

**KARL MARX'S INDIVIDUALISTIC CONCEPTION OF THE  
GOOD LIFE**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an interpretation and critical examination of Karl Marx's vision of the good life, a vision that is potent but also notoriously unspecified and opaque. It makes three major interpretive claims. First, it argues that at the heart of Marx's vision is an uncompromising commitment to ethical individualism, the view that the ultimate value and goal of human societies is the self-realisation of individuals. This individualism is explored through an examination of Marx's critique of the division of labour (Chapter 2) and hostility to social roles (Chapter 3). Second, it argues that Marx's ideas about the good life are not of a piece but change in crucial respects throughout his lifetime. For instance, it is argued that Marx gives different arguments in different texts as to why community is necessary for self-realisation (Chapter 3), and different arguments, too, about whether labour or leisure constitutes the true realm of self-realisation under communism (Chapter 4). Third, while Marx's views do indeed change in crucial respects throughout his lifetime, it argues that these changes cannot be understood in terms of a break between the 'early' and 'late' Marx, as is commonly claimed. Rather, it argues that Marx oscillated between different conceptions of the good life throughout his lifetime, never fully settling on one. On top of these interpretive claims, the thesis also addresses the question of which, if any, of Marx's visions provides the most feasible and desirable foundation for a Marxist conception of the good life today. Here, it is argued that in the concluding paragraphs of the 'Comments on James Mill's *Éléments D'économie Politique*' (hereafter the *Comments*) Marx puts forward a richer and more plausible conception of the good life than that which he put forward in other texts.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about Karl Marx's vision of the good life, a vision that is potent but also notoriously unspecified and opaque. It aims to provide an interpretation and critical examination of its central features.

While each chapter engages in a number of textual disputes, in what follows I make three major interpretive claims. First, I argue that Marx's vision of the good life contains an uncompromising commitment to ethical individualism, the view that the ultimate value and goal of human societies is the self-realisation of individuals.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in Chapter 2, I show that Marx's critique of the division of labour is based on the individualistic view that the enrichment of the powers and capacities of society cannot come at the expense of the powers and capacities of the individual. Likewise, in Chapter 3, I show how Marx rejects the communitarian idea that the only way to overcome alienation is to accept the duties that flow from one's social role; on Marx's view, by contrast, really free activity is unconstrained by roles altogether. The individualistic side of Marx's thought has not received much attention in the literature.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on this side in some detail in the chapters that follow I hope to bring Marx's individualism out of the shadows.

Second, I argue that while Marx's commitment to individualism is unwavering, his ideas about how individuals achieve self-realisation change in crucial respects throughout his lifetime. For instance, in Chapter 3 I argue that while Marx is always committed to the view that community is necessary for self-realisation, he gives different arguments in different writings as to why this is so. Likewise, in Chapter 4, I argue that while Marx is always committed to the view that self-realisation consists in creative activity, he changes his mind about whether necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.8. Note that I do not take a stand on whether Marx is committed to other forms of individualism (e.g. methodological individualism).

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, the individualistic themes I pick up here have been noticed and emphasised by commentators before me, yet there is no full-length treatment of them, and overly communitarian interpretations of communism still tend to be advanced in the literature. More will be said about these communitarian interpretations in Chapter 3, where I shall examine Marx's idea of a reconciliation of self-realisation and community under communism. For other individualistic interpretations of Marx's ideas about the good life, see Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, pp.521-528; G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: An Interpretation and Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp.129-133; and Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), Chapter 6.

labour or leisure constitutes the ‘realm’ within which future individuals will realise the inherent creativity of their nature. In this way, I argue that Marx’s ideas about the good life under communism are not of a piece but change in crucial respects throughout his lifetime.

The third and final major interpretive claim concerns the much-debated issue of Marx’s intellectual development. The claims of the previous paragraph – that Marx’s views change during the course of his lifetime – are not new. In fact, it is common for commentators to argue that there is a shift, or even a ‘break’,<sup>3</sup> between the writings of the ‘early’ Marx and ‘late’ Marx. With regards to his ideas about the good life, Marx’s ideas are generally thought to become more pessimistic as time wore on. Thus, according to what we might call the ‘standard story’, while Marx’s early writings are buoyantly optimistic that alienated labour will be overcome under communism, his later writings acquiesce in the permanence of alienated labour in all forms of human society. Consequently, Marx is said to look to leisure rather than labour as the sphere of life best suited for human self-realisation. In what follows, however, I argue that the ‘standard story’ misconstrues the exegetical evidence, and that, properly interpreted, Marx’s intellectual development on these matters is less even and more complex than the standard story supposes. In my view, Marx moves between different conceptions of the good life throughout his lifetime, never fully settling on one. On this issue, I shall argue, Marx’s intellectual development is best understood as an oscillation rather than a shift.

