they hardly justify the term 'descriptions' at all, let alone 'utopian' ones. It will further be suggested, however, that even in relation to Marx's 'visionary' descriptions of the truly

The Higher Phase of Communism

human individual the term 'utopia' seems problematic. This is because, as every Marxologist knows, these descriptions were never 'systematically' presented but were rather scattered about throughout Marx's writings. The fact that Marx's 'utopia' can only be assembled by means of collating a series of disparate remarks (together, of course, with the fact that Marx repeatedly told us that he was not in the business of contriving utopias) seems to indicate that there was more to Marx's 'utopianism' than the mere act of describing a utopia. Chapters 4 and 5 will then attempt to establish what this something more was.

3.2 The 'Mundane' Aspects of Full Communism

Four things can be said with absolute certainty about the mundane aspects of full communism as envisioned by Marx: that private property will have been abolished, that class distinctions will have disappeared, that the producers will have direct control over the means of production and that the individual will no longer be a slave to the division of labour. These four things effectively define the social relations of production that will exist in full communism. What they also do, however, is represent *the sum total* of Marx's definition of the relations of production that will exist in full communism. For Marx never went beyond the level of general phrases and sweeping statements when it came to describing these relations and one finds it difficult as a consequence to imagine what they actually infer.

Take the abolition of private property as an example. In communism, says Marx, its place will have been taken by 'the possession in common of the land and of the means of production' (Marx, 1946: 789). What, however, does this actually mean at the institutional and organisational level? Common ownership could be taken to mean a thousand and one things — and *has* been taken to mean a thousand and one things; just think of all the contrasting utopias to which the notion of common ownership has given rise — and yet Marx never outlines one of them. Nor does Marx specify the type of inter-personal relationships that will characterise a society devoid of classes. How will the fact that everyone occupies the same

The Higher Phase of Communism

relation to the means of production affect the specific relations between these people? If no longer defined in terms of class, then what would these relations be defined in terms of? Consulting Marx for an answer to such questions will only lead to disappointment. Similar things can be said with respect to Marx's concept of workers' control. For although the symbolic relevance of the notion is easy to grasp — it symbolised both worker self-determination and their mastery over, rather than subservience to, the productive forces of society — the actual form that such symbolic self-determination would take remains a mystery. All that is certain is that the associated producers will 'regulate national production upon a common plan, thus taking it under their own control' (Marx, 1968e: 291). What this plan would actually involve Marx does not say, how it would be drawn up Marx never specifies, how and by whom it would be implemented is anyone's guess. That there would be a plan is all we are told.

Turning our attention now to the division of labour, whilst Marx does have a little more to say on this matter he probably does not have as much to say as one might think. For Marx was primarily concerned with the question of the *abolition* of the division of labour and not with that of describing alternative modes of organising production within the factory. It would therefore be a mistake to describe the abolition of the division of labour as a 'Utopian' category, although it is often treated as such. In fact, the abolition of the division of labour had the same symbolic value for Marx as the concept of workers' control of the means of production; it was symbolic, that is, of a more fundamental aspect of communism — worker self-determination. For underlying Marx's repeated attacks on the division of labour was the fact that it subjected individuals to an activity *forced* upon them. Marx thus refers to 'the subjection of the individual under the division of labour, under a definite activity forced upon him' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 69) and argues that because 'each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape' his own productive power 'enslaves him instead of being controlled by him' (ibid.: 54). Whilst, therefore, there were other reasons why Marx criticised the division of labour —

The Higher Phase of Communism

most notably because 'the life-long annexation of the workman to a detail function' transforms him into 'a living appendage of the machine' (Marx, 1946: 363, 489) — these criticisms were underscored by Marx's belief that the division of labour epitomised the labourer's 'complete subjection to capital' (ibid.: 350). When Marx described the preconditions for communism in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', it was thus 'the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour' that would have to vanish (Marx, 1968f: 320).

Now, with regards to what communism would look like once the subordination of the individual to the division of labour *had* actually vanished, we have, of course, the most ridiculed passage in the entire canon of Marxism. One hardly needs reminding that the passage reads as follows:

in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic (Marx and Engels, 1970: 54).

Fortunately, however, whilst this passage used to be seen as a 'utopian' embarrassment to be avoided by students of Marx, it can now be viewed as a celebration of Marx's humour and a testimony to his anti-utopianism. For as Terrell Carver has helpfully indicated, not only did Engels, rather than Marx, draft the passage in the first place, but Marx actually reprimanded Engels for doing so, adding the bits concerning after-dinner criticism 'in order to send it up' (Carver, 1988: 135). As Carver therefore concludes:

The famous passage on communist society from *The German Ideology* cannot now be read as one continuous train of thought. In fact it shows Marx sharply rebuking Engels for straying, perhaps momentarily, from the serious work of undercutting the fantasies of Utopian socialists (ibid.).

This subsequently raises problems for those who wish to emphasise Marx's implicit utopianism. For the hunter-fisherman-herdsman-critic passage can no longer be used in support of such a conclusion; other passages need to be found. When it comes to descriptions of how communism will function without the division of labour, however, there are no such passages. All Marx provides us

The Higher Phase of Communism

with are proclamations about how the division of labour needs to be abolished and familiar (though still extremely general) remarks such as: 'In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 109).

With regards to Marx's description of the relations of production that would exist in full communism, this much then should now be clear; that the term 'description' hardly applies to such vague and nebulous remarks. The same is also true of Marx's description of the political sphere. For although he tells us that there will be no parliaments in communism (Marx, 1960b: 126), nor any soldiers, policemen, hangmen, legislators or judges (Marx, 1960a: 52), and although we know for sure that when 'class rule has disappeared' there will be 'no state in the present political sense' (Marx, 1974e: 336), what there *will* be is far less clear. All we have to go on is the notion of 'an aggregate body working merely for the satisfaction of the national wants' (Marx, 1959: 830), within which 'the functions of government become purely administrative' (Marx and Engels, 1974a: 314) and 'the public power will lose its political character' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 105). What Marx actually means by a non-political aggregate public administrative non-state is never made explicit, however, and general phrases such as Engels' 'withering away of the state' are so general that a whole industry has been built around trying to decipher them (see, for example, the attempts made by Solomon Bloom, 1946; Richard Adamiak, 1970; and Hal Draper, 1970).

Thus far, then, one finds that Marx's 'grand and noble vision' amounts to this: that some form of common ownership will be in place, that the workers will regulate production according to some form of plan, that nobody will be defined in terms of one particular sphere of their activity, and that a non-political aggregate public administrative non-state will have some undefined role to play. In terms of J. Max Partick's definition, I think it safe to conclude that, with regards to such mundane issues as its institutional and organisational arrangements, Marx did not really

The Higher Phase of Communism

describe the state or society called full communism 'in a variety of aspects' and did not, therefore, present us with a 'utopian' picture of it.

One may well argue here that such a conclusion has been reached too hastily. For Marx had lots of other things to say about the mundane aspects of full communism, things such as distribution according to need and the notion of the government of people being transformed into the administration of things. In view of the fact that Marx did have things such as these to say about full communism, it is sometimes suggested that his vision of it closely resembled those put forward by the 'utopian socialists' (see, for example, Levitas, 1990a: 40, 45). In my view, however, little importance should be attached to any superficial similarities that exist between the two, firstly because, as Marx Wartofsky rightly emphasises:

The game of "adumbritis" or "precursoritis" is easy to play, but it is, in the end, a trivial game and is, at its worst, a misleading one. At most, it shows the continuity of human thought, whether in the history of philosophy or of the arts and sciences generally. But it does not serve to show the identity of one man's thought or discovery with another's (except in those rare instances of parallel discovery, or in the degenerate case of outright plagiarism) (1977: 7).

The fact that Marx and Engels' vision of communism was in some ways similar to those of the utopians should not, therefore, be taken to indicate anything other than the continuity of human thought. This is not to deny, of course, that Marx and Engels were heavily influenced by the 'utopians', as they themselves readily conceded. The early Engels in particular was intoxicated by Fourier's 'scientific research, cool unbiased, systematic thought' (Engels, 1975a: 394) and at one time even pronounced that 'I should like to subscribe to the proposals of *Robert Owen*, the English Socialist, since these are the most practical and most fully worked out' (Engels, 1975b: 252). Passing swiftly over the fact that Owen was Welsh and Fourier anything but 'cool' and 'unbiased', it is important to note that the similarities between Marx and Engels' vision of communism and those of the utopians were generally confined to the elements of the present society that would *disappear* in the future. In the *Manifesto*, therefore, Marx and Engels say of the utopians that:

The Higher Phase of Communism

They attack every principle of existing society. Hence they are full of the most valuable materials for the enlightenment of the working class. The practical measures proposed in them — such as the abolition of the distinction between town and country, of the family, of the carrying on of industries for the account of private individuals, and of the wage system, the proclamation of social harmony, the conversion of the functions of the State into a mere superintendance of production, all these proposals point solely to the disappearance of class antagonisms . . . (Marx and Engels, 1967: 116).

It was these *negative* proposals, which point to the *disappearance* of class antagonisms, that Engels also had in mind when he declared that:

German theoretical socialism will never forget that it rests on the shoulders of Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen — three men who, in spite of all their fantastic notions and all their utopianism, stand among the most eminent thinkers of all time and whose genius anticipated innumerable things the correctness of which is now being scientifically proven by us (Engels, 1968a: 246).

Marx's science was now proving that class antagonisms will disappear, so that the utopians' negative measures were correct *in spite of* the fantastic utopian alternatives they erected in their place.

With regards to the *positive* proposals apparently endorsed by Marx and Engels — most notably the Saint-Simonian idea concerning 'the conversion of the functions of the State into a mere superintendance of production' and the famous distributive principle of 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs', first formulated by Cabet — there is no reason to believe that these were adopted as anything other than mere 'catchwords'. As we saw in chapter 1 (page 34), 'catchwords' were all that the ideas of the utopian socialists amounted to in the era of materialistically critical socialism, and it is as catchwords that Marx's apparent adoption of some of their ideas should therefore be viewed.

To take one specific example, in fact, it is impossible to believe that Marx adopted Saint-Simon's notion of the government of people being transformed into the administration of things as anything *other* than a catchword. For as far as Saint-Simon was concerned, 'the administration of things' had to be based upon a strict and hierarchical division of power, and it was imperative that the scientists rule the most important, i.e., the 'spiritual', sphere of society. As he explains to the proletariat: 'A scientist, my friends, is a man who foresees; it is because science

The Higher Phase of Communism

provides the means to predict that it is useful, and that scientists are superior to all other men' (Saint-Simon, 1976a: 76). The corollary of this, and equally as imperative, was the need for all power to be withheld from the proletariat. The reasoning behind this is explained to the proletariat thus:

I must discuss with you something which angers you deeply. You say: *we are ten, twenty, a hundred times more numerous than the proprietors and yet they exercise a power over us very much greater than that which we wield over them.* I can understand, my friends, that you are aggrieved. But notice that the proprietors, although fewer in number, are more enlightened than you are and for the general good power should be distributed according to the degree of enlightenment (ibid.: 78).

Saint-Simon stressed the need for an élite minority to exercise political power, so that for him the 'government of people' would be transcended by the proletariat doffing their caps of their own volition. When Marx appropriated the phrase, one can therefore be sure that he did not appropriate the content of this 'utopian' idea: it was *just* a phrase and *just* a catchword.

Similarly, it is interesting to note that during the course of over four decades' work and who knows how many hundreds of thousands of words, Marx referred to Cabet's distributive principle only *once* — and only then in a pamphlet written for five of his friends and certainly not intended for publication. This must surely tell us something. Perhaps, indeed, it tells us that Marx was referring to some previous conversation that he had had with his friends or perhaps, as was the case with the hunter-fisherman passage, he was actually 'sending up' the views held by one or more of them. What it must tell us, however, is that Marx did not give the matter any detailed thought. For if Marx *really had* given the distributive principle in question his considered thought, and if it *really did* form a part of some clearly structured 'vision' of the future, then surely Marx would have referred to it again, at least in his private notebooks or correspondence. This, however, he did not do.

All of which raises an interesting point. For if one browses through Marx's correspondence, one will find that reference is never made to the future structure of communism. As Oscar J. Hammen remarks:

The Higher Phase of Communism

The *Briefwechsel* contains nothing in the way of comment or speculation regarding the lot of humanity in the communist society to come — nothing to supplement the sparse, scattered and vague pronouncements that appear in the published critiques and other sources. Judging from the letters, the question of humanity and the form in which humanity would be realized occupied their thoughts very little, in contrast to matters of 'party' policy, proper tactics, the prospects of an economic crash, the privations of Marx's family, and the chances of revolution as such (1990: 428).

In his private correspondence with Engels, then, Marx displays not the slightest bit of interest in the form that the society of the future will take. Nor did he display any interest in the matter during his after-dinner conversation, as Melvin Lasky informs us by way of a nice little anecdote concerning the diary of one of Marx's dining partners for the evening of January 31st 1879: Marx, said the man, was 'interesting and often, as I thought, showing very correct ideas, when he was conversing of the past or the present, but vague and unsatisfactory when he turned to the future' (Lasky, 1977: 628n). Whilst such anecdotal evidence is relatively worthless on its own, it does suggest that Marx's description of communism was so meagre a) because Marx did not know what communism would look like and b) because he consciously avoided giving the matter any considered thought.

Indeed, this is the conclusion to which the whole of the foregoing analysis gives rise. For as we have seen, Marx's description of full communism was generally phrased in the negative and concerned those things that would disappear in the future. Furthermore, when Marx did talk in terms of positives, these were either so vague as to defy understanding or were catchwords that lacked any content. Now, whilst one *could* attempt to contrive a 'utopia' out of this material (as Bertell Ollman, 1977, does), the question I would ask is why bother? For it seems to me that Marx's esoteric and ambiguous comments concerning the nature of communism were esoteric and ambiguous because Marx did not actually give them much thought. This really is the most rational explanation for the paucity of detail in Marx's supposed 'utopia'. Unfortunately, however, most commentators refuse to accept this explanation and search instead for hidden meanings behind Marx's nebulous phrases. Could it be, however, that we do not know what Marx meant when he said that in communism 'there would be no state in the present

The Higher Phase of Communism

political sense' because Marx did not know either? Could it also be possible that Marx did not really know what he meant because he had not actually thought beyond the level of general phrases? And could it be possible that Marx had not thought beyond the level of general phrases because he did not, in fact, *care* what lay beyond this level? As he repeatedly told the utopians, one can never know the form that the future will take and attempting to contrive utopian pictures of it is just silly, stale and reactionary. General phrases could serve as catchwords, but this apart, descriptions of communism had lost *all* theoretical justification and *all* practical value. Is it any wonder, then, that Marx did not offer us anything more than a collection of catchwords?

One final thing needs to be said in relation to the 'utopianism' of Marx's description of the mundane aspects of full communism, and this concerns the principle of proletarian self-determination. For it was this principle, I suggested earlier, which informed his belief that the production process within communism would have to be regulated according to a common plan, and it was this principle which informed the imperative to abolish the division of labour. Now, in the sense that the principle of self-determination is a norm of some kind, one could say that Marx's understanding of the mundane aspects of full communism was informed by a normative concept. Whether or not the concept represents an 'ethical' norm is a debatable issue, although what is beyond debate is the fundamental importance attached to it by Marx. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 1, it was precisely because they denied the proletariat the right to determine its own form of future existence that Marx denounced the utopians as reactionary. This aside, however, Marx did say certain things about communism on the basis of the very same principle he had used to criticise the utopians, and this in itself would be enough to convince many commentators that he was a utopian. Saying things about the future on the basis of a value judgement is utopianism in anybody's language, and because Marx did this he was therefore a utopian.

The Higher Phase of Communism

I think that we should treat Marx with some degree of fairness here, however, for it seems that all too often he is declared a utopian by virtue of having said *anything at all* about communism. It seems, in fact, that the normal rules governing what does and does not count as a 'utopia' are abandoned when it comes to anti-utopians such as Marx, so that the mere suggestion of a plan to regulate production within communism is seized upon as concrete evidence of utopian tendencies. Whilst it would therefore be churlish to deny that Marx argued for the superiority of communism over capitalism on the basis of a normative concept of self-determination, the question is whether or not Marx's arguments to this effect led him to contrive a 'utopia'. The normal rules do, in other words, apply to Marx, and one needs to judge his 'utopianism' accordingly.

Under normal rules, then, the issue is not about whether Marx judged capitalism and found it wanting (which he did), or about whether he said *some* things about the mundane aspects of full communism (which he also did); it is about whether or not the things he said constitute a 'utopia' (which they do not). Indeed, the principle of proletarian self-determination prompted Marx to remain silent when it came to conceptualising the future far more often than it prompted him to describe it. Whilst, that is, the principle led him to proclaim that the proletariat would require a national plan to regulate production and thus bring it under their conscious control, it was also this principle which prevented him from saying anything about what this plan would actually involve. And whilst the principle led him to conclude that the division of labour would have to be abolished, it was also this principle which prevented him from describing how production would be organised in its absence. It was this principle, too, which prevented him from specifying the type of common ownership that would form the economic base of full communism, and it was this principle which prevented him from pre-empting the nature of the non-political framework that would emerge from within it. None of these things could be known in advance and utopian speculation was pointless: the proletarians would be more than capable of determining for themselves what

The Higher Phase of Communism

communism would look like and they should be given the absolute freedom to do so.

In summary, then, I would argue that Marx's description of the mundane aspects of full communism cannot be termed a 'utopia' because it was vague and ambiguous and because its vague ambiguity stems from the fact that Marx did not actually care all that much about what the mundane aspects of full communism would look like. We know that proletarian self-determination would be the key feature of communism, but apart from the negative concept of the abolition of the division of labour and the general notion of a production plan, this principle prompted Marx to remain silent when it came to describing the institutional and organisational aspects of communism. With regards to the mundane aspects of full communism, therefore, there are no hidden depths to be found in Marx's comments nor any 'utopia' to be retrieved from them.

3.3 Marx's Visionary Conception of Full Communism

Many writers would agree wholeheartedly with the arguments put forward in the previous section and yet would still insist that Marx was a utopian. They would argue that whilst Marx did not give much thought to the institutional or organisational aspects of communism, he did give a great deal of thought to the nature of the individuals that would inhabit it. Zygmunt Bauman, for example, notes that Marx saw communism as

a totally novel culture, with a new dominant philosophy, a new concept of reality and of human potentialities, new ways of incorporating the individual biography into societal history, and new patterns of interhuman relations, rather than as a mere institutional change in the titles of ownership or a reshuffling of the ruling garrison (1976: 75).

Derek Sayer also points out that:

Communism, for Marx, . . . is not simply a matter of equitably redistributing wealth, or changing the title deeds on property. It is nothing less than the creation of conditions within which human production processes and the social relations they entail are brought under human control, so that all can develop their individual capacities to the full and mutually benefit from their collective enterprise. It is, in Marx's vision, a movement to humanise a world which currently confronts individuals as alien (1990: 684).

The Higher Phase of Communism

For Leszek Kolakowski, it is precisely its emphasis on the human rather than the structural that differentiates Marx's vision from those of the utopian socialists:

The picture of a harmonious community, a society without conflict in which all human needs are satisfied, and so forth — all this can be found in Marx in similar formulas to those of the utopians. But socialism means more to Marx than a welfare society, the abolition of competition and want, the removal of conditions that make man an enemy of man: it is also, and above all, the abolition of the estrangement between man and the world, the assimilation of the world by the human subject (1978, I: 223-224).

For each of these writers, then, Marx was concerned with something more than the mundane aspects of communism; he was concerned with those fundamental aspects that would help to define the individual within it. Communism was to represent a new culture, based around the development of individual capacities and the assimilation of the world by the human subject. One gets the impression here that descriptions of institutions and so forth were almost beneath Marx; they were trifling irrelevancies when compared to his far nobler concerns. That Marx described the mundane aspects of communism with such vague ambiguity should therefore come as no surprise: Marx greeted such matters with a sneer of disdain and focused instead on what communism would mean for the human subject. When one refers to Marx's 'utopia', therefore, not only is one referring specifically to his description of the higher phase of communism, one is also referring specifically to his conception of the human subjects that would inhabit this phase. How, then, did Marx conceive of these subjects?

Well, as John O'Neill rightly suggests, Marx defines 'a set of characteristic capacities and activities, in terms of which one can grasp what it is for humans to flourish' (1994: 21). This set comprises three elements. The first we may term, following Ernst Fischer, 'The Dream of the Whole Man' (1970: 15), and the passage which best exemplifies it is found in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being — a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man — the true

The Higher Phase of Communism

resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution (Marx, 1977a: 90).

According to such a vision of communism, 'being' is reconciled with everything that once faced it in antithesis. Embodied within the communistic individual is, and existence within communism can only be defined as, the resolution of the antitheses between humanity and Nature, the individual and the species, existence and essence, etc. Not only is communism a classless society, it is a society devoid of any fragmentation and separation; within it one is 'whole'. Of this passage Kumar says that: 'Such a dazzling vision of universal harmony is hardly to be found anywhere else in the serious utopian literature' (1987: 62), and this is presumably why Kumar is 'inclined to think Marx's own vision more dazzling in its utopianism than that of even the most utopian of utopian socialists' (ibid.: 53).

The second element may be termed 'the development of the all-round individual', an idea expressed by Marx when he approvingly quotes a Frenchman on his return from San-Francisco:

Once in the midst of this world of adventurers, who change their occupation as often as they do their shirt, egad, I did as the others. As mining did not turn out remunerative enough, I left it for the town, where in succession I became typographer, slater, plumber, &c. In consequence of thus finding out that I am fit for any sort of work, I feel less of a mollusk and more of a man (Marx, 1946: 493n).

In objectifying a whole host of one's individual powers through a diverse range of labour activities one becomes 'more of a man'. This is because 'it is the vocation, the destination of each man to develop himself in many different ways, to realize all his dispositions' (Marx and Engels, 1965: 316). 'The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human being *in need* of a totality of human manifestations of life' (Marx, 1977a: 99), because human beings need to 'be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 55). In order to be *rich*, therefore, to reach their *destination*, people *need* to experience the *totality* of life activities.

The Higher Phase of Communism

Between them, the 'visionary' concepts of the Whole Man and the all-round individual go some way towards explaining Marx's almost pathological hostility towards the town/country and mental/manual labour distinctions foisted upon the worker by the division of labour. For whilst the underlying force behind the imperative to abolish the division of labour (the fact that it precludes proletarian self-determination) can be explained without some ultimate reference to a visionary conception of the individual, it seems that these ulterior motives cannot. When Marx rails against the distinctions in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels, 1970: 68-72), the *Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 1967: 104-105), the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' (Marx, 1968f: 320), *Capital* (Marx, 1946: 513), and so on, it seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that he does so from the perspective granted by the two 'visionary' concepts hitherto discussed — on the one hand, the distinctions constitute antitheses which need to be resolved before communism can claim to represent the resolution of *all* antitheses, and on the other hand they form obstacles which prevent the individual from experiencing the totality of life activities.

Turning now to the third element which defines what it is for humans to flourish, this may be termed 'the ontological necessity of labour'. In the words of Douglas Kellner, this means that 'labour should be seen as the human activity in which man transforms nature, develops his potentialities, and strives to create a human-social world after his own image' (1973: 7). This ontology is exemplified by Marx's claim that in communism 'labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want' (Marx, 1968f: 320). People need to see themselves in a world *they* have created, and because of this, 'production for its own sake means nothing but the development of human productive forces, in other words the development of the richness of human nature as an end in itself' (Marx, 1971a: 247-8). In communism, therefore, labour becomes 'but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the labourer' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 77). Labour has become life's prime want because the individual 'can only express his life in real, sensuous objects' (Marx, 1977a: 136). To 'be' in communism is to physically

The Higher Phase of Communism

create, so that, as Ernest Mandel phrases it, labour becomes 'the fulfilment of the personality' (1977: 144).

Of the three elements which together comprise Marx's 'vision', it is often said that Marx was inconsistent in his description of the latter. For in *The German Ideology* Marx had quite specifically stated that:

For the proletarians . . . the condition of their existence, labour, and with it all the conditions of existence governing modern society, have become something accidental, something over which they, as separate individuals, have no control, and over which no *social* organisation can give them control . . . the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to the present), namely, labour (Marx and Engels, 1970: 85).

Rather than being an ontological need, labour thus becomes a process which needs to be abolished altogether. This passage can, however, be reconciled with Marx's ontology of labour if one follows Herbert Marcuse in suggesting that Marx 'envisioned the future mode of labor to be so different from the prevailing one that he hesitated to use the same term 'labor' to designate alike the material process of capitalist and communist societies' (1983: 293). When Marx talks of the abolition of 'labour' in *The German Ideology*, then, he could merely be talking about the abolition of 'that activity which produces capital', and not of the abolition of that activity through which individuals objectify their essential powers (ibid.). In this sense, Marx would be remaining entirely faithful to the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, i.e., the simultaneous abolition of x *and* the preservation of its essential truth.

Other ambiguities concerning Marx's vision of the role of labour within communism appear in *Grundrisse*, however. For both Agnes Heller and Steven Lukes point to a passage which seems to imply that Marx foresaw a fully automated future (Heller, 1974: 104, Lukes, 1984: 160). The passage in question reads as follows:

Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator of the production process itself . . . No longer does the worker insert a modified natural thing [*Naturgegenstand*] as middle link between the object [*Objekt*] and himself; rather, he inserts the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between

The Higher Phase of Communism

himself and inorganic nature, mastering it. He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body — it is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth (Marx, 1973a: 705).

As far as I can see, however, this passage merely describes the *transformation* that the labour process will undergo in communism, not its *abolition*: The labourer is no longer included *within* the production process, but acts instead as its regulator, stepping to the side of it rather than being its chief actor. What this means is that the labourer gains conscious control of the production process, thus dominating it rather than being dominated by it. No longer part of some alien process, the labourer sees the whole, of which he or she is master. The workers have mastered Nature through the industrial process and are henceforth able to appropriate their own powers. Because individuals now confront the process as social beings rather than as isolated monads, they have mastered Nature as social individuals. None of this, or so it seems to me, contradicts Marx's ideas concerning the individual's ontological *need* for labour.

The passage is nonetheless ambiguous. It can be rendered less so, however, if one places it in the context, not even of Marx's works as a whole, but in the context of the rest of *Grundrisse* itself. For Marx introduces the subject by saying that 'labour becomes attractive work, *the individual's self-realization* . . . only when it is of a scientific and at the same time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process . . . as an activity regulating all the forces of nature' (Marx, 1973a: 611-612, emphases added). Here it is made quite explicit that 'regulation of production' does not mean that the workers have divorced themselves from it, it means instead that they have *realised themselves in it*, i.e., that they are able to consciously regulate the forces of nature according to their own design.

What Marx does in *Grundrisse*, in fact, is establish the relationship between labour-time and free-time, both of which are considered essential if the individual

The Higher Phase of Communism

is to become truly human. Thus, when he describes free-time as 'room for the development of the individual's full productive forces' and when he says that 'the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum . . . corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free' (ibid.: 708, 706), he is merely saying that individuals need free-time *in addition to* labour time if they are to experience the totality of life activities.

Indeed, in communism, labour-time will be a source of creativity and not merely a means of reproducing one's existence. For:

It goes without saying, by the way, that direct labour time itself cannot remain in the abstract antithesis to free time in which it appears from the perspective of bourgeois economy. Labour cannot become play, as Fourier would like, although . . . [f]ree time — which is both idle time and time for higher activity — has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject. This process is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice [*Ausübung*], experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become (ibid.: 712).

Individuals thus enter the direct production process with the additional powers they have developed in their free time, and treat this process, maybe not as play, but as a means of scientific creativity; as a source, that is, of freely developing one's individuality. In *Grundrisse*, then, labour plays the same role as it does elsewhere in Marx's works, i.e., it satisfies a need in itself.

Yet another source of contention concerning Marx's ontology of labour concerns that notorious passage on the realms of freedom and necessity which appears toward the end of *Capital* Volume III. Says Marx:

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom,

The Higher Phase of Communism

which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite (Marx, 1959: 799-800).

Here it seems that labour can *never* be an end in itself and that freedom can *only* occur outside it, and this is what led Marcuse to declare that: 'In a single toss of a ball, the player achieves an infinitely greater triumph of human freedom over objectification than in the most powerful accomplishment of technical labour' (1973: 14-15). The same passage has also prompted many a writer to insist that Marx grew wise with old age. Ali Rattansi, for example, suggests that Marx realised that labour is a necessary though alienated activity which the communistic individual would simply have to deal with and that he subsequently advanced nothing more than a 'realistic' reduction of the working day (1982: 74). Isidor Walliman also emphasises Marx's realism, arguing that the Marx of *Capital III* was talking of the *voluntary* division of labour as a means of reconciling individual freedom with labour as a necessary and alienated process (1981: 172).

Once again, however, alternative interpretations of Marx are available. Krishan Kumar, for example, argues that:

There cannot really be two spheres of activity, the one expressing constraint, the other freedom. This suggests a persisting duality or dichotomy quite at variance with Marx's general concept of future society. In communal production, both socially necessary work and free creative activity will find their synthesis (1987: 57).

Indeed, in the sense that Marx quite specifically states that the individual can achieve freedom *in* the realm of necessity, this could be taken to mean that in communism labour would become *not only* a means of life *but also* life's prime want, i.e., that people would satisfy an ontological need in the process of performing an activity that they would have to perform anyway. This is certainly what Avner Cohen means when he says that:

What characterizes labour is its status as an activity whose goal is not contained within it. Marx, on the other hand, was able to describe a society which supplied its own subsistence needs through an activity which contained its own goal (1995: 45).

It seems to me, therefore, that there is a good case for arguing that Marx *consistently* referred to the existence of an ontological need for labour. Even if he did not, however, this matters little. For it is clear that the notion most *often*

The Higher Phase of Communism

referred to by Marx in relation to the role of labour within full communism was that concerning the individual's ontological need for it. And if one insists on constructing an entity called Marx's 'utopia' then one of its principal building blocks will have to be the notion that in communism labour will have become life's prime want. Now and again Marx *may* have strayed from this idea, but the important thing is that he always came back to it.

To conclude our discussion of Marx's utopian vision now, it would seem that the arguments put forward by Bauman, Sayer and Kolakowski are quite correct. For rather than describing the institutional logistics of communism, Marx did indeed concentrate on describing its human dimension. As a consequence, full communism does indeed involve a new concept of human potentialities, it does indeed involve the development of individual capacities, and it does indeed involve the assimilation of the world by the human subject. From this one could further conclude that Marx did indeed describe in a variety of aspects and with some consistency the nature of *the individuals* that would inhabit the imaginary state or society which he regarded as better than the one in which he lived but which he described only vaguely. Marx, in other words, can be said to have presented us with a 'humanist' utopia.

No attempt will be made here to deny that this is what Marx did. For it is more than obvious that with regards to the three principal categories outlined in this section, Marx provided enough detail, and did so with enough consistency, for us to imagine what the communistic individual would look like and for us to believe that these descriptions were not merely a collection of 'catchwords'. In this sense, then, one can quite legitimately claim that Marx was a 'utopian'. In another sense, however, such a conclusion seems far too simplistic. That this is so can best be highlighted with reference to the opening paragraphs that everyone feels obliged to write before they discuss Marx's 'utopia'. For as one will recall from the 'nevertheless' argument discussed in the Introduction (pages 6-7), these opening paragraphs state that 'Marx never offers a systematic account of the communist

The Higher Phase of Communism

society', *nevertheless* 'descriptions of the future society are scattered throughout Marx's writings' and *hence* the reason why I am going to talk about them (Ollman, 1977: 8). Whilst, therefore, such discussions invariably conclude by arguing that Marx's descriptions constitute a 'utopia', in so doing they tend to bypass a whole host of questions to which their opening remarks give rise: Why, if Marx was simply a 'utopian', did he never offer a systematic account of the communist society? Why, instead, does one have to scurry around pasting various disparate remarks together in order to assemble Marx's humanist 'vision'? Is not ascribing the term 'utopia' to such scattered and disparate remarks just a way of reading into Marx something that was not really there? And if Marx was really trying to present us with a humanist utopia then why did he never once tell us that this is what he was doing?

Each of these questions seem to indicate that Marx's 'utopianism' is a far more complex issue than many writers would have us believe. For it is not just a case of compiling a catalogue of comments and then declaring with joy that one has discovered a 'utopia', it is also a case of explaining why one has had to spend a great deal of time compiling a catalogue in the first place and why one has discovered a 'utopia' that Marx never once admitted to writing. Whilst one could reply here — as Ollman himself does, for example — that 'strategic' considerations prevented Marx from admitting to his own utopianism, this will not do because, as we have already seen, in his personal correspondence with Engels Marx never once showed the slightest bit of interest in the form that humanity would take in the future. To argue that Marx's humanist vision was the product of a utopian predilection would therefore be to argue that it was the product of a utopian predilection that he not only hid from his political rivals but also from himself.

In any case, if Marx really did attempt to conceptualise a humanist utopia, then what becomes of his vehement anti-utopianism? Are we expected to believe that Marx simply contradicted himself? Are we expected to believe that Marx

The Higher Phase of Communism

systematically avoided any concrete suggestions concerning the nature of the mundane aspects of communism only to shoot himself in the foot by describing the nature of the individuals that would inhabit it? Or should we subscribe to the 'nevertheless' argument which observes that Marx *did* describe communism and that is just the way it is? Both options appear to me to be entirely unsatisfactory. I do not, that is, think that Marx set about constructing a humanist utopia in spite of his proscriptions against so doing, nor do I believe that his descriptions of full communism were just 'there', waiting to be observed or explained by a shrug of the shoulders and the word 'nevertheless'. Instead, what I would suggest is this: that whilst Marx did provide us with a series of scattered and unsystematic descriptions of the nature of the individuals that would inhabit communism, these descriptions were not the product of a consciously articulated utopianism. Whilst, that is, these scattered descriptions could, if assembled together, be taken to constitute a 'utopia', they were not the result of any attempt on Marx's part to describe, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, an imaginary state or society which he regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which he lived. In short, if Marx did present us with a utopia then it was not his intention, either overtly or covertly, to do so.

Given that this is my conviction, the burden now rests upon me to explain why, in spite of his intentions to the contrary, Marx did present us with a utopia. It will be the task of chapters 4 and 5 to offer such an explanation. Before so doing, however, the findings and arguments presented in this chapter need to be summarised.

3.4 Conclusion

Did Marx describe, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, an imaginary state or society which he regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which he lived? The answer to this question is 'yes', but a muted 'yes'. For although he did describe, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, that state or society known to us as the dictatorship of the proletariat,

The Higher Phase of Communism

his intention in so doing was not to present us with a view of a 'better' world. It was rather to describe the nature of the society that would act as the *transit point* to a better world in circumstances of relative economic under-development. And although Marx did describe some of the mundane features of the state or society known to us as 'full communism', these were limited in their variety and described only vaguely. What chapter 2 and the second section of the present chapter have attempted to argue, then, is that when one talks of Marx's 'utopia' one is referring neither to his description of the lower phase of communism nor to his descriptions of the mundane aspects of the higher phase. In our subsequent discussion of Marx's 'utopia' these descriptions will therefore be left aside.

What will not be left aside, however, is Marx's 'vision' of the individuals that will inhabit communism, for this *was* described in a number of aspects and with some consistency. By means of three central categories — The Dream of the Whole Man, the development of the all-round individual and the ontological necessity of labour — Marx presented us with a picture of what human existence in the higher phase of communism would involve. Indeed, it is this picture which E. K. Hunt describes as 'the grandest and noblest vision in human history' and which Kumar refers to as being 'more dazzling in its utopianism than that of even the most utopian of utopian socialists'. Henceforth, then, when we direct our attention towards Marx's 'utopia', it is to this vision of humanity and its three defining categories that reference is being made.

The reason why our attention *needs* to be directed towards Marx's 'utopia', i.e., the reason why we cannot conclude our discussion by merely recognising its existence, was explained in section 3.3. For whilst it is widely recognised that Marx's vision of communism was more concerned with people than with structures and institutions, there is a sense in which the writers who recognise this go too far. In noting the existence of a humanist 'utopia' within Marx's writings, they tend to imply that whilst he was reluctant to describe communism's structure he was more than happy to present us with a utopian picture of its inhabitants.

The Higher Phase of Communism

This is, however, a rather dubious conclusion to reach. For given his critique of utopian socialism, the fact that Marx described the nature of communism at all seems surprising. Even more surprising is the fact that Marx described the nature of the individuals that will inhabit it in such detail. For was not the nature of communism unknowable, and was it not the task of *the proletariat* to define it once they had victoriously overthrown the society of the present? Was it not, furthermore, both dangerous and deceptive to describe that which cannot be known? Was it not, indeed, the epitome of paternalistic elitism to announce in prophetic tones that one has discovered what the emancipation of humanity looks like? For Marx, as we saw in chapter 1, it was indeed. For this very reason I think that one should hesitate before one describes Marx's vision of the communistic individual as a 'utopia' proper. Rather than ascribing this vision to some utopian predisposition, that is, one should look elsewhere for an explanation for its existence. The following two chapters, therefore, attempt to do just that.

Chapter 4

The Function and Failings of ‘Materialistically Critical Socialism’

4.1 Introduction

Utopianism in the era of materialistically critical socialism, said Marx in his letter to Sorge, can only be silly, stale and reactionary from the roots up. Utopianism should have evanesced, he argued in the First Draft of *The Civil War in France*, now that a real insight into the working class movement had become possible. Utopianism appealed to the workers without a rigorous scientific idea and without a positive doctrine, he added in his attack on Weitling. All of which indicates that Marx’s critique of utopian socialism took place from the perspective of an alternative, an alternative founded on real insight, an alternative which contained a rigorous scientific idea and a positive doctrine, and an alternative that was materialistically critical in nature. The present chapter explores the nature of this alternative, which, for the sake of methodological simplicity, will be referred to as ‘materialistically critical socialism’. This is not to suggest that when Marx himself employed the term in his letter to Sorge he was referring to the same ideas that the term will be used to refer to here. It is merely to indicate that the various ideas specifically counterposed by Marx to utopianism can be treated as a whole and that ‘materialistically critical socialism’ is a nice term under which to deal with these various ideas.

The purpose of the chapter is to argue that materialistically critical socialism did not perform the function that Marx wanted it to perform. In arguing along these lines, therefore, one needs to establish what this function was and why materialistically critical socialism failed to perform it. Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 deal with the first question and argue that the basic function of materialistically critical socialism was to ‘sufficiently guarantee’ that the future would be emancipatory. In so doing, Marx believed that it would perform the function that utopianism had once performed, imbuing the proletariat with the future optimism

Materialistically Critical Socialism

required in order to invoke the spirit of revolution, but that it would do so in a manner consistent with the principles of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination, the principles which utopianism undermined. Section 4.5 deals with the second question and quite simply argues that materialistically socialism did not succeed in sufficiently guaranteeing that the future would be emancipatory. The conclusion then sets the scene for chapter 5 by suggesting that the failure of materialistically critical socialism to perform the function asked of it led Marx to conclude that it had to be revised or developed in certain ways. Chapter 5 will then argue that the key to understanding Marx's utopianism lies in these revisions and developments.

4.2 The Need to Set People in Motion

The existence of an alternative to utopianism had been announced by Marx as early as 1843, when he told us that 'we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas, but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old' (Marx, 1975b: 207). Marx had, in other words, found a way of discovering the new world which somehow overcame the need for fantastic (i.e., utopian) anticipations of it. Because this new mode of discovery was based upon a mode of critique, Marx was able to distinguish between 'utopian communist systems' and his own 'critical communism' (Marx, 1976c: 338). Critical communism, then, as its name suggests, was based solely on critique, and not on dogmatic anticipation or system building. When talking of the part played by theory in the working class movement, George Lichtheim is therefore correct to suggest that: 'For Marx it was "criticism" — the analysis of the actual historical process' (1969: 195). Lichtheim is also correct, however, to observe that: 'Criticism is powerless so long as it remains speculative. It becomes a material force when it sets men in motion' (ibid.). Given, then, that utopianism had once been able to set people in motion (a fact never denied by Marx), but that its time had now passed, one needs to ask of Marx how his critique-driven alternative was able to do the same.

Materialistically Critical Socialism

The answer to this question lies, of course, in the nature of the critique contained within critical communism, or rather in the ‘rigorous scientific idea’ embodied in such critique. Now, to argue that Marx contrasted his own ‘science’ to others’ utopianism is to risk being accused of vulgarisation. Such a sharp dualism was alien to Marx, it is often argued, and is nothing more than a curse placed upon Marxism by Engels. This, however, is simply untrue. For Marx did quite deliberately contrast his own science to others’ utopianism, and we know this because he told us so in his ‘Conspectus of Bakunin’s *Statism and Anarchy*’ (1874). For in this little notebook one finds Marx emphasising, in response to Bakunin’s mention of ‘*scientific socialism*’, that this ‘was only used in opposition to utopian socialism, which wants to attach the people to new delusions, instead of limiting its science to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself’ (Marx, 1974e: 337). Scientific socialism, in other words, was a phrase *specifically* coined in order to contrast Marx’s conception of socialism to that of the utopians.

That Marx did contrast his own science to others’ utopianism does not, however, implicate him in some vulgar dualism. For as we saw in chapter 1 (pages 33-35), Marx was convinced that utopianism had been made redundant by the progress of history and the working class movement. Socialist utopias and utopian socialism really had, therefore, had their day. When he criticises utopian socialism from the perspective of his own scientific socialism, then, he is neither being vulgar nor ‘undialectical’ — he is merely criticising the old, superseded, form of socialism from the perspective of that which had superseded it. As Frank Manuel says of Marx and Engels:

They conceived of their doctrine dialectically, as at once an outgrowth of utopian thought and its contradiction, which in effect condemned the utopians as outdated and historically superseded fantasy (1973: ix).

In this sense, Marx could quite legitimately claim that ‘utopian socialism, in the era of materialistically critical socialism’, was *wrong* (or some other such

Materialistically Critical Socialism

simplistic adjective) and yet still remain faithful to an anti-dualistic dialectical approach.

In the 'Conspectus of Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*', Marx claimed that utopian socialism was wrong (or some other such simplistic adjective) because it attaches people to delusions rather than limiting itself, as did Marx's scientific alternative, to a knowledge of the social movement. The question prompted by this claim, however, is how, by limiting one's science to a knowledge of the social movement of the people, one is able to set these same people in motion. How, in other words, can a knowledge of the movement of the present motivate people to destroy it? This is a problem to which Marx gave some thought and the following section discusses the conclusions he reached.

4.3 Here the Content Goes Beyond the Phrase

For Marx, the key to setting people in motion without having to provide them with utopian descriptions of the future lay in comprehending the fundamental distinction between the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and those of the nineteenth. The distinction in question, most succinctly expressed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), was this: 'There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase' (Marx, 1968c: 98). What Marx meant by this was that the English and French Revolutions had required utopian 'phrases' in order to compensate for their lack of real 'content', whereas the content of the revolutions of the nineteenth century was so real that no utopian phrase could do it justice. Put another way, the content of the English and French Revolutions could not inspire action without the aid of a deceptive and utopian language, whereas the content of the revolutions of the nineteenth century rendered such language thankfully obsolete.

That the revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries *did* require utopias Marx explains in terms of the economic limitations of the revolutions themselves. In fact, he explains the utopianism of the Puritans and Jacobins using

Materialistically Critical Socialism

the very same framework that he used to explain the utopianism of the utopian socialists. He thus begins by pointing out that:

In both revolutions [1648, 1789], the bourgeoisie was the class which was *genuinely* to be found at the head of the movement. The proletariat, and the other sections of the town population which did not form a part of the bourgeoisie, either had as yet no interests separate from those of the bourgeoisie, or they did not yet form independently developed classes or groups within classes (Marx, 1973b: 192).

The English and French Revolutions thus had as their socio-economic background conditions which as yet precluded the development of an independent proletarian class. Though lacking independent initiative, the nascent proletariat nonetheless had its spokespersons in the form of Cromwell, the Levellers, Saint-Just, Robespierre, and so on. As was the case with the utopian socialists, however, these spokespersons could only articulate the needs of the proletariat-to-be in fantastic terms, given that the material conditions for its emancipation had yet to develop. In place of real insight into these conditions, therefore, the bourgeois representatives of the nascent proletariat saw the solution to its misery in terms of the application of reason. Thus says Marx:

The classical period of political intelligence is the French Revolution. Far from seeing the source of social defects in the state, the heroes of the French Revolution see in social defects the source of political misfortunes. Thus Robespierre sees in extremes of poverty and riches only an impediment to pure democracy. So he wishes to establish a general Spartan frugality (Marx, 1977c: 125).

The Golden Age utopia of Spartan frugality is thus conjured by Robespierre in order to compensate for his lack of understanding of the historical process (although Robespierre himself could not be blamed for failing to comprehend something which as yet defied comprehension). As Marx had told us in the First Draft of *The Civil War in France*, however, visions of emancipated humanity could never be realised because their very existence was indicative of the lack of the social conditions required for such emancipation. Indeed, herein lies Marx's explanation for the Jacobin Terror; it was the end result of the attempt to impose a plebeian utopia on society when the economic conditions were simply not ripe for it. And, like all such premature attempts, its failure only served the interests of the bourgeoisie:

Materialistically Critical Socialism

If therefore the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary, only an element in the service of the bourgeois revolution itself, as in the year 1794, as long as in the course of history, in its "movement", the material conditions have not yet been created which make necessary the abolition of the bourgeois mode of production and therefore also the definitive overthrow of the political rule of the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1976c: 319).

In the *Manifesto*, Babeuf's attempt to impose his own plebeian utopia is interpreted by Marx in the same way:

The first direct attempts of the proletariat to attain its own ends, made in terms of universal excitement, when feudal society was being overthrown, these attempts necessarily failed, owing to the then undeveloped state of the proletariat, as well as to the absence of the economic conditions for its emancipation, conditions that had as yet to be produced, and could be produced by the impending bourgeois epoch alone. The revolutionary literature that accompanied these first movements of the proletariat had necessarily a reactionary character. It inculcated universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form (Marx and Engels, 1967: 114-15).

In many respects, then, Marx's analysis of Robespierre and Babeuf was similar to his analysis of the utopian socialists; their systems were each the fantastic products of undeveloped economic conditions and each were doomed to failure. Shlomo Avineri is also correct to highlight the similarities between Marx's account of the Terror and that of Jacob Talmon, for whom the Terror was precisely the attempt to impose a crude utopia on a people who were neither prepared for nor desirous of it (Avineri, 1968: 189). Where, however, Marx differs from Talmon — and here my own interpretation differs from that of Avineri (1968: 185-201) — is in his belief that the plebeian utopianism of Robespierre and Saint-Just was a *necessary* part of the revolutionary process. For when Marx argues that 'there the phrase went beyond the content', not only is he arguing that the utopian phrases could never be realised, he is also suggesting that there the phrase *had* to go beyond the content. Little else could make sense of the first few pages of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, the key, in my opinion, to understanding why Marx considered himself able to overcome the need for utopianism.

Marx famously begins by bemoaning the fact that revolutionaries have always felt the need to disguise their actions in clothes borrowed from the past:

Thus Luther donned the mask of Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789 to 1814 draped itself alternately as the Roman republic and the Roman empire, and the Revolution of

Materialistically Critical Socialism

1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795 (Marx, 1968c: 96).

Almost immediately, however, Marx highlights the difference between the disguises of 1789-95 and those of 1848, the difference being that the disguises of the former were *necessary*:

unheroic as bourgeois society is, it nevertheless took heroism, sacrifice, terror, civil war and battles of peoples to bring it into being. And in the classically austere traditions of the Roman republic its gladiators found the ideals and the art forms, the self-deceptions that they needed in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy (ibid.: 97).

The revolutionaries thus required heroic Roman ‘phrases’ in order to conceal from themselves the unheroic nature of the revolution’s ‘content’. The implication here is that without these phrases the revolutionaries’ enthusiasm would have waned and the revolution itself would have collapsed. The same is true of the English Civil War, argues Marx, in which ‘Cromwell and the English people had borrowed speech, passions and illusions from the Old Testament for their bourgeois revolution’ (ibid.). As a consequence,

the awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in imagination, not of fleeing from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk about again (ibid.).

The disguises of 1848, on the other hand, had served only the negative functions mentioned above — parodying old struggles, fleeing from reality, etc. — because:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the phrase went beyond the content; here the content goes beyond the phrase (ibid.: 98).

In arguing that the revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its inspiration from the past, Marx is attacking those revolutionaries who, in 1848, had attempted to do exactly that, and who, as a consequence, had been ‘fleeing from reality’. He was also criticising those who were *still* fleeing from reality and who were still, therefore, spouting ‘utopian nonsense, to which an end must be put’

Materialistically Critical Socialism

(ibid.: 102). In addition, however, he was pointing out that it did not matter that the content of the future could not be phrased, because, by virtue of being 'beyond' any phrases that could be conjured now, it would attract support without the aid of utopian drugs. The content of the revolution of the nineteenth century thus went beyond the phrase in two senses; firstly, in the sense that a knowledge of this content lay beyond anyone's epistemological reach; and secondly, in the sense that the magnificence of the coming content itself defied representation in terms of the phrases available to one now — it was to be so qualitatively different that it lay beyond even our most imaginative attempts to phrase it.

The key to understanding why Marx considered himself able to overcome the need for utopianism lies, therefore, in the way he perceived the 'content' of the revolution of the nineteenth century. It lies in his belief that this content would defy any expectations that could be phrased now and in his conviction that people would be set in motion by the promise of such a phrase-defying content. The question prompted by all of this is, of course, *how* Marx knew that the content of the revolutions of the nineteenth century would go beyond the phrase. It is in Marx's answer to this question that one encounters the materialist conception of history.

4.4 The Material Conditions for Emancipation

In Volume 1 of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels proclaim that:

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence (Marx and Engels, 1970: 56-57).

Communism was thus a movement, the premises of which were *now* in existence, rather than an ideal 'end', the realisation of which would demand adjustments being made to reality by some independently conceived 'means'. For Marx, then, what distinguished his ideas from those of the utopians was that he had established a real and necessary link between the capitalist present and the communist future. Never before had this link been made, or, to put it another way, all previous

Materialistically Critical Socialism

attempts to make this link had been utopian ones — fantastic images of the classless society abstracted from the horrors of contemporary class divisions and heralded as ‘oughts’. What Marx *thought* he was doing that was new, then, (irrespective of whether this was *in fact* new), was superseding the fantastic abstractions and wishful thinking that typified utopianism by *grounding* the socialist future in the present.

It is interesting to note here that when contrasting his position to that of the utopians, it was always a deterministic version of historical materialism, with all its talk of ‘necessity’ and ‘inevitability’, that Marx employed. The essence of this position is well stated in *The Civil War in France*:

The working class . . . have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historical processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant (Marx, 1968c: 291).

Although, therefore, the future is many struggles and transformations away, this society *will be* an emancipatory one because the emancipated society is what the present bourgeois one is pregnant with — the present society is ‘irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies’ towards a ‘higher form’. A knowledge of this enables the working-class to avoid the need for utopias.

The difference between the Marxist and the utopian positions is subsequently summarised by Engels in *The Housing Question* (1873) thus:

To be utopian does not mean to maintain that the emancipation of humanity from the chains which its historic past has forged will be complete only when the antithesis between town and country has been abolished; the utopia begins only when one ventures, ‘from existing conditions’, to prescribe the *form* in which this or any other antithesis of present-day society is to be resolved (Engels, 1962: 628).

Marx and Engels did not, therefore, have to describe ‘the form’ that communism will take in order to know that it will exist; their theoretical framework enabled them to read the future emancipation of humanity into the antitheses of present-day society and thus avoid utopianism.

Materialistically Critical Socialism

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx explains how they were able to do this:

Just as the *economists* are the scientific representatives of the bourgeois class, so the *socialists* and the *Communists* are the theoreticians of the proletarian class. So long as the proletariat is not yet sufficiently developed to constitute itself as a class, and consequently so long as the very struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie has not yet assumed a political character, and the productive forces are not yet sufficiently developed in the bosom of the bourgeoisie itself to enable us to catch a glimpse of the material conditions necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat and for the formation of a new society, these theoreticians are merely utopians who, to meet the wants of the oppressed classes, improvise systems and go in search of a regenerating science. But in the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece. So long as they look for science and merely make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society. From this moment they see this side, science, which is produced by the historical movement and associating itself consciously with it, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary (Marx, 1976b: 177-178).

Here then, once again, Marx is contrasting his position to the utopian alternative (indeed, both Steven Lukes and Darko Suvin regard this passage as the defining statement of Marx's dispute with the utopians; see Lukes, 1984: 157-159, and Suvin, 1976: 67-68). And this position, so contrasted, is as follows: that utopianism was symptomatic of an insufficiently developed capitalism and proletariat; that *now*, however, both *have* developed, and, as a consequence, have rendered utopianism obsolete; that utopianism has been rendered obsolete because the productive forces have developed so that a revolutionary science need do no more than 'take note of what is happening before its eyes'; that it need do no more than this, i.e., it need not improvise utopian systems, because the scientist can now 'catch a glimpse of the material conditions necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat'.

Marx provides a neat summary of this argument in his obituary to Proudhon. There, Marx tells us that 'the utopians are hunting for a so-called "science" by which a formula for the "solution of the social question" is to be excogitated *a priori*' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 188). Immediately following this, however, and yet again contrasting his position to utopian *a priori* excogitation, he says that he

Materialistically Critical Socialism

derives *his* 'science from a critical knowledge of the historical movement, a movement which itself produces the *material conditions for emancipation*' (ibid.).

An important point to note is that both here and in *The Poverty of Philosophy* it is the material conditions *for* the emancipated society that are grounded in the present, and not the *nature* of that society itself. And the same phrase reappears during the *Manifesto*'s critique of the utopians:

Since the development of class antagonism keeps even pace with the development of industry, the economic situation, as they find it, does not as yet offer to them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. They therefore search after a new social science, after new social laws, that are to create these conditions (Marx and Engels, 1967: 115).

The phrase reappears once again in *Grundrisse*:

if we do not find concealed in society as it is the material conditions of production and the corresponding relations of exchange prerequisite for a classless society, then all our attempts to explode it would be quixotic (Marx, 1973a: 159).

The Marxist position, then, when contrasted to the utopian, seems to revolve around the notion of having discovered 'the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat'. Communism subsequently becomes the *Aufhebung* of the present made possible by the historical creation of the conditions for its supersession. But what are these material conditions for the emancipation of humanity which are presently in existence?

The answer to this Marx provides in his letter to Domela-Nieuwenhuis of 1881. For there he describes the material conditions in question thus:

Scientific insight into the inevitable disintegration of the dominant order of society continually proceeding before our eyes and the ever-growing fury into which the masses are lashed by the old ghostly governments, while at the same time the positive development of the means of production advances with gigantic strides — all this is a sufficient guarantee that the moment a real proletarian revolution breaks out the conditions (though these are certain not to be idyllic) for its immediately next *modus operandi* will be in existence (Marx and Engels, 1969: 411).

There are thus two 'material conditions for emancipation' or two elements to the 'sufficient guarantee' that the future lies in communism. The first is fairly straightforward — the masses are being lashed into an ever-growing fury, thus

Materialistically Critical Socialism

grounding the future existence of a revolutionary situation. The second — the fact that the means of production are advancing with gigantic strides — is slightly less straightforward because it is this element which guarantees that the revolution will usher in communism, as opposed to some other not-capitalism. Marx nonetheless means nothing more by this than what Engels had said in his *Principles of Communism* (1847), namely, that ‘hitherto the productive forces had not yet been so far developed that enough could be produced for all’, but that now ‘large-scale industry and the unlimited expansion of production which it makes possible can bring into being a social order in which . . . all the necessities of life will be produced’ (Engels, 1976: 350, 347).

‘Materialistically critical socialism’, as elucidated by Marx himself when specifically contrasting his position to utopianism, can therefore be summarised using the following categories: The ‘increasing fury of the masses’ and ‘the possibility of the unlimited expansion of production’, which represent ‘the historically created material conditions for the emancipation of humanity’, ‘sufficiently guarantee’ that when ‘a real proletarian revolution’ breaks out it will be the ‘classless society’ which is ‘concealed within’ these material conditions that will follow. Because, therefore, ‘the present society is irresistibly tending by its own economic agencies towards a higher form’, a ‘science’ based upon the ‘critical knowledge’ of these facts allows one to avoid the ‘fantastic anticipations’ and ‘*a priori* excogitations’ which define the utopian methodology. If science ‘takes note of what is happening before its eyes’, it can therefore show why ‘here the content goes beyond the phrase’.

When Marx contrasts his own ‘rigorous scientific idea’ to the utopians’ *a priori* excogitations, he is therefore claiming no more than this: that theoreticians of the proletarian class such as himself take note of what is happening before their eyes and limit themselves to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself. They thus become the mouthpieces of ‘science’ in the sense that a) they consciously associate themselves with the historical movement which has made

Materialistically Critical Socialism

such 'science' possible and b) they recognise and can thus articulate the revolutionary nature of the science which the historical process has made possible. By means of an empirically-based analysis of, rather than *a priori* excogitations about, the historical movement, the theoreticians of the proletarian class are able to observe the present existence of the material conditions requisite for future human emancipation.

Of utmost importance here is what Marx's critical communism enabled him to do. For it enabled him to do all of the things that utopianism had once done but without falling into the traps that the utopians had fallen into. In this sense, the idea that the theoreticians of the proletarian class can discover 'the material conditions for emancipation' by merely taking note of what is happening before their eyes serves several distinct purposes: firstly, by establishing that the emancipation of the proletariat is grounded in the material conditions of the *present*, Marx's claims are kept safely within its epistemological confines; secondly, by establishing, through mere observation, that the emancipation of the proletariat is grounded in the material conditions of *its own existence*, Marx avoids the idea that these conditions have to be imported from outside and manages, therefore, to uphold the principle of proletarian self-emancipation denied by utopian philanthropists; thirdly, because it is the material conditions *for* the emancipated society, and not the *nature* of that society itself, which are grounded in the present, the future is not foreclosed and the principle of proletarian self-determination escapes unscathed; and finally, by emphasising that the material conditions for the emancipated society of the future *are* grounded in the present, the theoreticians are able to glorify and magnify the struggle *of* the present and thus capture the spirit of revolution.

This is what Marx's critique of utopian socialism was all about — materialistically critical socialism could do everything that utopianism could do, but it could do so without foreclosing the future and without resorting to philanthropic paternalism or messianic elitism. As a consequence, utopian socialism, in the era of

Materialistically Critical Socialism

materialistically critical socialism, could only be silly, stale and reactionary from the roots up. Let us now take a closer look at materialistically critical socialism, in order to assess whether it really could do the things that Marx said and thought that it could.

4.5 The Failings of Materialistically Critical Socialism

By taking note of what is happening before their eyes, the theoreticians of the proletarian class are able to identify the material conditions for the emancipation of humanity, i.e., the material conditions within which the classless society is concealed. Hence the reason why Marx can 'sufficiently guarantee' the future existence of a classless society without having to offer utopian descriptions of it. The two principal 'material conditions' in question are the ever-growing fury of the masses and the simultaneous development of the means of production. According to Marx, these two factors between them ensure that a) society as it is will be destroyed and b) a classless society will take its place. This, as we have just seen, is the essence of the 'materialistically critical socialism' which Marx directly counterposes to utopianism.

The merest glance at this schema reveals a problem, however. For how does Marx extrapolate from a) the productive forces of society are developing by means of gigantic strides to b) a proletarian revolution will bring with it a classless society? What, in other words, links the present development of the productive forces to the future existence of a classless society? In the lengthy passage taken from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx states that he is able to make this link because the productive forces are now 'sufficiently developed within the bosom of the bourgeoisie' to enable him to do so. He also argues that the theoreticians of the proletarian class no longer need to seek science in their minds because the struggle of the proletariat has now assumed clearer outlines. What these two remarks seem to indicate, therefore, is that the general claims made by Marx during his critique of the utopians were informed by two more specific ideas; one concerning the very nature of the development of the productive forces and one

Materialistically Critical Socialism

concerning the very nature of the proletarian struggle. In order, therefore, to assess the merits of materialistically critical socialism and its ability to ground the future existence of a classless society in the material conditions of the present, we now need to examine Marx's more specific claims concerning the emancipatory nature of the developing productive forces and the equally emancipatory nature of the proletarian struggle.

4.5.1 The Forces of Production, Historical Progress and the Classless Society

When Marx argues that the formation of a new society is somehow linked to the fact that the productive forces have 'sufficiently' developed within the bosom of the bourgeoisie itself, what he is claiming is that the future existence of a classless society can be sufficiently guaranteed by an adequate understanding of the relationship between the forces and relations of production. What we need to do now, therefore, is take a look at the forces/relations model of historical development and assess the way in which it links the future development of a classless society to the present development of the productive forces.

Beginning with the way in which this model explains the development of a revolutionary consciousness within the proletariat, Marx says that 'this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production' (Marx, 1970: 21). Here, revolutionary consciousness is explained in terms of the contradictions lying at the heart of the present and not in terms of the perspective granted by the conception of a utopian alternative. Indeed, this has to be the case, for: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness' (ibid.). On this basis, consciousness of a future set of social relations is denied access to everywhere except the imagination. This point is reinforced by the assertion that:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of the forces of production (ibid.: 20).

Materialistically Critical Socialism

In other words, one cannot become conscious of a set of social relations until one enters into them and one's entry into them is a matter beyond one's will, thus precluding the possibility of willing into existence an alternative set.

What Marx is offering here is both a realist-materialist epistemology (a subject/object dualism in which the object, i.e., the individuals' social existence, has explanatory primacy) and what M. Levin terms a 'topographical theory of consciousness' (how one interprets one's social existence is dependant upon one's economic position within it — see Levin, 1990: 298-299). The proletariat's social existence thus determines its consciousness but its economic position allows it to become conscious of the *contradictions* within this existence, ensuring that its consciousness becomes revolutionary. In this way, Marx avoids pure voluntarism (the proletariat's consciousness is actually *created by*, and is not merely a response to, capitalism's structural weaknesses), and pure structuralism (it is the proletariat, and not capitalism itself, which constitutes the transformative force).

The model still leaves the future open, however, and fails to ground *socialism*, as opposed to *not-capitalism*, in the present. For the question is *how* the proletariat becomes aware of the structural contradiction between the forces and relations of production. According to Marx, one becomes aware of the fact that 'the productive forces of society [have] come into conflict with the existing relations of production' because one becomes aware that '[f]rom forms of development of the productive forces these relations [have] turn[ed] into their fetters' (Marx, 1970: 21). This, however, begs another question, namely, how the proletariat (or anyone else for that matter) knows what the existing relations of production are acting as a fetter *on*.

In answer to this question, as we have already seen, Marx and Engels argued that the present was destroying itself a) because it was creating proletarian misery and b) because capitalism contains within itself the possibility of vastly increased production. From this we then saw them argue that c) the productive forces were now sufficiently developed to bring into being new relations that would satisfy

Materialistically Critical Socialism

everyone's needs, and d) that the abolition of the present relations of production would ensure that the free society would follow. But, as has already been suggested, to deduce c) and d) from a) and b) involves a giant leap of faith. For thus far Marx has merely stated that the productive forces of society could be developed more effectively than they are presently being allowed to and that by virtue of their economic position within capitalism the proletarians are able to discern that this is so. There is, however, nothing in these claims which even imply, let alone establish or demonstrate, that 'concealed within' the potential development of the productive forces is the actual development of a classless society — all that is implied is that the productive forces of society could be developed more effectively than they are presently being allowed to and that the proletarians are able to discern this. Marx seems to be deducing, therefore, that because the proletariat is able to discern some unrealised potential within the productive forces of society, these same proletarians are destined to introduce a classless society and thus emancipate the whole of humanity. As David Crocker rightly emphasises, however, to deduce such a thing is to base one's belief in the future existence of socialism on nothing short of 'Utopian Optimism' (1983: 179).

Viewed in the light of the things that Marx tells us about the relations of production that will exist in full communism — i.e., that common ownership will have replaced private property, that classes will have disappeared, that the workers will control the means of production and that the division of labour will have been abolished — the problem faced by Marx can be reformulated as follows: how does he know that the present relations of production are fettering the development of *these* future relations of production? How, that is, does Marx know that these future relations of production are 'appropriate' to the stage in the development of the productive forces that society will progress to once the current fetters have been destroyed? To suggest here that these proposals are merely negative extrapolations made from the capitalist relations of production they are supposedly going to supersede (the negation of the negation, as it were) will not do because, as Barbara Goodwin rightly points out:

Materialistically Critical Socialism

Although logical propositions have contradictions and contraries, there is no such thing as a contradictory institution: even inversion cannot achieve this unambiguously — the opposite of rule by men could be rule by women, children, monkeys or God . . . one might almost believe that *the* contrary to private property is collective ownership, or that the only alternative to the nuclear family is the collective rearing of children, whereas these are drawn from a range of alternatives (Goodwin and Taylor, 1982: 30).

If, therefore, the relations of production engendered by private property are indeed fettering the further development of the productive forces, this does not mean that, once abolished, they will be replaced by common ownership of the means of production. For it may be the case that the productive forces of society develop better in response to a meritocratic ownership structure. Indeed, it could be the case that, as Saint-Simon for example believed, the development of the productive forces of society would best be served if control of them were placed in the hands of the ‘scientists’. At any rate, what is certain is that common ownership is not the only possible negation of private property, nor is worker control of the means of production the only negation of control by capitalists.

Fortunately, however, Marx’s vague pronouncements concerning the relations of production that would exist in full communism were not informed by the (false) belief that they represented the logical negation of the relations of production that exist in capitalism. As we saw in the previous chapter, they were informed instead by a belief that these relations would foster proletarian self-determination (see pages 79-80). What this seems to suggest, however, is that Marx’s belief in the future existence of these relations was premised on nothing more than a norm — because the current relations of production hinder proletarian self-determination they should be abolished and because the ones he describes foster self-determination they should replace them. Not only, therefore, does this imply a norm-based voluntarism on Marx’s part, it also undermines his basic claim that ‘men inevitably enter into definite relations, *which are independent of their will*, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of the forces of production’.¹

Materialistically Critical Socialism

The typical way of circumventing problems such as these is to suggest that, for Marx, what *should* be *will* be. There is, in other words, a great historical coincidence between communism as a norm and communism as a movement. Whilst, therefore, people will enter the definite relations of communism independently of their will, it just so happens that these relations will be the ones which Marx believes ought to exist. As far as the basic forces/relations model of historical development goes, however, this really would have to be a coincidence. For to argue that *because* certain aspects of the present relations of production hinder proletarian self-determination, the next relations of production will *therefore* facilitate this, is to confuse two separate and quite distinct issues. There is, in other words, nothing to prevent the next relations of production from facilitating the development of the productive forces *without* a common plan, *without* the common ownership of the means of production, or even with the *increased* subordination of the individual to the division of labour. Nothing other than a coincidence, that is.

Or a general theory of progress. For the forces/relations model of historical development did not confine itself to analysing the transition from capitalism to communism. The nature of that transition was placed, instead, in the context of all previous transitions, and the context established by these transitions was one of progressive historical development. On the subsequent basis of what may tentatively be termed his theory of 'progress', Marx considered himself able to deduce that the productive forces of the present, once released from their fetters, would generate a future set of social relations that would be considered 'emancipatory' when compared to those of the present because a series of precedents had established the inherently progressive nature of the historical process. With regards to the form taken by the inherently progressive nature of the historical process, Marx tells us in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that: 'In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society' (Marx, 1970: 21). Progress is

Materialistically Critical Socialism

thus defined in terms of a series of radical transitions, from one mode of production to another. The radical transition from capitalism to communism is then referred to as the final mark of progress, confining all previous developments to the dustbin of 'prehistory' (ibid.: 22). A similar schema was put forward in *The German Ideology*, where Marx again divides history into four principal epochs; the tribal, ancient, feudal and capitalist (Marx and Engels, 1970: 43-48). Once again, then, progress is defined in terms of a series of radical transitions, and once again the transition to communism is seen as that which will mark the end of (pre)history. The question which needs to be asked now, therefore, is whether or not this context of progressive development allowed Marx to talk of the transition to communism without ultimately relying upon Utopian (in the sense of naive or unrealistic) Optimism.

The answer to this question is no, simply because Marx establishes this context so badly. In *The German Ideology*, for example, the four modes of production are merely described and no attempt is made to explain the transitions between them. Instead, the materialist conception of history is developed separately as a general theory and the reader is then left to apply this theory to the movement from one epoch to the next. In the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, moreover, the progressive development of the four modes of production is simply taken for granted and one is led to assume that Marx has established the progression elsewhere. Unfortunately, however, he had not, and the few attempts he did make invariably saw him becoming embroiled in a tangled mess of ideas. In *Grundrisse*, for example, Marx explains the transition made in Europe from the Asiatic (primitive communal or tribal) mode of production to the ancient or classical — with Rome being 'the most classic example' of this (Marx, 1973a: 484) — in terms of competition for land, subsequent wars, the taking of slaves and the ultimate erection of an oligarchic empire (ibid.: 471-494). When attempting to explain why this transition had not taken place in Asia itself, however, Marx first toys with the idea that the development of cities in Europe had something to do with it (ibid.: 476-479) and then suggests that Europe

Materialistically Critical Socialism

transcended the Asiatic mode of production because the Asiatic mode of production never really existed in Europe — it was based instead on a specifically *Germanic* form of communal property which Marx directly contrasts to the Asiatic form. The first of these ideas leads Marx into murky waters, however, as he dismisses Asian cities as ‘works of artifice’ (ibid.: 479), and the second does no less than undermine his whole Asiatic-ancient-feudal-capitalist framework. Needless to say, Marx never satisfactorily resolves the matter.

More problematic still was the transition from the ancient or classical mode of production to that of feudalism. Indeed, it seems that Marx never even *attempted* to explain this transition and one can well understand why. For as George Lichtheim remarks:

One cannot deduce from a general law of social evolution the alleged necessity for one type of society to give birth to a more developed one — otherwise it would be incomprehensible why classical Antiquity regressed and made room for a primitive type of feudalism, instead of evolving to a higher level (1971: 75).

Of the various transitions in question, the one which Marx *did* try his hardest to explain was the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Even here, however, his account is neither consistent nor entirely convincing. For in Volume III of *Capital* Marx acknowledges two possible modes of transition, a first in which ‘The producer becomes merchant and capitalist’ and a second in which ‘the merchant establishes direct sway over production’ (Marx, 1959: 329). As Robert J. Holton rightly indicates, these two modes of transition emphasise completely different causal factors, with the first explaining the transition from feudalism to capitalism in terms of the growth of a ‘wage-labour’ force and the second by means of identifying ‘the origins of mercantile activity and the growth of towns and trade’ (1981: 836). In Volume III of *Capital* itself, Marx describes the merchant-capitalist route as ‘the really revolutionizing path’, whereas the merchant-industrialist route ‘cannot’, it is said, ‘by itself contribute to the overthrow of the old mode of production’ (Marx, 1959: 329). In *The German Ideology*, however, Marx had quite clearly opted for the latter route and had explained the transition from feudalism to capitalism almost solely in terms of the development of towns

Materialistically Critical Socialism

and mercantile trade (Marx and Engels, 1970: 74, 80). The transition from feudalism to capitalism has subsequently formed the basis of various debates within the field of Marxist socio-economic history, and as Holton again points out, the sheer complexity and ferocity of these debates 'can probably be explained by the shifting and somewhat ambivalent character of Marx's comments on social change in general and the rather brief and unsystematic nature of his comments on the transition from feudalism to capitalism in particular' (1981: 834).

In addition to the problems associated with Marx's accounts of the individual transitions contained within his historical schema, one also has to deal with the ambiguous legacy he bequeathed concerning its universal validity. For whilst in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx seems to be arguing that societies in general progress by moving through the Asiatic-ancient-feudal-capitalist matrix, elsewhere he indicates that historical development is a multilinear process and that different societies may therefore progress in different ways and along different paths. The most famous example of this concerns Marx's discussion of Russia, the most pertinent aspects of which are set down in his notorious letter to Vera Sassoulitch. For in 1881 Sassoulitch had written to Marx asking him to confirm that, in his view, the mir (i.e., the traditional peasant commune) would have to disintegrate and give way to capitalism before Russia could expect to witness the realisation of communism. In response, Marx wrote with regards to the development of capitalism that 'the 'historical inevitability' of this movement is expressly limited to the countries of Western Europe' (Marx, 1977d: 576), and he furthermore added that the peasant commune could act as 'the mainspring of Russia's social development' (ibid.: 576-77). Indeed, in one of Marx's draft letters, he adds that 'the Russian 'rural commune' can . . . become a direct starting point for the economic system towards which modern society is tending. It can acquire a new skin without beginning by its suicide. It can obtain the fruits with which capitalist production has enriched humanity without passing through the capitalist regime' (ibid.: 577-78). In short, as Norman Levine observes, Marx 'believed that, left to itself, the

Materialistically Critical Socialism

mir could act as the transition point to communism' (1990: 416), thus by-passing the capitalist stage altogether.

Angus Walker accounts for the fact that Marx abandoned the Asiatic-ancient-feudal-capitalist model in the following terms:

Disappointed by the failure of capitalism to give rise to the revolutionary movements on which he had pinned his hopes in Europe, his desire to encourage Russian radicals with economic ideas significantly different from his own, led him to betray the most powerful elements in his own theory (1978: 200).

Whilst there is undoubtedly some truth to this, I would suggest in addition that Marx was willing to betray his own theory because he was prepared to accept that in certain circumstances it remained unconvincing. Marx had found it extremely difficult to explain the various transitions of which his theory was comprised and was therefore willing to accept that, in a country still stuck somewhere between the Asiatic and feudal modes of production, alternative transitional models may work better than his own. If, like Germany and France, Russia had been in the midst of a bourgeois revolution, then one would probably have found Marx advocating a revolutionary dictatorship as a means of consolidating its shaky bourgeois foundations. No such foundations existed in Russia, however, and Marx knew that he would have been unable to explain how these were to develop. As a consequence, he abandoned his general schema and opted instead for a specifically Russian one.

In terms of the present discussion, what this example reveals is that the context of historical progress within which the transition from capitalism to communism was supposedly set was itself resting on shaky foundations. What it also shows, moreover, is that Marx was aware of this. In terms of the forces/relations model of historical development, then, one can conclude by stating that it failed in its attempt to ground the communist future in the capitalist present and that this failure in turn undermined the basis upon which Marx's materialistically critical alternative to utopian socialism rested. Neither the progressive development of historical epochs in general nor the specific relationship between the forces and

Materialistically Critical Socialism

relations of production within capitalism could be used in support of the claim that a classless society was 'concealed within' the material conditions of the present. The general claims against which utopianism was judged proved, upon further investigation, to be unfounded. There was, that is, nothing inherently emancipatory about the development of the productive forces.

4.5.2 The Proletariat, Private Property and the Classless Society

Marx repeatedly criticised the utopians for their conception of the proletariat: 'Only from the point of view of being the most suffering class does the proletariat exist for them' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 116). For Marx, on the hand, the proletariat was not 'only' the most suffering class, it was also the historical guarantor of socialism. Not only, that is, did Marx believe that its economic position enabled the proletariat to become aware of the contradictions within capitalism, he also believed that its very nature as a class meant that it alone was able to resolve these contradictions and thus usher in communism as opposed to some other not-capitalism. Two analytically distinct models were employed by Marx in this respect, one which attempted to establish a direct link between the proletarian revolution and the transition to a classless society and another which attempted to link the proletarian revolution with the abolition of private property and thus, by logical implication, with the transition to a classless society.

The basis of the first of these models is set down in *The German Ideology*, where Marx argues that 'each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 65-66). What distinguishes the proletariat from all other ascendant classes, however, is the fact that its interest *really is* the common interest and its ideas *really are* the only rational, universally valid ones. Two reasons are given for this: the first is that each new class 'achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the

Materialistically Critical Socialism

class ruling previously', and the second is that 'the opposition of the non-ruling class against the new ruling class later develops all the more sharply and profoundly' (ibid.). The simplification of the class structure and the subsequent intensification of the class struggle, together with the 'broadness' of the base upon which the proletariat stands, thus ensures that a proletarian revolution will bring an end to 'class rule in general' (ibid.). Let us deal with each of these ideas in turn.

With regards to the simplification of the class structure, this is phrased in the *Manifesto* thus: 'Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 80). This is then placed in historical context. For: 'In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank' (ibid.). In these earlier epochs, Marx continues, the multitude of classes meant that the social ascendancy of one particular class could not possibly do away with class antagonisms altogether. Instead, remnants of old classes persisted into the new epoch, or they mutated into new classes, and thus brought with them 'new forms of struggle in place of the old ones' (ibid.). The 'distinctive feature' of 'the epoch of the bourgeoisie' is thus the sheer simplicity of its class structure; its division into 'two great classes' (ibid.).

Together with the splitting-up of society into two great classes comes the intensification of the struggle between them. This intensification is explained in terms of the increasing misery of the proletariat on the one (negative) hand and their expanding association on the (positive) other. As Marx proclaims in *Capital*:

Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working-class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the very process of capitalist production itself (Marx, 1946: 788-789).

Materialistically Critical Socialism

In this passage one also encounters the notion that the proletariat is forever expanding and thus broadening its social base. The very nature of 'the epoch of the bourgeoisie' means, therefore, that once the day of its great face-off with the bourgeoisie arrives, the proletariat will encompass the vast majority of humanity. 'One capitalist always kills many', argues Marx, and the centralisation of capital brings with it the 'expropriation of many capitalists by few', consigning the victims of expropriation to the ranks of the proletariat (Marx, 1946: 788). This, in turn, means that with the transition from capitalism to communism 'we have the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people' (ibid.: 789).

According to this first model, then, an end will be put to class rule in general because, with the victory of the proletariat in its coming confrontation with the bourgeoisie, history will quite simply have run out of classes. With society divided into two great classes, and with one of these comprising only 'a few usurpers', there would be no scope for the development of 'new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle' once these usurpers had been expropriated (Marx and Engels, 1967: 80). 'The proletarian movement' in this sense becomes 'the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority' (ibid.: 92), and the inevitable victory of this movement represents the final disintegration of the proletariat and of classes in general.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, more than one writer has detected a millenarian strain to this line of argument: Karl Löwith and Mircea Eliade each compare it to the Jewish-Christian belief in the final fight between Christ and Antichrist (Löwith, 1949: 44; Eliade, 1987: 207), D. Rudolf Bultmann compares it to 'the struggle between Good and Evil' (1957: 69) and Reinhold Niebuhr suggests that it parallels the messianic belief in 'the final triumph over evil in history' (1949: 210). Nor has the inadequacy of Marx's account of the simplification and intensification of the class struggle escaped the attention of subsequent commentators. As Oscar Berland remarks:

Materialistically Critical Socialism

When 'Marx' is refuted it is generally the concept of proletarian revolution resulting from the polarization of wealth on one side and poverty on the other that is toppled and re-toppled. It is an easy concept to criticize. Capitalist society has not polarized in the manner Marx anticipated; the proletarians of industrial nations have not become more revolutionary (1990: 291).

The inadequacy of Marx's account of the simplification and intensification of the class struggle stems, in fact, from the inadequacy of his account of the nature of 'classes' in general. There is little doubt that Marx was conscious of this lacuna in his works, for he was still grappling with the subject on his deathbed (his death inconveniently interrupted the only systematic exploration of 'class' he ever attempted to offer, published by Engels as the final chapter of *Capital* Volume III). Of great importance, moreover, is the fact that when Marx did investigate the nature of 'class' he openly conceded that the matter was far more complex than his general pronouncements would have us believe. In Volume III of *Capital*, therefore, Marx remarks that: 'In England, modern society is indisputably most highly and classically developed in economic structure. Nevertheless, even here the stratification of classes does not appear in its pure form. Middle and intermediate strata even here obliterate lines of demarcation everywhere' (Marx, 1959: 862). He then concedes that his own criteria allow the term 'class' to be applied to 'the infinite fragmentation of interest and rank into which the division of social labour splits labourers as well as capitalists and landowners' (ibid.: 863). Elsewhere, too, Marx clearly expresses the view that the bourgeois epoch was not splitting into two great camps. In the *Theories of Surplus Value*, in fact, the converse was true, for there Marx quite readily concedes that 'the middle class will increase in size and the working proletariat will make up a constantly diminishing proportion of the total population' (Marx, 1969: 579). This, he then adds, is 'the tendency of bourgeois society' (ibid.). The debilitating effect of remarks such as these upon the first of Marx's models is quite obvious. For if the bourgeois epoch, like all those preceding it, was indeed typified by 'a complicated arrangement of society into various orders' then that epoch would cease to possess the 'distinctive feature' which enabled Marx to separate the interests of

Materialistically Critical Socialism

the proletariat from those of all the other classes which had hitherto existed. The bourgeois epoch becomes just another epoch and the proletariat just another class.

This, then, is where the second of Marx's models comes in. For here it is neither the numerical supremacy of the proletariat nor the simplification and intensification of its struggle with the bourgeoisie which guarantees its relation to communism, but rather the position it occupies in relation to private property. Unfortunately, however, many of the claims upon which this model is based preempt Lukács' attempts to 'out-Hegel Hegel'. Take the following passage from *The Holy Family* as an example:

Private property as private property, as wealth, is compelled to maintain *itself*, and thereby its opposite, the proletariat, in *existence* . . . The proletariat, on the contrary, is compelled as proletariat to abolish itself and thereby its opposite, private property, which determines its existence, and which makes it proletariat . . . The proletariat executes the sentence that private property pronounces on itself by producing the proletariat . . . When the proletariat is victorious, it by no means becomes the absolute side of society, for it is victorious only by abolishing itself and its opposite. Then the proletariat disappears as well as the opposite which determines it, private property (Marx and Engels, 1980b: 46-47).

Here Marx argues that, by virtue of having produced the proletariat, private property pronounces its own death sentence. Why? Because the proletariat is *compelled* by dialectical logic to abolish that thing which created it. Simple! In his 'Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', Marx expands upon the nature of this compulsion when he describes the proletariat as

a class with radical chains, a class in civil society that is not a class of civil society, of a social group that is the dissolution of all social groups, of a sphere that has a universal character because of its universal sufferings and lays claim to no particular right, because it is the object of no particular injustice but of injustice in general. This class can no longer lay claim to a historical status, but only to a human one. It is, finally, a sphere that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating these other spheres themselves. In a word, it is the complete loss of humanity and thus can only recover itself by a complete redemption of humanity (Marx, 1977b: 72-73).

One thus finds that humanity *will* recover itself because the proletariat, by virtue of its very existence, can *only* represent universal humanity. The proletarian revolution is guaranteed to 'emancipate humanity' because the emancipation of humanity is somehow contained *within* it. Here, I think it fair to say, dialectics

Materialistically Critical Socialism

descends into mysticism. More importantly, it was precisely this kind of mystical approach that Marx mocked the ‘true socialists’ for clinging onto. It was because they used ‘an arbitrary connection with German philosophy’ to ‘fabricate some fantastic relationship’ between the present and the future ‘with the help of the “absolute” or some other ideological method’ (Marx and Engels, 1970: 119), i.e., it was precisely because the ‘true socialists’ *needed* to rely upon ideological concepts such as the ‘Absolute’ (the ‘universal’ subject) that Marx spent hundred of pages deriding them in *The German Ideology*.

What Marx’s mysticism was trying to get at, of course, was the notion that ‘The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains’ (Marx and Engels, 1967: 120-21). As Robin Blackburn remarks: ‘Without any stake in capitalist private property, the proletariat’s historical mission is to destroy it’ (1990: 241). In *Wage Labour and Capital*, Marx provides us with a non-mystic rendering of this theme when he talks of the ‘free labourers’ who are forced to sell themselves to the highest bidder at auction (Marx, 1968b: 74). For the worker, argues Marx, ‘whose sole source of livelihood is the sale of his labour power, cannot leave *the whole class of purchasers, that is, the capitalist class*, without renouncing his existence. He belongs not to this or that capitalist but to the *capitalist class*, and, moreover, it is his business to dispose of himself, that is, to find a purchaser within the capitalist class’ (ibid.: 75). When Marx refers to the proletariat as the object of injustice in general, the complete loss of humanity, and so on, he is thus referring to the fact that it belongs to a class that will allow it to starve unless the proletarians themselves continually prostitute themselves to it. From this Marx then deduces that the proletariat is destined to destroy the system which gives rise to such a complete loss of humanity.

The link made here between the proletariat and communism thus concerns the fact that the proletariat as a class has no interests in the present system which, in a future system, will be foisted upon others. As Marx says in the *Manifesto*:

All the preceding classes that got the upper hand sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletariat

Materialistically Critical Socialism

cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property (Marx and Engels, 1967: 92).

Because the proletariat has nothing of its own to secure and fortify, the society it creates will not be subjected to its conditions of appropriation. The proletariat appropriates nothing and can therefore do nothing other than abolish all modes of appropriation. Hence the inevitability of its bringing forth a classless society.

There was one major flaw in this line of thought, however, as Marx himself was aware: the fact that the working class did not present itself as a unified class. Instead, it was bitterly divided and the various divisions did, in fact, believe that they had interests to secure and fortify. That Marx recognised this may come as a surprise, for his denigrators often criticise his failure to anticipate the proletariat's incorporation into capitalism and its inability to confront the system of private property as a unified force. Anticipate these things, however, he did. For even in the *Manifesto* Marx had complained that: 'This organization of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 90). Such upsets were, in turn, a necessary product of the proletarians' need to compete with each other on the labour market, thus rendering division, rather than unity, the end result of the proletarian's position within the system of private property. Indeed, in his 'Instructions for Delegates to the Geneva Congress' of the First International in 1866, Marx remarked that: 'The disunion of the workmen is created and perpetuated by their *unavoidable competition between themselves*' (Marx, 1974b: 91). Compounding the effects of this competition within the working class was the fact that its representative organisations, i.e. the trade unions, were seeking to give it a stake in the very system which perpetuated its miserable existence. Whilst, therefore, Marx conceded that the fight for better wages, conditions and working hours was 'not only legitimate' but 'necessary', he also added that: 'Too exclusively bent upon the local and immediate struggles with

Materialistically Critical Socialism

capital, the trade unions have not yet fully understood their power of acting against the system of wage slavery itself' (ibid.).

The problem faced by Marx, then (and by all subsequent Marxists as well), was that the proletariat's objective existence as a class had yet to translate into a subjective awareness of its existence as a class. And yet it was precisely its subjective awareness of its class position that had enabled Marx to link the proletariat with a classless future. The future existence of a classless society had been extrapolated by Marx from the notion that the proletariat would recognise its existence as a class which had 'nothing of its own to secure and fortify'. If, however, the proletarians were divided by the *unavoidable* competition between themselves, and if this competition gave rise to competing organisations each of which attempted to further the interests that their members had in the system of private property, then what becomes of the proletariat's historical mission? How, that is, could Marx sufficiently guarantee that a proletarian revolution would give rise to a classless society when the proletariat itself was riven by an internal competition aimed precisely at winning things to secure and fortify?

In answer to this problem — and the fact that he answered it testifies to his awareness of it — Marx argued that the revolutionary process itself would ensure that the great leap forward lands in communism. Conscious of the fact that the proletariat as it presently stood was incapable of abolishing all modes of appropriation and thus securing the existence of a classless society, Marx tells its members that, come the revolution:

You will have 15, 20, 50 years of civil war and national struggle and this is not merely to bring about a change in society but also to *change yourselves* and prepare yourselves for the exercise of political power (Marx, 1971b: 62).

Developing this idea in *The German Ideology*, Marx remarks that:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew (Marx and Engels, 1970: 94-95).

Materialistically Critical Socialism

According to this notion, then, the proletariat's subjective awareness of itself as a universal class will not precede the revolution but will emerge *during* it. As to *how* the revolutionary experience will foster such an awareness, however, Marx remains silent, and it is left to John P. Burke to speak for him. According to Burke:

Involvement in the practical movement, the revolutionary process, provides an indispensable education or development of the working class, without which it could not cope with a new social order (if, indeed, such a social order could come about). This education is both a liberation from past conceptions and ways of acting and a preparation — a practice — for revolutionary thinking and activity. Self-determination through rationally organized social life is the feature of the revolutionary process that would carry over into communist society (1981: 91).

If Burke is right, however, and this is indeed what Marx thought, then a series of problems once more emerge. For on what grounds can one claim that the revolutionary experience *will* rid the proletariat of 'all the muck of ages', *will* feature 'self-development through rationally organised social life', *will* 'change' the proletariat and hence 'prepare them for the exercise of political power', and so on? As Martin Jay indicates:

Marxist theory has steadfastly refused to offer a blueprint for postcapitalist society . . . Occasional attempts by [Marx's] successors to describe "Socialist Man" have usually been thwarted by the recognition that he will have to define himself in a process of self-creation that cannot be predicted in advance (1970: 342).

What was true of Marx's successors was also true of Marx himself. For if a knowledge of the future structure of society and of the nature of the individuals that will inhabit it was epistemologically unattainable, then what was it about the revolutionary experience that enabled Marx to 'sufficiently guarantee' that the next relations of production and the next generation of individuals would be communist ones? As Darko Suvin rightly observes, Marx's conclusion to this effect was based on nothing less than 'a historical optimism politically as unrealistic as that of the utopians' (1976: 66).