On top of these interpretive claims the thesis also contains a critical component. Having distinguished a number of different models of the good life in Marx’s texts, the thesis aims to provide a response to the question of which, if any, of Marx’s descriptions of communism provides the most feasible and desirable basis for a Marxian vision of the good life today. Here, I shall argue that in the concluding paragraphs of the *Comments* the young Marx puts forward a conception of self-realisation and community which, for reasons given during the course of the thesis, provides a richer and more attractive model of the good life than that which he tilts towards in other texts. To make this claim, Chapters 2 through to 4 identify a family

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of the ‘break’ was first put forward by the French Marxist Louis Althusser (Althusser, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1968)).

of problems that Marx's other visions of the good life run up against, and to which, I subsequently argue in Chapter 5, Marx's position in the *Comments* can respond.

Let me say something about the structure and organisation of the thesis that follows. I start in Chapter 1 by examining some fundamental problems that are often thought to undermine Marx's vision of the good life. My hope in addressing these problems is not that we will settle them decisively, but that we will come to a clearer understanding of what these problems are, and what criteria Marx's vision would have to meet if we are to take it seriously.

In Chapter 2, I examine Marx's notorious claim in *The German Ideology* that future individuals will 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner...without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic'.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I am especially concerned with Marx's ideal of all-round development, that is, the idea that self-realisation consists in the all-round development of the individual's powers and capacities. This ideal has been widely criticised. For instance, both Jon Elster and G.A.Cohen have argued that all-round development represents an implausible and not necessarily attractive ideal of individual self-realisation. In response, I argue that all-round development is not as implausible as Elster and Cohen suggest. However, while I defend the ideal of all-round development, I shall argue that Marx was wrong to think that the implementation of that ideal requires an abolition of the division of labour, and that, on the contrary, the ideal of all-round development could be realised within specialised activities. In this way, I hope to show that Marx's out and out hostility towards the division of labour was misguided.

In Chapter 3, I argue that Marx's claim that in a future society 'there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities',<sup>5</sup> goes beyond a hope that specialisation will be abolished, to suggest that social roles will also be overcome. That is to say, there will be no painters in a communist society not simply because no one will spend all their time painting but also and more intriguingly because no one will occupy the social role of painter. I argue that Marx sought to abolish roles because he thought that the constraints of a role were incompatible with the free development of individuals. While I argue Marx's desire

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<sup>4</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology, MECW*, volume 5 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p.47.

<sup>5</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.394.



to abolish roles provides a reply to the objection that Marx's vision of the good life aims to subsume the individual in society, I show how it leaves Marx vulnerable to a surprising criticism made by G.A. Cohen: namely, that in its excessive concentration on individual development, Marx's vision of the good life provides an impoverished conception of human community. To anticipate my response, I will concede that Marx is sometimes guilty of this failing, but argue that the Marx of the *Comments* is not, for in that text Marx provides a much richer account of human community.

In Chapter 4, I examine the well-known discussion in the third volume of *Capital* where Marx describes work as belonging to a 'realm of necessity', and talks of the 'realm of freedom' that exists beyond it, in leisure.<sup>6</sup> This passage has seemed to many to provide irrefutable evidence that Marx did change his views about communism, moving away from the youthful optimism of his early writings to adopt a more sober and realistic account of labour in a future society. Others, however, have argued that there is no such change, and that the view expressed in the in the third volume of *Capital* is entirely consonant with Marx's early ideas about the good life under communism.

In this chapter, I offer a new reading of this debate. I argue that while Marx's view in *Capital Volume III* does represent a significant departure from the view he holds at others points, where labour constitutes the 'realm of freedom', the transition between these two views cannot be understood in terms of a simple shift between a 'early and 'late' Marx. Rather, I argue that Marx moves between two models of the good life throughout his writings, never fully settling on one. In this way, I suggest that Marx's intellectual development on this issue is best understood as an oscillation rather than a shift. Once this interpretive claim is advanced, the chapter moves on to consider the potential causes and implications of Marx's life-long oscillation between two different conceptions of the good life.

In Chapter 5, I examine in some detail the concluding passage to the *Comments*, where Marx invites us to imagine that we had 'carried out our production as human beings'.<sup>7</sup> Here, I will argue, Marx puts forward a vision of the good life that contains more resources with which to respond to the family of problems which

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, *Capital A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. III, MECW*, volume 37 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998), p.807.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill's *Éléments D'économie Politique*', *MECW*, volume 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), pp.226-228.

Marx's other conceptions of communism run up against. Unsurprisingly, however, the position Marx adopts in the *Comments* also faces problems of its own, especially with regards to the issue of whether it could be applied on a society-wide basis. I conclude by considering these problems, and some lines of response at Marx's disposal.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEMS OF MARX'S VISION OF THE GOOD LIFE

As soon as we start to think Marx's vision of the good life a family of problems arise. For instance, given Marx's well-known reticence for the drawing up of blueprints for the future, one may doubt whether Marx even had a 'vision of a good life'. Alternatively, given the voluminous literature on Marx and Marxism, one may wonder whether there is anything new to be said on the topic pursued here. Even if one accepts that Marx has a vision of the good life, and that the secondary literature has not covered all the relevant issues, one may still doubt the value of a full-length study of its central ideas: for instance, one may think that Marx's vision of the good life is irredeemably utopian or based on a one-sided account of the human good.