Having now examined materialistically critical socialism and the various ideas which together comprise it, we are in a position to answer the question to which this section has been addressed; namely, did materialistically critical socialism

Materialistically Critical Socialism

successfully perform the function asked of it by Marx? Did it, that is, provide a convincing reason for believing that the emancipation of humanity lies in the material conditions of the present and that one need only take note of what is happening before one's eyes in order to recognise this? The answer, of course, is that it did not. For each of the ideas developed by Marx in order to support the claim that it did perform this function were purely speculative in nature. Thus, even if one accepts the forces/relations model of historical change (and this is a big 'if' in itself), there is nothing in it which suggests that the next relations of production will embody the emancipation of humanity. All it suggests is that the present relations of production are acting as a fetter on something. And if one places this 'something' in the context of progressive historical development alluded to by Marx then one fares no better, firstly because Marx failed in his (meagre) attempts to explain the transitions between the previous epochs of history and secondly because this context provides not a shred of evidence to support the claim that the next epoch will mark the end of pre-history. Nor does Marx's talk of the proletariat's historical mission stand the test of scrutiny, for his cataclysmic notion of the final showdown between two great classes is undermined entirely by his own more reasoned analysis of the complex and manifold gradation of social classes within capitalism. His further attempts to characterise the proletariat as a class united in its antithetical relation to private property and thus destined to transcend it then fell at the hurdle of empirical observation, a hurdle which led Marx to qualify his faith and argue instead that the revolutionary process — rather than the material conditions of its own existence — would enable the proletariat to recognise the nature of its historical mission. Why this was, however, he would not say.

In short, then, when Marx specifically contrasted his own ideas to those of the utopians he emphasised the fact that he had discovered the future emancipation of humanity in the material conditions of the present. On further reflection, however, even Marx was forced to concede that his general pronouncements belied far more complex issues that he found difficult, to say the very least, to resolve.

Materialistically Critical Socialism

4.6 Conclusion

The essence of the foregoing analysis is captured by R. N. Berki when he claims that:

Marx's distinction from "utopian" and similar kinds of socialists and communists, as seen by himself, is his ability to show that the overthrow of capitalism and the (conceptually equivalent, though chronologically spread out) inauguration of communism is an historically, scientifically 'necessary' event; communism is not a wished-for, empty, pious dream, a shadowless ideal, the cry of an impotent imagination, something which is merely, and moralistically, *desirable*; it is the actual movement of existing society (1983: 88).

Such a scientific interpretation of Marx's 'critical communism' will no doubt upset some Marxologists. Derek Sayer, for one, says of communism's final victory that

Marx clearly had reason to think that in view of his analysis of the contradictions of capitalist production, this was a likely outcome of its development. He also had political cause to make this conclusion explicit, and was not above employing a rhetoric of inevitability. But he never, to my knowledge, made any serious attempt to *prove* the necessity of the triumph of socialism, and he would not have succeeded if he had (as he probably well knew) (1979: 139).

Marx always *emphasised* communism's 'necessity' in the context of his critique of the utopians, however, and he did so not as a rhetorical flourish but because it was the cornerstone of the theoretical framework he was attempting to erect in its place. For Marx, historical materialism was (and had to be) more than just a theory of history (although it was of course such a theory, and was used as such to trace the development of utopianism); it was (and had to be) a theory of history which served the same function as utopianism had done in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, enabling people to conceptualise their future and thus inspiring them to act (in the name of this future) in the present. By sufficiently guaranteeing that the future would be emancipatory, *whatever form it took*, Marx not only enabled the workers to conceptualise a better future, but he also did this without undermining the idea that a) they would emancipate themselves, and b) they would determine for themselves what the emancipated society would look like.

Materialistically Critical Socialism

I find it difficult to agree with Geoghegan, therefore, when he claims that ‘Marx and Engels had not criticised the utopian socialists’ ‘search after a new social science, after new social laws’, merely to put in its place a new tyrannical ‘science’ (1987a: 31). For the whole point of Marx’s critique of the utopian socialists had been to demonstrate the tyrannical nature of their utopianism-masquerading-as-science. And Marx *did* put in its place a new science, precisely because this allowed the theoreticians of the proletarian class to *avoid* the tyranny of the utopian masquerade.

Nor should Marx’s faith in the powers of scientific insight come as any surprise. He was, after all, a nineteenth-century thinker, and as Darko Suvin observes, ‘from the very beginning of that century, *Wissenschaft* had with exceptional rapidity risen to mean one of the two supreme goods of the German nation and indeed of mankind (the other being the much older *Kunst* or art)’ (1976: 64). Tom Kitwood also describes the nineteenth century as

a time in European history when science appeared to be triumphant. The world which it revealed was free of occult powers, and in principle intelligible. During the previous century science had achieved amazing advances at the theoretical level, and had already been responsible for vast increases in the human control of the natural environment. It could now advance with confidence, gradually claiming all territory — matter, life, mind, spirit — as its own. It appeared, indeed, to some thinkers around this time as if science were nearing the end of its task of representing the world. Like a crossword puzzle almost completed, there might be a few adjustments to be made here and there, but a final and unique solution was assured (1978: 25).

That Marx and Engels considered science to hold the key to the riddle of history is thus more than understandable. Indeed, although the scientific elements of Marx’s thought are often ridiculed today, he was, in fact, quite restrained when compared to others around him. For as we have already seen, the utopians, together with Comte and other positivists, considered themselves able to predict the future in glorious technicoloured detail. Compared to such claims, Marx’s belief that scientific insight into the material conditions of society sufficiently guaranteed that the future would be emancipatory, was unfashionably modest.

Materialistically Critical Socialism

Even such modest claims failed to stand the test of scrutiny, however. For 'materialistically critical socialism' quite simply failed to guarantee the future existence of socialism, i.e., it failed to ground the *socialist* future in the present. The theory of proletarian revolution, simply because it was *a* coherent theory of revolution, provided a convincing case for conceptualising a future *not-capitalism*, but there was no necessary reason, not even a 'sufficient' guarantee, that 'not-capitalism' would equal 'socialism'. This is not, of course, to say that Marx's ideas were vacuous. Far from it. To say that capitalism was creating proletarian misery and contained within itself the possibility of vastly increased production; to claim that the revolutionary process, once underway, would educate the proletariat and prepare them for the exercise of power; to claim also that history has witnessed a series of radical transitions between qualitatively different modes of production; to say all of this is to say something substantial. A lesser man than Marx may, indeed, have rested content after having said it.

Marx, however, did not rest content, and the reason for this should become clear if we combine the findings of this chapter with those of chapter 1 and present them in the following terms:

- i) For Marx, a knowledge of the *form* that the future would take was epistemologically unattainable, and those who claimed to possess such knowledge were, and could only have been, utopians.
- ii) Utopianism, as a means of creating 'the spirit of revolution', whilst once revolutionary, could no longer be defended. This was because it implied 'that the workers are too uneducated to free themselves and must first be liberated from above by philanthropic big bourgeois and petty bourgeois'. More than this, in fact, because history, the class struggle and the proletariat had developed since the time of the original utopians, the workers *were* now in a position to free themselves without the aid of philanthropic bourgeois utopians. As a consequence, utopianism could *now* 'only be silly, stale, and reactionary, from the roots up'.

Materialistically Critical Socialism

iii) Revolutionary practice needed to be informed, therefore, by a theory which did two things: a) it needed to create ‘the spirit of revolution’ by imbuing the proletariat with a sense of future-optimism that was grounded in its own existence and not imported from ‘outside’, and b) it needed to do this in a way that left the future open enough for the proletariat to determine for itself the *form* that its future would take.

iv) Fortunately, Marx believed that such a theory had emerged with the development of history, the class struggle and the proletariat — this theory was termed ‘materialistically critical socialism’ and it succeeded in creating ‘the spirit of revolution’ in the manner outlined in iii) by means of identifying ‘the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat’ that were *presently* in existence. These material conditions were ‘the ever-growing fury into which the masses are lashed by the old ghostly governments’ and the fact that ‘the positive development of the means of production advances with gigantic strides’. In identifying these material conditions, ‘the theoreticians of the proletarian class’ had only ‘to take note of what was happening before their eyes and become its mouthpiece’ — no bourgeois philanthropy was required. Because what was happening before their eyes was in fact ‘the positive development of the means of production’, the theoreticians of the proletarian class did *not* need ‘to prescribe the *form* in which the antitheses of present-day society are to be resolved’; they simply needed to emphasise the fact that communism is ‘the real movement which abolishes the present state of things’. In this way, the emancipation of the proletariat could be ‘sufficiently guaranteed’ (thus ensuring the development of ‘the spirit of revolution’) without having to foreclose the future (thus upholding the principle of proletarian self-determination).

v) A detailed examination of this schema revealed certain flaws, however. In particular, Marx’s conviction that the material conditions of the present would ensure the positive movement towards a society embodying proletarian emancipation was found to be based upon nothing short of pure optimism. The

Materialistically Critical Socialism

schema provided no reason to believe that the productive forces of capitalism, once released from their fetters, would bring forth communist relations of production. The previous pattern of history and the intrinsic nature of the proletariat may have indicated that there was a *chance* of this happening, but they provided no 'sufficient guarantee' that it would. Even Marx himself, during his more sober analyses of these phenomena, recognised this.

Indeed, it is not at all surprising to find that Marx recognised the flaws in his own position. For if one begins by asking why, when specifically contrasting his position to those of the utopians, Marx persistently employed a 'vulgar' and deterministic model of historical development, then a reasonable conclusion to reach would be that, when directly confronting the utopians, Marx sought to emphasise the *fundamental* distinction between his ideas and theirs. When, that is, Marx directly challenged the utopian notion that the emancipation of humanity depended upon the realisation of this or that particular utopia, he wanted to stress his own belief that the emancipation of humanity was tied in with the movement of the present. In order to emphasise this belief, therefore, Marx presented it in its starkest form. In its starkest form, however, materialistically critical socialism failed to establish any convincing reasons for believing that the emancipation of humanity *was* tied in with the movement of the present. Nor is this surprising, for arguments in their starkest form generally prove unconvincing once subjected to close scrutiny. The point being made, however, is that this stark form of materialistically critical socialism was not intended to stand the test of close scrutiny; it was designed solely for the purpose of emphasis. It seems quite reasonable, therefore, to suggest that Marx was aware of the fact that it did not stand the test of close scrutiny because it was not intended to do so.

It is here, then, that one arrives at the reason why Marx did not rest content. For Marx *really did* have to show how the emancipation of humanity was tied in with the movement of the present. He had not been saying this merely for the sake of it, nor, *pace* the commentators we examined in chapter 1, had he been saying it as

Materialistically Critical Socialism

a means of distancing himself from his political rivals. He had been saying it because he really did object to utopian philanthropy and really did think it necessary to offer the proletariat hope in a form which avoided it. And for the reasons outlined in this chapter, Marx believed that if one could ground socialism in the real movement of the present then one *could* offer hope without any of the messianic utopian baggage. Because, however, materialistically critical socialism in its starkest form failed to convincingly ground socialism in the real movement of the present, Marx considered it *necessary* to develop it further.

Marx thus set himself the task of developing the themes and ideas embodied in materialistically critical socialism. In so doing, however, he made a series of 'utopian leaps'. For in attempting to provide a concrete link between the socialist future and the present, Marx refined materialistically critical socialism by employing a variety of additional concepts and categories, and it is these concepts and categories that are responsible for the development of his 'utopia'. The intention of the following chapter is to defend this claim.

Notes

¹ G. A. Cohen's famous attempt to defend the forces/relations model of historical development (Cohen, 1978) falls down precisely because he explains the development of new relations of production by means of a voluntarism which is alien to the model itself. For according to Cohen, the emergence of new relations of production can be explained in terms of rational individuals recognising that the current relations of production are fettering the development of the forces of production and then deciding to replace them with alternative relations which, they have deduced by means of their intelligence and rationality, will promote the further development of the productive forces. Such 'rational-choice' Marxism does, however, rid the historical process of all its irritating complexities and does seem to imply that a) one's individual consciousness determines one's social existence and b) that entering into a set of social relations is entirely a matter of one's individual will. Ted Honderich (1982: *passim*) offers an excellent critique of Cohen and all other attempts to mount a defence of historical materialism based on 'functional' or 'teleological' explanations.

Chapter 5

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

5.1 Introduction

Marx . . . never offers a systematic account of the communist society. Furthermore, he frequently criticises those socialist writers who do as foolish, ineffective and even reactionary. There are also remarks which suggest that one cannot describe communism because it is forever in the process of becoming . . . Yet, as even the casual readers of Marx know, descriptions of the future society are scattered throughout Marx's writings (Ollman, 1977: 8).

This, it will be recalled from the Introduction, is what I termed the 'nevertheless' (or 'yet' or 'in spite of') argument (see pages 6-7). The present chapter attempts to explain *why* descriptions of communism are scattered throughout Marx's writings in spite of his belief that one cannot and should not attempt to describe communism. With regards to these scattered descriptions themselves, the discussion will focus on the three categories which define Marx's 'visionary' conception of the higher phase of communism and which were outlined in chapter 3 — The Dream of the Whole Man, the development of the all-round individual and the ontological necessity of labour. The explanation to be offered follows directly from the findings of chapter 4 and concerns the relationship between the concept of socialism and the methodology of historical materialism. Working on the premise that the latter was seen by Marx as a way of superseding utopianism by grounding the socialist future in the present, it will be suggested that the move to socialism always involved a 'utopian leap', i.e., the leap from the present to some supposedly concrete future via a purely speculative category. On this basis, it will further be suggested that Marx's 'utopian' vision of communism was the product of the failure of his 'anti-utopian' methodology.

The first three sections of the chapter each deal with a particular version of historical materialism and argue that its attempt to ground the socialist future in the capitalist present required as a logical and founding assumption a speculative category claimed as empirical fact. These speculative categories were none other

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

than the utopian categories which define Marx's visionary conception of the higher phase of communism. Thus, The Dream of the Whole Man was the logical and founding assumption upon which Marx's teleological model of historical materialism based the transition from capitalism to communism (section 5.2), the development of the all-round individual was the logical and founding assumption upon which his structuralist model of historical materialism based the transition (section 5.3) and the ontological necessity of labour was the logical and founding assumption upon which the pragmatic version of historical materialism based the transition (section 5.4). Throughout each of these sections it will be argued that the speculative and 'utopian' category in question was developed by Marx in order to 'fill the gaps' or 'plug the holes' in the materialist methodology that was supposed to supersede utopianism. The conclusion will then suggest that Marx was an 'Accidental Utopian' in the sense that the distinctive features of his utopia were devised, not as a conscious and deliberate attempt to think the future, but as an accidental by-product of the failure to establish the logical coherence of his (anti-utopian) historical framework.

5.2 The Utopian Leap Via Teleology into 'The Dream of the Whole Man'

Teleology is a somewhat enigmatic concept. Used here, however, it refers to a particular conception of history, according to which communism represents the end (*telos*), the 'final stage', of history, an end which *history itself* is delivering. This teleological conception would have us believe that history has a purpose and that phenomena can be explained in terms of this purpose, in terms of their final, as opposed to efficient, cause. In Marx's case, we should expect to find him explaining things *because* they lead towards, prepare the ground for, facilitate the realisation of, etc., communism. Historical movement would not be seen in terms of accident, contingency or chance, but rather in terms of necessary, predetermined progression. With regards to historical materialism, Marx would be able to say that capitalist relations of production *are* acting as fetters on the development of productive forces which *will* generate communist relations of

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

production, because communism *is* history's telos and capitalism *is* its final preparatory stage.

Marx often denied possessing such a view of history. In *The Holy Family*, for example, he launches this famous tirade against the idea that history has some inherent 'meaning':

History does nothing, it "possesses *no* immense wealth", it "wages *no* battles". It is *man*, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights: "history" is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims (Marx and Engels, 1980b: 116).

At other times, however, Marx *does* possess a teleological view of history. In *The Holy Family* itself, for example, Marx rejects the idea that 'history is the activity of man pursuing his aims' and replaces it with the idea that history *forces* people (in this case the proletariat) to pursue *its* aims, irrespective of what they consider *their* aims to be:

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do (ibid.: 47).

What needs to be established here is not the existence of a teleological conception of history (it should soon become clear that Marx had one of these), but whether or not this conception enabled Marx to *know*, or at least to 'sufficiently guarantee', that communism will follow capitalism. Let us therefore examine Marx's teleological conception of history in order to see what he thought it enabled him to do.

In spite of his critique of Hegel, Marx bases his teleological reading of history on Hegel's concept of 'the cunning of reason': present conflicts and antagonisms are 'rational' because they are a necessary step towards the realisation of history's meaning. Indeed, he implicitly acknowledges his use of this concept when he tells us that:

Some parties may wail over it; others may wish to get rid of modern arts, in order to get rid of modern conflicts. Or they may imagine that so signal a progress in industry wants to be completed by as signal a regress in politics. On our part, we do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit (Hegel's 'cunning of reason') that continues to mark all these contradictions (Marx, 1980: 656).

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

The shrewd spirit will resolve the contradictions of the present because, as Marx said in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself only arises when the material conditions for its solution are already present (Marx, 1970: 21).

Antagonisms therefore *only arise* when they are about to be solved, all present conflicts serving as a necessary means to some 'higher' end. This belief in the inherent rationality of the actual informs Marx's notorious approval of English imperialist atrocities:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindoustan, was activated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England, she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution (Marx, 1962: 351).

Present evils, as evil as they may be, are 'rational' because history has created them in order to fulfil mankind's destiny.

When it comes to the question of what mankind's destiny actually is, Marx's belief that it lay in communism was framed by a dialectical conception of historical development. Of this J. Coulter provides as good a summary as any:

Each new form of social order in human pre-history develops through the *contradictions* (antagonisms between collectively organized interests and felt needs, tensions between preceptions [sic] of actuality and ideas of potentiality, etc.) which produce negative, transcendent social forces that can shatter the old set of socio-economic arrangements but *maintain and further develop* its material and cultural heritage along qualitatively different lines. Finally, with the communist phase, the *absolute* development possible in human pre-history (capitalistic civilization) has given way to its ultimate *negation*, the *higher synthesis* of human existence (1990: 131).

Schematically, then, communism was mankind's destiny because it was the *ultimate* negation of that which embodied the *absolute* development possible in human pre-history, i.e., capitalistic civilisation. In practice, however, Marx had to show why *communism*, as opposed to some other not-capitalism, would develop from the contradictions of capitalism, and this he could not do. For as Oliva Blanchette points out:

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

Much like Hegel . . . Marx does not read history from the beginning on, as an evolutionary perspective tries to do, but rather from the end back. The full development of what appears at the end brings to light what had appeared as subtle nuances in earlier formulations (1990: 37).

It is only at the *end* of history that Marx, like Hegel, can understand history's development. Unlike Hegel, however, Marx did not consider himself to be standing at the end of history. It is difficult to see, therefore, how he could possibly identify the subtle nuances in the present that would, in the future, be interpreted as 'rational' historical developments.

What Marx was attempting to do, in fact, was use a dialectical framework in order to *project* results when he knew full well that this could not be done. For his aim, as he wrote in a letter to Engels in 1858, was 'to bring a science by criticism to the point where it can be dialectically presented' (Marx and Engels, 1969: 123). As Scott Meikle points out, however:

Marx's dialectical method requires that the categories in which a science is presented dialectically be derived from a detailed appropriation of the concrete empirical data of the field in question (1979: 11).

This is because, as Marx himself says in *Capital*:

Man's reflections on the forms of social life, and consequently, also, his scientific analysis of those forms, take a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development. He begins, *post festum*, with the results of the process of development ready to hand before him (Marx, 1946: 46-47).

Marx did not have the results of the process of historical development ready to hand before him, and could not, therefore, dialectically present its movement.

This is undoubtedly why one finds an additional notion within Marx's work, namely, the idea of an historical *beginning*, an 'original', 'natural', unity to which communism will be the *return* on a 'higher' level. Marx, not having seen the end of history, thought he could convincingly argue that there was such an end, and that history was the dialectical movement towards it, if he could somehow establish the idea of an origin characterised by features that *will* characterise society again. This leads Marx to make his first 'utopian leap', a leap into *The Dream of the Whole Man*.

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

Let us look once more at that famous passage from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being — a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man — the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution (Marx, 1977a: 90).

Of this passage Krishan Kumar says: 'Such a dazzling vision of universal harmony is hardly to be found anywhere else in the serious utopian literature' (1987: 62). The passage itself, however, does not belong to the field of 'serious utopian literature' — it belongs to the field of Marx's teleological conception of history, the purpose of which was to ground communism in the present and thus avoid the need for utopian literature of any kind. For the passage clearly talks of a 'return of man to himself' and of this return solving the riddle of history. Communism knows itself to be the telos of human history because it knows itself to be the return to an original state of unity.¹

There is no greater testimony to the importance attached by Marx to the notion of a return to an original state of unity than Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. For Engels tells us that his own book was based upon Marx's *Abstract of Morgan's 'Ancient Society'*, which Marx himself was intending to transform into a book highlighting Lewis Morgan's 'scientific' proof of historical materialism (Engels, 1968d: 449). What is of primary interest in Engels' book, and in Marx's abstract which Engels quotes widely, is Engels' claim that Morgan was 'speaking of a future transformation of society in words which Karl Marx might have used' (ibid.: 460).

Two passages in Morgan's book, which both Marx and Engels quote with approval, are worthy of attention. The first appears when, talking of the Iroquois

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

'gens' (a sub-division of the native American tribe, based upon Mother Right), Morgan says:

All the members of an Iroquois gens were personally free, and they were bound to defend each other's freedom: they were equal in privileges and in personal rights . . . and they were a brotherhood bound together by the ties of kin. Liberty, equality, and fraternity, though never formulated, were cardinal principles of the gens (ibid.: 512).

The second appears when Morgan concludes his study in terms that must have brought a smile to Marx's face:

Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. *It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes* (ibid.: 583).

Such was the excitement induced by Morgan's findings that Engels went as far as to qualify the opening remark of the *Manifesto* — 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' (Marx and Engels, 1967: 72) — with: 'That is, all *written* history' (ibid.: 72n).

What Engels' enthusiasm indicates, however, is not that Morgan had somehow 'proved' that history will witness the return to an original state of unity — Morgan's claims to this effect were based on unfounded speculation no less than were Marx's own — but rather the desperation which accompanied Marx's and Engels' *search* for such proof. For without it, Marx's original state of unity remained a mere assumption. Indeed, Marx attempted to divert attention away from the fact that it was a mere assumption by arguing that it did not require an explanation:

It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which demands explanation, or is the result of a historical process, but rather their separation from these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence (Marx, 1973a: 489).

By *assuming* such an origin, however, Marx makes the same mistake that he repeatedly castigated Hegel for making. For if Hegel abstracted from the divisions of bourgeois society and assumed these divisions to be universal in order to equip himself with an 'ideal subject' with which to begin his historical process, then

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

Marx abstractly assumed that all present divisions were 'unnatural' in order to equip *himself* with an 'ideal subject' with which to begin *his* historical process. Indeed, empirical considerations would lend more weight to Hegel's ideal subject. For the division which Marx most frequently castigates Hegel for assuming to be universal, i.e., the division between mental and manual labour, seems to be a defining feature of every mode of production, even the primitive communism described by Morgan.

Of course, even if Morgan *had* provided Marx's conception of the original state of unity with concrete support, he would have provided no logical grounds for supposing that its return could be guaranteed. That Marx, therefore, not only conceptualised such an original state of unity but also *did* suppose that its return could be guaranteed only serves to demonstrate that the concept itself was nothing more than a speculative assumption. Habermas is thus correct to argue that because it *was* founded on a speculative assumption Marx's whole teleological schema was a 'metaphysical heuristic' (1973: 251-2). He is furthermore also correct to conclude that if Marx's historical philosophy 'retains a merely heuristic character' then 'the anticipatory presupposition of history's end remains hypothetical' (*ibid.*). The teleological conception of history cannot, in other words, ground the future existence of communism in anything other than mere speculation — for what is more speculative than a conception of the future which is premised on the 'return' to an original state that did not itself actually exist?

As far as our purposes are concerned, however, the fact that *The Dream of the Whole Man* was a speculative and one might say 'utopian' (in the sense of *imagined*) category is less important than the reason why Marx imagined the category in the first place. For he imagined it in order to provide his teleological conception of history with a logical starting point. His historical teleology, on the other hand, was itself designed to provide a concrete link between the capitalist present and the communist future. Drawing these two strands together, we may therefore say that *The Dream of the Whole Man* — a concept which represents

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

one of Marx's outstanding contributions to the utopian tradition — was also the foundation of an historical method designed to *overcome* the need for utopianism. In other words, Marx's utopia (or one element of it) was the direct result of the failure of his anti-utopian methodology (or one version of it).

5.3 The Utopian Leap via Structuralism into 'The All-Round Individual'

A structuralist account of the transition from capitalism to communism argues that the proletarian revolution will issue forth communism, as opposed to some other not-capitalism, because the structural logic of capitalist production means that this is the *only* possible outcome. Underlying this approach is the 'womb' metaphor — the idea that capitalism turns into socialism by the very same logic that a foetus turns into a child. With regards to historical materialism, Marx is able to say that capitalist relations of production *are* acting as a fetter on the development of productive forces which *will* generate communist relations of production because Marx has *seen* these communist relations of production as they gestate within capitalism.

The womb metaphor takes as its premise the claim that the transition from capitalism to communism has *already* taken place, *within* capitalism. As R. N. Berki puts it: 'Communism is the necessary outcome of capitalism, because communism is *already here*' (1983: 90). Some writers have identified a certain problem with this claim, however. Angus Walker, for example, says of Marx that:

On the one hand, he writes as if history and social change proceeded by way of a series of revolutions and disruptive jumps marked by violence and bloodshed. On the other hand, both descriptively and analytically, he often makes explicit allowance for transitions which clearly imply that the passage from one mode to another can be made without any discontinuity. This difficulty does not arise simply from special pleading or bad faith; it is connected with a real theoretical problem. Marx is concerned, in part, to explain and predict 'revolutions'. If revolution is conceived as a complete break in the process of social development, then the theoretical problem is that of specifying the conditions which will lead to the breakdown of a given system. But the 'completeness' of the break with the past makes it difficult to see on what basis it is possible to predict the new social system to which the revolution gives rise. On the other hand, if, in order to deal with this problem, revolution is conceived of as something less than a discontinuity, and the persistence of some determining factors in the old system is posited, then this position may be criticised on the grounds that it does not account for real revolutions, and here the term is being used simply to elevate into a social climacteric something which is better

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

thought of, perhaps, as an accelerated but relatively continuous process of social adaptation (1978: 191).

If communism is to represent a *revolutionary* departure from capitalism, it follows that its *nature* cannot be derived from an analysis of capitalism. Conversely, if one *can* derive the nature of communism from an analysis of capitalism then communism cannot be regarded as a *revolutionary* departure from it. This argument carries a certain weight. For as Adam Schaff says of the transition from capitalism to communism: 'Theoretically, both a peaceful and a violent change is possible: the important thing is that a qualitative change does take place at a certain moment' (1990: 218). A qualitative change occurs when quantitative changes (changes which can be measured in figures, e.g., numbers, temperature, size, etc.) produce a change that cannot be measured in figures. Thus, a quantitative change in the temperature from 1°C to 0°C produces a qualitative change as water becomes ice. The important thing is that the nature of the qualitative change cannot be derived from an analysis of quantitative changes (see Kolakowski, 1978, I: 389-390). Marx thus faces two distinct problems here. For on the one hand he needs to be able to argue that communism is qualitatively different from capitalism in spite of its already existing within it, and on the other hand he needs to be able to derive the qualitative transition to communism from the quantitative changes taking place within capitalism.

With regards to the first of these problems, let us allow Marx the benefit of the doubt. Let us assume, that is, that the womb metaphor allows Marx to argue that the communist child, whilst gestating within capitalism, *could* represent a revolutionary departure from it. Putting the history of genetics to one side, let us accept that a child and its mother can take forms that are qualitatively different from each other. With regards to the second problem now, if Marx wants to argue that the qualitative change has *already* taken place — i.e., that the communist child is alive and kicking within its capitalist host — then he needs the socio-methodological equivalent of an ultra-sound. He needs to be able to distinguish between the things that belong solely to capitalism, the appearances

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

produced by capitalism's pregnancy and the essential things that *will become* communism. David-Hillel Ruben claims that Marx possessed such equipment and argues that:

For Marx and Engels, scientific socialism was distinguished from utopian socialism in just this way — the vision of the future was founded on the real (physical) possibilities inherent in the present (1979: 58).

Marx's ultra-sound worked, therefore, by identifying the real (physical) possibilities inherent in the present. This, however, is not the same as describing what *will* happen:

Since laws as they describe the nomic behaviour of individuals do not operate at the level of the actual, but rather at the level of the tendential, which may or may not become manifest, predictions cannot be immediately made from the statement of laws (*ibid.*: 71).

Describing what is possible can, however, act as a catalyst for its realisation. This is because,

if what is physically necessary about the life history of a thing is only that it has a *tendency* to develop in certain ways, then one can see the relevance of revolutionary practice in using scientific results, *true ones*, to impede, block, or hasten and develop the actual manifestation of those physically necessary tendencies (*ibid.*).

What we are offered here, then, is a predictive model which rejects deduction in favour of an essentialism which is true even if it never manifests itself. Indeed, the realisation of a prediction depends less upon a correct observation of regularity than it does upon human action. This is the kind of self-fulfilling Marxism forwarded by Gramsci when he said that: 'In reality one can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result 'foreseen'' (1971: 438). Because Marx has identified that communism is growing within capitalism and that, therefore, capitalism is *tending* towards communism, all one need do in order to realise communism is act upon these tendencies.

Although this tendential nature of the communist child does seem to rid the womb metaphor of its very coherency, we shall once again give Marx the benefit of the doubt. We shall assume, that is, that capitalism is pregnant with a qualitatively different child, although this child is only a real (physical) possibility, a tendency

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

which may or may not be born depending on the actions taken by whatever midwives happen to be around at the time. Given such assumptions, then, what we need to do now is examine the tendencies towards communism identified by Marx.²

There were, in fact, two main tendencies, or two ways in which Marx claimed to be able to ground the future existence of communist relations of production in the structural tendencies of capitalism itself. With regards to the first of these, his basic claim was that private property 'becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it' (Marx, 1946: 789), the defining features of this 'new' mode of production being thus:

the co-operative form of the labour process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodological cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labour into instruments of labour only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as the means of production as combined, socialised labour, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this, the international character of the capitalist régime (ibid.: 788).

Due to the very nature of this mode of production, Marx concludes that 'the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialised production, into socialised property' will inevitably ensue (ibid.: 789).

Unfortunately, however, Marx was not justified in reaching such a conclusion. For it was based upon the claim that socialised production and socialised property are inseparable, and whilst Marx spends a remarkable amount of time in *Capital* establishing that the laws of capitalist production tend inevitably towards socialisation, he spends very little time establishing that a tendency towards the socialisation of production implies a move towards socialised ownership. Indeed, to say that capitalism has a tendency towards 'socialised' production is merely to say that the laws of the concentration and centralisation of capital demand that all production becomes co-operative. Co-operative production, on the other hand, is defined thus: 'When numerous labourers work together side by side, whether in one and the same process, or in different but connected processes, they are said to co-operate, or to work in co-operation' (ibid.: 315). As such, it takes a feat of the

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

imagination to establish a logical link between the development of co-operative production and the development of social ownership. It is probably for this reason that the Marx of *Capital* Volume III does nothing other than embarrass himself by proclaiming that joint-stock companies actually *represent* socialised ownership.³

The second way in which Marx attempts to ground the future existence of emancipatory socialist relations in the actual tendencies of capitalist production leads him to make his second 'utopian leap', this time into the concept of the 'all-round individual'. For Marx introduces the concept in the following way:

Modern Industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail worker of to-day, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to a mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers (ibid.: 494).

Modern Industry thus possesses a tendency, nay a compulsion, to produce the 'fully developed individual'. In this way, the second of the 'utopian' categories developed by Marx and discussed in chapter 3 finds a concrete footing in, and becomes a (physical) possibility created by, the logic of capitalism. Modern Industry possesses a tendency to produce the fully developed individual because:

By means of machinery, chemical processes and other methods, it is continually causing changes not only in the technical basis of production, but also in the functions of the labourer, and in the social combinations of the labour-process. At the same time, it thereby also revolutionizes the division of labour within the society, and incessantly launches masses of capital and of workpeople from one branch of production to another (ibid.: 492-493).

The logic and rationality of Modern Industry, therefore, 'launches masses of capital and of workpeople from one branch of production to another', thus 'revolutionising' the division of labour by tearing individuals away from one particular branch of production and demanding that they become adept at a variety of tasks. However,

if Modern Industry, by its very nature, therefore necessitates variation of labour, fluency of function, universal mobility of the labourer, on the other hand, in its capitalistic form, it reproduces the old division of labour with its ossified particularisations (ibid.: 493).

In summary, then:

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

Modern Industry . . . sweeps away by technical means the manufacturing division of labour, under which each man is bound hand and foot for life to a single detail-operation. At the same time, the capitalistic form of that industry reproduces the same division of labour in a still more monstrous shape; in the factory proper, by converting the workman into a living appendage of the machine (ibid.: 489).

Marx thus attempts to establish a link between the crippled detail-worker, that 'living appendage of the machine' who personifies the capitalistic form of Modern Industry, and the fully developed individual who personifies Modern Industry itself. This link he terms the 'absolute contradiction between the technical necessities of Modern Industry, and the social character inherent in its capitalistic form' (ibid.: 493). The living appendage of the machine is the negative side of Modern Industry and the fully developed individual the positive in the negative. For Marx, of course, the positive will eventually emerge victorious:

But if, on the one hand, variation of work imposes itself after the manner of an overpowering natural law, and with the blindly destructive action of a natural law that meets with resistance at all points, Modern Industry, on the other hand, through its catastrophes imposes the necessity of recognising, as a fundamental law of production, variation of work, consequently fitness of the labourer for varied work, consequently the greatest possible development of his varied aptitudes (ibid.: 493-494).

This is the argument, then, which informs Marx's belief that Modern Industry 'compels' society to produce the all-round individual. There are, however, two problems with it. The first is purely empirical and points to the fact that there *was not* a tendency for the division of labour to produce the 'all-round' individual and that there *was* the very opposite. Five decades after the publication of *Capital*, Taylorism and Fordism had become the ruling production paradigms, and *their* development — i.e., the development towards an even greater degree of specialisation within the division of labour — can, as David Harvey points out, be traced back to the 1850's (Harvey, 1989: 125). Similarly, in his seminal study of the division of labour in the nineteenth-century, Emile Durkheim argued that the one-dimensionality of the production process was being *reinforced* by developments within education:

Education is growing more and more specialized. We deem it more and more necessary not to submit children to a uniform culture, as if they were all to lead the same life; but to train them differently in the light of the different functions they will be called upon to fill (Durkheim, 1960: 43).

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

Empirical support for the tendency towards greater specialisation could be churned out *ad nauseam*, as could both theoretical and empirical support for the crippling and dehumanising effects of the division of labour. Any support for the idea that the all-round individual emerges, like a phoenix, from the ashes of this dehumanising process is, however, tellingly lacking. Indeed, as any reader of *Capital* will know, when Marx talks of the tendencies for the rate of profit to fall, for the immiseration of the proletariat to increase, for the processes of the concentration and centralisation of capital to accelerate, etc., he supports his arguments with references to as many newspaper and periodical articles and as many parliamentary reports as he can possibly find. It is somewhat indicative, then, that all we get with regards to the development of the all-round individual is the passage we encountered in chapter 3 in which Marx quotes a Frenchman on his return from San-Francisco (see page 90).

The second problem becomes clear if one places the emergence of the fully developed individual within the context of Marx's overall theory of the division of labour. For in the light of his far more familiar claim that 'capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt'(Marx, 1946: 786), the idea that capitalist production 'gives free scope' to the emergence of 'the fully developed individual' seems almost perverse. Nor will it do for Marx to say that the two represent both sides of the contradiction of Modern Industry. For Marx does not always employ the idea that crippling monotony and life-affirming flexibility dialectically co-exist. More often than not, in fact, he employs the one-sided conception of the division of labour that is most readily associated with him and which is actually supported by the empirical considerations we have just discussed. Thus, for example, in support of the claim that the division of labour 'increases the social productive power of labour, not only for the benefit of the capitalist instead of that of the labourer, but it does this by crippling the individual labourers' (ibid.: 359), he quotes Adam Smith's claim that, through the division of labour, the worker 'generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become' and that it 'corrupts even the activity of his body and

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employments than that to which he has been bred' (ibid.: 356). This hardly conforms to Marx's belief that the division of labour produces an individual fit for any task!

Indeed, Marx often uses the idea of this one-dimensional individual to positive effect. He agrees with Ure, for example, when he claims that the division of labour, because it produces workers highly skilled in one specific area, can act as the source of proletarian revolt:

it happens that the more skilful the workman, the more self-willed and intractable he is apt to become, and of course the less fit a component of a mechanical system in which . . . he may do great damage to the whole (ibid.: 362).

The concept of the all-round individual developing within capitalism is thus replaced by the concept of the very specialised individual disrupting it.

Let us now take a look at the argument upon which the development of the all-round individual depends: that Modern Industry 'imposes as a fundamental law of production, variation of work, consequently fitness of the labourer for varied work, consequently the greatest possible development of his varied aptitudes'. The interesting thing is that if this argument were true then one of the most powerful ideas set down in *Capital* — the creation of an Industrial Reserve Army — would completely collapse. For this idea is premised on the claim that: 'The whole form of the movement of modern industry depends, therefore, upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands' (ibid.: 647). This is because:

It is the absolute interest of every capitalist to press a given quantity of labour out of a smaller, rather than a greater number of labourers, if the cost is about the same . . . The more extended the scale of production, the stronger this motive. Its force increases with the accumulation of capital (ibid.: 649).

The laws of accumulation therefore demand that part of the labouring population becomes constantly unemployed. In determining which part of the labouring population becomes unemployed, moreover, the capitalist 'progressively replaces skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

female, that of adults by that of young persons or children' (ibid.: 649-650). And rather than giving full scope to their varied aptitudes, what Modern Industry brings is 'the misery, the sufferings, the possible death of the displaced labourers during the transition period that banishes them into the industrial reserve army!' (ibid.: 654). Now:

That the natural increase of the number of labourers does not satisfy the requirements of the accumulation of capital, and yet all the time is in excess of them, is a contradiction inherent to the movement of capital itself. It wants larger numbers of youthful labourers, a smaller number of adults. The contradiction is not more glaring than that other one that there is a complaint of hands, while at the same time many thousands are out of work, *because the division of labour chains them to a particular branch of industry* (ibid.: 656, emphasis added).

All of which leads Marx to conclude that:

The folly is now patent of the economic wisdom that preaches to the labourers the accommodation of their number to the requirements of capital. The mechanism of capitalist production and accumulation constantly effects this adjustment. The first word of this adaptation is the creation of a relative surplus-population, or industrial reserve-army. Its last word is the misery of constantly extending strata of the active army of labour, and the dead weight of pauperism (ibid.: 660).

According to this line of argument, then, Modern Industry compels society *not* to produce the fully developed individual. For the contradiction between Modern Industry and its capitalistic form, which supposedly grounds the future existence of this individual, is undermined by other contradictions which preclude 'variation of work' even in its capitalistic form. The contradictions which preclude variation of work furthermore *develop* with the development of capital itself, so that the one passage used by Marx in support of his notion of the all-round individual — the Frenchman returning from San-Francisco — represents an example taken from a country in which, as Marx himself states, 'the class contradictions are but incompletely developed' (cited in Bloom, 1946: 114). The Frenchman, then, does not represent the *possibilities* of capitalism — he represents instead the possibilities which are being *denied* by its development.

Why, then, does Marx talk about the development of the all-round individual when the basis for this development contradicts both the empirical evidence and Marx's other ideas which are supported by this evidence? The answer to this question lies

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

in the fact that the notion of a crippled, impoverished and immiserated proletariat could not ground the transition to socialism, whereas the notion of a fully developed individual could. With regards to the idea that an immiserated proletariat cannot ground the transition to socialism, we need only remind ourselves of the failed arguments concerning the innate nature of the proletariat put forward by Marx and examined in the previous chapter (pages 124-131). With regards to the development of the all-round individual, however, this provides much stronger grounds for arguing that capitalism's integument, once burst asunder, will sound the birth of communism. Nor was Marx oblivious to this, as a key passage from *The German Ideology* serves to demonstrate.

For Marx begins by arguing as follows:

the abolition of a state of things in which relationships become independent of individuals, in which individuality is subservient to chance and the personal relationships of individuals are subordinated to general class relationships, etc. — the abolition of this state of things is determined in the final analysis by the abolition of the division of labour (Marx and Engels, 1970: 117).

This we know already from chapter 3. Because the division of labour in the factory forces an activity upon the individual and thus enslaves this individual to the whims of chance, it undermines the principle of proletarian self-determination. For this reason, therefore, the division of labour has to be abolished. Marx then continues as follows:

at the present time individuals *must* abolish private property, because the productive forces . . . have developed so far that, under the domination of private property, they have become destructive forces (ibid.).

This we know already from chapter 4. Because the relations of production supported by private property are now fettering the development of the productive forces, these relations, together with the whole concept of private property itself, must be abolished. What we also know from chapter 4, however, is that Marx could provide no satisfactory reason for supposing that, once the productive forces of society had been released from the fetters of private property, the next relations of production would represent the emancipation of humanity. It would be perfectly feasible to suppose, that is, that the next relations of production

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

would promote the development of the forces of production by making full use of the division of labour in the factory. Undoubtedly aware of this, Marx then suggests that:

private property can be abolished only on condition of an all-round development of individuals, because the existing character of intercourse and productive forces is an all-round one, and only individuals that are developing in an all-round fashion can appropriate them, i.e. can turn them into free manifestations of their lives (ibid.).

Before private property can be abolished, individuals need to be able to deal with the productive forces in a manner which precludes the need for the division of labour. Conversely, if private property is abolished and individuals are not in this position, then presumably some new despotic form of the division of labour will ensue. A precondition, therefore, for the abolition of the division of labour is an individual who has developed in an all-round fashion and can utilise the all-round productive forces without becoming subservient to them. If communism is to be a society in which individuals determine their own form of existence (and this, I have repeatedly argued, is a belief which Marx held dear), then these individuals need to overcome the need for the division of labour and need, therefore, to have developed in all-round way. The all-round individual subsequently becomes a precondition for communism.

Marx thus links the basic forces/relations model of historical development with the imperative to abolish the division of labour by suggesting that the current relations of production cannot, or rather should not, be burst asunder until the workers are able to utilise the all-round nature of the productive forces without ever becoming subservient to them. Hence the fact that Marx attempts to demonstrate the empirical existence of such individuals in *Capital*. Realising that the purely structural transformation of capitalist relations of production into socialist ones cannot at all be guaranteed, and realising that the prior all-round development of the individual is a good way of securing that guarantee, Marx not only makes the utopian leap into devising this category, he makes the further, and furthermore fantastic, leap into telling us that this individual *actually exists* within capitalism. In order to save his structural grounding of the socialist future, Marx informs us

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

that the economic laws of capitalism create the all-round individual the existence of which will 'sufficiently guarantee' that communism, as opposed to some other form of not-capitalism, follows the abolition of private property.

With regards to Ruben's idea that Marx's vision of communism was founded on real (physical) possibilities which took the form of tendencies, Marx, in this case, never tells us which of the various tendencies he identifies — to cripple the worker, to produce the disruptive specialist, to produce the 'all-round' individual — is the actual tendency of Modern Industry and which are the counteracting influences. Given, however, that the major emphasis was always placed upon the tendency to cripple, given also that this tendency was supported by hundreds of pages of empirical evidence whereas the tendency to produce the all-round individual was supported by none, given in addition that this tendency was used to support many more of Marx's ideas (such as the creation of an Industrial Reserve Army), and given finally the actual development of Modern Industry into Fordism, one can assume that this was the (physically) possible tendency and that the production of the 'all-round' individual was merely a (non-existent) counteracting influence.

With regards to this one idea at least, then, we find Marx in agreement with Lukács, who, in one of his more obscure moments, proclaimed that

every orthodox Marxist who realizes that the moment has come when capital is no longer anything but an obstacle to production, that the time has come for the expropriation of the exploiters, will respond to the vulgar Marxist litany of 'facts' which contradict this process with the words of Fichte, one of the greatest of classical German philosophers: 'So much the worse for the facts' (1972: 27).

More than anything else, in fact, the existence of the notion of the all-round individual reveals Marx's inability to achieve his aim. The phoenix of communist relations of production can only emerge from the ashes of private property with the help of individuals who can utilise the productive forces in an all-round way. As a result, Marx leaps into the utopian description of this individual, and then, confronted with the inevitable utopianism of this description, leaps further into the realms of fantasy by claiming its empirical existence.

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

We can say, therefore, that the all-round individual, i.e., the second element of Marx's utopia, was a concept devised by Marx, not as the result of some deliberate utopian speculation on the ideal form of the future, but as a means of guaranteeing that his anti-utopian methodology could sufficiently ground the socialist future in the capitalist present. Once again then, Marx dazzles us with the (necessarily) utopian foundation of his alternative to utopianism.

5.4 The Utopian Leap via Pragmatism into 'The Ontological Necessity of Labour'

According to Marx's pragmatic version of historical materialism, individuals do not confront the independent external world of which their thought is a mere reflection, but produce the external world in the course of satisfying their biological needs, creating new needs for themselves in the process. History thus becomes a process in which the subject continues to change the world and continues to create new needs for itself. With regards to historical materialism, Marx can say that capitalist relations of production *are* acting as fetters on the development of productive forces which *will* guarantee communist relations of production because humans, in the process of creating the world, have created the *need* for the development of these relations.⁴

Central to this model is a rejection of the subject/object dualism upon which 'pure' materialism is based:

Men do not in any way begin by 'finding themselves in a theoretical relationship to the things of the external world'. Like every animal, they begin by *eating, drinking, etc.*, that is, not by 'finding themselves' in a relationship, but by behaving actively, gaining possession of certain things in the external world by their actions, and thus satisfying their needs. (They thus begin by production) (Marx, 1977e: 581).

Instead of positing a passive relation *to* the objective world, Marx here emphasises the individual's active involvement *in* it. As George Plekhanov explains:

For [Marx] the gist of the matter was not the indisputable fact that sensation precedes thinking, but the fact that man is induced to think chiefly by the sensations he experiences in the process of his acting upon the world (1969: 32).

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

An understanding *of* the world cannot, in other words, be separated from practical activity *within* it. This aspect of Marx's thought has been emphasised by many commentators, and rightly so (see, for example, Anthony Giddens: 1990: 522, and Bertell Ollman, 1976: 126). For it was by means of the idea that individuals develop *themselves* in the process of altering nature that Marx believed he could sufficiently guarantee the transition from capitalism to communism. What makes the idea particularly attractive to contemporary writers, however, is the *way* in which it theorises this transition. Thus argues Sean Sayers:

Marx . . . portrays history as a progressive process in the sense that it involves the growth of human productive powers, and hence the development of human nature in all its aspects: needs and desires, powers and capacities, freedom and reason. This theory provides the basis on which he criticises capitalism and envisages socialism. It does not appeal to universal or transhistorical values . . . either of human nature or of morality and justice. Nor is it a teleological theory: it does not posit an ultimate end towards which history is tending (1994: 82-83).

Because human nature develops *in the process* of the individual's activity within the world, Marx can criticise capitalism and envisage socialism without appealing to universal theories of human nature or justice and without resorting to a teleological conception of history. This is because:

When Marx criticizes capitalism for preventing the realization of human powers and potentialities, these are ones which have been developed within capitalism itself (*ibid.*: 74).

The whole question of Marx's conception of human nature, human needs, the human essence and so forth is a thorny one which generally revolves around his claim that 'the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (Marx, 1968a: 29). I think that Norman Geras was wrong to go to the lengths that he did to show that this *did not* mean that Marx was arguing against a universal human nature (Geras, 1983: 29-58). For it is more plausible to suggest that Marx was reiterating his view that 'the human essence possesses no true reality' *because* 'man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society' (Marx, 1977b: 63). What Marx was trying to get at, in other words, was 'the self-creation of man as a process' and the idea that 'objective man — true,

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

because real man — [is] the outcome of man's *own labour*' (Marx, 1977a: 132).

With regards to his *intention*, then, I agree with Terrell Carver when he says that:

Marx held the view that man makes — and re-makes — his own nature and the societies in which he lives through his productive activities, and that out of these activities comes his ideas about himself and his society (1990: 196).

It was Marx's intention to show that man makes his own nature through his productive activities. Whether or not he did so, however, is a different matter entirely.

What Marx, in fact, thought he had achieved by means of his pragmatic grounding of the human essence was the solution to a problem peculiar to his own theoretical system: how are workers able to transcend alienation from within it? According to Agnes Heller, his solution produces 'one of the most important paradoxes in Marx's theory' (1974: 58):

on the one hand, capitalist society reduces to mere "having" and homogenises into "greed" the system of needs both of the dominant class and of the working class (though in different ways); on the other hand, it generates antagonistic "radical needs" which transcend capitalist society, and whose bearers are called upon to overthrow capitalism (ibid.).

In spite of the fact that capitalism reduces all needs to its own level, it also generates needs which transcend it. A paradox indeed. In telling us how he reached such a paradoxical conclusion, however, Marx makes his third utopian leap — this time into the ontological necessity of labour.⁵

The labourer, according to Marx, giving form to objects in order to survive, at first regards these objects as mere things-in-themselves which are assimilated by Capital; the labourer, in other words, experiences alienation. He or she soon comes to realise, however, that the objects being given form are not things-in-themselves, but are, in fact, things for him/her. The labourer comes to be united with nature in the awareness that nature is not an external force but is there specifically for his or her use. As Marx remarks in *Capital*:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway (Marx, 1946: 156-157).

The driving force behind this reconciliation with nature is coercion. The individual becomes united with nature only because he or she is forced by fear and necessity to consciously give form to objects. Submission to the dictates of another is a necessary precondition for self-realisation: 'The human being *had to be* reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world' (Marx, 1977a: 94). By having nothing to gain from the labour process except the reproduction of a bare existence, the labourer is able to see labour for what it is — or rather for what it could be — rather than seeing in it the source of profit or whatever. The labourer thus *had to be* reduced to the status of alienated being in order to see in labour something other than alienation. This something other is the objectification of one's existence and the realisation of powers that were previously only latent. Through non-alienated labour, therefore,

I would have objectified my *individuality*, its *specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective*, *visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt* (Marx, 1975a: 227).

The realisation that labour is an ontological necessity has created the *real* human being *within* capitalism and guarantees that humanity will follow the abolition of private property:

The abolition of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human* (1977a: 94).

The senses *have become* human *within* the system of private property because the system of private property demands that the labourer makes his or her personality visible to the senses. The labourer thus becomes human through the process of labour because he or she realises that to labour is to be human. This allows one to make sense of Marx's claim that 'its [communism's] *actual* act of genesis — the birth act of its empirical existence — is . . . the *comprehended* and *known* process of its *becoming*' (ibid.: 90). For to claim that communism exists empirically when

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

its process of becoming is comprehended seems to imply that it exists before it exists. Marx simply means, however, that communism as *a potential way of being* exists within capitalism, and that once the labourer comprehends that such a way of being potentially exists he or she will feel the need for communism *qua* the only form of society which can realise this way of being.

Marx's ideas concerning the ontological necessity of labour were therefore inextricably linked to his attempt to ground the transcendence of alienation within alienation itself. It was only by means of attributing some mystical properties to the labour process — and by arguing that these properties only became visible to those whose lives had been reduced to absolute poverty — that Marx could argue that capitalism creates the *need* for its own transcendence. When Marx talked about the ontological need for labour emerging within capitalism, he was thus devising an ingenious escape from a theoretical problem, namely, how to explain the transition to communism when he was dealing with subjects whose complete alienation he had himself so convincingly described. If he also thought that alienation was *really* being transcended by the emergence of the ontological need for labour, then, as Agnes Heller notes, 'Marx was quite particularly guided by the principle of Hope that he rejected and ridiculed' (1993: 51). Elsewhere, indeed, Heller agrees with Sayers that 'capitalism as a social relation limits the enrichment of needs which are its own creation' (1974: 47), and yet she is forced to concede 'that in Marx's time these radical needs had not yet become actual' and 'that Marx therefore had to "invent" them' (ibid.: 86). More importantly, as she also concedes, 'the system of needs of united individuals are utopian' (ibid.: 130).

The ontological need for labour which presages the dawn of communism was a need both invented and projected by Marx. More importantly, this need was invented and projected by Marx in order to provide an escape route from alienation and in order to establish a mechanism by which individuals become conscious of a self-created need, the satisfaction of which will guarantee the realisation of communism. Without this concept, Marx's pragmatic model is faced

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

with both an empirical system of needs grounded firmly in (and continually reproducing) capitalism, and the apparent intransigence of this system of needs, i.e., the apparent impossibility of transcendent needs being created in the process of an individual's activity within the world. The ontological necessity of labour, which is the third element of Marx's utopia, was therefore forwarded as a means of guaranteeing the transcendence of capitalism and the simultaneous realisation of communism whilst remaining within a (supposedly) anti-utopian framework. The final stroke of Marx's utopian artwork is consequently forced by the failure of the last of his anti-utopian methodologies.

5.5 Conclusion

The findings of this chapter seem to indicate that whilst Marx was a 'utopian', his utopianism was merely 'accidental'. As this seems a rather odd thing to say, some further elaboration is required. Let us begin, therefore, with the findings of chapter 3, which suggested that three central categories define Marx's 'visionary' conception of full communism — The Dream of the Whole Man, the development of the all-round individual and the ontological necessity of labour. Given his vociferous anti-utopianism, it was then claimed, the existence of these categories within Marx's work needs explaining. What this chapter has attempted to do, therefore, is explain them. This explanation, however, does not point to Marx's 'utopian humanism', nor does it rely on convenient references to 'Marx's utopian heritage' (see Richard Lowenthal, 1970: 40). What it does instead is locate the development of these categories within the various frameworks established by Marx in order to *avoid* the need for utopianism. As a consequence, it seems fair to conclude that these categories were less the product of a consciously utopian approach than the result of the failure of an anti-utopian one. It is in this sense, therefore, that the development of Marx's 'utopia' was 'accidental'.

Approaching the subject from a different angle, we can begin by saying that, as far as Marx himself was concerned, what distinguished his ideas from those of the utopians was the fact that he had grounded communism in the movement of the

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

present. As far as he himself was concerned again, therefore, this enabled Marx to invoke the spirit of revolution without having to foreclose the future. Nor was this a mere boast on Marx's part, for he considered it incumbent upon the theoreticians of the proletarian class to invoke the spirit of revolution without undermining the principles of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination. To do so, therefore, was his own political imperative. The fact that 'materialistically critical socialism' failed to ground communism in the movement of the present, and the more important fact that Marx himself recognised this, should, as a consequence, lead us to conclude that Marx saw it as incumbent upon himself to modify it so that it *would* ground communism in the movement of the present. When one seeks to identify the nature of Marx's anti-utopianism, one should not, therefore, confine oneself to his specific attacks upon the utopians. One should, instead, regard his entire life's work as an attempt to supersede the need for utopianism and the philanthropic elitism which he considered integral to it.

This is important because when Marxologists deal with Marx's anti-utopianism they do tend to confine themselves to Marx's specific attacks upon the utopians. In so doing, they are inclined to point out, and quite rightly so, that the position adopted by Marx in relation to the utopians is nothing other than a vulgar determinism. This is then contrasted to Marx's less deterministic ideas in order to demonstrate that Marx's vulgar opposition to utopianism was at odds with other elements of his thought and that it must, therefore, have been motivated by 'strategic' reasons. Once this has been established, commentators can then celebrate the 'utopian humanism' of the non-determinist Marx and can argue that, outside the realms of political in-fighting, Marx was not averse to utopianism after all. What the present chapter (and indeed the thesis as a whole) has sought to argue, however, is that there were not 'two' Marxes, one a strategic anti-utopian and the other a more flexible and pragmatic man who was not *really* opposed to utopianism. Instead, there was just the one Marx who really was opposed to utopianism at all times. And whilst this one Marx did adopt a vulgar position

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

when specifically confronting the utopians, the very same Marx developed other models when not specifically confronting them, and his aim in so doing was to support the claim that he had found a way of superseding utopianism.

When Marx developed and experimented with his teleological, structural and pragmatic models of historical development, he was still, therefore, experimenting within the anti-utopian framework which guided all of his ideas. Indeed, these models testify to the efforts made by Marx to do what he had said he could do when he was criticising the utopians, namely, ground the future existence of communism in the movement of the present. So concerned was he to do this that he formulated various models, toyed with various ideas and adopted various positions, some of which were contradictory and some of which were more convincing than others. Each of these models, ideas and positions were, however, motivated by the same guiding principles and were part of the same project. The principles were those of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination and the project was that of invoking the spirit of revolution in a manner consistent with them.

Now, it just so happens that none of the models in question succeeded in grounding the future existence of communism in the movement of the present. Furthermore, it just so happens that the logical coherency of each ultimately depended upon a speculative assumption claimed as empirical fact. The teleological model assumed an original and 'natural' state of unity so that it could interpret the present as an unnatural state of separation and the future as a natural state of reunification. This assumption was made in order to lend some concrete weight to Marx's claim that humanity's destiny lay in communism. If the dialectic of historical development was to 'sufficiently guarantee' the *future* existence of communism, then it would require something more than the notion of dialectical movement itself. For the dialectician 'begins post festum, with the results of the process of development ready to hand before him', and because the results of the process are ready to hand, the dialectician is able to identify the subtle nuances in

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

the past that were actually responsible for the process of development itself. Without the results of the process ready to hand, the dialectician becomes a mere speculator. In order, therefore, to mitigate the speculative nature of his dialectical model, Marx assumed an original state of unity and then announced that history would witness its return on a higher level. The unity-separation-reunification schema was thus a heuristic adopted by Marx in order to impose a concrete 'destiny' upon a model of historical development that otherwise left the future almost open-ended. Having heuristically arrived at such an assumption, Marx could then announce that communism, as reunification, would resolve every conflict between every thing and would thus solve 'the riddle of history'.

The structural model operated on an altogether different basis. For rather than locating a meaning in the past in order to support his claim that a meaningful destiny lay in the future, Marx argued here that one could find in the empirical tendencies of the *present* everything one needed to know in order to 'sufficiently guarantee' the future existence of an emancipated society. The structural logic of capitalism gives rise to certain phenomena which, if acted upon by subjects aware of them, can only lead towards communism. Unfortunately, however, the empirical present and the communist future were linked together by Marx by means of purely speculative assumptions; assumptions concerning the nature of joint-stock companies and semantic assumptions concerning the relationship between socialised ownership and socialised production, for example. More importantly, however, Marx could only link the structural logic of the present to the future existence of communism by assuming the empirical development of the all-round individual. Hence the fact that Marx attempted to demonstrate this empirical development in spite of the fact that it contradicted both the empirical evidence and many more of his own ideas. Without the empirical existence of the all-round individual, there is no possible way that Marx could have guaranteed an emancipated future. For who knows what could follow the abolition of private property if the individuals who abolished it were still one-sided. As a consequence, if the structural model was to make any sense then it would have to

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

show how the empirical tendencies of the present were producing an individual fit for any task.

Similar considerations apply to the pragmatic model and the way in which it established a link between the movement of the present and the future existence of communism. For Marx surmised that if he could somehow establish that the proletarians, in the course of satisfying their own biological needs, created needs which transcended capitalism, then he could also show that the proletarians, by virtue of the material conditions of their own existence, were destined to overthrow capitalism and inaugurate a new world of universal emancipation. In order to do this, however, Marx would have to demonstrate how these transcendent needs arise and why they lead towards communism. Given, then, that the proletariat's existence is defined almost exclusively in terms of the labour process, and that this same process reduces the proletariat to the level of absolute poverty, Marx further surmised that he would have to explain the emergence of transcendent needs in terms of the labour process and in terms of the absolute poverty from which the proletariat is destined to escape. As a consequence, Marx formulated an argument to the effect that the proletariat *had to be* reduced to the level of absolute poverty in order to recognise the labour process as the objectification of individual powers rather than as the source of profit or of a comfortable and satisfying existence. Having recognised this, he concluded, the proletariat would overthrow the system of private property and introduce a society which permits full scope to be given to these individual powers. From this conclusion, therefore, Marx deduced that a link between capitalism and communism could be established if the proletariat recognised the ontological dimension to labour which their bare existence allowed them to perceive.

From these considerations, one can now present an argument as follows:

i) That the defining feature of communism as Marx saw it was self-determination. From this he concluded that the proletariat would have to regulate production according to a common plan, thus bringing it under their conscious control, and

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

that their enslaving subordination to the division of labour, to activities forced upon them, would have to be abolished.

ii) That for Marx the emancipation of the working class had to be the act of the working class itself, and not that of utopian bourgeois philanthropists. This in turn meant that the spirit of proletarian revolution could not be invoked by means of fantastic pictures of the future structure of society. Fortunately, the need for such pictures had evanesced with the movement of history, the class struggle and the proletariat itself. All the theoreticians of the proletarian class had to do now was demonstrate how the emancipation of humanity was contained within the material conditions of the present.

iii) Having failed to demonstrate this in terms of the 'materialistically critical socialism' which he directly contrasted to utopian philanthropy, Marx sought to demonstrate it in terms of something else. He thus formulated three different models of historical development and experimented with each in the hope of adequately demonstrating how the emancipation of humanity was contained within the material conditions of the present.

iv) None of these models adequately demonstrated this, and we know now that none of them could. Instead, the internal coherency of each relied upon a speculative assumption; the teleological model relied upon the assumption that communism would witness a return to an original state of unity because such an assumption lent a certain coherency to the model's claim that the destiny of humanity lay in communism; the structural model relied upon the assumption that the all-round individual was developing within capitalism because without this assumption the model could not coherently profess to have grounded a future typified by self-determination in the tendencies of the present; and the pragmatic model relied upon the assumption that labour possessed an ontological dimension which the proletariat would recognise because without this assumption Marx could not possibly explain how transcendent needs would emerge from within a proletariat reduced to the level of absolute poverty.

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

v) These assumptions, taken together, form a reasonably detailed and consistent picture of the nature of the individuals that will inhabit communism. We know, that is, that communism will resolve all antitheses and that within it, therefore, the individual will be 'whole'. We also know that the individuals within communism will have developed in an all-round way and will have become 'rich' by virtue of having experienced the totality of human manifestations of life. We know finally that in communism labour will have become not only a means of life but also life's prime want because individuals can only express their lives in real sensuous objects. Taken together, then, these images form what may reasonably be termed a 'utopian' picture of the communistic individual.

vi) Whilst undoubtedly 'utopian' in nature, these pictures of communism were not projected by Marx as a result of a conscious decision on his part to imagine what the 'ideal' form of humanity would look like. Instead, they entered his work as part of a completely different endeavour, the endeavour, that is, to devise a model of historical development that could guarantee the emancipatory nature of the future without having to paint pictures of it at all. In the sense, therefore, that this endeavour ultimately required the development of 'imaginary' categories which together form an 'imaginary' picture, Marx can ultimately be termed a 'utopian'. In the sense, however, that these categories were developed in the midst of Marx's attempt to avoid, undermine and supersede utopianism, Marx can ultimately be termed an 'accidental' utopian. Marx's utopianism, that is, was nothing more than an accidental by-product of his inability to get historical materialism to do the things that he wanted it to do.

By way of some final concluding remarks, one can say that the assessment of Marx put forward here has been both sympathetic and critical. Sympathetic in the sense that Marx's dedication to the principles of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination has never been questioned, and sympathetic also in the sense that his 'utopianism' has not been used as a means of undermining his anti-utopianism, as it so often is (Marx was a utopian, therefore his anti-utopianism

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

could not have been up to much). The assessment has also been critical, however, in the sense that the conclusion reached is that, on its own terms, Marx's project failed. Marx sought to imbue the proletariat with a sense of future-optimism by establishing a non-utopian link between the capitalist present and the communist future, a link, that is, which did not foreclose the future by describing the 'form' that communism would take. Accidental or not, then, the fact that Marx did describe the nature of the communistic individual means that he failed in his attempt to avoid one of the central problems he himself associated with utopianism.

Thus ends my attempt to reconstruct the meaning of Marx's project from the standpoint of an *internal* understanding of the framework established by Marx's own texts. Whilst some of the implications of this reconstruction will be discussed in the Conclusion, our next immediate task is to examine the various *external* critiques of Marx (i.e., those critiques which are based on knowledge and interests that are independent of the framework established by Marx himself). This, then, is the aim of the following two chapters.

Notes

¹ It could be contended here that because the passage in question predates the 'discovery' of historical materialism, it could not have been developed in order to solve the problems associated with it. As we have already seen, however, the anti-utopian foundations of historical materialism had been laid as early as 1843, when Marx said that 'we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas, but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old' (Marx, 1975b: 207). The problems involved in 'discovering' the new world without 'anticipating' it had thus been facing Marx since then. That the solution proposed in the *Manuscripts* predated the term 'a materialist conception of history' does not, therefore, mean that it was the solution to a different problem.

² Marx identifies the existence of many tendencies within capitalism. Some of these, including the most famous of all — the tendency of the rate of profit to fall — are confined solely to the workings of capitalism and do not point to anything beyond it. As Berki correctly remarks:

The famous scientific theses concerning the growing concentration of capital, increasing misery, the falling rate of profit, the changing 'organic composition' of capital, and the prevalence of relative surplus-value over absolute surplus-value etc., could only show, by themselves, that capitalism is *changing* — abstractly, hypothetically, open-endedly, and thus, in the last resort, inconsequentially. They do not show that it is *communism* which is 'tendentially and potentially' involved in capitalist development (1983: 104).

Important though they are, these tendencies need not concern us here. What we are interested in are those tendencies which lead us towards communism.

Marx the 'Accidental' Utopian

³ Marx refers to the joint-stock company as 'the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself' (Marx, 1959: 427). He also refers to it as 'outright social property' and thus 'the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself' (ibid.: 428-429). Although Daniel Bell suggests that Marx was pre-empting the theories of post-industrialism and the notion of the decentralisation of capital (1973: 40), it is more common to see Marx struggling to understand the development of a new *form* of capital — what Rudolf Hilferding was to call 'finance capital'. According to Hilferding, the joint-stock company was merely symptomatic of the transformation of the bank into an industrial capitalist in its own right (1981: 225). Following Hilferding, Lenin also argued that 'a personal link-up, so to speak, is established between the banks and the biggest industrial and commercial enterprises, the merging of one with the other through the acquisition of shares' (1968: 196). A generous interpretation of Marx would therefore argue that he quite understandably failed to recognise the role played by joint-stock companies in developments that were to take another three or four decades to fully manifest themselves. A less generous interpretation would point to the realities of the joint-stock company as it existed in Marx's time (for an excellent study see Charles Freedeman, 1979: *passim*) and would mock him for believing that it had anything to do with the development of 'outright social property'

⁴ Jindrich Zelený describes this model as Marx's 'ontopraxiological procedure' (1980: 208). I have termed it the pragmatic version of historical materialism instead, because, as Stanley Moore suggests, Marx's 'position strikingly resembles Dewey's version of pragmatism' (1990: 139). Whilst I do not know how far the specific parallel between Marx and Dewey can be taken, I think that its emphasis on the role played by practice in the constitution of knowledge, and more importantly on the fact that the practice itself becomes a part of that which is known, enables one to link Marx's model here to a pragmatism of sorts.

⁵ Marx's talk of alienation and the dialectics of labour have often been accounted for in terms of a simple Hegelianism on Marx's part. In this sense, then, the existence of an ontology of labour in Marx's works needs no explaining; it simply testifies to the fact that Marx appropriated lots of ideas from Hegel. Such a notion will not do, however, simply because it fails to account for the fact that Marx transformed Hegel's ideas to such a great extent. Thus, for Hegel, labour as objectification was alienation, and alienation was an ontological fact, whereas for Marx alienation could be overcome by recognising the ontological fact that labour is objectification. As Alasdair MacIntyre quite rightly remarks: 'The concepts that dominate Marx's thinking are drawn from Hegel and Feuerbach; the use he makes of them is his own' (1969: 29). What needs to be accounted for, then, is the use to which Marx puts some of the ideas which he draws from Hegel and then transforms.

Chapter 6

The Limitations of Utopia as a Political Tool

6.1 Introduction

The socialist project is defined by Daniel Singer thus: ‘a socialist movement has to fight within the framework of existing capitalist society and provide solutions which lie beyond that framework’ (1993: 250). A similar definition is offered by Ralph Miliband, who suggests that socialism ‘both is rooted in the reality of the present and continually strives to transcend it’ (1994: 13). For both, socialism has to bridge the gulf which separates the concrete analysis of the present from the projection of solutions which somehow transcend it. Bridging this gulf is far from easy, however, and success depends upon achieving the right balance between projection and analysis — too great an emphasis on the former might detach socialism from its empirical moorings, whilst too great an emphasis on the latter might detach it from its quest for a better future. ‘The socialist project’, observes Zygmunt Bauman, ‘is therefore caught between a suicidal adventurism on one side and a no less suicidal compromise with realism on the other’ (1976: 65).

Marx, in fact, made things even harder for himself. For not only did he attempt to balance concrete analysis with socialist projection, he also attempted to balance these with the principles of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination. Because these latter two considerations precluded, or rather because Marx thought that they precluded, him from adopting utopianism as a mode of projection, one could describe the Marxist project thus: a Marxian socialist movement has to fight within the framework of existing capitalist society and provide solutions which a) ultimately transcend that framework, b) are derived solely from an analysis of that framework, c) are not imported from ‘outside’ by bourgeois philanthropists, and d) do not foreclose the future by describing the *form* that the society beyond the present will take.

The Limitations of Utopia

As chapter 5 hopefully demonstrated, Marx was unable to find a solution which satisfied these criteria. For he *did* import concepts not derived solely from an analysis of the present, i.e., the 'utopian' concepts identified, and he *did* foreclose the future by arguing that these concepts would define one's existence within communism. In providing the solution which all socialists need to provide, therefore, Marx only succeeded in embracing the utopianism which his particular variety of socialism ostensibly precluded. This, of course, presents a problem. For if utopianism really does suffer from all the drawbacks ascribed to it by Marx, and if socialists really do need to provide solutions which transcend the present, and if Marx himself failed in his attempt to provide a solution which escaped the thralls of utopianism, then Marxism seems to be faced with a Catch 22 situation: either it continues to reject utopianism, in which case it will find it difficult to provide transcendent solutions to the problems of the present, or it strives for such solutions with the aid of utopias, in which case it will open itself up to Marx's original critique of utopianism.

Attempts to circumvent this problem have generally relied upon the claim that utopianism *does not* suffer from the drawbacks ascribed to it by Marx. Indeed, Marxism is often castigated for what Geoghegan terms its 'general failure to adequately harness utopian energy' (1989: 68). In this way, then, the 'utopian' nature of Marxism's quest for transcendent solutions is rendered unproblematic — Marx was wrong to criticise utopianism and Marxists should therefore unashamedly embrace it, harnessing its positive energies for their own ends. It is with the arguments to this effect that the following two chapters are concerned, the basic aim of which is to indicate that utopianism does indeed suffer from the drawbacks ascribed to it by Marx. This, of course, brings us back to the Catch 22 situation described above. It will also lead us into the Conclusion, where, after having summarised the arguments of the thesis as a whole, a second means of circumventing the Catch 22 situation will be suggested.

The Limitations of Utopia

The following two chapters, then, seek to defend Marx's critique of utopianism. This critique, one will recall, revolved around the claim that those who construct utopian systems generally proceed to claim that the emancipation of humanity depends upon their realisation. They will thus deny that their systems are mere utopias and will claim instead that they have somehow accessed 'the truth'. In so doing, the utopian will implicitly, if not indeed explicitly, be arguing that the masses are unable to formulate their own emancipatory strategy (because they are unable to access the truth and thus do not know what their emancipation actually involves) and he or she will also be foreclosing the future, denying the masses the right to determine what the society of the future will look like. As an emancipatory strategy, therefore, utopianism can only be silly, stale and reactionary from the roots up.

In order to defend this critique, the arguments put forward by those who consider it misplaced need to be examined. This is what the present chapter seeks to do. Section 6.2, however, begins by emphasising the fact that Marx has not been Utopia's only critic. Far from it. If conceived as a blueprint to be realised, then many a writer has come forward to denounce its messianic and authoritarian implications. More than this, in fact, some pro-utopians have even accepted its messianic implications and have sought to defend them. Sections 6.3 and 6.4, however, deal with those pro-utopians who refuse to accept utopianism's messianic implications. Rather than blueprints to be realised, these writers argue that utopias should be seen as critical and inspirational tools. Throughout both these sections, however, it will be argued that utopianism only possesses the power to criticise and inspire if it is conceived as the drawing up of blueprints to be realised, thus rendering it open to charges of messianic elitism. Section 6.5 assesses the attempts made by some to avoid the messianic implications of utopia conceived as a goal to be realised and it concludes that these remain unconvincing. Chapter 7 will then highlight the problems involved in a utopian approach to Marxism by examining the works of William Morris, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, a triad of thinkers to whom contemporary pro-utopians look for

The Limitations of Utopia

inspiration. The conclusion reached at the end of that chapter will then suggest that an endorsement of utopianism is more problematic than the pro-utopian Marxists would have us believe.

6.2 Utopia as a Blueprint to be Realised

It has often been argued that utopias conceived as blueprints to be realised will involve nothing less than a messianic and authoritarian elitism. The most famous of these arguments was, of course, presented by Karl Popper, whose critique of 'Utopian engineering' centred around the claim that it 'is likely to lead to a dictatorship' because the utopian is almost certainly going to claim that his or her utopia represents the best world for all and is almost certainly, therefore, going to 'suppress' those who think otherwise (Popper, 1962: 157-168). Many others have expressed the same view (see, for example, E. M. Cioran, 1996: 86, Geoffrey Hodgson, 1995: 197, and Michael Barclay, 1993: *passim*), and Agnes Heller presents the case well when she remarks that 'superimposing one's own utopia on others as their panacea has become an outrage. Utopian imagination, so misused, becomes a weapon against the utopian imagination of others and kills their promise of happiness' (1993: 57).

All too often the response to claims such as these is simple derision. Fredric Jameson, for example, argues that 'this general feeling that the revolutionary, Utopian or totalizing impulse is somehow tainted from the outset and doomed to blood by the very structure of its thoughts does strike one as idealistic, if not finally a replay of doctrines of original sin in their worst religious sense' (1989: 35-6). Jameson, however, ends his response here, as if by merely highlighting the existence of the Popperian critique of Utopia the critique itself becomes worthless. Jameson, however, neglects to mention several things. The first is that Popper's critique almost mirrors Marx's own. For Marx also believed that there is no rational means of determining what the 'ideal' form of society is, and he also believed that superimposing one's own utopia on others as their panacea is an outrage because he also believed that it was not the task of prophetic utopian

The Limitations of Utopia

messiahs to determine what the future should look like. Like Popper, then, Marx believed that such prophetic utopianism portended to an elitist philanthropy that was doomed from the outset to result in failure.

Jameson also neglects to mention that such views are shared by erstwhile supporters of the utopian imagination such as Krishan Kumar, who opines that:

The attempt to realize utopias as a political project is fraught with danger. It is, at best, likely to bring about a society bearing only the slightest resemblance to the utopian conception and that in what may be its most superficial features. At worst it will create the opposite of utopia, an anti-utopia of authoritarian regimentation. This has been the experience of all so-called utopian communities and utopian societies, from the American communities of the nineteenth century to the socialist societies of the twentieth (1991: 95).

The idea that the totalising impulse to *realise* Utopia is tainted by blood from the outset is thus a popular one, not only with Popperians and 'orthodox' anti-utopian Marxists, but also with contemporary pro-utopian socialists such as Kumar. The idea is also accepted by Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, whose *The Politics of Utopia* is perhaps the most sustained attempt to deal with utopianism as a political tool. What is interesting about this book, however, is the fact that Goodwin and Taylor's defence of utopianism is nothing less than a defence of its elitist, messianic and authoritarian nature. Goodwin and Taylor accept the authoritarian implications of trying to realise Utopia but they also argue that utopianism is virtually powerless unless it is conceived as the attempt to realise utopias. In order to defend utopianism, therefore, they see it as their task to defend the utopian's right to impose his or her vision upon others. Taylor thus begins by forwarding this descriptive argument:

Historically, the conviction that something positive can be done to transform existing conditions of misery into a new world of true harmony and happiness has invariably spread as the result of the deliberate efforts of various individual thinkers or groups of thinkers who have assumed the mantle of leadership, and have usually presented themselves as great intellectuals, prophets, revolutionaries or even messiahs (Goodwin and Taylor, 1982: 139).

Goodwin then transforms this description into a prescription. Working on the premise that utopians 'expect rational adherence to just laws by moral men' (ibid.: 62), she responds to the question, 'whose rationality, whose justice, whose

The Limitations of Utopia

morality?', by quite openly conceding that it will be the utopian's. She then concedes further that a utopia *will* be totalistic, that the utopian *will* impose his or her concept of the Good on society, that those who disagree *will* be coerced into acceptance without political choice or debate, that utopia *will* be highly regulated and *will* forbid both spontaneity and various liberal freedoms, etc. (ibid.: 99-110). In short, she accepts the premises of the liberal critique of utopianism, those used by Popper to illustrate the dangers implicit in it, but defends utopianism nonetheless.

She does so on two grounds. Firstly, because Arrow's General Possibility Theorem shows that in many circumstances people *have to be* coerced — because the sum of individual rationalities does not lead to a collective rationality, and because a collective rationality is required when dealing with collective goods such as healthcare and education, someone simply has to impose a collective rationality in these areas (ibid.: 214-218). Secondly, she argues that liberalism itself coerces, regulates, imposes, precludes real choices, hinders real debate, etc., and that the utopian's mode of *open* coercion is superior to liberalism's mode of covert coercion (ibid.: 67). In sum:

The method for devising a theoretical utopia is therefore the elaboration of collective rationality (or the common good) as analysed by the utopian, and the method for realizing this objectively and benignly defined collective good must be its imposition without consultation of personal preferences, since these would lead in diverse and contradictory directions (ibid.: 215).

The common good as defined by the utopian is 'objective' because it is that 'which people would agree to be fair in the absence of vested interests' (ibid.: 224), which implies of course that the utopian decides what 'vested interests' are and somehow escapes their thrall him/herself. The common good is also 'benign', despite being imposed by a single individual, because 'elitism, promoted by human variety and specialization, is likely to be with us always, and the utopian solution of an elite with *open access* held in check by strongly egalitarian social arrangements, is a possibly good solution' (ibid.: 67).

The Limitations of Utopia

In an article entitled 'The 'Authoritarian' Nature of Utopia', Goodwin reiterates these ideas. Yes, she argues, utopians impose their rationality on others, but

the utopian could defend his/her procedure by arguing that the so-called free rationality which flourishes in a liberal-democratic system is no more than ideology and conditioning mixed with ignorance, and is never an expression of pure, rational desire (Goodwin, 1982: 25).

Arguing once more from the need for someone to define the collective good, she suggests that 'because there *are* supra-individual goals in any society, a utopian approach is the most rational approach' (ibid.: 26). In this article, she also forwards an additional idea designed to defend the utopian's right to restrict individual freedom. For she talks of

the central preoccupation of utopianism, namely, the contention that people owe the Good Life to their fellows, individually and collectively, and are owed it likewise; they ought therefore willingly to sacrifice [sic] a measure of personal freedom and convenience to realise it (ibid.: 27).

Individuals owe the collective Good Life to their fellows and should sacrifice their freedom in order to realise it. Because most people in liberal democracies are ignorant puppets of ideology, however, one cannot define this Good Life 'on the precarious basis of individual choice' (Goodwin and Taylor, 1982: 225). And because the social elites within liberal society coerce people covertly, whilst maintaining that they are acting in the name of freedom, their definition of the Good Life is not to be trusted. Rather, the task of defining the collective good should be placed in the hands of a utopian, who will take on 'the mantle of leadership' which Taylor spoke of and lead the people into 'a new world of true harmony'.

One thus finds in Goodwin and Taylor's account an explicit acceptance of the elitist and messianic foundations of the utopian process. If a utopia is viewed as a goal, a vision of the Good to be striven for and realised, then *of course*, we are told, it will involve an individual, or a group of individuals, assuming the mantle of leadership, presenting themselves as prophets or messiahs and imposing their vision of true harmony upon anyone who refuses to accept its inherent truth. Indeed, for Goodwin and Taylor, it is only by means of an individual parading as a

The Limitations of Utopia

messiah and assuming the mantle of leadership that anything is likely to be done to transform the existing world of misery.

Now, as one will recall from the Introduction to the thesis (page 1), M. Shiviah told us that Marxism should take note of the concept of utopia *divested of its pejorative connotations*, and what he meant by this was that utopia should be divested of the connotations described in this section. Utopia, that is, should be divested of its authoritarian and messianic connotations. What the rest of this chapter seeks to argue, however, is that utopia cannot be divested of these connotations, firstly because the pro-utopians fail to divorce utopianism from its function as a blueprint to be realised and secondly because its function as a blueprint to be realised cannot be divorced from the process of messianic elitism described by Popper, Marx and Goodwin.

6.3 Utopia as a Mode of Critique

Carol Farley Kessler thinks that we should 'see the values of Utopia to be less a blueprint for change and more a reflection of social lack, less apolitical prediction than social criticism' (1989: 120). One can, that is, divorce Utopia as social criticism from Utopia as blueprint for change and thus rid utopianism of the messianic implications which follow from the latter. This section examines Utopia as social criticism and argues that it cannot be divorced from Utopia as blueprint for change and cannot, therefore, rid itself of the messianic implications discussed in the previous section.

We can begin, however, by highlighting the importance attached by some to Utopia's function as social criticism. Paul Ricoeur, for example, even goes as far as to say that utopianism is a *precondition* for social critique:

What we must assume is that the judgement on ideology is always the judgement from a utopia. This is my conviction: the only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it, and judge an ideology on this basis. Because the absolute onlooker is impossible, then it is someone within the process itself who takes the responsibility for judgement (1986: xvi).

The Limitations of Utopia

Ricoeur's is an interesting argument. For one of the many objections Marx had to utopianism was the fact that it implied someone standing 'outside' society and identifying 'the Good' which lay beyond and ahead of it. For Ricoeur, however, it is precisely because one *cannot* stand 'outside' society that utopias are essential. Because all ideas are social constructs, one has to construct one's own (a utopia) in order to criticise that constructed in order to maintain the social hegemony of the ruling elite (an ideology). Utopianism, in other words, becomes an *essential* precondition for social critique.

This is, in fact, an extreme version of a quite straightforward notion; the notion that one cannot criticise what exists without implicitly formulating a view of what *should* exist in its stead. John P. Burke, Lawrence Crocker and Lyman H. Legters present the same argument in a less extreme form when they opine that:

It is a truism that one can criticise a given society without offering a blueprint for its replacement. But it is also clear that any but the most superficial criticism of existing society delimits the range of alternative societies that the critic would find more congenial. These could only be societies lacking the feature that is the immediate target of criticism in the present society. Vague as it may be, a vision of a good society is, if nothing else, at least the hidden agenda of all social criticism (1981: 1).

What Burke, Crocker and Legters mean here is that any critique of exploitation, alienation, or whatever, will implicitly assume the idea of a non-exploitative or non-alienated society. These alternative societies then become utopian hidden agendas, reinforcing the notion that any critique of the present world will depend upon a vision of a different and better one.

Two things can be said in relation to these arguments. The first is that, in its weaker form, the argument presents no problems for the anti-utopian. For the concept of a non-exploitative, non-alienated society is in no sense a 'utopia'. As Burke, Crocker and Legters concede, it is a truism that one can criticise features of the present without having to describe those things that will or should replace them. It is a truism also, however, that a list of negatives to be abolished does not constitute a utopia. Nor, for that matter, does it properly constitute 'a vision of good society', for there is nothing 'visionary' about criticising negatives without

The Limitations of Utopia

proposing positive alternatives. Following on from this, the second thing to be said is that, in its stronger form, the argument is simply incorrect; in order to criticise an ideology one *does not* have to declare a utopia. Without wishing to become embroiled in debates concerning the possibility of 'scientific' critique, it is clear that Ricoeur is mistaken in thinking that a non-utopian critique will depend upon the existence of an 'absolute onlooker'. It is, in other words, perfectly possible to criticise the present from *within* it. One does not have to be an 'onlooker' to be able to identify the structural contradictions of capitalism, nor does one have to declare a utopia before one can say that these contradictions are responsible for real human misery.

Such matters need not, at any rate, concern us here, for the vast majority of writers do not insist that utopianism is a precondition for social critique. What they do insist, however, is that utopianism is the *best* form of critique. Whilst, that is, Marxism does not *need* to describe an alternative in order to criticise the present, it will be better equipped to do so if it does describe such an alternative. The reasoning behind such claims is eloquently presented by Vincent Geoghegan when he describes the power of Utopia thus:

Its alternative fundamentally interrogates the present, piercing through existing societies' defensive mechanisms — common sense, realism, positivism and scientism. Its unabashed and flagrant otherness gives it a power which is lacking in other analytical devices. By playing fast and loose with time and space, logic and morality, and by thinking the unthinkable, a utopia asks the most awkward, the most embarrassing questions. As an imaginative construction of a whole society, the utopia can bring into play the rich critical apparatus of the literary form and a sensitivity to the holistic nature of society, enabling it to mock, satirize, reduce the prominent parts, to illuminate and emphasize the neglected, shadowy, hidden parts — and to show the interrelatedness — of the existing system (1987a: 1-2).

Utopianism is a powerful mode of critique, then, because utopias 'pierce through' such 'defensive mechanisms' as common sense and realism, mechanisms which 'other analytical devices' supposedly reproduce. A utopia's very 'otherness', in other words, allows it to desymbolise ideological claims concerning the nature of the present in ways denied to more sober methods of critique.

The Limitations of Utopia

Now, it will not be denied here that utopias can and do serve a critical function. What will be denied, however, is that utopianism serves a critical function *lacking in other analytical devices* if it is divorced from the attempt to realise the utopias produced. For one can assume that the pro-utopian Marxists want their critique to be something more than mere coffee-table chat. One can assume, that is, that the aim of their critique is to engender change. What hope does a utopia have of achieving change, however, if the alternative posed is not designed to serve as the form of change desired? What critical forces, in other words, can a utopia generate if, for example, its own author concedes that it is nothing more than an analytical device? Other analytical devices — mere observation in fact — can be used to mock and satirise the present, so what we want to know is what sets the utopian device apart; what makes it so special that Marxism cannot do without it? If it is something more than satire but less than a blueprint for change, then what, exactly, is the radical function served by a utopian critique?

Darko Suvin supplies one possible answer when he argues that

utopia is a *method* rather than a *state*, but I would add that it is a method camouflaging as a state: the state of affairs is a signifier revealing the presence of a semiotic process of signification which induces in the reader's imagination the signified of a Possible World, *not necessarily identical with the signifier* . . . In other words, even in the case of perfect stasis and closure in the signifier, the signifying process inscribed in or between the text's lines, and finally proceeding to contextual reference, will make for a larger or smaller opening of the signified (1990: 74-75).

Suvin goes on to claim that utopian discourse is a process which emphasises creative power rather than the created piece of work, a process which involves 'an ongoing feedback dialogue with the reader' (ibid.: 75). Utopias, in other words, whatever their content, induce the reader's imagination to contemplate the possibility of other worlds. This is what André Gorz had in mind when he described 'A Possible Utopia' in *Ecology as Politics*. Rather than representing *the* future or the *best* future, it was merely *a* possible future and 'its only function', said Gorz, was 'to liberate the imagination as to the possibilities for change' (1987: 42).

The Limitations of Utopia

The force generated by a utopia which no one hopes to see realised, then, is that which liberates the imagination as to the possibilities for change. By means of 'an ongoing feedback dialogue', the construction of a utopia creates an opening through which the reader enters the world of alternatives to the present. These alternatives may bear no resemblance to the original utopia encountered by the reader, but this does not matter, for if the utopia has made the reader aware that alternatives can be thought of then it will have succeeded in its task. This is, in fact, a powerful argument. It is difficult to see, however, how the ongoing feedback dialogue will liberate the imagination unless both the dialogue and the imagination are linked to the quest to *realise* the utopias they create. As Gorz remarks, utopias liberate the imagination as to *the possibilities for change*, and if this argument is to make any sense then surely the possibilities for change which the imagination has now conceived will be those informed by the utopian alternative it has either encountered or produced. The possibilities for change will be those presented by the utopia and change will be defined in terms of a movement towards realising this utopia.