It is the primary purpose of this chapter to examine some of these issues that Marx's vision runs up against. My hope in addressing these issues is three-fold: first, that we will come to a clearer understanding of what these problems are; second, that we will see that these problems may not, in some respects at least, be as damaging as they first appear; and finally, third, that we will start to determine a criterion that a defensible vision of the good life must satisfy.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I start (in §1.1) by anticipating two doubts that one may have with a project of this kind, before going on to consider whether Marx's vision of the good life is vitiated by its determinism (in §1.2), its perfectionism (in §1.3), or its utopianism (in §1.4).

#### 1.1. Two Doubts

Let us start by anticipating two doubts one might have with the study of Marx's vision of the good life.

First of all, whatever one thinks of other aspects of Marx's thought, one might consider his vision of the good life to be too fragmentary and unspecified, and thus doubt the value of a full-length study of its central ideas. A survey of the secondary literature would heighten this worry. Sympathetic commentators have described Marx's vision of a future society as 'extremely thin',<sup>1</sup> 'vague and

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.9.

uninformative’,<sup>2</sup> and ‘so non-committal as to be almost vacuous’.<sup>3</sup> What little Marx did write on this matter has been described as ‘astonishingly implausible’<sup>4</sup> and ‘defective and misleading’.<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Wolff sums up the prevailing view when he says that although Marx provides us with some of the ‘sharpest tools’ for criticising existing society, as a ‘creative thinker’, by contrast, he was ‘hugely optimistic, sometimes mistaken in his arguments and assumptions, often infuriatingly vague about the details and, in consequence, he has little to tell us now about how to arrange society’.<sup>6</sup>

While I cannot hope to answer objections of this kind at the outset, let me make a couple of preliminary points that may at least ease this worry. First, while it is true that Marx says comparatively little about his vision of the future society, it would be wrong to suggest that discussion of this theme is completely absent from Marx’s texts. In fact, most of Marx’s major works, from the early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* through to his magnum opus, *Capital*, contain a description of the society that he believed was destined to replace capitalism. Second, while these descriptions are – without exception – brief in length, they are also rich in content, containing a number of philosophically interesting ideas. For instance, Marx makes some distinctive claims about the human good (that man is by nature a creative being, who achieves self-realisation through the exercise of his creative capacities), some striking social recommendations (that we should abolish the division of labour and the social roles created therein), and some controversial claims about the compatibility of values (that freedom and community are not compatible but deeply complementary). Thus, although Marx’s vision of the future society is undeniably short on detail, there are some reasons for thinking that it contains more of philosophical interest than is commonly supposed.

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<sup>2</sup> Allen W. Wood, ‘Antimoralism’ in Allen W. Wood and Songsuk Susan Hahn (ed) *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.506.

<sup>3</sup> John Plamenatz, *Karl Marx’s Philosophy of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.465.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Rosen, ‘Karl Marx’ in E.Craig (ed) *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p.562.

<sup>5</sup> Alec Nove, ‘Introduction’, *The Economics of Feasible Socialism*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p.x.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Wolff, *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.3.

Even if one accepts the theoretical interest in Marx's vision of the good life, however, one might think that the secondary literature has already covered the relevant issues. This brings us to our second worry, that there is nothing left to be said on the topic of Marx's vision of a future communist society.

This is a reasonable but ultimately mistaken worry. For although many works contain some discussion of Marx's vision of the good life, full-length philosophical studies of the themes broached here are rare. There are two explanations for why this has been the case. The first lies with the fact that some of Marx's most interesting descriptions of the good life were buried in texts that only became available long after Marx's death. So, for example, the notebooks Marx kept in Paris in 1844, which have come to be known as the *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the 'Comments on James Mill' – a rough but fascinating body of works containing some of Marx's most philosophically interesting ideas – were first published in 1932 and only translated into English in 1956.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the notebooks known as the *Grundrisse*, another text now considered of seminal importance, was first published even later in 1941 and only translated into English in 1973.<sup>8</sup> Even important works published in Marx's lifetime, such as 'On the Jewish Question', could not be said to be widely available until the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> The late publication of these writings has been significant in two ways. First, it has meant that Marx's legacy was formed when knowledge of his philosophical writings was partial and incomplete. Since Marx's philosophical writings were not readily available to the public until the 1950s, it is hardly surprising that Marx was regarded primarily as an economist for the first half of the twentieth century. Second, the late publication of these texts denied earlier commentators the opportunity of engaging with some of Marx's most important pronouncements about the good life under communism. Crucially, this includes the text that I take to contain Marx's most philosophically interesting account of the good life, the 'Comments on James Mill'.