One needs to ask again, therefore, what critical powers a utopia can be said to possess if nobody ever wants to see it realised. A second, and now highly popular, response to this question draws our attention to the new breed of 'critical' or 'self-reflexive' utopias, utopias which abandon the blueprint format and thus avoid the authoritarianism associated with the 'traditional' utopia and yet which serve a subversive and critical function nonetheless. Tom Moylan outlines the principal difference between the two genres when he says that 'traditional utopias can be read as discourses that generate metaphysical models which have served the dominant social formation. Critical utopias can be read as metaphorical displacements arising out of current contradictions within the political unconscious' (1986: 213). Michael Gardiner provides a more lengthy exposition of the benefits accruing to the critical utopia thus:

They are not merely imaginary projections of ideal cities or societies, in that they are linked to actual socio-historical movements and the activities and desires of particular social groups. Moreover, they are reflexive in the sense that they are aware of the

The Limitations of Utopia

limitations of the dominant utopian tradition, but also in that they are self-ironizing and “internally” deconstructive. Accordingly, they attempt to realize the contours of a desired future society in their very textual form via the incorporation of elements of contradiction, ambiguity, and openness. In so doing, they disrupt the unified and homogenous narrative of the traditional utopia and demonstrate the multiplicity of possible futures. In sum, the critical utopia is a heterodox manifestation of a diffuse “utopian impulse” which steadfastly resists the systemization and closure characteristic of the traditional utopia and is ultimately concerned with the satisfaction of unfulfilled needs and the perennial human desire for autonomy and voluntaristic solidarity (1992: 25).

By virtue of self-irony, internal deconstruction, ambiguity, contradiction and openness, the critical utopia resists systematisation and closure. More importantly, as Giuseppa Saccaro Del Buffa emphasises, critical utopianism rejects ‘the pretension of possessing and imposing a universal truth’ (1990: 74). Instead, ‘utopia must become a plural noun — utopias — which means . . . it has to propose a variety of projects, in order to suppress univocal social conventions, big, monotonous systems, and spatial-temporal homogeneities, in favour of a non-Euclidean political geometry’ (ibid.). The key to ‘critical’ utopianism thus lies in the plurality of utopias to which it gives rise and the refusal of each to claim for itself the status of ‘truth’.

These utopias, it is claimed, arise out of current contradictions within the political unconscious and articulate the needs of actual socio-historical movements by means of incorporating the ambiguous and often contradictory nature of these needs into the Utopian text itself. The source of the critical utopia’s subversiveness is deemed to lie in this very ambiguity — the ambiguous, ironic and contradictory form taken by the language and structure of the Utopian narrative supposedly disrupts the homogenous language by means of which ‘the dominant social formation’ has hitherto been supported. Helen Kuryllo can subsequently argue that the factors which once made Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853) the source of ridicule — the fact that its narrative was clumsy and that it lacked any structure — now make it a radical and subversive force (1989: 106).

A number of things need to be said about the ‘critical’ utopia. The first is that its proponents claim too much for it and are clearly confused if they think that elements of ambiguity and openness have not played their part in traditional

The Limitations of Utopia

utopias of the Morean kind. As Darko Suvin has argued, not even More's Utopia was unambiguous or closed (1990: 73-4). Secondly, in claiming that its link to actual socio-historical movements somehow sets the critical utopia apart from its traditional namesake, writers such as Moylan and Gardiner reveal an ignorance of the history of 'traditional' utopian movements. Thirdly, one of the major socio-historical movements to which the critical utopia is linked is the Green movement, and yet the utopias produced by this movement are archetypes of the 'traditional' form they are supposedly disrupting. A simple glance at the language used by 'ecotopians' reveals that they are nothing short of social millenarians, proclaiming 'the dawn of a new age' (Goldsmith and Allaby, 1972: 62), and professing to incorporate '*a different world view*' (Porritt, 1984: 44), '*a new world view*' (Goldsmith, 1992: xvi), and many other sins connected with 'totalising' discourse. Not only this, but they want, nay demand in apocalyptic tones, to be *realised*. As Andrew Vincent remarks: 'They usually want a total value change in society — a new age to be constructed, where the whole perception of the world and nature changes' (1993: 265). Robin Eckersley adds that the Green movement aims to create a 'cultural, educational, and social revolution involving a reorientation of our sense of place in the evolutionary drama' (1992: 59) and 'the cultivation of a new worldview, a new culture and character' (ibid.: 63).

Finally, it is difficult to appreciate the subversiveness of those utopias which truly *are* self-reflexive and internally deconstructive. Listen, for example, to Naomi Jacobs as she tells us about Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*:

There is thus quite literally no stasis and no symmetry in the book. The shifts between exposition, poetry, and narration continually destabilize a reader's relationship with the writer and her characters. And the complexity of Le Guin's imagined world requires physical shifts between parts of the book; I began by diligently turning to the "back of the Book" for explanations and definitions, but eventually gave up on studying this textbook and simply browsed around in it, following Stone Telling's story as long as the hunger for narrative lasted, flipping randomly to other parts when I wanted variety, choosing a poem here, a drawing there, a recipe or map or dance or a chart of the system of lodges, and then returning to the narrative thread which weaves through the whole (1989: 114).

On the basis of appraisals such as this, it would seem that the more 'intelligent' and 'self-reflexive' utopias *lose* their subversive critical power as a result of their

The Limitations of Utopia

very intelligence and self-reflexivity. Rather than acting as a political tool, they become 'social texts' which carry meaning only to those who understand how to deconstruct them. It seems, in fact, that the function of the 'critical' utopia is to provide a picture of a world so complex that intellectuals, who thrill in being 'continually destabilised' by a text, need to consult an appendix in search for explanations and definitions. Whilst this may render utopianism devoid of any authoritarian political implications, it also, I would suggest, renders it unable to interrogate the present in any truly useful way.

The point being made here, then, is that a utopia's ability to interrogate the present is linked to the possibility of its being realised in the future. Utopias which eschew the blueprint format and opt for internal deconstruction instead may enable academics to write pompous tracts preaching the values of destabilising complexity but they will hardly help the rest of us to come to terms with the problems facing us in the present. And utopias which are written with no intention of being realised will be dismissed as imaginative fancies or will be seized upon by others as a utopia which *can* and *should* be realised. Indeed, as Alasdair Morrison quite rightly observes:

utopia can, and often does, generate both enthusiasm and determination. It attracts supporters who will not be content with thought-experiments: they want the real thing. That indeed is what utopia is *for*: it is an inspiration and a goal (1984: 144).

Only once a utopia has made the transition from thought-experiment to inspirational goal will it take on a function that somehow sets it apart from other modes of critique. It is, therefore, to its function as a means of inspiring action that our attention shall now turn.

6.4 Utopia as a Means of Inspiring Action

According to Vincent Geoghegan: 'Marx and Engels failed to develop a psychology. They left a very poor legacy on the complexities of human motivation . . . A simple concept of the individual coexisted with simplistic socialist strategies' (1987a: 68). One of the principal reasons for the current popularity of utopianism is that it claims to take the complexities of human

The Limitations of Utopia

motivation into account and thus seems to fill this particular gap within Marxism. With regards to the relationship between utopianism and the complexities of human motivation, Ivor Sarakinsky argues that:

People are hardly receptive to dry conceptual discourse. However, they respond quickly to images, rhetoric and symbols. Utopian thought has all of these, and more. As a result, it has the potential to stir the emotions, get people involved and draw them together in hope of a better future (1993: 112).

Jürgen Habermas makes much the same point when he remarks that:

People do not fight *for* abstractions, but *with* images. Banners, symbols and images, rhetorical speech, allegorical speech, utopia-inspired speech, in which concrete goals are conjured up before people's eyes, are indeed necessary constituents of movements which have any effect on history at all (1986: 146).

For both Sarakinsky and Habermas, then, movements require utopias because their symbolic imagery inspires action in a way that dry conceptual discourse and theoretical abstractions do not. This, in essence, is a rerun of the classic Reason versus Rhetoric debate, although Maurice Meisner adds another dimension to Utopia's appeal when he suggests that

people must hope before they can act, and their hopes must be lodged in a vision of a better future if their actions are not to be blind and devoid of purpose. Indeed, it is an inherent and unique attribute of mankind that human actions are both purposive and future oriented. In this respect, the utility of utopias is obvious. Utopian visions of the future not only serve as critiques of existing social orders but offer alternatives to it, and thus not only make people aware of the imperfections of the present but also move them to transform it in accordance with the utopian ideal (1982: 20-21).

Utopias thus inspire people to act in a way that dry conceptual discourse cannot, not only because people are more responsive to their symbolic imagery and so on, but also because people are unlikely to act unless they have a *goal*. Utopias provide such a goal whereas rational critique does not. Utopias are therefore essential if a movement is to have any effect on history at all.

Arguments such as these have led many writers to suggest that his utopianism was the most powerful element of Marx's thought. Adam Ulam, for example, claims that: 'Even in that least utopian of socialisms, in Marxism, it is the vision of the final and frankly utopian phase of social development, of communism, which is

The Limitations of Utopia

responsible for much of its appeal' (1973: 117). This idea is phrased rather more forcefully by Kumar thus:

The authorities do not have to worry very much about *Das Kapital*; But *Voyage en Icarie*, or *Looking Backward*, or *News From Nowhere*, are a different matter . . . No one denies that these utopian writings won far more converts for socialism than any of Marx's writings (1991: 89).

At the present historical juncture, winning converts for socialism is proving more difficult than ever. Because of this, the idea that socialism in general, and Marxism in particular, needs a visionary goal, has become extremely popular. As Harry Brighouse puts it,

socialists need more than a critique of the self-evident (and even the oblique) evils of capitalist society: they need to pose an institutionally viable alternative to capitalism which can plausibly be thought to avoid at least most of the evils of the no longer actually existing socialist societies. The return to utopian and transitional model building, as long as it does not signal a thoroughgoing retreat into theory, is a valuable component in the revivification of the socialist project (1994: 569).

Given that people have seen something called socialism in action — and have had the idea that socialism = Stalinism etched deeply onto their consciousness by the post-mortems which followed the demise of 'actually existing socialism' — socialists can no longer rely merely on critique. Instead, they need to provide alternative models of socialism with which to counter the things that people have seen. As Gregory Elliott remarks, the idea that socialism = Stalinism has gained widespread acceptance because of 'the palpable absence of any feasible and desirable alternative to it as a non-capitalist societal future' (1993: 7). Socialists should therefore take the time to offer a desirable alternative to Stalinism as a non-capitalist societal future.

That the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' added a new dimension to the relationship between Marxism and utopianism hardly requires stating. Nor does the fact that the changing political landscape has changed the landscape of Utopia itself. Thirty years ago, for example, Leszek Kolakowski could declare that: 'The Left gives forth utopias just as the pancreas discharges insulin — by virtue of an innate law' (1968: 70). No such declaration could be made today, however, as the Left appears to have become (in a predictable extension of Kolakowski's simile)

The Limitations of Utopia

diabetic. The innate law which drove the Left to discharge utopias has now been displaced by what Habermas terms 'the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies' (1989: 48). This pancreatic failure was induced, in turn, by the events of 1989 and their aftermath. As Wolf Lepenies remarked in 1991, 'two years of unbelievable political change in Europe have been sufficient to proscribe the use of the word 'utopia'. No one talks about utopia any more . . . Utopias are dead' (1991: 8).

For many on the Left, such events have rendered Marx's critique of utopianism obsolete. In order to avert its impending death, it is claimed, socialism itself needs to talk about utopia, and talk about it a lot. The exhaustion of utopian energies is here equated with the exhaustion of the socialist project, and a heavy dose of insulin is said to be required if socialism is ever to recover. Indeed, for Daniel Singer, it is *only* by means of such a utopian injection that socialism can hope to gain mass support. For he argues that:

After all that has happened, people may still be driven by their conditions to rebel, but they will not enter a coherent movement, will not join a potentially hegemonic bloc capable of long term action without knowing the goal and the route to be travelled (1993: 253).

This is the crux of the pro-utopian argument. Marxism needs to embrace utopianism, we are told, not because of any critical powers it possesses, but because now, more than at any other time in its history, Marxism needs *more* than critique; it needs a revitalised sense of purpose; it needs a goal. The full force of this argument is brought home by a remark once made by Roger Scruton. 'Revolution is now unthinkable', he said: 'it is like murdering a sick mother out of impatience to snatch some rumoured infant from her womb' (1989: 1-2). This is important because the point being made by those such as Singer is that people now need more than rumours before they will act. Never again will rumours or vague hints win any converts for socialism. People have seen what revolutions based on rumours produce — the spectre of 'actually existing socialism'. If, therefore, people are to join a socialist movement which aims at the radical transformation of society, they will now demand to *know* what socialism is, and

The Limitations of Utopia

this is why Marxism needs to be able to tell them. This is why, in other words, Marxism needs to develop its own Utopia.

The same point is made by many other writers. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, thinks it crucial that we learn from the Bolshevik Revolution and substitute concrete goals for abstract rumours (1991: 316-317). Fred Halliday, for similar reasons to those put forward by Singer, insists that 'the starting point for a future politics has to be the critique of existing capitalist society and the laying out of alternatives that are both desirable and plausible' (1991: 114). Robin Blackburn, too, emphasises the need for socialism to develop a goal, arguing that:

Anti-capitalist movements can do valuable work checking particular manifestations of the divisive or destructive logic of capitalist organization. But if they won sufficient support, what could they offer at the level of regional or national government? And if they are dissatisfied with the world pattern presided over by the Group of Seven, what would they have develop in its place? (1991: 174).

For all of these writers and many more, Marxism needs to embrace utopianism because it needs to provide a *goal*, in the form of an institutionally *viable alternative* to capitalism, that will *inspire* people to join a socialist movement capable of long-term action and will serve as the *pattern* to be introduced if and when the movement gains sufficient support to implement it. The form of utopianism advocated by all of these, then, is the act of drawing up a blueprint to be realised. There is no other way of interpreting their arguments: if Marxism needs a utopia because it needs a goal around which to mobilise support, and if it needs a utopia because it needs to provide a viable alternative to capitalism which could be implemented *as* an alternative, then surely Marxism is being told that it needs a utopia because it needs to formulate a goal to be realised. As we saw Maurice Meisner remark earlier (page 189), utopias are required in this context not only to make people aware of the imperfections of the present but also to move them to transform it *in accordance with the utopian ideal*.

Does not this, however, imply the process of messianic elitism described in section 6.2? I would argue that it does, and I would also argue that many of the pro-utopians fail to recognise that it does because they fail to think beyond the need

The Limitations of Utopia

for a goal and into the processes which follow from it. Whose goal is it to be? How is support for this goal to be created? These are the questions that need to be addressed here. For Goodwin and Taylor, as we have already seen, the goal will be that of a single individual and support will be gained because this individual will assume the mantle of leadership and will present him or herself as a messiah who has gained access to the truth. For Goodwin and Taylor, in other words, the utopian process will be exactly like that described and criticised by Marx. For them, however, it will have to be this way because the diverse, misguided and manipulated choices of the multitude within capitalism present no hope of transforming the existing world of misery. If change is to come then yes, people need a goal around which to mobilise, but if change is to *really* come, they go on to insist, then the process by which this goal is created and support mobilised will have to have elitist, messianic and authoritarian implications.

Now, if the contemporary pro-utopians are to convincingly argue that Marxism needs to embrace utopianism then surely they will need to provide an account of the utopian process which avoids the elitist, messianic and authoritarian implications ascribed to it by Marx and accepted by Goodwin and Taylor. Are they, however, able to do this? This is the question which the following section seeks to address.

6.5 Utopia as an Irretrievably Messianic Process

To claim that utopia is an *irretrievably* messianic process may seem a little harsh, and many writers would mock me for saying it. Prime amongst these, no doubt, would be Mark Holloway, who sees utopia 'as a means to an end rather than an end in itself' (1984: 180). To illustrate what he means by this, he refers to Oscar Wilde, who made perhaps the world's most poetic overture to Utopia when he said that:

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias (1912: 43).

The Limitations of Utopia

As Alasdair Morrison rightly indicates, the utopian process described here 'does not point to the imposition on society of some total blueprint, but to partial modifications of society *in the light of* the alternative blueprint' (1984: 148). The utopia reveals flaws in the nature of the present and subsequently prompts certain changes to be made, after which the utopia still reveals flaws in the present and prompts Humanity to set sail again, and again, and again. As Holloway suggests, then, Utopia understood in this sense serves as a *means* of provoking change rather than an *end* to be achieved.

Whilst such a conception of Utopia *may* help to rid it of its messianic implications, it also seems to rid it of its specific content. For as Morrison rightly asks, 'does this version', with its claim 'that the function of the blueprint may only be to suggest directions for partial change, really catch the whole spirit of utopia?' I am not sure that it does' (1984: 148). Neither am I, and further suspicions are raised when Holloway suggests that useful utopian work is done by government Think Tanks (1984: 185). One senses here, then, that the terms 'Utopia' and 'Plans for Modest Reform' are being confused and that Holloway is talking at cross-purposes with the critics of utopianism.

Let us accept, however, that utopians can provoke partial change without proclaiming themselves messiahs. Let us now say three things in relation to this. The first is that Marx himself would have been quite happy to concede that, in all fields of practical endeavour, progress is made by individuals, or by groups of individuals, acting purposefully; that is, by conjuring the potential results of a particular action in the imagination and then acting to realise them. What was in contention as far as Marx was concerned, however, was not the idea that progress *within* a particular mode of production could be aided by the use of imaginative abstraction, but whether the concrete, historical, political and revolutionary transition from capitalism to communism could be effected by such means. Marx argued that it could not because utopianism on a class-based political level served only to waste revolutionary time and deny the workers the rights of self-

The Limitations of Utopia

emancipation and self-determination. The second thing to be said is that the pro-utopian Marxists need to convince us that the revolutionary transition to communism *can* be effected by utopian means and without descending into messianic elitism. Utopia's ability to facilitate modest changes within the present system is an irrelevance for those concerned with the realisation of a different one. The third and final thing to be said is that the pro-utopian Marxists examined in this chapter do not champion Think Tank utopianism and its reformist pretensions. Instead, they champion utopianism's ability to provide the masses with a *radical* goal with truly inspirational potential. Thus, for example, Daniel Singer wants his utopian solution to lie *beyond* the framework of capitalism (1993: 250), Aijaz Ahmed thinks we should utilise 'the utopian aspect of the communist imagination' in order to 'overthrow' capitalism (1994: 94-95), and even Robin Blackburn is searching for 'a programme which could take us *beyond* capitalism' (1991: 173). When we talk of the relationship between *Marxism* and utopianism, we are therefore referring to utopianism as a process that will take us beyond capitalism and into the socialism that it describes. Utopias, so understood, are intended to serve the function ascribed to them by Karl Mannheim — they are 'orientations transcending reality' which, 'when they pass over into conduct, tend to shatter . . . the order of things prevailing at the time' (1968: 173). It is this process, then, that we need to focus on, for it is this process which is here being termed irretrievably messianic.¹

In order to avoid such charges, Daniel Singer remarks that socialism 'cannot be built thanks to a blueprint drawn at the top and imposed from above. The vision of a different society must be elaborated collectively and in the open . . . the project itself is bound to be flexible, provisional if socialist construction is seen as a conquest by the working people, advancing stage by stage and changing themselves as they change society' (1993: 253). Singer thus adopts a gradualist, grass roots approach to utopian construction. It is to be a collective project, advancing stage by stage. Presumably, the utopian vision itself will change as

The Limitations of Utopia

people change themselves and openly elaborate their ideas concerning the different society to which their changing selves eventually hope to give rise.

Michael S. Cummings goes even further than Singer and offers what amounts to a series of guidelines for the construction of a grass-roots utopia:

First, practical utopians must identify the real strengths and weaknesses of the present system, taking care not to imagine away the strengths . . . Second, practical utopians need to build a national movement gradually, from the grass roots up . . . Third, grass roots utopians such as worker cooperatives, intentional communities, and safehouses for abused women need first to establish their own strong base, but then as soon as possible to identify and join their potential allies in a broader movement for social change . . . Finally, practical utopians need to appeal simultaneously to the self-interest and the idealism of people whose active commitment they seek. Self-interest alone will tempt without inspiring, will involve without permanently uniting. Pure altruism, on the other hand, may move gods and saintly humans but not the rest of us — not for very long, anyway. A vision worth struggling for, a truly practical utopia, must have its feet on the ground *and* its head in the clouds. It must both promise people something they need and demand a fair sacrifice in return (1989: 77).

Once again, then, we are told that a truly practical utopia needs to be built gradually, from the grass-roots up. Practical utopians needs to build a national movement and offer its members something they need, in return for which some fair self-sacrifice will be tolerated.

On paper at least, this sounds fine — the gradual emergence of an openly debated vision based around a broad movement for social change seems a realistic means of both developing a vision worth striving for and of avoiding the elitist notion that such visions should emerge ‘from above’. Unfortunately, however, the logic of the argument in general, and of Singer’s in particular, is inconsistent. For as we have already seen, the principal reason why Singer considered utopianism necessary in the first place was because ‘people will not enter a coherent movement, will not join a potentially hegemonic bloc capable of long term action without knowing the goal and the route to be travelled’ (see page 191). And yet he then tells us that the people within this movement will themselves be responsible for developing the goal whose *prior existence* had actually drawn them into the movement! Singer cannot have it both ways — either the goal exists *prior* to the movement, in which case it will have had to have come from the

The Limitations of Utopia

individual(s) who first created it, or the goal will emerge from *within* the movement, in which case people *will*, contrary to Singer's initial claim, have joined the movement without having known the goal to be reached.

What Singer could be suggesting, of course, is that some initial goal be drawn from above so that people will join the movement in the first place, and then that the goal be revised as more and more people join and lend their voices to the open debates taking place within the movement. This, however, belies the urgency with which Singer talks of the need for people to 'know *the* goal and *the* route to be travelled' *before* they will enter any coherent movement. Indeed, the whole gist of Singer's paper is to stress that people, at the present historical juncture, will not be prepared to join a movement that does not have a clear and well-defined utopian goal. Given the horrors associated with past attempts to change the world, people will refrain from becoming involved in any future attempt if it involves uncertainties or risks. As such, a *knowledge* (the word is Singer's) of the goal and the route to be travelled is required by people in order to persuade them that *this time* there will be few uncertainties or risks.

Indeed, what Singer and many others appear to be saying is that a concerted utopian effort is now required because the historical mechanisms which usually drive the utopian process have ground to a halt. If we take Karl Mannheim's analysis of the utopian process as the standard example, we see that he begins by arguing that 'every "actually operating" order of life is at the same time enmeshed by conceptions which are to be designated as "transcendent" or "unreal" because their contents can never be realized in the societies in which they exist' (1968: 175). He then proceeds to suggest that some of these 'transcendent' conceptions absorb themselves into the consciousness of a social group and that this social group, on the basis of its new-found 'utopian mentality', translates the ideal into social action (ibid.: 186-187). As far as the pro-utopians are concerned, however, the distinctive feature of the present historical juncture is that it lacks transcendent conceptions of life and subsequently lacks the basis upon which utopian

The Limitations of Utopia

mentalities are constructed. As a consequence, they see it as their own personal task to rebuild the utopian base of society in order to regain the imperative for social action. At the same time, however, the utopian base needs to be stronger and firmer than it has ever been before precisely because people will no longer allow themselves to be carried away on the basis of a mere transcendent conception of life. Instead, they require a map which not only tells them where they are travelling but also gives them detailed directions of how they will get there. Now, given that this is Singer's general argument, it would seem difficult, on Singer's own terms, to win mass support for a goal and a route to be travelled if one concedes from the very outset that the goal and the route will change in unpredictable ways as people get down to the business of arguing about it.

Much more persuasive, then, is Cummings' account of the emergence of a grass-roots utopia. For Cummings says nothing about 'the people' themselves determining what this utopia will be. He talks instead of extant utopians joining hands in order to persuade the people, by means of appeals to both their self-interest and their altruism, to accept the sacrifices involved in realising their utopian vision. Such a line of argument, however, fails to rid itself of the elitism ascribed to the utopian process by Marx. For the idea that workers co-operatives and intentional communities should strive to persuade the people that *their* vision is worth making personal sacrifices for would, for him, have been complete anathema. The co-operatives and communities would have been derided as false prophets, deluding the people with pedantic cerebrations parading as universal panaceas.

This, then, brings us back once more to the description of the utopian process provided by Goodwin and Taylor. For them, utopians will have to parade as prophets and present their individual cerebrations as universal panaceas if they are to become in any sense 'practical'. For radical change depends entirely upon an individual or a group of individuals doing this in order to gain the mantle of leadership required in order to lead the people into a new world of harmony. This,

The Limitations of Utopia

I would claim, is an accurate description of the utopian process, and it follows, I would add, from the premises which underlie pretty much every argument in favour of utopianism as a 'practical' political tool. These premises were best articulated by Maurice Meisner when he said the 'people must hope before they can act, and their hopes must be lodged in a vision of a better future if their actions are not to be blind and devoid of purpose' (see page 189). There are three basic claims being made here, two explicit and one implicit. The two explicit claims are that people must hope before they can act and that purposeful hope is dependent upon a vision of a better future. The implicit claim is that people at present lack purposeful hope. Indeed, it is precisely because people at present lack purposeful hope that the pro-utopians talk about utopianism in the first place — as a means of both igniting hope and of providing it with a purpose. These three claims, then, inform the majority of pro-utopian arguments and the fact that they do means that the utopian process can never be anything other than that described by Goodwin and Taylor.

That this is the case can best be demonstrated if we look in some detail at the three thinkers regarded as the progenitors of utopian Marxism; Morris, Bloch and Marcuse. For one of the strange features of the pro-utopian stance adopted by the writers discussed in this chapter is that they preach the values of utopianism whilst rarely practising the art themselves. We are repeatedly told that Marxism needs a vision of a better future, and yet few of the people who repeatedly tell us this seem prepared to offer one, not even as a means of initiating some open and collective debate. The problems involved in providing Marxism with a vision of a better future are thus better highlighted if one studies those who actually tried to do so. This, then, is what the following chapter will do.

6.6 Conclusion

Marx criticised utopianism because the utopian process, conceived as a political strategy, invariably descended into messianic elitism. Those who construct utopian systems will deny that they are mere utopias and will claim instead that

The Limitations of Utopia

they have somehow accessed 'the truth'. They will then proceed to claim that the emancipation of humanity depends upon the realisation of this truth. Of the various responses to this critique, the most common insists that utopianism does not seek to realise utopias. On the contrary, it sees its function as purely critical, constructing alternative worlds in order to illuminate the flaws in this one. There is nothing messianic, elitist or dictatorial about this, it is then claimed. And, indeed, there is not.

If, however, one's utopian critique is to be something more than mere apolitical satire; if, that is, one regards its function as the catalysing of the will for political change, then it is difficult to see how utopian critique can be divorced from the desire to realise the utopia in question. In any case, whilst many pro-utopians may well regard the utopian function as purely critical, this is not why its incorporation into Marxism is repeatedly called for. Quite the reverse, in fact. Marxism needs to embrace utopianism, it is argued, precisely because, as Harry Brighouse put it, 'socialists need *more* than a critique of the self-evident (and even the oblique) evils of capitalist society' (see page 190). This 'more' that utopianism supposedly provides comprises four things. The first is a vision of socialism with which to dispel the myths created by the no longer actually existing socialist societies. The second is the goal without which 'people will not enter a coherent movement, will not join a potentially hegemonic bloc capable of long term action'. The third is a means of inspiring action. For if human beings are purposive creatures who are more prone to respond to symbolic imagery than they are to rational discourse, then utopianism would appear to be the *only* means of inspiring mass political action. This is especially so in view of the failure of Marx's alternative — because Marx could not devise a means of inspiring purposive action without descending into utopianism himself, why not openly endorse utopianism and have done with it? The fourth is a set of policies which the coherent movement created by the vision of socialism would implement once this vision had inspired the movement to overthrow the world pattern presided over by the Group of Eight. The 'more'

The Limitations of Utopia

that utopianism supposedly provides, therefore, is the vision of a 'more' which seeks to be *realised*.

The inherently messianic and authoritarian nature of utopianism conceived as the construction of blueprints to be realised has, however, been condemned from all sides; from the Marxist left, from the Popperian right and even from some of the pro-utopians themselves. Of the pro-utopians, only Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor seem to have the honesty to concede that utopianism understood as a political tool will be both messianic and authoritarian. The task of the pro-utopians, as they see it, thus becomes that of defending the right of the utopian to proclaim him or herself a messiah and suppress those who reject his or her utopian view of the true Good. Contemporary pro-utopian Marxists, however, have to refuse this task. They have to find a way of defending utopianism as a political tool whilst maintaining that it carries with it no inherently messianic, elitist or authoritarian implications. The only way they can do this is by suggesting that the utopia to be realised will have to come from within the socialist movement as a whole, rather than from individuals above it. Such an argument, however, belies the fact that the pro-utopians only ever talk of the need for utopianism because the general populace lacks the ability to think of alternatives to the present. How, then, is the requisite socialist vision to emerge from within a people whose very lack of any vision prompted the call for visions in the first place?

Such problems, it has been claimed, follow directly from the three premises which underlie the utopian approach to politics. Utopianism is necessary, we are told, because a) people at present lack hope, b) hope is a precondition for social action, and c) hope depends upon a vision of a better future. This triad of claims contains an implicit elitism not recognised by the pro-utopians because none of them go as far as to present us with a vision of a better future; all they do is talk about Marxism's need for one. The following chapter will thus seek to highlight the elitism implicit in this triad of claims by focusing on three writers who *did* attempt

The Limitations of Utopia

to provide Marxism with a vision of a better future; William Morris, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse.

Notes

¹ The objection could be made here that not all contemporary Marxists view utopianism as a process which shatters the prevailing order of things. Instead, certain aspects of the prevailing order of things are accepted by the pro-utopians, most notably the need for markets. Hence the popularity of the concept of 'market socialism'. The real distinction I have been trying to get at, however, is that between utopianism as a means of reforming the present and utopianism as a process which not only inspires people to challenge the present but also serves as the pattern to be introduced once the present has in fact been challenged. There is thus a difference in kind between the piecemeal 'utopianism' proposed by Mark Holloway and the radical utopianism proposed by those who would call themselves Marxists. This is not to deny that the distinction can become blurred at the edges: at what stage, for example, does utopianism take on a radical, as opposed to piecemeal, function? What if a 'utopian' alternative to the present deemed by its author to be radical is deemed by others to be nothing more than a proposal for piecemeal reform? These are the issues surrounding the phenomenon of 'market socialism', which *is* deemed by some to represent a radical alternative to the present whilst simultaneously being rejected by others as a piecemeal compromise with reality as it presently stands. I still think, however, that there are valid grounds for distinguishing between the variety of market socialisms on offer. On the one hand, therefore, Eric Hobsbawm is correct to describe certain varieties as 'capitalism with a bit of social christian input' (1991: 322). Göran Therborn, for example, falls into this category because his 'vision' involves nothing more than 'a deepening of the institutions of the most advanced welfare states' accompanied by the concepts of care and responsibility (1991: 302). On the other hand, however, whilst Robin Blackburn accepts 'the necessity of the socialized market' (1991: 227), he also wants to move beyond capitalism and the world pattern presided over by the Group of Eight. This in turn will involve considerably more than a bit of social christian input — it will involve a radical transformation of all the institutions and values upon which the present system is based. It is utopianism in this latter sense — as a process which inspires people to transform the institutions and values upon which the present system is based and which also offers a utopian pattern to replace the institutions and values upon which the present system is based — that is being dealt with here.

Chapter 7

'Utopian' Marxism in Action: A Critique of Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

7.1 Introduction

Marxism needs a vision of a better future because people will no longer join a socialist movement unless this movement provides them with a goal. Such is the argument presented by the pro-utopians. As a means of illustrating the problems associated with such a line of argument, the present chapter discusses three thinkers who *did* attempt to provide Marxism with a vision of a better future. The three thinkers in question — William Morris, Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse — were chosen for two principal reasons. The first, of course, is their sheer popularity and the fact that they are generally perceived to be the three founding fathers of utopian Marxism. The second reason is that, unlike many of the contemporary pro-utopians, each of them was fully aware of the problems associated with utopianism and gave these problems a great deal of thought. Bloch, in fact, reproduced Marx's critique of utopianism in its entirety and Marcuse was so aware of the problems associated with utopianism that never once did he admit to being a utopian himself. Morris, too, demonstrated a familiarity with, and a sympathy towards, Marx's critique of utopianism, a fact one would hardly adduce from the secondary literature. Rather than merely eulogising the utopian imagination without a care for the consequences, then, each of these writers was fully aware of these consequences and spoke of utopianism in the light of them. The fact that each failed to overcome the problems associated with utopianism, in spite of their awareness of these problems, thus becomes all the more pertinent.

The reason why each failed to overcome the problems associated with utopianism, in spite of their awareness of these problems, can be linked to the triad of claims which inform virtually every argument in favour of utopianism as a political tool.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

These claims, one will recall from the previous chapter, are that, firstly, people at present lack hope, secondly, that people must be given hope before they can act, and thirdly that hope depends upon a vision of a better future. Each of the three thinkers under discussion here accepted this triad of claims, and because they did, it will be argued, they were each, in spite of their best intentions, led down the road of philanthropic elitism and messianic prophetism.

7.2 The Case of William Morris

A great deal of importance has recently been attributed to the work of William Morris. Krishan Kumar, for example, goes as far as to say that:

If socialism — and utopia — are to revive following the shadow cast upon them both by the experiment in Eastern Europe, then it is something like Morris's utopian socialism that is likely to be needed to restore faith in the usefulness of utopian thought and in the still unrealized promise of socialism (1995: xxii-xxiii).

Morris' attitude towards utopianism was, however, more ambivalent than is often thought. So ambivalent was it, in fact, that he could argue along the following lines:

In making our claims for the changes in Society which we believe would set labour free and thus bring about a new Society, we Socialists are satisfied with demanding what we think necessary for that Society to form itself, which we are sure it is getting ready to do; this we think better than putting forward elaborate utopian schemes for the future (Morris, 1973e: 188).

In suggesting that utopian schemes should be rejected in favour of allowing the future society to form itself, Morris would have won the support of Marx. As indeed he would when he rejected the idea that one can describe the details of the society of the future:

To attempt to answer such questions fully or authoritatively would be attempting the impossibility of constructing a scheme of a new society out of the materials of the old, before we knew which of those materials would disappear and which endure through the evolution which is leading us to the great change (1973c: 106-7).

Morris even went so far as to reword Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach so that it read as a critique of utopianism — 'the function of the reformers now alive is not so much prophecy as action' (1973e: 189). Contrary to popular mythology, then, Morris was hardly an uncritical champion of utopianism. Indeed, in

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome, a book co-authored with E. Belfort Bax, Morris made his anti-utopian position quite clear.¹ Referring to 'The Utopists: Owen, Saint-Simon and Fourier', Morris and Bax begin with a crude rendering of Marx's own critique:

These men thought it possible to regenerate Society by laying before it its shortcomings, follies, and injustice, and by teaching through precept and example certain schemes of reconstruction built up from the aspirations and insight of the teachers themselves. They had not learned to recognise the sequence of events that *forces* social changes on mankind whether they are conscious of its force or not, but believed that their schemes would win their way to general adoption by man's perception of their inherent reasonableness (Morris and Bax, 1893: 206-207).

Because they failed to recognise the sequence of events that forces social change upon mankind, the utopians each fell 'into the trap of formulating dogmatically an elaborate scheme of life with all its details, a scheme which could never be carried out, however good the principles on which it was based might be' (ibid.: 215). As such, Socialism of this kind was 'attempting to realise its doctrines by crude, dislocated, and consequently hopeless schemes of action' (ibid.: 222). For Morris and Bax on the other hand,

though we have no doubt of the transformation of modern civilization into Socialism, yet we cannot foretell definitely what form the social life of the future will take, any more than a man living at the beginning of the commercial period, say Sir Thomas More or Lord Bacon, could foresee the state of society at the end of the nineteenth century (ibid.: 288).

Before discussing Morris' 'utopian socialism', then, one must bear in mind his own personal critique of utopianism. For not only did Morris recognise that the nature of socialism cannot be known in advance, he also believed that prophesy should be sacrificed in favour of action and that action should be informed by the desire to allow the new society to form itself. Kumar is thus correct to draw the following parallel between Morris and Marx:

For both Marx and Morris, the future society was not something to be constructed according to a plan or blueprint; it would be made by men and women in the process of their own self-transformation. No one could predict the future society in anything other than the most general terms; it remained to be invented by those who would live in it (1993: 141).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Why, then, did Morris himself become a Utopist? Why did he take the time to write one of the most detailed descriptions of socialism in the history of utopian literature? What possible function did he expect it to serve?

Well, simply put, Morris became a Utopist because he accepted the triad of claims which underlie the utopian approach to politics (see page 204 above). As a prelude to the first of these, Morris paraphrases *Capital's* chapter on the Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation and argues that,

the fuller development of industrialism from the ancient crafts through the workshop-system into the system of the factory and machine, while it has taken from the workmen all pleasure in their labour, or hope of distinction and excellence in it, has welded them into a great class, and has by its very oppression and compulsion of the monotony of life driven them into feeling the solidarity of their interests and the antagonism of those interests to those of the capitalist class (1973b: 81).

The capitalist integument is torn asunder and the expropriators are expropriated, one almost expects him to say next. He does not, however, because Morris realises that the existence of an oppressed and degraded, though unified and organised, class does not in itself sound the death knell of capitalist production. Something else is required before the oppressed will join the fight for socialism, and this something else is hope:

I tell you there is plenty of discontent, and I call on all those who think there is something better than making money for the sake of making it to help in educating that discontent into hope, that is into the demand for the new birth of society (ibid.: 83).

For Morris, then, whilst the people were certainly discontented they at present lacked hope. And hope, he continued, was the precondition for action because only hope would translate into the demand for the new birth of society. Morris subsequently describes his project thus:

Fear and Hope — those are the names of the two great passions which rule the race of man, and with which revolutionists have to deal; to give hope to the many oppressed and fear to the few oppressors, that is our business (1973d: 135).

The notion of 'educating discontent into hope' thus becomes the central feature of Morrisian politics, although it is generally referred to as 'the education of desire'— a phrase never used by Morris himself but ascribed to him by Miguel Abensour — and is variously described by Morris as 'educating people to a sense

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

of their real capacities as men' (1973d: 157) or 'the education into Socialism of the working classes' (1973f: 231).

With regards to how one educates discontent into hope, Morris, in spite of his awareness of the problems associated with it, opted for utopianism. This was because he subscribed to the third of the triad of claims mentioned above and argued that utopias, 'these dreams for the future, make many man a Socialist whom sober reason deduced from science and political economy and the selection of the fittest would not move at all' (1973e: 189). Morris thus subscribed to the idea that utopias are necessary because people, for good or ill, are more prone to respond to positives than they are to negatives. He believed, that is, that hope depends upon a vision of a better future.

Utopianism, for Morris, thus becomes a means of motivating and inspiring people into action. As such, its place within his system of thought is quite clear. For on the one hand, Morris believes that social change is *forced* upon people whether they are conscious of it or not. He also believes that 'the transformation of modern civilization into Socialism' is an inevitable event. Because of this he criticises the utopians for attempting to will into existence their own particular visions and he also points out that one cannot possibly predict the shape of the new society to come. Rather than putting forward elaborate utopian schemes for the future, what socialists should therefore do is concentrate on the present, and in particular on educating the discontent of the masses into hope. Once the masses have hope, they will themselves be able to initiate the great change and will themselves be able to determine the form that socialism will take. Paradoxically, however, the very task of educating discontent into hope requires the use of utopias. Rightly or wrongly, people respond to dreams for the future in a way that they do not respond to sober reason and science. As a means of creating the hope that will lead the masses to take control of their own lives, utopianism therefore becomes essential.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Rather than acting as an ideal *end* towards which history is tending, utopia thus becomes a *means* of facilitating the development of an end which defies description (i.e., Socialism). Utopias, so understood, are nothing more than prompts, hurrying history along the road that it is already travelling along anyway. In *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, Morris and Bax argue that history needs to be hurried in this way because ‘the great mass of those who are pushing forward by this road, are only very partially conscious of whither it is tending; seeing, not the birth of a new society founded on general equality of condition, but rather a higher and less precarious standard of livelihood and something more of social recognition from their superiors’ (1893: 276-77). Utopias are thus required in order to raise the aspirations of the masses and to imbue them with a hope that will form the basis of their awareness that the future lies in Socialism.

Thus far, then, we have traced the way in which Morris came to recognise the need for utopias in spite of his critique of utopianism. As a means of motivating people and of raising their aspirations for the future, utopias were simply necessary. Like it or not, therefore, the development of socialism would require the help of utopias. Unlike many of the pro-utopians discussed in the previous chapter, however, Morris did not stop once he had convinced himself of the need for utopianism. Instead, he went on to discuss the practical and political implications of such a conviction, paying particular attention to two central questions, namely, *whose* vision should be adopted as a means of creating revolutionary hope and *how* was support for it to be mobilised? In providing answers to these questions, however, Morris descended — and I would argue could not *avoid* descending — into the philanthropic elitism which typifies the utopian approach to politics.

For it is by no means a simplification of his views to point out that, once he had convinced himself of the necessity of utopianism, Morris went on to argue that the task of articulating proletarian hope should be placed in ‘the hands of a few highly cultivated men, who can go often to beautiful places, whose education enables

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

them, in the contemplation of the past glories of the world, to shut out from their view the every-day squalors that the most of men move in' (1973a: 54). Two distinct arguments are involved here; the first is that the hope of the proletariat should be placed in the hands of a few men who do actually possess hope, and the second is that these few men are to be those who go to beautiful places and contemplate the past glories of the world. The first of these, I would argue, is the logical conclusion of the triad of claims underlying the pro-utopian theoretical framework. For if one accepts that the masses at present lack hope in the future, and that hope in the future depends upon a vision of a *better* future, then it more or less follows that the masses themselves will be unable to formulate such a vision. A people lacking hope in the future, that is, are less than likely to formulate a vision which embodies and supposedly fosters it. This is the problem we saw Daniel Singer encounter in the previous chapter. For whilst he wanted his Marxist utopia to emerge from within the movement, he also believed that a people lacking hope would need to be given a vision before they would join it. Implicit here, then, was the concomitant belief that a vision of a better future would not emerge from within the masses if the masses lacked hope enough to believe that an alternative to the present was possible. Hope had to come from 'above' or from 'outside' the realms of the working class, and if hope depends upon a vision of a better future then this vision too would have to come from above or outside. No amount of lip-service to the notion of a grass-roots utopia will hide the fact that a people lacking hope in the future, which for the pro-utopians is the same as saying a people lacking a vision of a better alternative, cannot be expected to formulate their own vision.

Morris, at least, had the honesty to admit that this was the logical conclusion of his approach. For as far as he was concerned, the fact that most people moved around in squalor meant that

it is hard indeed to give the poor any hope. It is, then, no less than reasonable that those whom we try to involve in the great struggle for a better form of life than that which we now lead should call on us to give them at least some idea of what that life may be like (1973d: 135-6).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

By virtue of their lack of hope, the poor themselves were unable to picture a better form of life worth struggling for. It was up to a few men with hope, therefore, to provide them with some ideas (the idea that a few women may also possess hope seemed to escape Morris). These few men with hope would, in turn, almost inevitably be drawn from the upper classes, a fact that Morris himself never attempted to deny. For as he remarked in a lecture addressed to those whom he wished to convert:

I daresay that you will find some of my visions strange enough. One reason which will make some of you think them strange is a sad and shameful one. I have always belonged to the well-to-do classes, and was born into luxury, so that necessarily I ask much more of the future than many of you do (1973e: 190-191).

When Morris argued that the task of articulating proletarian hope should be placed in the hands of those who go often to beautiful places and rejoice in the past glories of the world, he was thus quite candidly arguing that the task of articulating proletarian hope should be placed in the hands of those such as himself, who, by virtue of having been born into luxury, ask more of the future than the proletarians themselves.

One further conclusion reached by Morris on the basis of such considerations was that, because of their lack of hope and inability to think outside the squalors of the present,

it is essential that the ideal of the new society should be always kept before the eyes of the mass of the working-classes, lest the *continuity* of the demands of the people should be broken, or lest they should be misdirected (Morris and Bax, 1893: 278).