The second explanation lies with the nature of twentieth century Anglophone philosophy. For much of the twentieth century, and at least up in till the late 1960s, the discipline of political philosophy seemed to be in a state of decline. Indeed, in the

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<sup>7</sup> David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.4.

<sup>8</sup> David McClellan, *Marx's Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.4.

1950s and 1960s a number of commentators wondered whether the tradition of political philosophy had come to an end.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, then, although Marx's ideas received a good deal of attention from economists, historians and sociologists in this period, they received far less attention from philosophers.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, at the start of the 1970s Marx's philosophy would have had a credible claim to be the least well-known aspect of his thought.

The fortunes of political philosophy changed dramatically in the 1970s with the publication in 1971 of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Whilst Rawls saw his own work as belonging to the tradition of Kantian liberalism, its publication also sparked a revival of interest in Marx. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, the remarkable emphasis Rawls placed on the value of justice prompted Marxists to consider what role, if any, the value of justice played in Marx's thought. Consequently, in the years following the publication of *A Theory of Justice* there was a vigorous debate in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* on the question of whether Marx thought capitalism was unjust.<sup>12</sup> Second, because Rawls aimed to defend a theory of justice that could accommodate traditional socialist criticisms of classical liberalism, *A Theory of Justice* invited philosophers in the Marxist tradition to consider whether there was still space for a Marxist critique of Rawlsian liberalism – an answer that some, at least, answered in the affirmative.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a helpful overview of twentieth century political philosophy, see Jonathan Wolff, 'The History of Analytic Political Philosophy', in M. Beaney (ed) *The Oxford Handbook to the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that Marx received no attention from philosophers in this period. The American pragmatist, Sidney Hook, published an overview of Marx's early writings and their relation to the young Hegelians (S. Hook, *From Hegel to Marx* (New York: Humanities Press, 1950)); John Plamenatz published a thoughtful study of Marx's political theory and Soviet communism (J. Plamenatz, *German Marxism and Russian Communism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1954)). H.B. Acton published a critical account of Marx's theory of history (H.B. Acton, *The Illusion of the Epoch* (London: Cohen and West, 1955)); and Isaiah Berlin published an intellectual biography (I. Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963)). But even so, given Marx's enormous historical and cultural significance in the twentieth century, the paucity of philosophical work on Marx in this period is striking.

<sup>12</sup> See Allen W. Wood, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1:3, (1972); Ziyad Husami, 'Marx on Distributive Justice', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 8:1, (1978); Allen W. Wood, 'Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 8:3, (1979).

<sup>13</sup> For example, see Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Rawls: A Reconstruction and Critique of 'A Theory of Justice'*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

It is worth noting, however, that while there was something of a revival of interest in Marx in these years, the topic under consideration here – Marx’s vision of the good life – remained very much in the background. Of course, the discussion in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* touched on the issue of whether Marx thought that communism would be more just than capitalism, but significant discussion of Marx’s vision of the good life was largely absent from the debate. The paucity of work on Marx’s vision of the good life continued in the subsequent years. In 1978, G.A. Cohen published an influential interpretation and defence of Marx’s theory of history, which attempted to apply the standards of clarity and rigour of analytic philosophy to historical materialism.<sup>14</sup> Following the publication of Cohen’s book, a group of like-minded scholars formed and a stream of books and articles appeared.<sup>15</sup> But although the concerns of the so-called ‘analytical Marxists’ shifted away from Marx’s theory of history and towards issues in ethics and normative political philosophy over the years, discussion of Marx’s vision of the good life remained almost completely absent from their works.<sup>16</sup> In the 1980s and early 1990s, there were articles on exploitation and the labour theory of value,<sup>17</sup> more work of Marx on justice and morality,<sup>18</sup> some important studies of the Marxist notion of ideology,<sup>19</sup> and some accounts of Marx’s

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<sup>14</sup> G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: An Interpretation and Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> For a survey of these publications, see Thomas Mayer, *Analytical Marxism* (London: Sage, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> One notable exception here is Jon Elster’s ‘Self-Realisation in Work and Politics’ in Jon Elster and Karl O. Moene (ed) *Alternatives to Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, G.A. Cohen, ‘The Labor Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 8:4, (1979); John Roemer ‘Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14:1, (1985); Jeffrey Reiman ‘Exploitation, Force and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism: Thoughts on Roemer and Cohen’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 16:1, (1987).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*; Phillip J. Kain *Marx and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Norman Geras, ‘The Controversy About Marx and Justice’ in A. Callinicos (ed) *Marxist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> See, Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Michael Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude: False Consciousness and the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).

philosophical ideas as a whole.<sup>20</sup> But Marx's vision of the good life was only discussed in passing, if at all.