The working classes, left to their hopeless everyday squalor, were liable to lose sight of or misdirect those demands which Morris' socialist elite had provided them with in the first place. As a consequence, it was the duty of this elite to watch over them and to direct their demands whenever their continuity was close to being broken. The revolutionary process, therefore, was to be both initiated and guided by the utopians; initiated because a people lacking hope needed to be presented with utopian visions, and guided because the people were likely to lose sight of this vision if they were not continually reminded of it.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

This, then, is the first of the arguments forwarded by Morris. The second concerned the need for the few utopians in question to be those who loved beautiful places. The second argument, in other words, was that the masses needed to be inspired and guided, not only by *a* utopia, but more specifically by *his*. For it is no secret that Morris' own utopia involved, more than anything else, an appreciation of beauty. Indeed, as Mark Bevir points out, for Morris, 'being surrounded by beautiful objects was . . . a need of the soul' (1996: 1218). His vision of socialism was subsequently 'defined by a romantic concern with good art' and 'focused on the conditions of labour that were conducive to the production of good art' (ibid.). This is made more than clear in both *News From Nowhere* and the concluding chapter of *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, in which Morris and Bax present their own vision of 'Socialism Triumphant'. In a sense, the latter makes for more interesting reading simply because, as a purely political tract, its relentless obsession with the aesthetic dimensions of socialism takes one entirely by surprise. Seldom has a thinker paid so little attention to the political and economic aspects of socialism whilst paying so much attention to the types of architecture, sculpture, engraving, poetry, music, drama, literature and even costume that the Socialist 'man' will create and demand. Seldom also has the spectre of dirty railway stations been given centre stage and seldom has the key to socialism been deemed to lie in the form of gardens that adjoin people's houses. Seldom, that is, has the role of beauty in Socialism been afforded such a priority.

Without wishing to become embroiled in the details of Morris' 'utopia', it is safe to say that, for him, life within socialism was to be based around the creation and appreciation of beauty. It is also safe to say, however, that Morris wished to retrieve the best ways of creating beauty from the past and insert them into the future. When talking of the role to be played by craftsmanship in socialism, he could thus remark that: 'In this case then, as in others, we believe that the New Society will revert to the old method, though on a higher plane' (Morris and Bax, 1893: 305). When Morris argues that the task of articulating proletarian hope

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

should be placed in the hands of those who go to beautiful places and contemplate the past glories of the world, not only, therefore, is he arguing that the task of articulating proletarian hope should be placed in the hands of those 'outside' the proletariat whose economic position allows them to gain access to hope, he is also arguing that the task should be placed in the hands of those who *do* go to beautiful places, *do* contemplate the glories of the past and *do*, as a consequence, offer hope in the form of a future based around the creation and appreciation of real beauty.

More specifically, however, what Morris is suggesting is that the task of articulating proletarian hope *should not* be placed in the hands of people such as Edward Bellamy. For as is commonly known, *News from Nowhere* was written 'in indignant response', as Kumar puts it (1993: 133), to the vision of a mechanised industrial utopia put forward by Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward*. More importantly, though, *News from Nowhere* was written in order to present the proletariat with a vision of socialism that was *right*. Morris' vision was *right* whereas Bellamy's was *wrong*; there is no other way of interpreting Morris' review of *Looking Backward* published in *Commonweal*. For there he suggested that 'The only safe way of reading a Utopia is to consider it as the expression of the temperament of its author', and Bellamy's temperament was that of a man who was not only 'unhistoric and unartistic' but also 'perfectly satisfied with modern civilization' (Morris, 1994: 420-421). Being of such a temperament, Bellamy 'has his mind fixed firmly on the mere *machinery* of life' and thus writes specifically for 'the industrious *professional* middle-class men' (ibid.: 421). Morris then goes on to ridicule *Looking Backward* for describing what he sees as 'a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and absurd, that may cast up amongst them' (ibid.: 423).

Of utmost importance here, however, is not the specific differences between Morris' vision and that of Bellamy but rather what Morris believed was at stake in the conflict between them. For he said that 'there is a certain danger in books

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

such as this', and the danger is that potential socialists, 'accepting its speculations as facts, will be inclined to say, 'If *that* is Socialism, we won't help its advent, as it holds out no hope to us'' (ibid.: 420). Concluding his review, Morris then adds that 'incomplete systems impossible to be carried out but plausible on the surface are always attractive to people ripe for change, but not knowing clearly what their aim is' (ibid.: 425). What was at stake, then, was the *right* way of holding out hope to the masses and the *right* way of showing people ripe for change what their aim is.

I think it fair to say that the popularity enjoyed by *Looking Backward* threw Morris completely. For up until now he had been able to convince himself that he was remaining faithful to the framework established by Marx. He had thus repeatedly acknowledged that the nature of socialism cannot be determined *now*, that the task of defining socialism should be left to the proletarians who will create it, etc., etc. Where he differed from Marx was in his belief that utopias inspire proletarian hope better than science ever can. Even now, however, utopias were only conceived of as a means of inspiring hope rather than as the ends to be realised once the revolution inspired by this hope had actually got underway. The proletariat would determine their own form of society once they had begun to act; it was just that they needed to be prodded into action by means of utopianism. Hence the fact that Morris never contrasted utopianism to science but rather referred to "scientific" Socialism as 'the complete Socialist theory', a theory to which he himself ascribed (Morris and Bax, 1893: 230).

Nonetheless, throughout all of this Morris *had* been convinced that the emancipation of humanity depended upon the realisation of his own particular vision of socialism. He had been able to disguise this, however, or hide it from himself, because of the singular lack of competing visions. Thus, when introducing the vision of socialism contained in *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*, Morris could remark:

It must be understood . . . that in giving this outline of the life of the future, we are not dogmatising, but only expressing our opinion of what will probably happen, which is of

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

course coloured by our personal wishes and hopes. We ask our readers, therefore, not to suppose that we have here any intention of making a statement of facts, or prophesying in detail the exact form which things will take; though in the main, what we here write will be accepted by the majority of Socialists (Morris and Bax, 1893: 289).

Morris could present his utopia without having to dogmatise because he could safely claim that history will ‘probably’ see it realised and because he could also say that the majority of socialists would agree with it anyway. The book thus concludes:

We would be the very last to wish to set any bounds to human ideals or aspirations; but the Socialism which we can foresee, and which promises to us the elevation of mankind to a level of intelligent happiness and pleasurable energy unattained as yet, is to us enough as an ideal for our aspirations and as an incentive to our action (ibid.: 320-21).

The point is, however, that in 1893 Morris did not have to set any bounds to human ideals or aspirations. For as he had said in his review of Bellamy (1890): ‘six or seven years ago the word Socialism was known in this country, but few even among the ‘educated’ classes knew more about its meaning than Mr Bradlaugh, Mr Gladstone, or Admiral Maxse know now — *i.e.*, nothing’ (Morris, 1994: 419). In 1893, therefore, he could say that his own utopia was enough of an ideal for him, rather than saying that it *should* be enough for everyone else, because it was the only ideal and incentive to action around. He could deny possessing any messianic conviction that he had solved the riddle of history because he could convince himself that his vision, ‘which means general happiness for all men, free from any substratum of slavery, will be *forced* on the world’ (Morris and Bax, 1893: 320), and because he could claim that the majority of socialists held similar views.

What Bellamy’s book did, however, was shatter all of this. No longer could Morris’ conviction that his vision represented the emancipation of humanity be disguised beneath the claim that it was what the majority of socialists thought and was therefore representative of socialism *per se*. For *Looking Backward* was selling more copies per year than Morris’ works would sell in a lifetime and a very large proportion of those buying Bellamy’s book thought that *that* was what socialism would look like. Morris thus had to come to terms with the fact that his

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

utopia was not only a means of giving hope to an ultimately self-determining proletariat, but also served as an end which he thought *should* be adopted because it and it alone represented the form in which the emancipation of humanity would be realised. Whilst Morris subtitled *News From Nowhere* 'some chapters from a Utopian Romance', one should therefore be in no doubt that he considered it to be something more than *a* utopia; he considered it the best. Indeed, I think we should take the book's closing remark quite literally: 'if others can see it as *I* have seen it', said Morris, 'then it may be called a vision rather than a dream' (Morris, 1995: 220). Morris did not want to liberate the imagination as to the possibilities for any old change; he wanted to liberate it as to the possibilities of realising *his* vision. Kumar is thus correct to observe that: 'For Morris utopia was about changing the world' (1993: 143). The task of the utopia was 'to make the dream of socialism so alluring, so compelling, that others would wish to join in the task of realizing it, and so transform the dream into a collective vision that could re-make the world' (ibid.). Morris wanted others to dream *his* dream and realise *his* vision because, like all political utopians, he thought that his vision was the *only* way forward.

Such a messianic conviction that one's own particular vision is right and that the emancipation of humanity depends upon its realisation is implicit, not only in Morris' ideas themselves, but also in the utopian framework within which Morris was operating. For if the masses need hope before they can act, and if hope depends upon a vision of a better future, then it is inevitable that those who construct the requisite vision of a better future will claim that their vision is *right*. If it is really to inspire hope, and if it is really to inspire action, then a utopia will have to be something more than one subjective vision among many, the particular whims of one individual. It will have to claim for itself the status of being the right vision, the best of the many, the best whims.

In view of this, I think that E. P. Thompson's defence of Morris in the postscript to his *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* was ultimately misplaced. For

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Thompson subscribes to Abensour's notion of 'the education of desire', and subsequently follows Abensour in claiming that Morris sought 'to teach desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire in a different way' (Thompson, 1977: 791). He then argues of Morris that 'his importance within the Marxist tradition may be seen, today, less in the fact of his adherence to it than in the Marxist "absences" or failures to meet that adherence half-way. Morris's "conversion" to Marxism offered a juncture which Marxism failed to reciprocate' (ibid.: 786). With regards to the question of how Marxism *could* have reciprocated, Thompson goes on to add that:

What may be involved, in "the case of Morris", is the whole problem of the subordination of the imaginative utopian faculties within the later Marxist tradition: its lack of a moral self-consciousness or even a vocabulary of desire, its inability to project any images of the future, or even its tendency to fall back in lieu of these upon the Utilitarian's earthly paradise — the maximization of economic growth (ibid.: 792).

By failing to meet Morris half-way, then, what Thompson means is that Marxism failed to follow Morris' lead in developing a vocabulary of desire. When Morris 'converted' to Marxism, Marxism should, in other words, have 'reciprocated' by embracing 'the imaginative utopian faculties' which Morris brought with him. Marxism did not do this, however, and relied instead upon a utilitarian scientism that was virtually useless on its own because, quite simply, 'science cannot tell us what to desire or how to desire' (ibid.: 806). In refusing to take 'the case of Morris' seriously, therefore, Marxism sacrificed its ability to tell people what and how to desire.

The obvious retort would be to ask whether Marxism really *wants* to tell people what and how to desire. Thompson clearly thinks that it should and he also thinks that its ability to do so depends upon its developing an imaginative utopian faculty. Somewhat bizarrely, however, Thompson also seems to think that without such a faculty Marxism is destined to fall back on the utilitarian maximization of economic growth. The issues involved in 'the case of Morris' thus boil down to a stark choice between utopianism and economic growth, and

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Thompson certainly knows which side he is on. Indeed, in a final crescendo of melodrama Thompson proclaims that:

It should now be clear that there is a sense in which Morris, as a Utopian and a moralist, can never be assimilated to Marxism, not because of any contradiction of purposes, but because one may not assimilate desire to knowledge, and because the attempt to do so is to confuse two different operative principles of culture. So that I've phrased the problem wrongly, and Marxism requires less a re-ordering of its parts than a sense of humility before those parts of culture which it can never order (*ibid.*: 807).

What we are now being told is that Marxism could not have reciprocated Morris' 'conversion' even if it had wanted to. For Morris was concerned with 'desire', which is both beyond the grasp of knowledge, i.e., the principle by which Marxism operates, and superior to it. Rather than meeting Morris half-way, then, what Marxism really needs to do is develop a sense of humility before him.

In extreme formulations of his argument such as this, Thompson merely reproduces the utopia/science dichotomy which he claims to abhor and then turns the traditional schema on its head, prioritising utopia over science. The fact that Thompson does this has, however, tended to obscure the key issue involved in 'the case of Morris' itself — the issue surrounding the education of desire.² For the issue does not stop being an issue once one has established, convincingly or otherwise, that utopias are required in order to educate desire. Rather, a whole host of other issues then present themselves, issues concerning the role of the educator, the ranking of desires, and so on. Morris himself had clear-cut solutions to such problems, and yet Thompson does not even entertain the possibility that Marxism's refusal to meet Morris half-way has something to do with these solutions. It is precisely these solutions, however, which distance Morris from Marxism and place him in the same fold as the 'utopian socialists' whom he criticised. For Morris knew who the educator was to be, i.e., cultivated men such as himself, and he knew which desires were best — those which focus on the creation and appreciation of beauty — and which were worst — those which focus on economic concepts such as efficiency and organisation and those which seek to minimise the role of labour altogether (i.e., Bellamy's). His task,

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

therefore, was one of persuading everyone else that their emancipation depended upon their desiring what he thought it right for them to desire.

‘The case of Morris’ is thus, in fact, a relatively straightforward one. On the one hand, he recognised that the nature of socialism cannot be predicted or described in advance, and he recognised also that demanding what was necessary for socialism to form itself was better than putting forward utopian schemes for the future. On the other hand, however, he believed that hope was a precondition for action and that hope depended upon a vision of a better future. Because of this, he considered utopianism a necessary means of inspiring both hope and action. Following this line of thought through to its logical conclusion, Morris then suggested that the task of constructing a vision of a better future would have to be placed in the hands of people such as himself, i.e., people who possessed hope. He also went on to recognise that if his vision was really to inspire both hope and action then people would have to believe that it was right. It was no use trying to inspire action by means of a vision the content of which was open to debate. Nor could a vision inspire action if one claimed that it was no better than competing visions. Rather, if a utopian vision is to serve any inspirational function then people must be convinced of its status as the *right* vision, the *true* embodiment of hope. This is why Morris claimed that his vision *was* right and this is why Marx’s critique of utopianism applies to Morris. For Morris *did* consider it his own personal task to reveal to the poor the shape of their future, and he *did* believe that the emancipation of humanity depended upon his particular pedantic cerebrations — as opposed to those of Bellamy, for example — being realised. Whilst, therefore, the messianic language which accompanied the ideas of the original ‘utopian socialists’ was missing in Morris, he was still thinking in terms of the utopian mindset described in chapter one and rightly criticised by Marx.

7.3 Ernst Bloch's Attempt to Build a Concrete Utopia

Bloch's importance is often deemed to lie in the fact that he read utopian desire into popular culture, and thus grounded the basis for a utopian transcendence of the present in the realm of everyday life. Thus states Geoghegan:

His achievement was to see that utopianism is not confined to intellectuals and their various blueprints of a better life. He saw that, in countless ways, individuals are expressing unfulfilled dreams and aspirations — that in song and dance, plants and plaster, church and theatre, utopia waits (1987a: 97).

Ostensibly at least, such a conception rids utopia of the elitism ascribed to it by Marx and epitomised by Morris. It does so only ostensibly, however, as this section attempts to demonstrate.

Beginning at the beginning, it is important to stress that the form of 'utopia' praised by Bloch has *nothing at all* to do with the great utopian system-builders; with, that is, the line stretching from More to the 'utopian socialists' of the early nineteenth century. This is because, for Bloch, each and every one of these were 'abstract' utopians — abstract in the sense that 'there is very often no genuine, historically new future at all in the goal of utopians, but a false, non-new future' (Bloch, 1986, 2: 581). This conclusion leads Bloch to reproduce, almost verbatim, Marx's own rejection of utopianism. He begins by arguing that the utopians sought solutions solely in their hearts and minds:

With their hearts the utopians condemned injustice, and wished for justice, with their minds they sought — as abstract utopians — to construct the better world, and in their hearts again they hoped to kindle the will for this world (ibid.: 578).

He then proceeds to point out that the production of these abstract and unhistorical wish-images was a function of the undeveloped state of capitalism and the proletariat:

The dream lantern shines into an empty space in the case of the abstract utopians, the given has to bow to the idea. Thus the constructive wishful images were applied unhistorically and undialectically, abstractly and statically to a reality which knew little or nothing about them. Though this weakness is only rarely a personal one of the utopians; rather, it was precisely here that the conception did not attain reality because the reality at that time did not attain conception. Industry was undeveloped, the proletariat immature, the new society barely visible in the old (ibid.: 579).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Following Marx to the very letter, Bloch finally insists that utopianism, in the era of materialistically critical socialism, is an irrelevance at best and reactionary at worst:

Since Marx the abstract character of utopias has been overcome; world improvement occurs as work in and with the dialectical coherence of the laws of the objective world, with the material dialectics of a comprehended, consciously manufactured history. Since Marx, mere utopianizing, apart from still having a partial active role in a few struggles for emancipation, has turned into reactionary or superfluous playful forms (ibid.: 582-3).

Bloch thus characterises the history of utopias *prior* to Marx as 'the progress of socialism towards science', whereas their history is one of 'decay and ultimately of opium after him' (ibid.: 619-20). He subsequently rejects with disdain 'the frivolous utopians after Marx' (ibid.: 619) and attacks William Morris with particular venom (ibid.: 614).

The full extent of Bloch's disdain for utopianism is revealed when he defends Marx's refusal to describe the communist future on the grounds that historical materialism precludes the need for such a description:

Actual descriptions of the future are deliberately missing . . . and they are deliberately missing precisely because Marx's whole work serves the future, and can only be comprehended and implemented at all in the horizon of the future, yet one which is not pictured in a utopian-abstract way. But a future which is illuminated in historical-materialist terms in and by the past and present, and hence by the tendencies which operate and continue to operate, in order to be at last a knowing future capable of being shaped (1986, 2: 621).

In the final section of *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch even goes as far as to say that one *cannot even imagine* what the socialist future will look like. This is because 'the still utterly opaque, indeed in and for itself still unavailable fundamental goal . . . The goal as a whole is and remains still concealed . . . its intended fundamental content itself has not yet dawned' (1986, 3: 1375). He also stresses that because 'the true horizon does not extend beyond the *knowledge of realities*', a hope which does not realise this, 'an unilluminated, undirected hope' which seeks to see beyond these realities and into some abstractly utopian future, will only distract, divert and ultimately 'lead astray' (ibid.).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

When one refers to Bloch as the champion of the utopian imagination, therefore, one is also referring to Bloch the unrelenting critic of the 'abstract' utopian imagination. One is referring to a man who believed that Marx was correct not to offer a utopian picture of the socialist future because the socialist goal remains concealed and subsequently defies all description. One is also referring to a man who believed that those who *do* seek to describe this goal are 'abstract' utopians whose only function will be to lead us astray. Yet Bloch championed the utopian imagination nonetheless, or rather the *concrete* utopian imagination.

Bloch's notion of a concrete utopia is extremely complex, and begins within the claim that 'in the dialectical trend latency of the material process, which is open to the new, there is no *pre-ordained* and therefore no settled end of the traditional teleological kind' (1971: 42). There is, however, *one possible* end which is objectively true because it embodies Authentic Being. This end he variously terms 'the Ultimatum', 'the Totum', 'the All' or 'the Authentic'. It is to these terms that the central term 'concrete utopia' applies. This undefinable utopian All is concretely utopian because it is 'the objectively-real Possible', by which Bloch means that,

man is the real possibility of everything which has become of him in his history and, above all, which can still become of him if his progress is not blocked. He is a possibility therefore which is not merely exhausted like an acorn in the enclosed realization of the oak-tree, but which has not yet ripened the whole of its internal and external conditions, condition-determinants (1986, 1: 235).

'The Real Possible begins with the seed in which what is coming is inherent', Bloch continues, but it displays an 'openness as really developing unfolding' such that 'the 'inherent propensity' unfolds itself in the unfolding itself' (ibid.: 237-38). The objectively-real Possible All of Authentic Being is thus a possibility which, although objective in the sense that it grows from a seed planted in the objective conditions themselves, is also *open* in the sense that what will germinate from this seed is unknowable in advance. In this context, Bloch is very fond of saying things like this:

From early on we want to get to ourselves. But we do not know who we are . . . We have in us what we could become. This announces itself in the unrest at not being sufficiently

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

defined . . . In this state people are on the tip of their own tongue, only they do not yet know what they taste like (1986, 3: 927).

Because Authentic Being is something yet to be achieved, we have yet to be ourselves and thus do not know who we are. What we *do* know, however, is that we have who we are 'in us' — we do not know what this actually is, but we know that it is there waiting to Become; it is on the tip of our tongue. Bloch terms this authenticity 'man's upright carriage — the proper stature that he has not yet achieved' (1971: 168).

Now, not only is the *content* of the Totum of the upright carriage unknowable, its realisation is also merely one possibility among many; it is 'only real-essential possibility, not yet the *real-essential necessity* which is only inherent in that possibility itself' (1986, 1: 240). The real-Possible subsequently represents an 'open alternative between absolute Nothing and absolute All' (ibid.: 312):

Man is that which still has much before it . . . The Authentic in man and in the world is outstanding, waiting, lives in fear of being frustrated, lives in hope of succeeding . . . what is possible can equally well turn into Nothing as into Being . . . if man does not intervene (ibid.: 246).

Simply stated, therefore, the task of Marxism is to ensure that the All, and not the Nothing, is realised by means of historical intervention.

Bloch now explains the nature of Marxism's intervention. This takes the form of a two-pronged attack, the prongs of which are termed Marxism's 'cold stream' and its 'warm stream' (ibid.: 209), or alternatively, reason and hope. Both these prongs are necessary because:

Reason cannot blossom without hope, and hope cannot speak without reason: both must operate in a Marxist unity; no other science has a future, no other future has science (1971: 33).

Bloch's project now becomes quite straightforward: Marxism utilises its cold stream of scientific reason in order to determine those tendencies which are leading to the All and then utilises its warm stream of liberating hope in order to ensure that it is these tendencies, and not those leading to the Nothing, which are acted upon.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

It is here, in discussing the mechanisms by which Marxism prompts people to act upon its warm stream of liberating hope, that Bloch follows the triad of claims which typify the utopian approach. The first of these, the claim that people at present lack hope, Bloch rephrases a little. For rather than lacking any hope, Bloch argues that most people possess *false* hope. To gauge the nature of people's hope, Bloch focuses on daydreams, which, of course, everybody has. The daydreams of *most* people, however, fall into the category of escapist fantasy and comprise only 'unregulated wishes' (1986, 1: 11). For: 'In general, the little man who is not class-conscious is content just to rearrange his lot slightly' (ibid.: 31-2). The hope of the little man is confined to dreams of revenge, sexual and business dreams, 'what would have happened if' dreams, and 'predominantly money, but also what it could be changed into' (ibid.: 33). If not these 'Little Daydreams' as Bloch terms them, then the wishing of the little man manifests in '*wishful images in the mirror*, in a beautifying mirror which often only reflects how the ruling class wishes the wishes of the weak to be' (ibid.: 13). This category mainly encompasses 'dressing up', i.e., the wish to disguise oneself in public, although the choice of disguises is dictated by advertising and the commodification of the ego, and are circulated in the 'magazine story', 'the rot-gut epic of the jackpot' (ibid.: 351). This is why, in Bloch's view, the daydreams of the little man are 'full of false hope' (ibid.).

The second of the triad of claims — that people need hope before they can act — was, of course, the driving force behind Bloch's entire work. It was precisely his conviction that behind the secret of true hope lay the secret of Authentic Being, Marxism's concrete utopia, that drove him to write *The Principle of Hope*, that enormous, sprawling attempt to understand where true hope actually lies. Given his trenchant critique of the 'abstract' utopians, however, and his defence of Marx's refusal to offer one, it would be surprising to find Bloch endorsing the third of the triad of claims, namely, that hope depends upon a vision of a better future. This, however, he does, when he claims that 'Marxism is only an

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

instruction for action when its grasp is simultaneously a grasp ahead: the concretely anticipated goal governs the concrete path' (1986, 2: 581).

Bloch himself, of course, tries to differentiate between a 'concretely anticipated goal' and an 'abstractly utopian description' by telling us that 'Marxism is *not no anticipation, but the Novum of a processive-concrete anticipation*' (1986, 2: 622). In spite of his critique of the abstract utopians, his belief that the goal as yet remains concealed, and so on, Bloch is now, therefore, telling us that one *can* anticipate the future, as long as one does it *concretely*. These reassurances are not, however, very reassuring, and I think that Douglas Kellner and Harry O'Hara are correct to define Bloch's project in the following terms:

Bloch wants the doors of revolution to be opened again and knows this can happen only if the actors in the revolutionary process are activated with a yearning desire for socialism. Realizing socialism requires the will to revolutionary practice and a clear sense of the goal which will infuse practice with the requisite revolutionary passion and foresight (1976: 17).

Bloch simply could not help thinking that revolutionary hope, this yearning desire for socialism, depended upon the revolutionary actors having 'a clear sense of the goal'. He knew that no such clear sense could be given because the goal as yet remained concealed, and he criticised the abstract utopians for constructing such goals. And yet he could not help believing that a goal, whatever the problems involved in providing one, was necessary. He could not, that is, help himself from being drawn into making the third of the triad of claims.

In order to avoid the 'abstract' implications of providing the revolutionary subjects with a goal, Bloch continued to insist that one can anticipate its nature in a processive-concrete way. He could thus remark that:

Concrete utopia is therefore concerned to understand the dream of its object exactly, a dream which lies in the historical trend itself. As a utopia mediated with process, it is concerned to deliver the forms and contents which have already developed in the womb of present society. Utopia in this no longer abstract sense is thus the same as realistic anticipation of what is good; which must have become clear (1986, 2: 623).

Concrete utopia *does*, therefore, attempt to anticipate 'the forms and contents' of the Good society, only it does so *exactly*, by identifying the forms and contents

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

which have already developed in the womb of the present. Before proceeding to highlight the elitist and messianic implications which follow from such a view, it is worthwhile discussing how Bloch considered himself able to anticipate the forms and contents of the Good society. For in asking how 'concrete' utopia does this without becoming 'abstract', as Bloch presumably thought it could, one encounters the problem of the methodological ultra-sound faced by Marx: how can one anticipate the characteristics of a future society which is only now gestating in the womb of the present?

In order to provide himself with such a methodological ultra-sound, Bloch develops the idea of a Cultural Surplus. Following Marx's example in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Bloch argues that each 'revolutionary epoch' is driven by 'the directly utopian impetus against what exists' (1986, 1: 154). With regards to the bourgeois revolution, Bloch adds that 'the bourgeoisie, not a very heroic class, had to boost itself in a particularly strong utopian fashion' (ibid.: 151-2). The bourgeois revolutionaries, in other words, conjured utopian self-deceptions in order to hide the shallow content of their revolution from themselves, and these utopian self-deceptions were 'illuminated by a real future place: by the realm of freedom' (ibid.: 143). Now, these self-deceptions and illuminations took place in the cultural realm, i.e., in the realm of art, philosophy, music, and so on, but — and this is Bloch's main contention — 'works of the superstructure progressively reproduce themselves in cultural consciousness even after the disappearance of their social bases' (ibid.: 154). The production of utopian self-deceptions illuminated by the realm of freedom, which had been a necessary means of invoking the spirit of the bourgeois revolution, is thus still continuing today even though the social base which once made them necessary has disappeared. This is the cultural surplus in which concrete utopia can be detected, or rather in which concrete utopia can be detected 'with knowledge and removal of *abstract utopia*' (ibid.: 157).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

This is where Bloch's use of the womb metaphor differs from Marx's. For Marx, the present was pregnant with the future because certain economic tendencies were leading towards socialism, and his task was to identify and then hasten the progress of these tendencies. For Bloch, on the other hand, the present is pregnant with the future because the realm of freedom is prefigured in the surplus produced by the cultural products of the superstructure. His task is therefore, firstly, to separate this concrete surplus from the surrounding abstract and ideological dross, and then, secondly, to use the so-discovered concrete utopia as a means of igniting the subjective will to revolution. In this context, Bloch says of Marxism that 'the advance from utopia to science was too extreme, as if everything utopian were purely abstract or even illusory' (1971: 171). For Bloch, not *everything* utopian is abstract and illusory, for *some* forms of what he calls 'utopica' produce a surplus which leads into the realm of truth, i.e., into the realm of freedom. As Kellner and O'Hara put it:

In Bloch's view, the human being is incomplete, unfulfilled, laden with unsatisfied needs and unrealized potentials which are the motor of human self-activity. Art, philosophy, and religion are the repository of needs and potentialities struggling for expression, hence they give us clues as to what the human being is and can be. Bloch's work is a magnificent project of decoding our cultural heritage to restore to us our human potential (1976: 21).

The problem faced by Marx, however, still applies to Bloch; the problem of how one identifies the tendencies which are leading towards socialism without making use of an *a priori* conception of what socialism is. We therefore need to ask of Bloch how he managed to separate the cultural products which concretely prefigure Authentic Being from those which abstractly do not, without formulating his own abstract conception of what Authentic Being actually is?

We need to ask this question precisely because Bloch failed to supply an answer. What he *did* supply, in lieu of an answer, was the concept of the Not-Yet-Conscious. This latter is 'the preconscious of what is to come, the psychological birthplace of the New' (1986, 1: 116), a form of 'premonition', 'the feeling for what is on its way' (ibid.: 122). Those cultural products which concretely prefigure Authentic Being thus emerge with the 'making conscious of the Not-

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Yet-Conscious', i.e., with 'the psychological representation of the Not-Yet-Become' (ibid.: 127). They are, in other words, nothing less than conscious expressions, premonitions even, of what is to come. They articulate a Novum, but one based on 'concrete anticipation' (ibid.). Unfortunately, however, only the coincidence of a genius and an appropriately 'ripe' time, can engender such premonitions:

The kindling place of inspiration lies in the *meeting* of a specific genius, i.e. creative propensity with the propensity of a time to provide the specific content which has become ripe for expression, forming and execution. Not only the subjective, but also the objective conditions for the expression of a Novum must therefore be ready, must be ripe, so that this Novum can break through out of mere incubation and suddenly gain insight into itself (ibid.: 124).

In this way, one finds that the conscious articulation of the Not-Yet-Become, the production of a concrete Novum, is the work of an individual genius operating in a time ripe for change. Such times render their own womb more transparent, so that the genius can gain a premonition, a 'feeling for what is on its way'. Unfortunately, however, the inherent circularity of this argument is plain to see: The cultural products which concretely anticipate Authentic Being are those works of individual genius which concretely articulate the Not-Yet-Become of Authentic Being. The implications of such a circularity become apparent when one examines those specific cultural products which Bloch considers, and which he also considers *not*, to be the works of Novum-producing genius.

According to Geoghegan, as we saw, Bloch sees utopia waiting in song and dance, plants and plaster, and so on (see page 219). One needs to ask, however, *which* songs, which dances, which plants, which plaster . . . ? In answering this question, Bloch supplies a lengthy list of the *which* with no explanation of *how* the list was drawn up. Thus, for example, although concrete utopia is said to wait in 'song and dance', it certainly *does not* wait in Jazz song or Jazz dance:

Nothing coarser, nastier, more stupid has ever been seen than the jazz-dances since 1930. Jitterbug, Boogie-Woogie, this is imbecility gone wild, with a corresponding howling which provides the so to speak musical accompaniment. American movement of this kind is rocking the Western countries, not as dance, but as vomiting (1986, 1: 394).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

The 'howling' of which Bloch speaks was being performed by, amongst others, Charlie Parker, Dizzie Gillespie and Thelonious Monk, and as any Jazz historian will tell you, if any musicians could claim to have produced a sonic Novum, to have articulated the Not-Yet-Become, then it was these three. In describing their music as 'howling', however, Bloch exposes his essentially conservative cultural taste and, somewhat ironically given the nature of his project, his dislike for, and one might even say *fear of* the new.

For Bloch tends to reject *anything* 'new' — compared to the Baroque which he lauds with tedious repetition, modern music, dance, furniture, architecture, modern everything, is monotonous, formalistic kitsch. And as for the idea that Bloch sees 'concrete' utopia in the artefacts of 'popular' culture, nothing could be further from the truth. Hollywood, for example, is 'a poison factory', 'dispensing escapist utopia' and 'White Guard propaganda' (1986, 1: 410), whilst those who reject the 'delightful and illusionistic power' of classical theatre are, and *really* are, labelled 'bigots' (ibid.: 422). Indeed, it seems that absolutely nothing in American culture can be redeemed — 'dead joy is the fun of the Yankee world' (1986, 2: 908) — and Bloch reacts with condescending horror to the popularisation of High Culture: 'this is an endeavour to turn Mozart into a stick of rock, Goethe into a philistine, and the Ninth Symphony into a non-denominational Sunday Sermon' (ibid.: 911). Finally, even though a 'concretely' utopian cultural artefact is meant to be 'concrete' by virtue of its embodying Hope, Aristophanes is praised — and this really does indicate the subjective randomness of Bloch's criteria — *even though* 'Aristophanes created several of his best comedies at the expense of revolutionary hope' (1986, 1: 435).

So, Bloch's belief that revolutionary hope depends upon a clear sense of the goal to be achieved led him to develop the notion of 'concrete' anticipation. Such anticipation involves scouring the world's cultural heritage in search of those surplus products which prefigure Authentic Being. The cultural products in question — the result of various meetings between geniuses and times ripe for

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

change — are those created by, amongst others, Beethoven, Mozart and Goethe. The question now, of course, is what one does with them.

The answer to this question Bloch supplies in the following passage, perhaps the defining statement of his project:

Everybody's life is pervaded by daydreams: one part of this is just stale, even enervating escapism, even booty for swindlers, but another part is provocative, is not content just to accept the bad which exists, does not accept renunciation. This other part has hoping at its core, and is teachable. It can be extricated from the unregulated daydream and from its sly misuse, can be activated undimmed. Nobody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right (1986, 1: 3).

Everybody has daydreams, but the daydreams of the little man, as we have already seen, are generally nothing more than enervating escapism. Bloch is at pains to point out that the 'determined imagination of the utopian function is distinguished from mere fantasizing precisely by the fact that only the former has in its favour a Not-Yet-Being of an expectable kind, i.e. does not play around and get lost in an Empty-Possible, but psychologically anticipates a Real-Possible' (1986, 1: 144). The little man merely fantasizes and gets lost in the empty-possible. Indeed, 'utopian function is not present at all in mere wishful thinking' (ibid.), and 'wishful thinking has discredited utopias for centuries' because 'it is easily led astray, without contact with the real forward tendency into what is better' (ibid.: 145).

Bloch, however, has examined the daydreams of people past and present, as manifested in the cultural products to which they give rise, and has identified those which are provocative, which psychologically anticipate a Real-Possible, and which thus have hope at their core. Such provocation and such hope, he then tells us, is teachable. The task, as Bloch now sees it, is to infuse this hope into the daydreams of the little man in order to prevent them getting lost in the Empty-Possible and in order to keep them trained on what is right. So, what one does with the cultural products which prefigure Authentic Being is teach everybody else to dream as their creators did.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

The Novum-producing dreams of geniuses past are to be 'taught' by means of 'guiding images' and 'guiding panels' which incorporate the Novums in question. These guiding images of the Novum are not only required because the little man cannot conjure the images for himself, they are also required because the little man, *qua* human being, is still undefined and is thus open to the effects of the *wrong* defining guiding panels: 'The boy is going to be someone, to be made into something. The young have to be educated, raw meat is not palatable. So it is minced or cooked, turned into the items you see on the menu' (1986, 3: 928). Authentic Being, though definitely a servable dish, is not on the menu of present society, and has to be *added* to the menu in the form of these guiding panels.

An example of the form taken by such panels — Bloch's favourite panel, I think — is that which incorporates the spirit of Goethe. As a genius, presumably writing during a time ripe for change, Goethe's articulation of the Not-Yet-Conscious was second to none. As a consequence, the little man should be taught to dream like Goethe, and the guiding panel by which the little man is to be taught is termed 'Venturing Beyond the Limits'. What this involves is being taught to follow Goethe's Faust when he says to the moment, "Stay awhile, you are so fair' (1986, 3: 1016). Venturing Beyond is thus 'The urge to the Here and Now' (*ibid.*: 1011), it is 'Religious orgasm' (*ibid.*: 1299), only without the religion (*ibid.*: 1311). If the little man is taught this — and is 'taught' to hate Jazz, love Beethoven, hate Bauhaus, love Baroque, hate everything which is not ornate, love everything which is, hate all aspects of American culture, develop a fetish for antique furniture, and so on — then his dreams will become provocative and his hope revolutionary.

Having now dealt with the content of Bloch's project, it is time to assess it. In this respect, the first question one needs to ask is whether or not his strategy would actually work. Would an education based around such guiding panels really lead the little man's hope to become revolutionary? One thinks not, for as Geoghegan remarks, Bloch's 'belief that 'concrete' utopia is somehow 'grounded'

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

in 'objective tendencies' does seem to rob it of those elements which make utopianism such a vibrant phenomenon' (1996: 152). This is understating the case a little, for one could go on to say that Bloch's belief that concrete utopia comprises a set of cultural artefacts seems to rob utopianism of the very basis for its existence, i.e., it seems to rob utopianism of the ability to describe an alternative *society*. Did Bloch really believe that the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat would be ignited if it were suggested to them that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony prefigured the Totum of Authentic All? Did he really believe that a selection of extant 'utopica', listed and then paraded as examples of the objective tendency towards 'man's upright carriage', would have more of an effect on revolutionary hope than the abstract opium produced by those such as Morris and Edward Bellamy? He did and one cannot help thinking that he was wrong to do so.

A second question is why Bloch insisted on using the term concrete utopianism to define his system of thought. For the concrete utopia Bloch describes is clearly not a utopia in the sense defined by J. Max Patrick, and even Marx provided us with more clues as to the nature of socialism than did Bloch. As utopias go, Bloch's must win the prize for minimalism, for it appears to be little other than a state of mind; the state of mind one enters when one listens to Beethoven, reads Goethe, sits on Baroque furniture, or whatever. Place this in the context of his scathing critique of 'abstract' utopians, i.e., those whom everybody else would consider 'proper' utopians, and one wonders why he did not choose another term than concrete *utopia* to describe what he thought.

The reason why he did use the term, I would contend, is that he was aware of the fact that he was working within the utopian framework utilised by his 'abstract' opponents and that it was this framework, rather than utopias as such, that he was seeking to defend. One might even say that he was trying to rescue the utopian framework from the trivialising threat of utopias. This framework, as I have repeatedly been suggesting, revolves around three central claims — that people at

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

present have no hope, that people need hope before they can act, and that hope depends upon a vision of a better future. Bloch operated from within this framework and was seeking to defend it against both the abstract utopians who were trivialising it and the Marxists who refused to recognise it. Bloch wanted to show, firstly, that, *pace* the extreme scientism of much Marxist thought, hope *does* depend upon a vision of a better future, and secondly that, *pace* the 'abstract' utopians whom these Marxists rightly mock, a vision of a better future does not require an abstract description of a better society.

Unfortunately, however, whilst Bloch does avoid abstract descriptions of a better society, he fails to avoid the messianic implications associated with such by Marx. These implications are that one will deny that one's vision is a subjective abstraction and claim instead that it is the truth, and one will then proceed to argue that the emancipation of humanity depends upon the realisation of one's own particular pedantic cerebrations. Now, I do not think it necessary to establish the fact that the cultural products which supposedly prefigure the Totum of Authentic All were nothing more than a spurious list of Bloch's personal likes. It is necessary, however, to stress the fact that Bloch heralded this list as *the truth*. Time and time again, Bloch employed the language of 'objective truth' and 'what is right' to describe his vision of Authentic Being, and time and time again he argued that the emancipation of humanity depended upon everybody else being taught to realise that his vision of Authentic Being was the truth. 'Hope', said Bloch, 'seeks the truth of history' (1976: 5), and Bloch knew what this truth is — it is the Totum, the All, the Ultimatum of Authentic Being; it is the truth which man is but has never been. The key to realising this truth then lay in the little man being taught to focus on those things which Bloch personally thought prefigured it. The messianic elitism implicit in such claims needs no further elaboration.

One particular phrase of Bloch's has been seized upon as a means of summarising his project, and that phrase is 'educated hope'. For Bloch, the emancipation of humanity depended upon humanity's hope being educated and trained to focus on

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

what is right, or rather on what Bloch in his infinite wisdom thought was right. Comparing Bloch's 'educated hope' to Morris' 'education of desire', Levitas is therefore right to suggest that

the retrieval of utopia by Marxism does not need a concept like that of educated hope . . . For both educated hope and the education of desire are intrinsically evaluative concepts which cannot be made other than through the specification of the content of the good society, and through judgements about the possibility and desirability of different aspirations towards the good life . . . the process of education implied in both the education of hope and the education of desire must be recognized as one which involves explicit value-based choices, not one in which the end is, as Bloch argues, somehow objectively given as the end of a teleological unfolding of what we have all 'really' wanted since time immemorial (1990b: 25).

Bloch modestly informed us that his own personal evaluations were objectively true and he insisted that the realisation of this objective truth depended upon his own personal evaluations being taught to everyone else. As Levitas remarks, Marxism does not need ideas such as these. I would argue, however, that Bloch's messianic elitism was less the product of his own flawed teleology and more the product of the utopian framework within which this teleology sought to operate. For Bloch, like Morris and most other pro-utopians, believed that subjective hope depends upon a vision of a better future. Like Morris and most other pro-utopians again, however, he believed that the masses, precisely because they at present lacked hope, were unable to formulate their own vision. Like Morris *again*, however, but this time *unlike* most other pro-utopians, Bloch recognised that a utopia only has the power to ignite subjective hope if it claims to be something other than a *mere* utopia. As a consequence, Bloch proceeded to inform us that his vision was concrete because it was true. This, then, is where his teleology came in — it served as a means of demonstrating the truth of the vision which he knew had to be more than a vision if it was to ignite the will for revolution.

In many respects, Bloch should be commended for recognising the intricacies of Marx's project and for refusing to adopt the simplistic line followed by, amongst others, William Morris. For Morris, Marxists faced a straightforward either/or choice: either they continued to reject utopianism (the reasons for which Morris

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

quite clearly understood) and failed, as a result, to win mass support, or they endorsed utopianism because only visions of a better future (whatever the problems involved in constructing them) can inspire people and mobilise action. For Bloch, on the other hand, the situation was far more complex. He recognised that it was foolish for Marxists to adopt a utopian strategy when the fundamental flaws in this approach had been clearly demonstrated by Marx himself. Yet he also recognised that mass support and the will to revolution depended upon hope. Like Marx himself, therefore, Bloch attempted to rethink the principle of hope in terms which avoided the need for abstract utopian descriptions of the future. Unlike Marx, however, Bloch accepted the third of the triad of claims which underlie the utopian approach, and in so doing he undermined the foundations of his own project. For by explicitly accepting that hope depends upon a vision of a better future, Bloch was inevitably drawn towards the messianic elitism which follows from it. For if one proceeds on the basis that utopianism (concrete or otherwise) is a necessary political tool; if, that is, one believes that action can only be mobilised in support of a vision of a better future, then one will be forced, somewhere down the line, to claim for one's vision the status of something more than *a* vision. A vision of a better future may well inspire hope and action, but it will only do so if those who hope and act on its behalf believe that it is *right*. And such a belief is unlikely to gain widespread support if the creator of the vision concedes that it is just a vision and that there are others, maybe even better ones, around. This is why utopians who seek to use their utopia as a political tool invariably claim that their utopia is more than a utopia. This is why they claim instead that *their* vision is *right*, that *their* utopia is a universal panacea, and that the future lies in *its* realisation. This is why Bloch did the same and this is why Marx's critique of utopianism applies as much to him as it does to the 'abstract' utopianism Bloch was seeking to avoid.

7.4 Marcuse and the Dictatorship of an Educated Elite

Much like Morris and Bloch, Marcuse demonstrates an awareness of the flaws involved in a utopian approach to politics. He thus bemoans the fact that:

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

We are still confronted with the demand to state the "concrete alternative." The demand is meaningless if it asks for a blueprint of the specific institutions and relationships which would be those of the new society: they cannot be determined a priori; they will develop, in trial and error, as the new society develops. If we could form a concrete concept of the alternative today, it would not be that of an alternative: the possibilities of the new society are sufficiently "abstract," i.e., removed from and incongruous with the established universe to defy any attempt to identify them in terms of this universe (1969a: 86).

One cannot define the new society in terms abstracted from the present. Instead, the new society must be allowed to form itself as it develops. This view is reiterated by Marcuse when he suggests that 'correct social theory' comprises 'two basic elements':

concern with human happiness, and the conviction that it can be attained only through a transformation of the material conditions of existence. The actual course of the transformation and the fundamental measures to be taken in order to arrive at a rational organization of society are prescribed by analysis of economic and political conditions in the given historical situation. The subsequent construction of the new society cannot be the object of theory, for it is to occur as the free creation of the liberated individuals (1968a: 135).

The analysis of economic and political conditions reveals the measures to be taken in order to transform the material conditions of existence into a realm of happiness. It does not and cannot, however, prescribe the 'form' to be taken by this happy society. On the contrary, Marcuse believes that this can only be prescribed by those who, in the future, will actually construct the rational society. Marcuse thus repeats and accepts Marx's proscription against foreclosing the future.