Interestingly, the neglect of Marx's vision of the good life was also replicated in the major strand of continental Marxism, albeit in a different way. In a series of works, Louis Althusser drew a line between the humanism of the early Marx and the scientific socialism of the mature Marx, rejecting the former as early juvenilia and consigning it to the dustbin of Marxism.<sup>21</sup> On this reading, fully-fledged Marxism is an objective, value-neutral science, devoid of value-judgements. The idea that Marx provided a vision of a better society that would eventually come to replace capitalism was entirely foreign to Althusser's interpretation of Marx.

Why the neglect of the vision of the good life in Marx scholarship? At least in Anglophone philosophy one plausible explanation lies in the path political philosophy took following the publication of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. For one distinctive feature of that book, and much political philosophy that has been published in its wake, is its emphasis on 'neutrality' – the view that political philosophy should not argue from a 'comprehensive' conception of the good, but should limit itself to providing a neutral framework within which different conceptions of the good can be pursued.<sup>22</sup> It is hard to resist the conclusion that the Rawlsian move away from perfectionism and towards neutralism played an important role in shaping the issues that Marx's commentators addressed in these years. It is, for instance, surely not coincidental that the most sustained debate in this period centred on the issue of justice in Marx's thought, while at the same time the perfectionist side of Marx's writings received far less attention.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx: Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1981) and Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1968); and *Reading Capital*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: New Left books, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). If anything, Rawls's neutralism hardened over the years. His later work insisted that liberalism was not founded on a 'comprehensive' ethics (à la Kant and Mill), but a strictly 'political' doctrine that could be accepted by reasonable citizens with diverse and potentially conflicting conceptions of the good. See, John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> In recent years, there have been some signs of renewed interest in the perfectionist side of Marx's thought. One could speculate that this recent revival may have been provoked, at least in part, by a growing dissatisfaction with Rawlsian neutralism. For discussion of perfectionist



The purpose of this abbreviated history has been to underline the point that, despite Marx's huge historical and cultural significance, Marx's vision of the good life has received relatively little attention from philosophers. But let us consider, if only briefly, how the story has developed from here. Of course, the major event in this regard was the sudden and unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. This had a profound impact on the philosophical study of Marx's thought. By the 1990s the various movements that had debated Marx's philosophical ideas in the 1970s and 1980s ran their course. Discussion of Althusser's work ceased. The analytical Marxists continued to publish important works in political philosophy, but it no longer focused on Marx. Instead, their work increasingly centred on issues of justice and equality and a critical engagement with the egalitarian liberalism of John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin.<sup>24</sup> In sum, Marx seemed to be something of a 'dead dog' in political philosophy. G.A. Cohen summed up the prevailing mood in his 1996 Gifford lectures:

'Marxism has lost much or most of its carapace, its hard shell of supposed fact. Scarcely anybody defends it in the academy, and there are no more apparatchiki who believe that they are applying it in Communist Party offices. To the extent that Marxism is still alive...it presents itself as a set of values and a set of designs for realizing those values. It is therefore, now, far less different than it could once advertise itself to be from the utopian socialism with which it so proudly contrasted itself. Its shell is cracked and crumbling, its soft underbelly exposed.'<sup>25</sup>

Despite the rather gloomy tone of this passage, there are reasons to be more optimistic about the study of Marx's thought today. The twentieth century was a difficult one for Marx scholarship. In a number of ways the Soviet Union sustained a very rigid and simplistic interpretation of Marx's thought, while much of the secondary literature was also marred by anti-Soviet bias. It is too early to tell whether the fall of Soviet communism, and the slow settling of ideological dust surrounding these issues, will give rise to another revival of interest in Marx like that seen in the

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themes in Marx, see Daniel Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), and Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, Chapter III.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, John Roemer, *Theories of Distributive Justice* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996); and G.A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> G.A.Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.103.

1970s. There does seem to be a moderate revival of interest in socialism within contemporary political philosophy.<sup>26</sup> But at the very least, the collapse of the Soviet communism provides a more conducive context for a sober assessment of Marx's ideas.

## 1.2. The Problem of Determinism

Having provided a response to these two doubts, I now turn to series of problems that are often thought to undermine Marx's vision of the good life. The next problem I consider centres on the determinism that is commonly associated with Marx's social theory and philosophy of history.

The idea that Marx has a vision of the good life may strike some readers as strange. After all, Marx did not think of himself as a visionary of the good society but as a social theorist who attempted to explain the nature of the modern social world and the dynamics of its history. Furthermore, Marx saw his social theory as underpinning a deflationary account of ethics according to which ethical ideas are determined by the needs of the prevailing economic structure. Marx provides a crystalline statement of his theory in the Preface to *A Contribution to A Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 (hereafter the *1859 Preface*):

‘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 their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the articles published in the wake of G.A. Cohen's *Why Not Socialism?* Miriam Ronzoni, ‘Life is Not a Camping Trip: On the Desirability of Cohenite Socialism’, *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 11:2, (2012); and Pablo Gilabert, ‘Feasibility and Socialism’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 19:1, (2011).

One area of specifically Marxist (rather than broadly socialist) research that has been developing in the last few years has focused on the topic of Marx and recognition – more precisely, on the questions of whether Marx developed a philosophy of recognition, and, if so, whether that philosophy could enrich contemporary debates in this area. A special issue on ‘Marx and Recognition’ has just been published in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 16:4, (2013).

men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness'.<sup>27</sup>

On this view, productive power (i.e. technology) tends to develop throughout history as human beings develop more and more dynamic productive methods in order to satisfy their ever-expanding needs. At each stage in history, 'economic structures' arise – previously feudalism, today capitalism, one day, perhaps, communism – that correspond to the level of the development of productive power. In turn, the economic structure itself determines the 'political, legal and intellectual' superstructure, of which ethics are also a part. In this way, Marx's theory of history moves outwards from its materialist starting point: productive power develops throughout history; the level of the development of the productive powers determines the economic structure; and the economic structure in turns determines the ideological superstructure.

How, according to this theory, does one form of society give way to another?

Marx continues:

'At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production...From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.'<sup>28</sup>

In other words, social change occurs when an economic structure that had previously facilitated the development of productive power plays out its historical role and becomes a fetter to them. To be sure, it is individuals that ultimately overturn one economic structure and replace it with another. But the root cause of change is not individuals or their ideals of a better society, but the tension between the productive forces and the prevailing economic structure.

On the view propounded here, the whole domain of ethics plays an epiphenomenal role in human history; ethical ideas are determined, or at least conditioned, by the prevailing economic structure of society. Hence, they lack any

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<sup>27</sup> Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to A Critique of Political Economy*, *MECW*, volume 29 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p.263.

<sup>28</sup> Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to A Critique of Political Economy*, p.263.

kind of autonomous force. In fact, the only real role for ethics within historical materialism is a conservative and obfuscatory one: their purpose is to stabilise the prevailing economic structure by sanctioning its practices (for example, by treating what are in reality class interests as impartial and universal standards of right).

Given the circumscribed role ethics have within Marx's social theory, it is of little surprise that when Marx discusses communism the point he often makes is that it is not the realisation of a pre-conceived ethical ideal but the culmination of complex historical processes. Thus, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels claim that 'communism is not for us a *state of affairs* which is to be established', but is 'the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things.'<sup>29</sup> Likewise, twenty-five years later, in *The Civil War in France*, Marx reiterated that communism is not the realisation of a pre-conceived vision of the good life. The working class, says Marx:

'...have no ready-made utopias to introduce. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which society is irresistibly tending...they will have to pass through long struggles.... They have no ideas to realise, but to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.'<sup>30</sup>

And yet, while statements such as the ones quoted above may seem to preclude the very idea that Marx has a vision of the good life, there are several reasons for not taking them entirely at face-value. One compelling point is that it is simply hard to make sense of Marx's life as a revolutionary unless one ascribes to him the belief that individuals and their ideas can have some positive role in shaping human society. For Marx not only tried to comprehend the inner motions of the capitalist economy, he also wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and other incendiary works, which aimed not to disinterestedly understand capitalism but to galvanise the class oppressed by it. Intermittently or implicitly, then, Marx seems to have believed that ideas could be a source of power to bring about change.

A second point is that while the *1859 Preface* puts forward a very deterministic line on the relationship between economic base and (political, legal and moral) superstructure, a number of commentators have interpreted Marx's theory of

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<sup>29</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.49.

<sup>30</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, *MECW*, volume 22 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p.335.

history in a more nuanced and less deterministic way, which has consequently opened the door for a much greater role for ideas and human initiative in the historical process.<sup>31</sup> While this is not the place to go into the finer details of Marx's social theory and philosophy of history, it is certainly true that when Marx analyses an actual historical event – as he does, for example, in the '18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Napoleon' – he seems to allow a much greater scope for human agency than that which is hinted at in the *1859 Preface*. Thus, although some of Marx's discussions of his theory of history seem to put forward a very uncompromising form of determinism, it is not obvious that this is Marx's considered view.

The third and most important point, however, is that while Marx often claims that communism is merely a form of society that human history is inexorably moving towards, in reality it is obvious that Marx did have a vision of the future communist society which he believed would one day replace capitalism. That vision is especially clear in the young Marx's *Comments*, where we are invited to 'imagine that we had carried out our production as human beings',<sup>32</sup> and in the notorious passage in *The German Ideology*, where future individuals are said to 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner...without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.'<sup>33</sup> But these passages cannot be discounted as early juvenilia, which a later more realistic Marx would disavow. For much later in *Capital* we are also told to 'picture to ourselves...a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common, in which the labour power of all the different individuals is consciously applied as the combined labour power of the community.'<sup>34</sup>

Despite all the frequent disavowals to the contrary, then, there is no doubt that Marx was committed to an ethical vision of a future communist society. Of course, one could object that Marx cannot be consistently committed to a deterministic theory of history and an ethical vision of a future society. But this is not an objection we

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<sup>31</sup> For a rejection of the view that Marx is committed to strict economic determinism, see Allen W. Wood, *Karl Marx*, Part II.