He then goes even further and proclaims that 'critical theory is not concerned with the realization of ideals brought into social struggles from outside' (1968a: 146). This is because such concerns tend to imply 'the idea of an educational dictatorship, exercised by those who are supposed to have acquired knowledge of the real Good' (1969b: 181). The utopian process, in other words, is irredeemably elitist and authoritarian — the utopian will claim to have accessed 'the truth' and will then attempt to impose this truth upon the social struggle 'from outside', in the form of an educational dictatorship. Marcuse thus accepts the messianic implications ascribed to utopianism by Marx and he tells us that his own critical theory is to have nothing to do with it as a result.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

As we did with Morris and Bloch, therefore, we need to emphasise from the outset that Marcuse accepted Marx's critique of utopianism and defined his own project in terms of this critique. Like Morris and Bloch again, however, Marcuse found himself unable to avoid the philanthropic and messianic elitism typical of the utopian process. The key to understanding his inability to do this, it will be argued here, lies in his acceptance of the claim that the *content* of socialism needs to be defined. For Marcuse was convinced that,

to claim an ethical and moral right, a revolutionary movement must be able to give rational grounds for its chances to grasp real possibilities of human freedom and happiness, and it must be able to demonstrate the adequacy of its means for obtaining this end (1968b: 135).

A revolutionary movement needs to demonstrate the unfreedom of the present and the possibility of freedom in the future; it needs to show how human, technical and material progress can be made to serve freedom and happiness; and it needs to do so in order to claim the ethical and moral right to destroy the present. Whilst different in specific content, this argument takes the same form as the third of the triad of claims underlying the utopian approach; the claim that hope (engendered by the sense that socialism is a moral imperative), and thus mass support, depends upon a vision of a better future (or at the very least, a rational prognosis of future happiness and freedom).

This conclusion is only reinforced by Marcuse's conviction that:

A Marxian analysis cannot seek comfort "in the long run." In this "long run," the system will indeed collapse, but Marxian theory cannot prophesy which form of society (if any) will replace it. Within the framework of the objective conditions, the alternatives depend on the intelligence and the will, the consciousness and the sensibility, of human beings (1972: 29).

Conceding that the victory of socialism is not the inevitable outcome of the collapse of capitalism, it thus becomes incumbent upon the human will to make the link between the two. Marcuse then expands upon the nature of the objective conditions and the human sensibility required for the realisation of socialism when he argues that:

There can be no blind necessity in tendencies that terminate in a free and self-conscious society . . . The revolution depends indeed upon a totality of objective conditions: it

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

requires a certain attained level of material and intellectual culture, a self-conscious and organized working class on an international scale, acute class struggle. These become revolutionary conditions, however, only if seized upon and directed by a conscious activity that has in mind the socialist goal (1983: 314).

Because socialism cannot be grounded entirely in the material conditions of the present, the working class needs to be guided in its struggle by a conscious awareness of the *goal* it is striving for. Only if the will of human beings is driven by a conscious awareness of the goal itself will the victory of socialism emerge from the ashes of capitalism. Not only, that is, does the socialist goal need to be defined in order to imbue it with a moral right, it also needs to be defined in order to direct the activity of the revolutionary subjects.

The similarity between Marcuse's project and the utopian process becomes even more evident when Marcuse describes the task of philosophers such as himself in the following terms:

Philosophy reaches its end when it has formulated its view of a world in which reason is realised. If at that point reality contains the conditions necessary to materialise reason in fact, thought can cease to concern itself with the ideal . . . Critical thinking does not cease, but assumes a new form. The efforts of reason devolve upon social theory and social practice (1983: 28).

Philosophy thus concerns itself with formulating a world in which reason is realised. Once reality has progressed to the stage where this world can in fact be realised, philosophy turns its attention to the social theory and practice required in order to make this realisable world real. This seems to imply two things. The first is that a theoretical precondition for social practice is a view of a world in which reason is realised, and the second is that the task of formulating this view belongs to the philosopher. Phrased differently, this could be taken to mean that people need a vision of a better future before they can act and that the people themselves are unable to formulate such a vision. Such claims, as we know, are fundamental to the utopian approach adopted by Morris and Bloch and ostensibly rejected by Marcuse himself.

A tension thus emerges in Marcuse's work between, a) knowing that socialism cannot be described, that the new society should be allowed to form itself, and

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

that imposing one's own ideal upon the social struggle from outside leads to an authoritarian elitism, and b) believing that socialism's moral authority depends upon its being able to demonstrate the possibility of future freedom, that the realisation of this future freedom will depend upon conscious activity directed towards the socialist goal, and that philosophy can demonstrate the possibility of this goal because it is able to formulate a view of a world in which reason is realised. This tension is aggravated somewhat by Marcuse's belief that he himself had formulated a vision of a world in which reason is realised. For Marcuse had a definite answer to what Vincent Geoghegan terms the 'central question of Marcuse's social theory: 'what is authentic existence, and how is it at all possible?'' (1981: 52). Peter Lind describes Marcuse's visionary answer thus:

Marcuse's view of the good society is one of co-operation, mutual understanding and all round individual development. It is a society where all will be able to engage in the type of work which most suits their needs and their aspirations. It is a society where all share equally in the available resources; it is a society where all will take part, on a basis of equality and fairness, in the various forms of necessary labour which will remain to be done. This labour will be reduced to a minimum by a rational use of modern techniques, and made more attractive through an extensive exchangeability of functions. All decisions concerning the distribution of necessary labour will be based on joint planning decisions in which all members of society participate on as full and equal a basis as possible. The overriding concern will at all times be the best satisfaction of each individual's needs and faculties, and all round sexuality, pervasive sensuality and aesthetic demands will all figure prominently among these needs. The individual will alone choose to engage in any given area of activity — with the exception of necessary rational labour, where mutual agreement will prevail — and there will be no other constraints than those following naturally from the need to let others similarly enjoy their full share of satisfaction and happiness through their own freely chosen activities (1985: 279).

From beginning to end, Marcuse believed that this is what freedom entailed. The overriding concern of the good society would be the satisfaction of each individual's *true* needs, and these Marcuse had identified as the need for all-round development, all-round sexuality, pervasive sensuality, mutual understanding, aesthetic stimulation and the need to labour only if it was *necessary*. These needs Marcuse describes elsewhere as 'the vital need for joy, for happiness with a good conscience', 'the vital biological need for peace', 'the need for calm, the need to be alone, with oneself or with others whom one has chosen oneself, the need for the beautiful, the need for "undeserved" happiness', and the need for a society 'in

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

which work becomes play' (1970: 66-68). These new needs would, in turn, require the development of a new type of 'man', 'a type of man with a different sensitivity as well as consciousness: men who would speak a different language, have different gestures, follow different impulses; men who would have developed an instinctual barrier against cruelty, brutality, ugliness' (1969a: 21). Informing this vision of a new type of 'man' with a new breed of needs, which Marcuse was to term the need for 'polymorphous sexuality', lay the basic desire 'to make the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labour' (1969b: 13). Much like Marx, then, Marcuse's vision of freedom was concerned less with institutional arrangements than it was with what defined the truly human individual, and his 'project' thus became one of liberating this individual from the restraints and irrationalities which surround and repress it within capitalism.

Where, however, does this leave Marcuse's claim that socialism cannot be defined? What becomes of his claim that the new society, and the individuals which inhabit it, must be allowed to form themselves, through trial and error? By identifying the needs which will define the truly human individual, Marcuse seems to be foreclosing the future *almost completely* and inhibiting the possibility of any future self-determination. To his credit, Marcuse was aware of this problem, and the tension it produced was to frame his entire work. For on the one hand, he sincerely believed that socialism needed a moral imperative and just as sincerely believed that he had provided this in the form of his vision of freedom. On the other hand, however, he was continually plagued by the fear that this vision was 'utopian' and thus open to criticism on the grounds of philanthropic elitism.

In order to defend himself against such criticisms, Marcuse never (to my knowledge at least) even *once* conceded that his vision of the emancipated society was a utopia. In 'Protosocialism and Late Capitalism', he did argue that his conception of socialism was a 'concrete utopia' (1980: 25), but by this he merely meant that socialism was 'an already existing, real possibility — indeed a necessity' (ibid.: 26). And whilst he once remarked, in a lecture entitled 'The End

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

of Utopia', that 'we must face the possibility that the path to socialism may proceed from science to utopia and not from utopia to science' (1970: 63), this was merely phrasing 'in a provocative form' his basic claim that socialism was no longer a utopia at all (ibid.). Indeed, Marcuse proceeded to emphasise his belief that:

All the material and intellectual forces which could be put to work for the realization of a free society are at hand. That they are not used for that purpose is to be attributed to the total mobilization of existing society against its own potential for liberation. But this situation in no way makes the idea of radical transformation itself a utopia (ibid.: 64).

Because the free society was now realisable, it was no longer a utopia. Hence the title of the lecture: 'The End of Utopia'. The 'provocative' idea that we should proceed 'from science to utopia' really meant, therefore, that we should proceed from science to the realisation of a utopia whose status as a utopia had now come to an end.

More often than not, in fact, when Marcuse refers to 'utopia' he is deriding those who continually refer to socialism in such terms. He could thus state that:

It may well be that precisely in those aspects of socialism which are today ridiculed as utopian, lies the decisive difference, the contrast between an authentic socialist society and the established societies, even the most advanced industrial societies (1969c: 20).

Marcuse's point here, then, was not that *he* endorsed a utopian conception of socialism. Quite the contrary. What he meant was that he endorsed a conception of socialism that was ridiculed by *others* as utopian. This was, indeed, a standard defence mechanism employed by Marcuse. In order to allay any fears concerning the utopian nature of his vision, he claimed that it could only be derided as utopian by those who wished to preserve the present system. Thus: 'What is denounced as "utopian" is no longer that which has "no place" and cannot have any place in the historical universe, but rather that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies' (1969a: 3-4). Sometimes he went even further, in fact, and claimed that *because* his vision was derided as utopian, this indicated that it was the truth: 'When truth cannot be realized within the established social order, it always appears to the latter as mere utopia. This transcendence speaks

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

not against, but for, its truth' (1968a: 143). Whatever others thought of it, then, the fact remained that the society he envisioned was not a utopia. Even in *Eros and Civilization*, which supposedly represents the archetypal exposition of his 'utopia', Marcuse makes it clear that: 'The notion of a non-repressive civilization will be discussed not as an abstract and utopian speculation' (1969b: 24). Emphasising the distinction between the society he envisages and a Utopia, he then informs us that 'Utopias are susceptible to unrealistic blueprints; the conditions for a free society are not. They are a matter of reason' (ibid.: 181).

Let us be clear about what Marcuse is doing here; he is offering a vision of socialism, even though the possibilities of the new society are so incongruous with the established universe as to defy any attempt to identify them in terms of this universe, and he is then suggesting that this vision is in no sense utopian. Already, then, one encounters the phenomenon of self-denial typical of political utopians. Marcuse, however, *needs* to be able to argue that his vision is a matter of reason in order to avoid the accusations of philanthropic elitism which are rightly levelled at those who seek to realise visions which are *not* a matter of reason. Hence the tension within Marcuse's thought; he needs to define that which defies definition because he proceeds from the premise that socialism's moral authority requires such a definition.

This tension often leads Marcuse into a tangled mess of ideas. In 'Philosophy and Critical Theory' (1937), for example, he begins by telling us that

a social situation has come about in which the realization of reason no longer needs to be restricted to pure thought and will. If reason means shaping life according to men's free decision on the basis of their knowledge, then the demand for reason henceforth means the creation of a social organization in which individuals can collectively regulate their lives in accordance with their needs (1968a: 141-42).

A world in which reason is realised thus becomes a social organisation in which individuals can collectively regulate their lives in accordance with their needs. For Marcuse, these are the need for what he later termed 'polymorphous sexuality'. A world based around the satisfaction of these, however, is no longer a matter of pure thought and will. Instead, it is based upon the findings of 'constructive

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

concepts, which comprehend not only the given reality but, simultaneously, its abolition and the new reality that is to follow' (ibid.: 145). He thus adds that: 'In the theoretical reconstruction of the social process, the critique of current conditions and the analysis of their tendencies necessarily include future-oriented components' (ibid.). Armed with his constructive concepts, Marcuse is thus able to analyse the tendencies of the present and comprehend the new reality that is to follow.

Somewhat perversely, however, Marcuse then tells us that comprehending the new reality that is to follow is the task, not of reason, but of fantasy. For:

The abyss between rational and present reality cannot be bridged by conceptual thought. In order to retain what is not yet present as a goal in the present, phantasy is required . . . Owing to its unique capacity to "intuit" an object though the latter be not present and to create something new out of given material of cognition, imagination denotes a considerable degree of independence from the given, of freedom amid a world of unfreedom. In surpassing what is present, it can anticipate the future (ibid.: 154).

Surely Marcuse cannot be suggesting here that the construction of a future world of freedom should be left to the imagination. This would be nothing short of a defence of utopianism, whereas Marcuse defends his vision of a future world of freedom on the sole basis that it is not a utopia. Marcuse thus qualifies his eulogy to the imagination by remarking that: 'True, in phantasy one can imagine anything. But critical theory does not envision an endless horizon of possibilities' (ibid.). Instead, critical theory demands a *disciplined* imagination, an imagination whose 'freedom', i.e., that unique attribute which allows it to intuit at all, 'disappears' because its remit is 'prescribed by the level of technological development' (ibid.).

What Marcuse seems to be arguing, then, is that one analyses the present level of technological development and identifies the tendencies within it. One then imagines the possibilities to which these tendencies could give rise and thus anticipates the future. This, however, simply will not do, for Marcuse both wants and needs to say much more than this. His vision of a world based around polymorphous sexuality needs to be more than *technically* possible if it is to avoid the charges of utopianism. For if a 'utopia' is simply a vision that is technically

impossible, then virtually no examples of it exist in the world of literature. Fourier's vision of Harmony, for example, was possible in the sense that it did not contradict the laws of technological development. What made it a utopia, however, was the fact that Fourier conjured his conception of the individuals that would inhabit his technically possible society from his imagination. If Marcuse wants to argue that his vision of a world in which reason is realised is not a utopia, he therefore needs to argue that his conception of the truly human individual is not a product of his imagination, however disciplined this may be by the level of technological development.

In view of this, he suggests that his conception of polymorphous sexuality is based upon 'the demonstration of what are found to be human potentialities' (ibid.: 146). These potentialities, and the needs and wants corresponding to them, he adds, are 'already unfolding' (ibid.: 155). He thus claims that his ideal possesses a concrete footing in the present because it involves the realisation of needs, wants and potentialities the existence of which can be demonstrated *now*. Unfortunately, however, Marcuse refrains from telling us how he can demonstrate the 'already unfolding' nature of these human potentialities. Instead, he merely argues that:

Their truth content, which surmounts their social conditioning, presupposes not an eternal consciousness that transcendently constitutes the individual consciousness of historical subjects but only those particular historical subjects whose consciousness expresses itself in critical theory. It is only with and for this consciousness that the "surpassing" content becomes visible in its real truth (ibid.: 148-49).

Critical theory, then, is able to *demonstrate* that the needs, wants and potentialities identified by Marcuse are *true* because these are the needs and wants of those 'whose consciousness expresses itself in critical theory'! Critical theory thus becomes the object of its own analysis, identifying itself as the truth it set out to discover. Although, therefore, Marcuse repeatedly tells us that he is concerned with fulfilling needs, wants and potentialities that can be demonstrated now, all he offers is a circular and ultimately vacuous argument: Reason demands that certain needs be fulfilled; Critical Theory can determine what these needs are; these needs are the needs of those whose consciousness expresses itself in Critical Theory.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

'Philosophy and Critical Theory' thus serves to highlight the tension within Marcuse's thought. For he wants to formulate a view of a world in which reason is realised and yet avoid utopianism whilst so doing. He thus suggests that the realisation of reason is no longer a matter of pure thought and will but is somehow tied in with the present 'social situation'. When he attempts to expand upon this insight, however, he finds himself conceding that only fantasy and imagination can bridge the abyss between the present and a future rational society. Realising that this sounds rather like a defence of utopianism, he then suggests that the imagination should be disciplined by the level of technological development. Realising now that this still does not allow him to avoid the spectre of utopianism, he proceeds to argue that the individual's true polymorphous sexuality is already unfolding and is therefore demonstrable. Faced with the inevitable inability to demonstrate the already unfolding nature of these needs, Marcuse ends by contriving a circular argument; critical theory knows these needs to be true because their truth content is rendered visible by critical theory.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Marcuse abandons this line of argument entirely and attempts to develop a new model in *Eros and Civilisation* (1955). This new model he describes thus:

The old formula, the development of prevailing needs and faculties, seemed to be inadequate; the emergence of new, qualitatively different needs and faculties seemed to be the prerequisite, the content of liberation (1969b: 13).

The old formula, adopted in 'Philosophy and Critical Theory', seemed inadequate. Liberation now required, not the development of needs and potentialities the existence of which could somehow be demonstrated, but the emergence of *new* ones. The needs to which Marcuse is referring are still the same as those referred to in 'Philosophy and Critical Theory', it is merely his assessment of *how* they will emerge that has changed. For he now recognises that these needs are qualitatively different to any which presently prevail and have yet, therefore, to emerge. How, however, can a conception of the world which is based around the emergence of new needs be 'a matter of reason'? Is not such a conception a matter for the

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

imagination instead? These are the questions to which the tension in Marcuse's thought now gives rise.

As a means of dealing with these questions, Marcuse asks another — with regards to 'the content of liberation', 'who is entitled to establish and enforce the objective standards?' (ibid.: 181). He answers as follows:

From Plato to Rousseau, the only honest answer is the idea of an educational dictatorship, exercised by those who are supposed to have acquired knowledge of the real Good. The answer has since become obsolete: knowledge of the available means for creating a humane existence for all is no longer confined to a privileged elite (ibid.).

If no longer confined to a privileged elite, however, then who now has access to this knowledge? According to Marcuse: 'The facts are all too open, and the individual consciousness would safely arrive at them if it were not methodically arrested and diverted' (ibid.). Marcuse's new reality principle, based around the development of qualitatively new needs, is 'a matter of reason' rather than a Utopia because the individual consciousness would arrive at the same conclusion were it not 'methodically' forced into reaching different ones. Marcuse thus endorses the Lukàcsian notion of an 'imputed consciousness' — x is the conclusion that the individual consciousness *would* 'rationally' arrive at were it not ideologically manipulated into thinking y. As it was with Lukàcs, however, such a line of argument was only employed as a means of avoiding the central question it was supposed to answer. The question was how one demonstrates the truth value of a consciousness that does not actually exist, and by arguing that such a consciousness is true because people *should* possess the needs associated with it, Marcuse, like Lukàcs again, fails to convince.

What needs to be emphasised, however, is not the fact that Marcuse failed to solve the problem he set himself, but rather the reason why he posed this problem in the first place. For Marcuse thought it necessary for Marxism to define the content of liberation. It was no use merely criticising the irrationalities of the present; in order to gain a moral imperative, in order to convince people that the present *has to be* destroyed, and in order therefore to mobilise support in favour

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

of socialism, one had to be able to demonstrate how and why future freedom was possible. Marcuse, however, was also rueful of the implications which generally flow from such a line of thought. For until now, he tells us, 'the only honest answer' to the problem of realising a definition of freedom has been the notion of an educational dictatorship, exercised by those who are supposed to have acquired knowledge of the real Good. And as far as Marcuse, at least up until *Eros and Civilization*, was concerned, such an idea was anathema. The problem, then, was this; how does one define the content of freedom without supposing to have acquired knowledge of the real Good? And if one can define the content of freedom, then how does one realise it without imposing this definition upon the social struggle from outside? How, that is, does one avoid the notion that people have to be forced to be free?

In 'Philosophy and Critical Theory' and *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse attempts to kill both questions with one stone. For he argues that *his* definition of freedom *is* true because it is grounded *in* the social struggle and will not, therefore, have to be imposed upon it from outside. In 'Philosophy and Critical Theory', he thus suggested that his definition of freedom was based upon needs and potentialities that were 'already unfolding', and in *Eros and Civilization* he argued that the individual consciousness would arrive at his definition of freedom if only it were unfettered from the ideological distortions which surrounded it. Underlying both these models, then, was an implicit belief that the content of liberation could be defined by the subjects who were to be liberated. Unlike Morris and Bloch, who argued that because the people lacked hope they were unable to formulate a vision which incorporated it, Marcuse attempted to argue that the vision of hope itself came from within the people it was to liberate. And, indeed, Marcuse *had to* argue along these lines. For if one believes that a vision of a better future is a necessary precondition for social action, then one will have to argue that the people themselves are able to formulate such a vision if one is to avoid the philanthropic elitism traditionally ascribed to the utopian process. This is what we

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

saw Daniel Singer trying to do in the previous chapter, and this is what Marcuse was trying to do in his earlier works.

Unfortunately, however, Marcuse found himself faced by the problem which faces Singer today. For he had to concede, firstly, that the need for polymorphous sexuality was not, in fact, already unfolding within the empirical lives of the majority of people, and secondly that the individual consciousness showed no signs at all of arriving safely at his conclusions. He thus faced the problem posed by the first of the triad of claims which underlie the utopian framework; that people at present lack hope enough to either imagine or desire any alternatives. If this is the case, however, then what happens to Marcuse's belief that one can define the content of freedom without having to impose this definition on the social struggle from outside? The answer is, of course, that it disintegrates and Marcuse finds himself (reluctantly at first) advocating the educational dictatorship that he spent his early works trying desperately to avoid.

Signs that Marcuse's faith in the everyday rationality of his vision had begun to waver first appeared in *Soviet Marxism*, published in 1958, only three years after *Eros and Civilization*. For here Marcuse says of Lenin that

his struggle against 'economism' and the doctrine of spontaneous mass action, his dictum that class consciousness has to be brought upon the proletariat 'from without', anticipate the later factual transformation of the proletariat from the subject to an object of the revolutionary process (1971: 32).

This quite clearly contradicts Marcuse's earlier claim that critical theory does *not* concern itself with ideas brought into the social struggle 'from without', and quite clearly, therefore, signifies a *volte face* on Marcuse's part. Indeed, in the 1966 Preface to *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse concedes that his views had changed radically in the years since the book had first been penned. For rather than the individual consciousness being able to safely grasp the content of liberation, Marcuse now suggests that 'the very scope and effectiveness of the democratic introjection have suppressed the historical subject, the agent of revolution: free people are not in need of liberation, and the oppressed are not strong enough to

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

liberate themselves . . . No philosophy, no theory can undo the democratic introjection of the masters into their subjects' (1969b: 13-14).

What the democratic introjection of the masters into their subjects means for Marcuse is that the subjects have been instilled with what Bloch had termed 'false hope'. Marcuse himself referred to such a phenomenon as 'The Happy Consciousness — the belief that the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods' (1964: 84). The hope of the historical subject now finds itself directed towards the present system rather than towards the rational society which lies beyond it. This was, of course, the theme taken up in *One Dimensional Man* (1964), that masterpiece of pessimism. For there he argued that the individual consciousness was now haunted by the spectre of 'one-dimensional thought', 'in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe' (ibid.: 12). The individual consciousness was, in other words, unable to think beyond the present universe and was unable, therefore, to formulate a vision of a better, or even different, future.

Within a decade of the publication of *Eros and Civilization*, then, Marcuse's concerns had shifted dramatically. No longer was he convinced that his vision of freedom could be grounded *in* the social struggle. Instead, he was confronted by the fact that the only visions of freedom engendered by the social struggle were those that had been introjected into it by the masters. In spite of this, however, Marcuse still believed it possible for philosophy to formulate a view of a world in which reason is realised. In *One Dimensional Man*, therefore, he could claim that because critical theory 'analyses society in the light of its used and unused or abused capacities for improving the human condition', it can thus 'identify and define the possibilities of an optimal development' (ibid.: xii).

We are familiar with claims such as this from 'Philosophy and Critical Theory'. There, critical theory had been able to identify the possibilities for the optimal development of the human condition because it could demonstrate the existence of

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

actual human potentialities that were already unfolding in real people now. In *One Dimensional Man*, however, the exact opposite was the case. For now Marcuse tells us that 'critical analysis must dissociate itself from that which it strives to comprehend; the philosophic terms must be other than the ordinary ones in order to elucidate the full meaning of the latter' (ibid.: 193). In order to regain its ability to intuit, critical theory must *retreat* from the world of everyday needs and *dissociate* itself from the world of the historical subjects it is striving to comprehend. Philosophy must purge itself of the everyday and take refuge in its own uncontaminated language, and it must do this because, as Marcuse succinctly puts it: 'Remoteness, not accessibility, is the key to culture's 'truth', its antagonistic function' (ibid.: 70).

Marcuse's conversion is now complete. From seeking to justify his vision in terms of its accessibility to the individual consciousness, he now claims that it serves an antagonistic function solely because of its remoteness. Two factors explain why Marcuse changes his position in this way. The first is that he came to despair of the individual consciousness and thus came to realise that it was never going to grasp the truth of his vision. The second was that Marcuse still considered it necessary for the content of freedom to be defined. Because, however, the everyday needs of the masses could no longer serve as a basis for this definition, the content of freedom had to be defined in terms dissociated from them. The repercussions of such a line of argument were immense. For now that the majority of people had become victims of The Happy Consciousness, and the key to critical theory's power lay in its remoteness, Marcuse could hardly avoid the conclusion he had spent years trying to avoid; that a knowledge of the Good Life *was indeed* confined to a privileged elite.

The fact that Marcuse had talked himself into this position troubled him greatly. So much so, in fact, that he sometimes preferred to provide no answers at all rather than accept that this was 'the only honest' one. In 'The End of Utopia' he thus remarks that,

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

for new, revolutionary needs to develop, the mechanisms that reproduce the old needs must be abolished. In order for the mechanisms to be abolished, there must first be a need to abolish them. That is the circle in which we are placed, and I do not know how to get out of it (1970: 80).

He did, in fact, know how to get out of it, and he broaches the subject of 'a dictatorship' here, although he remarks that this is 'one of the things that most disquiets me' (ibid.: 76).

Unfortunately, however, the framework within which Marcuse was now operating forced him to come to terms with this disquieting thing. For he remained convinced, as he always had done, that the content of freedom needed to be defined. Socialists needed to show their critics, and the people in general, that theirs was no vacuous dream, that their call to destroy the present was no empty, pious wish, and that their promise of freedom was real. They therefore needed to describe what this freedom entailed and they needed to show that its realisation was a possibility. In order to do this, they could not make do with utopias. Describing imaginary societies would establish no moral authority and would certainly not inspire people to destroy the present. If people were going to do that then they would need more motivation than the nebulous contents of someone's imagination. They would need to be shown that the content of freedom described by socialists was *true*. Recognising this, Marcuse began his project by attempting to both demonstrate the truth of his vision *and* avoid the notion that this truth was to be imposed from outside. In order to achieve this feat, he would have to show that the vision itself was the product of the historical subjects within the social struggle. This, however, he failed to do, because he came to realise that the subjects within the social struggle lacked hope and were unable to formulate a vision of freedom at all. He thus came to accept the first of the triad claims which underlie the utopian approach. He nonetheless *still* had to demonstrate that his vision of freedom was the truth, because the moral authority of socialism depended upon it more than ever. He thus *had to* come to terms with the fact that his ideas now implied the existence of a privileged elite who had gained access to a knowledge of the real Good: Given a) that people were generally unable to

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

formulate a vision of the Good, and b) that the moral authority of socialism depends upon its vision of the Good being true, it followed that c) the task of formulating a true vision of the Good was to be left to an enlightened and privileged elite.

Once he had reached this conclusion, Marcuse (with notable exceptions such as the disquieting 'The End of Utopia') proceeds to defend it as if he had never thought anything else. In his essay on 'Repressive Tolerance' (written in 1965), for example, he proclaims that 'there *is* an objective truth which can be discovered, ascertained only in learning and comprehending that which is and that which can be and ought to be done for the sake of improving mankind. This common and historical 'ought' is not immediately evident, at hand: it has to be uncovered by 'cutting through', 'splitting', 'breaking asunder' the given material — separating right and wrong, good and bad, correct and incorrect' (1969d: 103-104). With regards to the question of who should be entrusted with the task of uncovering this collective 'ought', Marcuse is quite specific:

The question, who is qualified to make all these distinctions, definitions, identifications for the society as a whole, has now one logical answer, namely, everyone 'in the maturity of his faculties' as a human being, everyone who has learned to think rationally and autonomously. The answer to Plato's educational dictatorship is the democratic educational dictatorship of free men (ibid.: 120).

In the postscript written in 1968, Marcuse is even more specific when it comes to identifying those who have learned to think rationally and autonomously:

If the final democratic criterion of the declared opinion of the majority no longer (or rather not yet) prevails, if vital ideas, values, and ends of human progress no longer (or rather not yet) enter, as competing equals, the formation of public opinion, if the people are no longer (or rather not yet) sovereign but 'made' by the real sovereign powers — is there any alternative other than the dictatorship of an 'elite' over the people? (ibid.: 134).

The common and historical 'ought' is not immediately evident and therefore has to be uncovered by intellectuals. Indeed, only the intellectuals are in a position to uncover this ought because the majority of people possess no vital ideas or values. This 'ought' then has to be foisted on the people because they are in no position to understand its objective truth. Marcuse thus adopts, in its entirety, the

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

authoritarian elitism which he himself had once criticised and which he himself equated with the politics of utopianism.

What is interesting here is the fact that Marcuse never wavers from the conviction that his definition of freedom is the truth. This is particularly interesting given the way in which Marcuse originally distinguished his vision from those of previous pretenders to the truth. For as we saw earlier, the notion of an educational dictatorship had become obsolete because Marcuse's truth, unlike those of Plato and Rousseau, was 'all too open' and was readily accessible to the individual consciousness. Now, however, Marcuse is saying that his truth is hidden and has to be uncovered by means of strenuous intellectual labour, and that only a small elite of people is capable of accessing it anyway. And yet, of course, it *still* remains 'the truth'.

The events of 1968 altered Marcuse's perception of things a little, but not fundamentally. What the events did, in fact, at least as far as Marcuse himself was concerned, was render concrete a set of ideas which had hitherto been merely abstract. For whereas Marcuse had previously spoken of an objective truth that can be discovered by the intellectual act of breaking asunder the given material, he could now observe a group of intellectuals *really* breaking asunder the given material and discovering the objective truth (i.e., his vision of 'authentic' existence). In the preface to *An Essay on Liberation*, he could therefore remark that: 'The militants have invalidated the concept of "utopia" — they have denounced a viscous ideology' (1969a: ix). The 'militant intelligentsia' had, in other words, demonstrated the truth behind what Marcuse had been saying for so long, namely, that his 'utopian' vision was not a utopia and that those who denounced it as such were merely viscous ideologues. He could subsequently ask of his belief in the development of a 'polymorphous sexuality': 'A utopian conception?' (ibid.: 22). Why no! For this conception had become real in the events of May '68: 'The new sensibility has become a political force. It crosses the frontier between the capitalist and communist orbit' (ibid.).

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

As far as Marcuse himself was concerned, then, the events of 1968 re-established the link between his vision of authentic existence and the real needs felt by real people. He greeted the events with exuberant joy because they enabled his talk of new vital needs and a new type of 'man' to escape the realms of pure abstraction. Temporarily at least, they also enabled him to avoid the authoritarian elitism implicit in his article on 'Repressive Tolerance'. For the notion of a dictatorship of an 'elite' over the people was now abandoned in favour of ascribing a purely catalytic role to the intellectuals. The 'militant intelligentsia', together with the lumpenproletariat and the 'ghetto population', 'by virtue of their consciousness and their needs, function as potential catalysts of rebellion' (1969a: 51-2). The experience of 1968, of the workers taking their lead from the students, had given Marcuse a little more faith in the one-dimensional 'men' of the Western world, and whilst he still conceded that 'the catalysts of transformation operate "from without"' (ibid.: 55), the notion of an external catalyst was somewhat more palatable than that of an educational dictatorship.

Whilst, however, Marcuse's faith in the intelligentsia never waned, his faith in its ability to catalyse the workers into self-conscious revolutionary action did. In this sense, the events of 1968 gave rise to a brief flirtation with the idea that the workers could *themselves* recognise the objective truth behind his vision of authentic existence once a revolutionary situation had actually got underway. This flirtation was only brief, however, as Marcuse soon came to realise that the workers would never come to realise the truth behind his vision unless they were *taught* to do so. The only real upshot of 1968, therefore, was that Marcuse had found a social group — militant students — who, according to him, *did* experience the new vital needs of which he had spoken as real. As a consequence, his vision of a 'new type of man' was not utopian because the militant students had invalidated the concept of utopia by virtue of having become this new type of 'man'.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

The problem still faced by Marcuse, however, was this; that whilst his own personal vision of human emancipation had now become a vision shared by the militant intelligentsia, the vast majority of people still remained victims of The Happy Consciousness. Whilst, that is, Marcuse had now discovered a revolutionary subject, this revolutionary subject was still nothing more than an elite. Hence the fact that the postscript to 'Repressive Tolerance', written in 1968, could imagine no alternative other than 'the dictatorship of an 'elite' over the people'. The events of 1968, that is, had done nothing to alter the fact that, because the majority of people possessed no vital ideas, they were unable to discover the 'objective truth'. This truth, therefore, was still only accessible to those 'outside' the social struggle and still had to be introduced 'from without'. Marcuse thus remained committed to the philanthropic/authoritarian elitism implicit in the utopia-parading-as-truth approach to politics.

In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972), in fact, Marcuse confidently heralds such authoritarian elitism as the only possible socialist strategy. The book begins innocuously enough, resurrecting the claim that

capitalism cannot satisfy the needs which it creates. The rising standard of living itself expresses this dynamic: it enforced the constant creation of needs that could be satisfied on the market; it is now fostering *transcending* needs which cannot be satisfied without abolishing the capitalist mode of production (1972: 16).

In diametrical opposition to Marx, however, Marcuse argues that the 'material conditions' of the *proletariat's* existence mean that *it cannot* develop such transcendent needs and thus attain a revolutionary consciousness:

To be sure, revolutionary consciousness has always expressed itself only in revolutionary situations; the difference is that, now, the condition of the working class in the society at large militates against the development of such a consciousness. The integration of the largest part of the working class into the capitalist society is not a surface phenomenon; it has its roots in the infrastructure itself, in the political economy of monopoly capitalism (ibid.: 6).

It is rather at the fringes of the *bourgeoisie*, in the militant intelligentsia, that a revolutionary consciousness premised on transcendent needs emerges: 'the radical goals as well as the radical strategy are confined to small minoritarian groups, middle class rather than proletarian in their compositions' (ibid.: 4-5). From this

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

Marcuse proposes an emancipatory strategy based around the middle class intelligentsia educating everyone else into feeling their needs as their own:

The only counterforce is the development of an effectively organized radical Left, assuming the vast task of *political education*, dispelling the false and mutilated consciousness of the people so that they themselves experience their condition, and its abolition, as vital need, and apprehend the ways and means of their liberation (ibid.: 28).

The strategy of an educational dictatorship of the intellectual elite, which he denounced in *Eros and Civilisation*, which disquieted him in 'The End of Utopia', and which he justified by special pleading in 'Repressive Tolerance', is now defended openly by Marcuse. Conceding that 'the New Left assumes an apparently elitarian character by virtue of its intellectual content: the concern of "intellectuals" rather than "workers"' (ibid.: 32), he pronounces that anyone who rejects the need for such an intellectual vanguard is responsible merely for the 'ritualization' and 'petrification' of Marxist theory (ibid.: 33-34). So confident now is he in fact, that Marcuse does not even argue for some 'organic' link between the intellectuals and the workers, and specifically states that the difference between his vanguard and Lenin's is that the latter 'assumed the leadership, in theory and practice, of a working class in which it was rooted' (ibid.: 41). Marcuse's vanguard, on the other hand, does not even have its roots in the working class. Marcuse thus returns to the key theme of Remoteness: Human emancipation demands that the working classes be educated by a political elite which is a) divorced from the social struggle itself and b) able, as a consequence, to discover the 'objective truth' otherwise hidden by the social 'infrastructure' within which the struggle takes place.

The point which this section has been trying to make, however, is that Marcuse was forced into this position by the very nature of his theoretical starting point. This starting point was the conviction that the content of freedom had to be defined if socialism was ever to gain the moral initiative and thus become a potent political force. What Marcuse realised from the very outset, however, and what the pro-utopians examined in the previous chapter conveniently ignore, is that if a definition of the content of freedom *really is* to mobilise support for socialism then

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

it will have to be something *more* than a 'utopian' definition. That Marcuse realised this can be demonstrated by the fact that he *never ever* conceded that his vision of freedom was a utopia. On the contrary, this vision was paraded as nothing short of the truth. Unfortunately for Marcuse, however, this starting point led him into certain theoretical difficulties. For he was fully aware of the elitist implications involved in parading one's vision of the Good as the truth, and, as a result, he attempted to find a way of avoiding these implications. This is why, in his earlier works, he sought to ground his vision in the everyday needs of the masses or in the concept of an imputed consciousness. He sought, in other words, to avoid the elitist implications of the utopian approach by circumventing the first of the triad of claims which underlie it. The people at present *do* have hope, he claimed, and he knew this because his vision of freedom — as opposed to others' utopian visions — was derived from it.

In time, however, Marcuse came to realise that the only hope enjoyed by the people was a hope placed *in* the present system, a hope informed by the Happy Consciousness which believes that the system delivers the goods. What this did, however, was destroy the framework he had previously been trying to erect. For now it became clear that the content of liberation could not be defined in terms of the needs or the consciousness of the masses. It had to be defined in terms of something else. But the whole point he had been trying to make for so long was that *his* vision of freedom was true by virtue of being derived from the needs and the consciousness of the masses. Surely, then, if it was not derived from these then it was not, by definition, the truth. Put another way, if it was not derived from the needs or the consciousness of the masses, then it was derived from Marcuse's imagination and was, therefore, a utopia.

This is the conclusion that Marcuse could easily have come to. To the unbounded joy of the pro-utopians, he could then have claimed that, yes, his vision of the future was a utopia, but that utopian visions are required if socialism is ever to gain mass support. Marcuse did not arrive at this conclusion, however, because

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

he realised that 'utopian' visions *do not* win converts for socialism. Just like almost every utopian socialist before him, therefore — just like Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Cabet, Weitling, Bellamy, Bloch and even Morris — Marcuse denied that his utopia was a utopia. Despite the disappearance of the bases upon which its 'truth' had previously been proclaimed, Marcuse's vision of freedom was *still* the truth. To be sure, this vision only appealed to a minority of middle-class intellectuals, who maintained no organic links to the populace in general, but it was the truth nonetheless. The 'only honest answer' to the problems of the present, Marcuse ended up conceding, lay in 'a position that has been tabooed by both Marxism and liberalism: Plato's position (an educational dictatorship of the most intelligent) and Rousseau's (people must be forced to be free)' (1980: 32).

Two final things can therefore be said about Marcuse. The first is that, contrary to popular belief, he did not consider himself to be a utopian. Like all utopians who seek to use utopianism as a political tool, he claimed that his utopia was the truth. The second thing is that Marcuse claimed that his utopia was the truth because he recognised that this is the only way that it could have any effect on history. Imaginary descriptions of better societies have little political effect if their imaginary status is conceded by the author. What kind of authority is granted by one individual's pedantic cerebrations? No, utopias become political weapons when people believe that they are true. The task of the political utopian will therefore be to convince people that *their* vision is the truth, that the emancipation of humanity lies in *its* realisation, and that the hope of the hopeless masses needs to be trained to focus on *what is right*.

7.5 Conclusion.

Each of the three writers examined in this chapter defined their own project, to some degree at least, in terms of that begun by Marx. Each was fully aware of Marx's critique of utopianism and each took this critique seriously. William Morris specifically stated that socialism should be allowed to form itself and he also stated that he thought this 'better than putting forward elaborate utopian

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

schemes for the future'. Such schemes would be hopelessly speculative, he argued, because it is impossible to construct a scheme of a new society out of the materials of the old, and, in any case, the function of reformers was not so much prophesy as action. For Bloch, Marx's strictures against utopianism occupied the status of a gospel. Those who sought to construct a better world with their minds were 'abstract' utopians and abstract utopians always offered a false, non-new future. The original utopians were forgiven because they were a product of the undeveloped nature of capitalism, whereas the post-Marx utopians were frivolous peddlers of opium. As was the case with Marx and Morris, Bloch stressed the impossibility of defining socialism *now*, for its content had not yet dawned. As a consequence, those who busied themselves with utopian descriptions served no other purpose than to lead the proletariat astray. Marcuse argued along the same lines, emphasising that the nature of socialism cannot be identified in terms of this universe and that the creation of socialism will be the task, not of theorists writing now, but of liberated individuals living then. As such, Marcuse was not concerned with the realisation of utopian ideals brought into social struggles from outside. To be concerned with such would be to subscribe to the Platonic notion of an educational dictatorship led by those who had somehow acquired knowledge of the real Good.

Together, then, Morris, Bloch and Marcuse comprise a good case study, for each attempted to provide Marxism with a vision of a better future whilst avoiding the problems associated with utopianism. In spite of this, however, each ended up adopting the philanthropic, elitist and messianic position ascribed to the utopian process by Marx. They did so because each accepted the premises which underlie the typical utopian framework: that the masses lack hope and are thus unable to formulate a solution to their problems which transcends the framework of the present; and that any solution to the problems of the masses which does transcend the framework of the present will need to describe, in varying degrees of detail, an alternative to it.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

The first of these claims is formulated powerfully by each of the three thinkers under discussion. Morris believed that the poor were devoid of hope because they were unable to shut out from their view the every-day squalors in which they moved. As such, their discontent remained mere discontent. Bloch went to great lengths to describe the feeble form taken by the daydreams of the little man — daydreams which focused on money, sex or revenge and were thus ‘full of false hope’. And Marcuse tirelessly expressed his dismay that the workers had bought into the Happy Consciousness which believes that the system delivers the goods. For each, then, the workers, masses, little men or whatever, were unable to convert their dismay into demands which transcended the realms of capitalism.

Marcuse, of course, came under relentless criticism for abandoning his faith in the working class, and writer after writer accused him of betraying the spirit of Marxism (see, for example, Sedgwick, 1966; Woddis, 1972; and Mattick, 1972). In arguing that the working class believes that its interests are served by capitalism, however, Marcuse was merely reformulating the notion of false consciousness that Marx himself had developed. In arguing, therefore, that transcendent demands were unlikely to emerge from within the working class, at least unprompted, Marcuse was not at all betraying the spirit of Marxism. Nor, for that matter, were either Morris or Bloch when they opined about a lack of revolutionary hope within the general populace. They were merely observing empirical realities.

That each made such an observation is nonetheless important, for they each believed that the second statement of utopian intent followed directly from it. Because the masses lacked revolutionary hope, they argued, they needed to be presented with a vision of a better future. Morris, indeed, explicitly made the leap from ‘the poor have no hope’ to ‘the poor need to be presented with visions of a better place’. The two terms ‘hope’ and ‘dreams for the future’ were, in fact, used synonymously. Bloch, too, seemed to regard such a leap of thought necessary. For although he spent page after page explaining why socialism was

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

beyond description, and why Marx was right to refuse to describe it, he was also convinced, as we have seen, that 'Marxism is only an instruction for action when its grasp is simultaneously a grasp ahead: the concretely anticipated goal governs the concrete path' (see page 224). Hope thus became indelibly attached to the search for embodiments of concretely anticipated goals. The same is true of Marcuse, who also spent pages explaining why socialism could not be described and how it was to be created by the individuals who would inhabit it anyway. For in spite of this, he seemed drawn to the conclusion that individuals suffering from a Happy Consciousness could only be cured if they were shown a picture of 'the common and historical ought'. The moral authority of socialism, he believed, depended on it.

This line of thought is only two steps away from the prophetic messianism described by Marx. The first step is, in fact, no more than a logical conclusion derived from the arguments hitherto discussed. For if people lack revolutionary hope, and if hope depends upon a vision of a better future, then it follows that the people lacking hope will not themselves be able to formulate such a vision. The logic of this step was accepted by Morris, Bloch and Marcuse, for each of whom the vision of a better future had to come from somewhere 'outside' the social struggle itself. For Morris, it was to emerge from the minds of a few highly cultivated men who could go often to beautiful places, whilst for Bloch Authentic Being could only be prefigured by a genius and then had to be taught to the masses by, presumably, someone such as himself who had deciphered and identified these prefigurations. Marcuse differed somewhat, in the sense that he tried to ground his vision in the social struggle. Once he had accepted, however, that neither true hope nor visions of a better future were actually emerging from within the social struggle, he was forced into the idea that such a vision could only be identified and forwarded by small minoritarian middle class groups operating from outside the working class.

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

This now draws us into the second step taken by utopians on their way to messianic prophetism. For as we saw in the previous chapter, the pro-utopians are fond of making a certain anthropological generalisation, one which claims that people are more inclined to react to positives than they are to negatives. This, they then suggest, lends support to the idea that utopias inspire people in a way that scientific and rational discourse do not. Whilst this may well be true, a caveat needs to be added, and it is this: that whilst utopias may inspire people in a way that rational discourse does not, they do not inspire people unless they are declared to be something *other* than a utopia. Put another way, people will not join a coherent movement if they know that the goal for which it strives is *merely* a utopia. Singer recognised this and was forced to conclude that people will not join a coherent movement unless they *know* (i.e., have a faith based upon knowledge) *the* (in the singular) goal to be achieved. Singer recognised, that is, that people will not join a coherent movement based around a vision which is conceded from the outset to be nothing more than a personal, subjective construct. People will not be inspired by a vision which is conceded to have no more truth-value than any other 'utopian' vision.

This is why the work of Morris, Bloch and Marcuse is instructive. For the vast majority of pro-utopians stop short of actually constructing a utopia. They thus fail to recognise the steps taken by those who do construct utopias. Morris, Bloch and Marcuse, on the other hand, did attempt to formulate a vision of a better future and did attempt to find a place for it within a broadly Marxist framework. And each of them also took the further step into prophetic messianism. None of them, that is, ever conceded that their visions were purely personal, subjective constructs. For Bloch and Marcuse, their visions were nothing other than *the truth*, and this they had to be if people were to be inspired by their content. If utopianism is to serve as a political tool, such that people are motivated into action by the utopias produced, then the authors of these utopias will inevitably be led to argue that *their* utopias are *right*. This is certainly what William Morris did. For although he never went as far as Bloch and Marcuse in claiming that his vision

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

was demonstrably true, the motivating force behind his writing *News From Nowhere* serves to indicate that he considered his personal vision to be superior to competing visions, that of Edward Bellamy in particular. And who can blame Morris for thinking along these lines? If one's theoretical premises lead one to conclude that revolutionary hope depends upon people being given a picture of an alternative to the present, then one is more than likely going to prioritise and filter the various alternatives on offer. And if one goes to the trouble of writing one's own alternative then one is more than likely going to explain why it, as opposed to other alternatives, best serves the interests of revolutionary hope.

This is why utopianism, conceived as a political tool rather than a mere literary genre, contains an implicit danger not readily conceded by its advocates. This danger was identified a century and a half ago by a certain Karl Marx and his findings are still applicable today. For Marx, socialism in its utopian form brought with it a prophetic messianism, such that the utopians claimed for themselves the status of prophets who knew what was right and they claimed for their utopias the status of New Jerusalems. For the utopians, the key to the riddle of history lay in their plans, if only others would realise it. Their plans were the truth and the emancipation of humanity awaited their implementation. The same is no less true of the writers discussed in this chapter as it was of the original 'utopian socialists'. It is, indeed, difficult to see how it could be otherwise.

The messianic nature of utopianism is not, of course, implicit in the actual act of constructing a utopia. There is nothing implicitly messianic in a writer describing, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, a state or society which is regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which its author lives. To claim otherwise would be bizarre. Utopianism *is* implicitly messianic, however, if it is regarded as a political tool. For if one believes that the revolutionary hope of the masses depends upon a vision of a better future then one will be led to proclaim that this vision is *not* a utopia, and one will be led to proclaim this because, quite simply, the revolutionary hope of the masses has

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

never been ignited by a *mere* utopia. Any utopia that has had any effect on history at all has had such an effect only because its author, or its author's followers, have proclaimed it a truth to be realised. Any utopia that has had any effect on history at all has had such an effect only because its author, or its author's followers, have proclaimed that the emancipation of humanity depends upon its realisation. No utopia will have any effect on history at all if its author concedes that it is a product of the purely subjective imagination, one possible vision among many, maybe not the best vision but what the heck, people need visions so here is mine.

When the pro-utopians eulogise the inspirational power of the utopian imagination they would do well to remember this. When they argue that Marxism needs to rehabilitate the 'utopian' spirit of Ernst Bloch or Herbert Marcuse they would do well to remember that neither of them considered their respective visions to be anything other than the truth. When they argue that the revolutionary hope of the masses depends upon a vision of a better future, they would do well to remember that it was precisely this argument which led Bloch and Marcuse down the road of messianic and philanthropic elitism. When they argue that the revival of socialism requires something like Morris' utopian socialism, they would do well to remember that this involves a few cultivated men manipulating the hopeless desires of the masses, training them, educating them, to focus unerringly on what is *right*. When they argue that Marxism needs to take note of the concept of utopia divested of its pejorative connotations, they would do well to take note instead of Goodwin and Taylor's analysis of the utopian process. For they were convinced, as we saw in the previous chapter, that utopians can, do, and have inspired hope. In Taylor's quite accurate words, however, they have managed to do this only because they 'have assumed the mantle of leadership, and have usually presented themselves as great intellectuals, prophets, revolutionaries or even messiahs' (see page 178).

When Marx criticised the original utopian socialists, he was criticising the entire mindset within which they operated. He was criticising the fact that the utopians

Morris, Bloch and Marcuse

proclaimed themselves messiahs, that they claimed to have accessed the truth, that they declared that the emancipation of humanity depended upon the realisation of their own pedantic cerebrations. To inspire the revolutionary hope of the masses in this way, he continued, was to deceive them and to treat them as gaping asses. No truly socialist movement can be based around the attempt to realise a spurious utopia disguised as objective truth. When contemporary Marxists tell us to embrace utopianism, they can begin by pointing out the utopians to whom Marx's critique does not apply.

Notes

¹ It is strange that so little attention has been paid to this book over the years, for it really is quite revealing. Florence and William Boos are similarly surprised, although they are no doubt correct to surmise that scholars of Morris are likely to 'discount a work co-authored with Bax' (Boos and Boos, 1986: 496). In the preface to the book itself, however, the authors emphasise that 'the work has been in the true sense of the word a *collaboration*, each sentence having been carefully considered by both the authors in common, although now one, now the other, has had more to do with initial suggestions in different portions of the work' (Morris and Bax, 1893: vi). With regards to this last point, Mark Bevir quite convincingly argues that throughout their various collaborations, Bax was invariably responsible for the economic theory (Bevir, 1996: 1217). This is borne out by Morris' own admission that the only chapter of *Capital* he actually understood was that concerning the Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation (1973g: 242). The lengthy chapter summarising *Capital* Volume I in *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* can therefore be ascribed to Bax. This having been noted, however, I am assuming here that the book *was* in the true sense of the word a collaboration and that Morris *had* therefore considered every sentence. The book will, in other words, be dealt with here as if it were representative of Morris' own views.

² Critiques of Thompson's interpretation of Morris are more often than not critiques of Thompson mistakenly parading as critiques of Morris. Perry Anderson, for example, takes issue with Thompson for reproducing the Romantic/Utilitarian, Utopia/Science dichotomy but then proceeds on the assumption that Morris too had reproduced it (Anderson, 1980: 157-175). Whatever Morris' faults, however, it can be said with some degree of certainty that he never sought to prioritise utopia over science nor desire over knowledge. The stagnant dichotomy is reproduced solely by Thompson. Unfortunately, however, Thompson's study has since become the bible of pro-utopianism and many writers have taken their cue from its language. Ruth Levitas, for example, argues that: 'The problem of Marxism versus utopia manifests as a problem of Utilitarianism versus Romanticism, knowledge versus desire, thought versus feeling' (1989: 35). This, however, it does not. The problem of Marxism versus utopia manifests instead as a problem of creating revolutionary hope without descending into philanthropic elitism or messianic prophetism. Thompson's study has therefore clouded the issues far more than it has cleared them.

Conclusion

The Aim of the Thesis Restated

'Each period has its bogeys and its significant dirty words. One of the favourite insults at present seems to be the term Utopian'. Thus begins Daniel Singer's 'In Defence of Utopia' (1993: 249). Like so many others around him, Singer feels it his duty to cleanse utopianism of the dirt which centuries of pejection have seen it accumulate. This is not a simple act of magnanimity on behalf of an unfairly maligned word, however, but is rather part of a wider political project. For Singer, like so many others around him, believes that the revitalisation of Marxism depends upon the rehabilitation of Utopia. If Marxism's moribund body is to drag itself into the new millennium, we are told, then it will have to capture the spirit and harness the energies of the utopian imagination. At a time when apathy and pessimism are the ruling passions, and in a world where socialism is deemed to equal nothing more than the gulag plus bread queues, the very survival of Marxism depends upon its being able to offer hope in the form of a vision of a better future. When Fukuyama says that 'we cannot picture to ourselves a world that is *essentially* different from the present one, and at the same time better' (1992: 46), Marxism needs to be able to say 'yes we can'; when François Furet remarks that 'henceforth we must live in a closed political universe, with nothing beyond the horizon' (1995: 80), Marxism needs to be able to say 'no we must not'; and for it to be able to say these things, it must think beyond the horizon of the present and paint a picture of a world that *is* essentially different from the present one and at the same time better. It must, in other words, construct a utopia.

These arguments have a certain emotive appeal, and one sometimes gains the impression that contemporary pro-utopianism is driven, to some small degree at least, by the burning (and not unreasonable) desire to spite Fukuyama and prove him wrong. What this thesis has sought to argue, however, is that the case is not quite as straightforward as many pro-utopians would have us believe. What the

Conclusion

thesis has attempted to show in particular is that the calls for Utopia are sometimes premised on a misrepresentation of Marx and on an underestimation of the power behind his critique of utopianism. Marx is misrepresented on two counts; firstly because his critique of utopianism is transformed into a simple means/ends dichotomy or is explained away by reference to strategic necessities, and secondly because he is portrayed as a 'utopian socialist' himself. Due in part to the fact that it *is* misrepresented, the power behind Marx's critique of utopianism is also underestimated, and it is underestimated in this one key respect; that Marx was right to criticise the original utopian socialists for their messianic and paternalistic elitism, and that the three acclaimed progenitors of utopian Marxism — Morris, Bloch and Marcuse — were culpable on much the same grounds. What the thesis has sought to argue, then, is that the case for Utopia is not, as it sometimes appears, a simple appeal to common sense. It is, instead, both complex and flawed.

The Key Arguments of the Thesis Summarised

The thesis began by examining Marx's critique of utopianism. As we saw in chapter 1, many writers suggest that this was hardly a critique of utopianism at all. Instead, it was a critique of the means by which the utopian socialists hoped to achieve their ends, means deemed by Marx to be inadequate because they lacked any real basis in the dynamics of capitalism. Whilst lacking any real basis in the writings of Marx, this line of argument serves a very useful purpose for those seeking a *rapprochement* between Marxism and Utopia. For if one's readers can be convinced that 'it was not the ends that the utopian socialists sought that made them "utopian" in the Marxist sense, but rather the inadequacy of the means proposed to achieve those ends', then they can also be convinced that the construction of utopian 'ends' is not, because it never has been, antithetical to the Marxist project. Similarly, if one's readers can be convinced that when Marx *did* criticise the ends that the utopians sought he did so for 'strategic' reasons, then they can also be convinced that Marxism, from its very beginning, involved no 'principled' objections to discussing the nature of communist society.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 sought to show that Marx's critique of utopianism was not based around a means/ends dichotomy, nor was it dictated by strategic necessity. For whilst Marx undoubtedly did criticise the 'means' proposed by the utopians, he also criticised their 'ends', and he did so for good reason. He did so first of all because none of the utopians considered their ends to be utopian. On the contrary, each considered their own particular utopia to be not only the truth but also a truth which embodied the emancipation of humanity. Each also claimed for himself the status of some form of messiah. These prophets of the working class had somehow gained access to the truth, and redemption depended entirely upon this truth being recognised as the truth by everyone else. Such messianism implied that the utopians had gained access to a knowledge of the future. It also implied the existence of only gaping asses beneath them, asses incapable of forming their own emancipatory strategy and whose emancipation thus depended on the prophetic announcements of the philanthropic utopians. A socialist strategy based around such messianic utopianism both foreclosed the future, in the sense that the only true future was that put forward by each respective utopian, and made a mockery of the first rule of the International, that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. Such a strategy was therefore silly, stale and reactionary from the roots up. When Marx criticised the utopian socialists, he was thus voicing a principled objection to utopian system building — he rejected utopian systems of *every* kind — and to the messianic mindset from within which such systems were invariably built.

The thesis then proceeded to examine Marx's own supposed 'utopianism'. Contrary to the conclusions reached by many of the pro-utopians — for whom the existence of a utopia in Marx's writings would, for obvious reasons, lend an added weight to their case — chapters 2 and 3 suggested that Marx's 'utopia' took a rather muted form. Marx, that is, did not really describe, in a variety of aspects and with some consistency, an imaginary state or society which he regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which he lived. He did describe in some detail a state or society which he termed the lower phase of communism, but

Conclusion

no utopian intent lay behind such a description. Instead, this merely described a phase on the journey to communism required by societies lacking a fully developed capitalist framework. As such, Marx's description of the dictatorship was designed to show how the development of capitalism could be speeded up in these societies. It was certainly not intended to epitomise a vision of the communist Good. Marx did, nonetheless, provide us with some descriptions that *were* intended to epitomise a vision of the communist Good. With regards to the actual nature of the communist state or society, however, these were general, vague and ambiguous. Such general pronouncements were more than likely adopted by Marx as mere catchwords rather than being the product of his utopian imagination. The elements of Marx's description of the higher phase of communism that were not adopted as mere catchwords concerned the nature of the truly human individual that would inhabit it. Three defining concepts were identified in this respect — The Dream of the Whole Man, the development of the all-round individual and the ontological necessity of labour. This then left us with a problem. For although Marx remained relatively quiet when it came to describing the institutions of the higher phase of communism, thus reflecting his own proscriptions against foreclosing the future, surely his descriptions of the kind of individual that will inhabit communism foreclosed the future to an even greater extent — what could possibly foreclose the future more than a set of pronouncements concerning the ways in which people will behave in it? The fact that Marx did describe the nature of the individual of the communist future, in spite of passionate proscriptions against so doing, thus became a thing in need of explanation.

Chapter 4 laid the groundwork for such an explanation when it discussed Marx's alternative to utopianism, or what he termed 'materialistically critical socialism'. This was designed to ground the revolutionary hope of the proletariat in something other than a utopia, and this something other Marx attempted to provide by 'sufficiently guaranteeing' that the future, whatever 'form' it actually took, would be emancipatory. This guarantee, however, proved insufficient.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 then explored the ways in which Marx attempted to render it sufficient, and *herein* (or so it was argued) lay the key to understanding Marx's utopianism. For Marx revised and developed materialistically critical socialism by employing a variety of additional categories — the idea that communism is the telos of history, the womb metaphor as a means of understanding the tendencies that are leading towards communism, and the notion of the self-creation of transcendent needs through one's practical engagement in the present. Underlying each of these categories, however, was a speculative assumption claimed as empirical fact, and it is these speculative assumptions which together comprise Marx's 'utopia'. The teleological conception of history assumed an original and 'natural' state of unity so that it could interpret the present as an unnatural state of separation and the future as a 'natural' state of reunification. The Whole Man thus became less a utopian 'Dream' than an assumed starting point for Marx's teleological reading of history. The structuralist interpretation of capitalism, which sees communism tendentially gestating within it, attempted to demonstrate the empirical development of the all-round individual. It did so because only an individual who has developed in all-round way would be capable of utilising the productive forces in such a way as to preclude the need for the division of labour. The all-round individual thus becomes less a utopian ideal than a prerequisite for the possibility of socialist relations of production following the abolition of private property. The pragmatic conception of historical development, according to which individuals create and recreate their own needs in the process of acting upon the world, assumed that the ontological need for labour had already emerged within the proletariat so that it could explain the transcendence of alienation from within it. It too, then, was less the result of utopian speculation than theoretical need. Marx did not talk about labour being life's prime want in communism because he had constructed a utopian vision in which labour took its place as life's prime want. He took the ontological need for labour as a given so that his pragmatic model of historical development could explain the transition to communism without having to rely on 'utopian' conceptions of anything.

Conclusion

On the basis of such findings, it was then suggested that Marx was an 'Accidental Utopian'. By this I meant that Marx's 'dazzling' utopian vision of the truly human individual was not the result of utopian speculation. Marx did not consciously construct 'a vision' of the future based around certain conceptions of the individual. He developed certain conceptions of the individual, which he himself took as empirical facts, because it was only by means of developing such conceptions that he could get his various historical models to work. His historical models, on the other hand, were designed to explain the transition from capitalism to communism in a way that would avoid the need for utopianism. Marx's utopia, in other words, was less the conscious result of a utopian approach than the accidental result of the failings of his anti-utopian approaches. It is extremely important, I think, to emphasise the accidental nature of Marx's utopianism. For although Marx was responsible for constructing a utopia of sorts, the accidental nature of this construction means that those who seek to find a utopian precedent in Marx would do better to look elsewhere. Marx's own vision of communism cannot, at any rate, be used in support of the claim that a *conscious* utopianism has always lain at the heart of Marxism. Marx would, indeed, have been mortified to have found himself being discussed as a part of the utopian tradition. As a man who consciously rejected utopian systems of *every* kind, the last thing he was attempting to do was construct one of his own.

The natural response to this, of course, would be to say 'who cares?' The fact that Marx rejected utopianism does not mean to say that Marxists today have to do the same. To define Marxism entirely in terms of what Marx himself said is nothing more than a useless theoretical fetishism. Indeed, for some of the writers we examined in chapter 6, the fact that Marx criticised and rejected utopianism only served to demonstrate that Marx was sometimes wrong. For utopianism, as far as they were concerned, is a necessity, whatever Marx thought about the subject. Utopianism is necessary, we were told, because only utopianism can inspire and motivate human action. Because human beings are purposive creatures, and because science and rational discourse are unable to provide a

Conclusion

future-oriented purpose, Marxism needs to draw upon something else if it is ever to provide such a purpose. This something else, everyone agreed, was utopianism. In the present political context, it was further suggested, the utility of utopias becomes even more self-evident. For now more than ever, it was claimed, socialists need more than a critique of the evils of capitalism. Now more than ever, popular action will depend upon people knowing the goal and the route to be travelled. People will no longer act on the basis of a critique of the present, or on the basis of vague and ambiguous hints concerning the future, because they believe that action based upon these things is doomed to result in failure. Just look at what happened in Central and Eastern Europe!

The problem with this line of argument was touched upon in chapter 6 and expanded upon in chapter 7. For if we are being told that utopianism is necessary because people need to know the nature of the goal to be realised, then the calls for utopianism open themselves up to various critiques of utopian blueprints. The notion that a utopia can serve as a goal to be realised has been criticised from all sides, and even from within the pro-utopian community itself, on the grounds that it implies a philanthropic elitism destined to end in messianic authoritarianism. This, in turn, returns us to Marx's own critique of utopianism and to its contemporary relevance. For whilst it would indeed be nothing more than a theoretical fetishism to define Marxism entirely in terms of what Marx himself said, what the pro-utopians often fail to recognise is that his critique of utopianism was powerful, instructive, and more importantly *accurate*. Thus, his belief that utopianism brought with it a messianic conviction that one's utopia is the panacea for all the world's evils was borne out by our study of Morris, Bloch and Marcuse. For each of these, their vision of the good society was the *best* vision of the good society, and their task was to convince everyone else that it was the best vision. If anyone thought any different, then this was because they were wrong, or because they did not as yet understand the truth, or because they had been indoctrinated into believing that the system delivers the goods, or because they spent too much time watching the poisonous products of Hollywood. It was because the original

Conclusion

'utopian socialists' adopted such a paternalistic and elitist line that Marx denounced them, and there is nothing in either Morris, Bloch or Marcuse that would have prevented Marx from denouncing them in similar terms.

Nor was such messianic elitism confined to these three thinkers. As chapters 6 and 7 sought to argue, a messianic, philanthropic and paternalistic elitism is implicit within the utopian framework itself. This framework — adopted by the majority of contemporary pro-utopians as well as by Morris, Bloch and Marcuse — revolves around three central premises; that people at present lack hope, that people need to hope before they can act, and that hope depends upon one's possessing a vision of a better future. By means of logical extension, it follows that if a) people at present lack hope and b) hope depends upon one's possessing a vision of a better future, then c) people at present must be lacking a vision of a better future and d) must be incapable of formulating one (people who lack hope will hardly be able to formulate visions which supposedly embody and foster it). From this it follows that the vision of a better future will have to be introduced from 'without', by the privileged few who, by some fortuitous twist of fate, still possess hope. Nor do the logical implications of the utopian framework end here. For it follows further that if a vision of a better future is *really* to inspire hope then it will have to claim for itself some special status. If, that is, Marxism needs a vision around which to mobilise the hope of the masses, then this vision will need to be something more than the spurious invention of one particular imagination. It will, in other words, need to be *more* than a 'utopia'. This is why all political utopians claim that their utopia is *the truth*, this is why they all declare that the emancipation of humanity depends upon its realisation, and this is why political utopianism is destined to result in messianic elitism.

The question now is where these considerations leave us. For if Marx was right to reject utopianism on the grounds that it inevitably involved a paternalistic elitism, and yet if he failed to find a way of igniting the revolutionary hope of the proletariat that did not itself involve speculative descriptions of communism, then

Conclusion

does this mean that Marxism has to accept utopian speculation as some kind of necessary evil? Given, in other words, that revolutionary hope needs to be ignited in some way and that Marx failed in his attempt to provide a non-utopian means of doing this, does this mean that, in spite of its paternalistic implications, the revolutionary hope of the masses simply *has to be* ignited by means of utopianism? This is certainly what William Morris thought and this is also why Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor defended utopianism in spite of its implicit messianism — yes, they argued, utopianism is inherently authoritarian and paternalistic, but, they claimed, it is the only way of ever getting things done. The following, and final, section of the thesis will give some thought to these problems.

Some Concluding Remarks: In Search of the Spirit of Adventure

During the course of this thesis, Marx's confrontation with Utopia has been interpreted in terms of his search for 'the spirit of revolution'. The general argument of the thesis has been that Marx was right to reject utopianism as a means of invoking this spirit. As a consequence, the thesis as a whole could well be accused of irrelevancy, or at the very least of po-faced seriousness — who, in 1998, can talk of 'the spirit of revolution' without the largest trace of irony? The socialist project and the spirit of revolution have been divorced for so long that it is a waste of time to seriously consider the relationship between them. Such would be the objection raised by many. To a certain extent at least, such objections stem from the images conjured by the word 'revolution' itself. Red flags and barricades, exiled leaders and counter-revolutionary plots, clichéd slogans painted on walls and an exalted sense of purpose; for many of today's socialists such things are a relic of the past, romantic notions shared only by students wearing Che Guevara T-shirts. If not these, then the word 'revolution' conjures images of violence and bloodshed, terror and oppression. Indeed, if the experience of 'actually existing socialism' proscribed the use of any word then it was 'Revolution' rather than 'Utopia'. The 'revolutions' of 1989 thus become the revolutions to end all revolutions; revolutions against the very concept of Revolution itself. In this context, to talk of 'the spirit of revolution' is either to

Conclusion

embarrass oneself by referring to a quaint but long dead concept or to implicate oneself in the blood of the gulag.

I do not want to get into the ethics of Revolution here; into the distinctions that have been made between legitimate proletarian force and illegitimate bourgeois violence (Petrovic, 1977: 107-110), between legitimate and illegitimate targets for revolutionary violence (see the essay on 'Our Morals' in Geras, 1990), between the prefiguration thesis favoured by Marcuse (the means have to be consistent with and prefigure the end; see Marcuse, 1968b) and the consequentialism adopted by Trotsky (the end justifies the means; see Trotsky, 1973). Instead, I merely want to emphasise that, in my view, the spirit of revolution and the realisation of socialism cannot at all be divorced. For the spirit of revolution is the spirit of radicalism and the will for change, the desire for a new and qualitatively different form of existence, a desire which demands the revolutionary transformation of the present. And if socialism is to be something more than capitalism with a human face then its realisation will require all of these things. It may also, of course, require violence, but this is a subject for a different thesis. What this thesis is concerned with is the relationship between Marxism, utopianism and the *spirit* of revolution.

It is with a view to such concerns that the ideas put forward by contemporary utopians have been examined. For them, Marxism needs to embrace utopianism because utopianism is the most effective means of generating the spirit of revolution. Let us therefore accept (for the sake of argument at least) that the spirit of revolution is a precondition for the realisation of socialism and let us deal with the arguments which suggest that utopianism is the best means of invoking this spirit. There are, in fact, three such arguments, or rather three main premises which inform one general argument. The premises are, firstly, that people at present lack hope, secondly that people must hope before they can act, and thirdly that their hope must be lodged in a vision of a better future if their actions are not to be blind and devoid of purpose. Utopianism is necessary, that is, not only

Conclusion

because of its ability to generate the hope which ignites the spirit of revolution, but also because only it can provide the purpose which then guides it.

Of the three premises in question, the first seems to be an accurate empirical observation. For instead of looking forward to a better future, people now seem self-consciously *afraid* of it. A MORI poll conducted in April 1995, for example, asked: 'Do you think that the kind of world that today's children will inherit will be better or worse than the kind of world that children of your generation inherited, or about the same?' In response, 60% of people answered 'worse', whilst only 12% answered 'better' (25% answered 'about the same' and 4% did not know). A similar poll conducted by Gallup in March-April 1995 asked: 'Do you think that children today have a better future in front of them than you had when you were a child, a worse future, or about the same?' This time 63% answered 'worse' and 18% 'better' (15% 'about the same' and 4% did not know) (cited by Michael Jacobs, 1996: 3). On the basis of such evidence, one would seem justified in concluding that people in general, at the present time at least, lack hope in the future.

The claim that people must hope before they can act is a little more contentious in the sense that other factors also motivate people to act — fear being the most obvious example. It would be easy to dismiss actions based upon fear as purely random and destructive, premised on the belief that nothing can be done to improve the conditions of the present. To do so, however, would require a complex socio-psychological investigation into the historical bases of political action. As such an investigation is beyond the scope of the present study, generalisations will take the place of historical scholarship. As a generalisation, then, I accept the claim that political action based upon fear is either purely destructive — with the 'riot' being its typical form — or, as in the case of the French Revolution (the case most often cited as an example of the political potency of Fear), merely the response to a betrayed sense of Hope.¹ I also accept, therefore, the concomitant claim that purposive political action needs Hope as a

Conclusion

basis. I accept, that is, the second premise underlying much of contemporary utopian thought.

People at present lack hope in the future and people must hope before they can act in any purposive and constructive way. Such claims are being accepted here. In addition to these, two further things can also be accepted; the first is that revolutionary hope cannot, as Marx himself believed, be fuelled solely by a critical analysis of the material conditions of the present, and the second is that, conversely, revolutionary hope needs to be fuelled by something *in addition to* the critical analysis of the material conditions of the present. For it should be emphasised here that whilst the present thesis has sought to defend Marx's critique of political utopianism, it has in no sense been uncritical of other aspects of his thought. Chapters 4 and 5 in particular offered a rigorous critique of 'materialistically critical socialism' and of Marx's belief that its findings enabled him to ground revolutionary hope in something other than utopianism. By sufficiently guaranteeing that the future would be emancipatory, whatever form it took, Marx thought he could imbue the proletariat with the requisite sense of future-optimism and still avoid the problems involved in foreclosing the future. But, of course, Marx *could not* sufficiently guarantee that the future would be emancipatory, whatever form it took, and his attempt to ground revolutionary hope in this guarantee was, as a consequence, a resounding failure.

Let us be quite clear, then, about what is being accepted here. The first two premises of the utopian framework are being accepted without condition, as is the notion that 'socialists need more than a critique of the self-evident (and even the oblique) evils of capitalist society' (although they *do*, one might add, need such a critique). It is considerations such as these, however, which lead writer after writer to proclaim the need for utopianism. If people need hope before they can act, and if hope cannot be lodged in a mere critique of the present, then what else can it be lodged in but a vision of a better future? Well, it is my contention that the 'something more' which socialists need can be *nothing more* than the spirit of

Conclusion

adventure. By this I mean something *like* Bloch's *Venturing Beyond the Limits*, only this time the venturer will be armed with a rational critique of the present rather than a metaphysical concept of Authentic Being. The spirit of adventure is thus the willingness to destroy the present in the name of a future that is not and cannot be known; it is the willingness, that is, to quite literally step into the *unknown*.

This will, of course, go no way at all towards appeasing the pro-utopians, for it was precisely Meisner's contention that visions of a better future are required if revolutionary action is to be something more than blind adventurism. This, however, only serves to highlight a fundamental flaw in Meisner's argument, and, indeed, a flaw in the arguments for Utopia full stop. For what the pro-utopians seem so often to be suggesting is that the construction of utopias somehow prevents radical political action from becoming adventuristic. The term 'adventurism' has, indeed, acquired all sorts of pejorative connotations and has itself become a 'dirty word' to be avoided at all costs. Thus asks Iakov Pevzner:

If you do not know what the new society will be like, is it reasonable to call for the destruction of the existing society? Is such an appeal not adventuristic? (1994: 8)

The only possible answer to this question is that *of course it is!* What I am suggesting, however, is that *all* calls for the destruction of the existing society will be adventuristic and that one should accept this from the outset rather than attempt to disguise the adventure in utopian clothes. For Pevzner is quite wrong if he thinks that one can make an appeal that is *not* adventuristic if one presents people with pictures of what the new society will be like. Pevzner's language is, in fact, indicative of the central problem here, for he quite plainly states that the key to avoiding adventurism lies in one's being able to *know* what the new society will be like, when, of course, no such knowledge is ever going to become available to anyone. This, however, seems to be what many pro-utopians think that utopianism is capable of doing. Daniel Singer, for example, advocated utopianism on the basis that people need to 'know' the goal and the route to be travelled, as if utopianism is capable of providing this, or indeed *any* form of *knowledge*. What

Conclusion

Pevzner's question leads to, in fact, is one of two perverse conclusions. The first is that because one can never 'know' what the new society will be like, all calls for the destruction of the existing society will be adventuristic and therefore open to censure. This, then, is nothing short of ultra-conservatism. The second is that if one needs to 'know' what the new society will be like before one can avoid charges of adventurism, then one will proclaim that one *does*, in fact, know what the new society will look like. This, then, is nothing short of the prophetic messianism which so many utopians adopt and which is rightly open to censure.

What the pro-utopians are really suggesting, of course, is that without a guiding vision all revolutionary action will be random and chaotic. Some form of guide-book is required if the revolutionaries are to avoid getting lost on their way to the promised land. Instead of the word 'knowledge', then, one should substitute the phrase 'some idea'; if one does not have 'some idea' of what the new society will be like, is it reasonable to call for the destruction of the existing society? People need to have 'some idea' of the goal and the route to be travelled before they will act, and so on. What this ignores, however, is the fact that revolutions respect no guide-books; by its very nature, the revolution is built on shifting ground and its terrain shifts so continually as to defy all attempts to map it. Nothing ever turns out as one expected, and certainly no revolution ever has. What purpose, then, does a utopian guide-book serve?

There are two possible answers to this question. The first is that the guide-book will serve as a blueprint. It will serve as a map to be imposed upon the shifting ground of the revolution, a pattern to be forced upon the terrain precisely in order to prevent it from drifting into the unknown. With the exception of Goodwin and Taylor, however, few pro-utopians like to think of utopian guide-books serving this function, and thankfully so. The second answer, however, fares no better. For this declares that the guide-book is merely a means of mobilising mass support. Although, that is, one cannot guarantee, or even expect, the utopia in question to be realised by means of a revolutionary upheaval, the very existence of a utopia is

Conclusion

a necessary prerequisite for a revolutionary situation emerging in the first place. Three things can be said in relation to this argument. The first touches once again upon the claim that if a utopia is to mobilise mass support then it will need to claim to be more than a mere utopia; it will need to claim for itself the status of 'what is right'. The second thing is that the whole idea smacks of Georges Sorel's notion of the revolutionary 'myth'; the idea that the irrational masses respond to images and symbols and therefore need to be presented with them, even though their creators know that the images and symbols in question have no basis in reality. For it is precisely the claim of the pro-utopians that people are moved more by images and symbols than they are by rational discourse, and if one proceeds to mobilise support around a utopian vision that one does not expect to see realised, then what is one doing but mobilising support around a symbolic myth? The third and most important thing to be said is that the very idea that utopianism is a necessary means of mobilising support is based upon a false equation; that which suggests that 'people are purposive creatures *therefore* people need visions of a better future'. For to claim that human beings are purposive creatures is to claim nothing more than people generally act only when they feel that their action serves a purpose, and there is nothing in this to suggest that the purpose of mass political action can be supplied *only* by a 'vision of a better future'.

This, however, is a common theme. Indeed, so intractable is the idea that utopias embody hope that one finds support for them arriving from the most unexpected quarters. Listen, for example, to Milan Simecka when he says of utopias that:

Being as a rule the fruit of elite aspirations and minority dreams, they automatically provoke attempts to inculcate forcibly the minority's ideals in the majority. Attracted by the lure of an abstract good, they easily succumb to the view that the end justifies the means, thus taking a direct part in the history of violence, dictatorships and slaughter in the name of a better future (1984: 172).

Karl Popper could not have said this any better. 'And yet', continues Simecka, 'let us try to imagine a world without utopias . . . A world without utopias would be a world without social hope, a world of resignation to the status quo and the

Conclusion

devalued slogans of everyday political life' (ibid.: 174-175). He thus concludes: 'Today the world is in such a state that it needs new utopias' (ibid.: 176). Arguments such as these are quite simply surreal — although utopianism involves an elite minority imposing its views upon the majority by means of violence and slaughter, it is still necessary because *only* utopianism can offer hope.

Such surreal claims are, in fact, the product of a popular (though equally surreal) misconception. Frank E. Manuel provides the archetypal rendering of this misconception when he remarks that 'to attack utopias is about as meaningful as to denounce dreaming' (1973b: 95). The misconception, therefore, is that utopianism is somehow inextricably linked to the process of dreaming; it is dreaming writ large. As we saw in the Introduction, this leads writers such as Lyman Tower Sargent to *define* utopianism as 'social dreaming' (1994: 9). What on earth, however, does this mean? Dreaming in the company of others? Many people sharing the same dream? What? The implication, of course, is that social dreaming involves dreaming *about* society. Are utopian thoughts about society really comparable to dreams, however? Sargent seems to think so and goes on to defend his definition on the grounds that 'utopianism is a universal human phenomenon' (1994: 3), adding that:

I do not think it necessary to assume a common "human nature" to conclude that the overwhelming majority of people — probably it is even possible to say all — are, at some time dissatisfied and consider how their lives might be improved (ibid.).

Whilst this is undoubtedly so, I think it almost self-evident to say that the ways in which people imagine improvements being made to their lives are almost never 'utopian'. As Bloch rightly emphasised, most people think in terms of winning the lottery, or in terms of sexual conquests, and rarely in terms of lucid descriptions of imaginary states. And yet writers keep on claiming that utopias are comparable to dreams; that we can no more avoid producing utopias than we can avoid dreaming. Not only, in fact, are the arguments to this effect unconvincing, they are also empirically incorrect. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger points out, 'utopian thinking is by no means an anthropological constant . . . In fact it is a specific

Conclusion

product of a very particular culture' (1991: 20). Kumar is also keen to see utopianism, not as an anthropological constant, but as a distinctly modern and Western phenomenon, a point he argues forcefully throughout his book *Utopianism* (1991). Levitas, too, persuasively remarks that

it is misleading to imply that utopianism will be expressed in some form in all circumstances. In spite of the recurrent theme of an earthly paradise in mythology, it is recurrent, not universal. There is every reason to suppose that some societies are more conducive to such speculation than others, and that it is not only the *form* of speculation which varies . . . Not only form and content, but the actual possibility of creating alternatives, are socially constructed. To suggest that the utopian impulse is 'natural' is both wrongly to dichotomise nature and culture, and to distract attention away from this process of social construction (1984: 21).

Although, therefore, Levitas keenly supports the utopian impulse, she is at least conscious of the fact that it is in no way 'natural'. The utopian impulse is, in fact, no more natural than the conservative impulse described by Roger Scruton, although both impulses are constructed by the same process of generalisation: people dream, say the utopians, therefore utopias are natural; people do not like change, says Scruton, therefore anti-utopianism is natural.

It is precisely the idea that it is natural, however, that leads erstwhile opponents of all things utopian like Simecka to proclaim that a world without utopias would be a world without social hope. Simecka thinks that those who oppose utopianism are somehow opposed to all forms of hope and are secretly plotting some wild scheme to eradicate dreams from the world. A world without utopias would be 'a world of resignation to the status quo', he argues, as if utopianism is the only possible way of challenging the status quo and the only possible source of social hope. Thankfully, however, it is not.

Before proceeding to argue the point, however, it is interesting to note why so many writers cannot see beyond the need for utopianism. They cannot see beyond this need, I would argue, because they are vainly attempting to get utopianism to do the comforting things that 'science' once did but no longer can. It is no coincidence that the interest in, and support for, utopianism began to emerge in the mid-1970's, at the same time, that is, that the omnipotence of 'science' was

Conclusion

being derided as a sham. Such derisions, of course, had a profoundly debilitating effect on Marxism, and it soon became clear that there was no scientific basis upon which the final victory of socialism could be proclaimed. Whilst, therefore, the 'inevitability' of socialism had long been questioned within the Left, it was only during the 1970's that its *evitability* was universally recognised. Understandably, the relegation of socialism to the realm of the possible (it could not even make it to the realm of the 'probable') caused all sorts of anxieties within the Left, and it is these anxieties which led many to turn to utopianism as a source of comfort. Unfortunately, however, via a strange process of substitutionalism, utopianism became burdened with a whole host of unreasonable expectations. Prime amongst these was the idea that utopias could somehow provide the sense of security that science had previously done. Faced with the evitability of socialism and the uncomfortable thought that its realisation would involve an element of the dreaded 'adventurism', the comforts of science were untidily transposed onto utopianism; the utopian imagination would now guide and direct us, providing us with a concrete purpose and ensuring a minimum of risk and singular lack of adventure, in exactly the same way that the iron logic of historical development used to do.

Sadly, however — and this is a point which needs to be emphasised, repeated and emphasised again — neither science nor utopia can prevent revolutionary action from being adventuristic. One could even go as far as to say that in the entire field of human action, there is nothing quite as adventuristic as a revolution. No other form of human action is as unpredictable or as dangerous, no other form of human action involves as many risks, and no other form of human action is quite so prone to abject failure. The word adventurism and the act of revolution go hand in hand. This is why the act of revolution requires 'the spirit of adventure', the willingness to risk everything without any guarantees. For there are no guarantees — those provided by science are no longer valid and utopianism, no matter how hard one tries, cannot offer any replacements. Socialism is now an adventure and socialists have to come to terms with this.

Conclusion

How, then, does one invoke the spirit of adventure without the aid of utopias? Well, one can begin by pointing out that the general lack of popular hope which the pro-utopians rightly emphasise is due less to a lack of alternative visions than it is to the feeling that subjective action *does not* serve any purpose. As Ruth Levitas once observed: 'The problem is not lack of utopias, but lack of hope; and the cause of this lies not in imagination but in the real conditions of the present' (1979: 31). The mistake made by the pro-utopians is that they equate 'lack of hope' with 'lack of utopias' and then declare that the solution lies in 'abundance of utopias'. What they fail to realise, however, is that an abundance of utopias will not cure the lack of hope precisely because the lack of hope will prevent people being drawn to utopias in the first place, no matter how abundant they are. By virtue of the fact that subjective action is now deemed to serve no purpose, people are unlikely to join a movement whose aim is to realise — by means of subjective action — a vision of a new and different world. People are scared of new and different worlds and showing them pretty pictures of them will do nothing to alter this.

Whilst, therefore, socialists do need more than a critique of the self-evident (and even the oblique) evils of capitalism, this something more is not an abundance of utopias. What socialists do need, however, is to convince people that subjective action can and does serve a purpose — that one can act in the world and change it for the better. What needs to be emphasised, therefore, is the immense scope for change that exists in the present and the fact that human beings can intervene and collectively alter the world around them. Utopian images will not do this because, quite simply, until people think and believe that radical change is possible, no radical 'alternative' will inspire them. And as soon as they *do* think that change is possible, utopian images become irrelevant because people themselves can be entrusted with the task of deciding what the alternative will be. The notion that revolutionary activity will require a utopian guide, as well as being open to refutation by history and riddled with the problems previously discussed, also

Conclusion

underestimates the ability of people to act on their own volition, *once, that is, they believe that their actions can actually serve a purpose.*

It is thus the task of socialists to show that human intervention does not always result in catastrophe. It is the task of socialists to emphasise the power of subjective action. It is the task of socialists, armed with a critique of the present and pointing to successes achieved by human beings in the past, to ignite the spirit of adventure. It is no use denying that the future is an adventure away, nor that its creation will involve risks. No amount of science and no number of utopias will enable one to do this. It is a matter of kindling the will to take risks and to embark on an adventure.

But this is precisely where utopianism proves so useful! the pro-utopians will be screaming here. Utopias should *not* serve as a blueprint to be realised, and maybe the idea that they can act as a guide-book *is* open to criticism, but what they *can* do is kindle the will to adventure; this is what they are particularly good at. Here one returns to Darko Suvin's notion that utopias initiate an 'ongoing feedback dialogue with the reader' and to André Gorz's claim that they 'liberate the imagination as to the possibilities for change'(see page 184). As we argued in chapter 6, however, utopias only do these things if they are conceived as, or initiate the construction of, worlds to be *realised*. A utopia may prompt the imagination of the reader to imagine other utopias, but this will not be translated into the will for change unless the utopia itself makes the transition from 'imaginative construct' to 'ideal to be realised'. And once it makes that transition it will encounter all the problems associated with utopias conceived as ideals to be realised. In any case, imagine, just for one moment, that Gorz's own utopia liberates the imagination into thinking about the possibilities for change. Imagine now that the possibilities which the imagination begins thinking about are similar in nature to those proposed by Rudolph Bahro. What would Gorz say? Would he rejoice in the fact that his utopia had liberated these thoughts? No he would not. For Gorz despairs of ecofundamentalists such as Bahro and spends a lot of time

Conclusion

explaining why their utopian vision is *wrong* (see, for example, Gorz, 1994: 6-8). Like all utopians who wish to use utopianism as a political tool, Gorz is convinced that *his* vision is right and that those of his political rivals are *wrong*. All his talk of opening up possibilities disguises the fact that the possibilities he is referring to are those described by him.

Socialists must therefore learn to live without utopias if they are to kindle the will for change *and* avoid the descent into messianic philanthropy. Some general catchwords may, of course, prove useful — distribution according to need, the reduction of the working day to a minimum, for example. These, however, do not comprise a utopia, and their importance is secondary to that of persuading people that there is a world to gain; not an abstract utopian world, existing in the ether of the present, nor a ‘concrete’ utopian world, disguised as ‘the truth’ or ‘what is right’, but a world whose nature is as yet unknown, indeed is unknowable *now*, but whose nature will be known to them, in the future, because it will be their creation. Because the realisation of socialism cannot be guaranteed, nor its nature predicted, by either ‘science’ or ‘utopia’, this will involve an adventuristic leap into the unknown. This leap will, in turn, only be taken by a people imbued with the spirit of adventure, a people willing to take risks in return for the opportunity to act in and upon the world.

Notes

¹ Many historians argue that ‘fear and rumour were potent springs of collective behaviour that marked the whole course of the French Revolution’ (Rudé, 1973: xiii). The greatest testimony to this was The Great Fear of 1789, which saw peasants destroying the French countryside on the basis of the fear generated by rumours of an aristocratic plot (see Georges Lefebvre, 1973: *passim*). Indeed, it has often been suggested that ‘the most famous night in French parliamentary history’, the night when the National Assembly sanctioned the official ‘destruction of the feudal regime’ (Furet, 1991: 34), was the result, not of Hope, but of Panic. As Colin Jones points out (1991: 76), the ‘official’ abolition of feudalism was born not of the joyful enthusiasm for a new world, but of simple fear, as the Assembly abolished the taxes and tithes which the marauding peasants, in the midst of the Great Fear, had been refusing to pay anyway. The important role played by Fear extends even further, so that the *sans-culottes* revolution of August 1792 is explained in terms of it (Rudé, 1959: 110), as is the Jacobin revolution of May 1793 (Bouloiseau, 1983: 64-68). Behind this widespread fear, however, lay its opposite — an exalted Hope. For as soon as Louis had called the Estates General in 1788, a tidalwave of Hope swept across France. As Cornwell B. Rogers remarks: ‘something of the miraculous was sensed in the changes that were taking place . . . it was assumed that, thanks to the revival of the Estates General, the

Conclusion

Kingdom had been transformed' (1949: 58). Rogers talks of 'unqualified optimism and unbounded hope' (ibid.: 245-6) and Rudé also refers to 'la grand espérance' (1959: 46) which swept across France in 1788-89. It is against this background of Hope, therefore, that the potent role played by Fear should be understood: a Fear that the transformation of the Kingdom was being undermined by aristocratic plots, a Fear that the initial hopes of the French people were being betrayed.

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