<sup>32</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.227.

<sup>33</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>34</sup> Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I, MECW*, volume 35 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), p.89.

need answer here, for our focus is on Marx's vision of the good life, and not on how well that vision hangs together with the other aspects of his thought.

### 1.3. The Problem of Perfectionism

The next problem concerns Marx's perfectionism, that is, his conception of human nature and the human good. Marx's perfectionism has been heavily criticised. For instance, left-liberal philosophers, like Richard Arneson and Will Kymlicka, have argued that Marxian perfectionism is based on a one-sided account of the human good, while Axel Honneth has argued that Marxian perfectionism is at odds with autonomy. These criticisms have led a number of Marx's followers to conclude that 'a perfectionist defence of nonalienation seems remote.'<sup>35</sup>

In his fine book on the topic, Thomas Hurka defines the perfectionist position as follows:

'It [perfectionism] starts from an account of the good life, or the intrinsically desirable life. And it characterizes this life in a distinctive way. Certain properties, it says, constitute human nature or are definitive of humanity – they make humans human. The good life, it then says, develops these properties to a high degree or realises what is central to human nature. Different versions of the theory may disagree about what the relevant properties are and so disagree about the content of the good life. But they share the foundational idea that what is good, ultimately, is the development of human nature'<sup>36</sup>

Marxian perfectionism states that humans are by nature creative beings. It says that they achieve self-realisation through the development of their creative powers. It criticises capitalism because while it creates the conditions for the achievement of individual self-realisation – chiefly by giving rise to a development of productive power that promises to liberate humanity from scarcity – it fails to achieve the goal of

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<sup>35</sup> John Roemer, 'Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?', p.52.

Of course, not everyone has found Marx's ideas about the human good controversial. In his recent magnum opus on the history of ethics, for instance, Terrence Irwin argues that: 'the features of human nature he [Marx] appeals to do not seem especially controversial; nor does it seem very controversial that expression of them is a central aspect of the human good; nor does it seem completely strained to argue that capitalism does not allow the degree of expression of them that would be desirable.' (Terrence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics, Vol.3: From Kant to Rawls*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.251).

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.3.

self-realisation that its own developments put tantalisingly within reach. Communism, by contrast, promises to create the conditions where our distinctly human capacities can flourish to a quite unprecedented degree.

Now, Marxian perfectionism has drawn criticism from different quarters in different ways. But the major complaint is that it is based on an insufficiently pluralistic account of the human good. That is, Marx's perfectionism over-emphasises one good, self-realisation through labour, over a whole range of equally valuable goods, which it thereby overlooks or undervalues.<sup>37</sup> In this way, some of Marx's critics have claimed that Marxian perfectionism is at odds with value-pluralism. For, as Kymlicka puts it:

‘There are many values that may compete with unalienated production, such as bodily and mental health, the development of cognitive facilities, of certain character traits and emotional responses, play, sex, friendship, love, art, religion. Some people will view productive labour as life's prime want, but others will not. A prohibition on alienated labour, therefore, would unfairly privilege some people over others’.<sup>38</sup>

As well as being based on an insufficiently pluralistic account of the human good, critics also suggest that Marxian perfectionism precludes autonomy, understood here simply as the capacity to choose for oneself how to live. This is because Marxian perfectionism dictates the activities individuals should perform rather than leaving them free to choose for themselves. Thus, as Honneth has put this point: ‘instead of leaving subjects free to decide how they wish to pursue their happiness under conditions of autonomy, this perfectionism imposes from above the stipulation that it is only if all members carry out meaningful, non-alienated labour that a society is free and just’.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For criticisms of this sort, see Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), Chapter 5; Richard Arneson, ‘Meaningful Work and Market Socialism’, *Ethics*, 97:3, (1987); A. Brown, *Modern Political Philosophy: Theories of the Just Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986); G.A. Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, *History, Labour and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). I return to Cohen's criticism of Marx in Chapter 3, Section §4.

<sup>38</sup> Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, p.90.

<sup>39</sup> Axel Honneth, ‘Rejoinder’, in B. van den Brink and D. Owen (eds) *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.359.

As a consequence, writers like Kymlicka, Arneson and Honneth, all broadly sympathetic to the traditional aims of socialism, argue that the identification of socialism with a particular vision of the good life is ‘unfortunate’.<sup>40</sup> Instead, they propose that socialists should direct their attention exclusively to considerations of justice and equality in the economic sphere. Socialists, they might say, should be concerned with the right not the good.<sup>41</sup>

Now, one preliminary point is that Marx is by no means a straightforward representative of the perfectionist tradition, in that perfectionism represents one strand amongst others in his ethical outlook. Thus, as well as the perfectionist concern with self-realisation, Marx’s writings also contains more Kantian themes, for example in the idea of exploitation, where the primary complaint against capitalism is not that it prevents workers from developing their creative powers and potentialities, but that it is a social system that treats workers as a means to a further end (i.e. making a profit).<sup>42</sup> In this way, Marx is something of an ambiguous perfectionist, whose critique of capitalism and vision of a future society contains different ethical strands.

Thus, it might seem that one way to place Marx in a positive light would be to minimise the perfectionist strand in Marx’s thought, and reconstruct Marx on more Kantian terms, so that concerns with exploitation rather than alienation and self-realisation come to the fore. This is a route that has been taken by some of Marx’s followers.<sup>43</sup> Yet it is not one that I shall take here. For not only do I doubt whether a distinctly Marxian ethics can be reconstructed free from its perfectionist roots,<sup>44</sup> I also

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<sup>40</sup> Arneson, ‘Meaningful Work and Market Socialism’, p. 518

<sup>41</sup> Thus, as Honneth puts it, ‘the criteria of moral assessment cannot be related to the internal character of the work process itself, but rather only to the institutional framework in which it is necessarily embedded.’ (Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, edited by C. W. Wright (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. xviii).

<sup>42</sup> In addition, some commentators have claimed that there is a utilitarian aspect to Marx’s ethics (though for myself I find it hard to read Marx in this way). For a utilitarian reading of Marx’s ethics, see Allen Buchanan, *Marx and Justice: The Radical Critique of Liberalism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

<sup>43</sup> This way of rescuing Marx has been proposed by John Roemer; see his ‘Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?’

<sup>44</sup> More precisely, I share Kymlicka’s doubt that ‘it is difficult to tell whether Marxism provides a distinctive account of justice from those of other political traditions’ (Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, p.192). Shorn of the perfectionist strand in Marx’s thought is difficult to see what differentiates Marxism as a moral and political philosophy from egalitarian liberalism.



think that the perfectionist strand in Marx – the humanist ideal of self-realisation – is one of the most valuable aspects of Marx’s philosophical inheritance. Therefore, a provisional defence of Marxian perfectionism is in order.

Perfectionist theories, we have seen, are often thought to be marred by two related defects: they (arbitrarily) elevate one good at the expense of all others, and they do not leave people free to choose how to live. What, then, would a plausible account of perfectionism look like? It would be one that is compatible with a significant degree of pluralism about what activities and projects are valuable. Thus, for example, Richard Arneson says that ‘to be remotely plausible any perfectionist doctrine would have to be very unspecific or disjunctive in its content: there are many human goods any of which could serve equally well to frame a rational plan of life.’<sup>45</sup>

Now, contra Arneson and others, I think that Marxian perfectionism may not be so far away from such an ideal. Marxian perfectionism, we have seen, identifies the human good with free creative activity, that is, with labour. In this respect, it might appear to be a monistic perfectionism, one that identifies a single life as best for all human beings. However, while Marx’s theory might appear to be monistic in this sense, the identification of labour as the human good actually leaves the issue of what activities individuals should perform relatively open. In this way, Marxian perfectionism differs from other varieties of perfectionism that specify that one very specific activity – philosophical contemplation, say – best actualises and promotes the human good. For the identification of labour as the chief human good, by contrast, means that there are many different ways which people can realise their nature: in activities like philosophical contemplation, politics and art that have traditionally been held in high regard in the history of philosophy, but also in activities like farming, craftwork and childcare which have not.

Of course, this is not to say that Marxian perfectionism is compatible with every form of human life: it is pluralistic to a degree but not infinitely so. On the Marxian view, for instance, a life of passive consumption is not form of self-realisation, neither is a life of purely private activity. But all perfectionist theories must discriminate between activities that are valuable and hence worthy of encouragement and promotion, and those that are not. The point I press here is simply

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<sup>45</sup> Arneson, ‘Meaningful Work and Market Socialism’, pp.524-525.

that Marxian perfectionism is compatible with a significant degree of pluralism about what activities are valuable.

Critics of Marxian perfectionism say that Marx over-emphasises the importance of creativity. To be sure, they do not deny that creativity is a good, but they question whether creativity is the singularly most important good in a human life. But for Marx creativity is not the *sole* value in labour. On the contrary, labour is an activity through which individuals realise other values, like community. Like Hegel, Marx emphasises that labour is not only an activity through which individuals develop certain talents and abilities, but also an activity through they relate to others and forge social bonds. In a future communist society, Marx maintains, I realise myself as an individual by producing in a way that develops powers and capacities, but also as a communal being by serving the needs of my fellows:

‘In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised*...my *human* nature, my *communal* nature.’<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, I am not persuaded by the unqualified charge that in his emphasis of the creative side of human nature, Marx completely overlooks other equally important human needs. For, as David Leopold has shown in his erudite study of the young Marx, on top of the need for meaningful work an extensive list of other needs can be reconstructed from Marx’s texts.<sup>47</sup> These include basic physical needs (for sustenance, shelter, physical exercise, basic hygiene and sex, for example) as well as less basic social needs (recreation, education, culture, artistic expression, emotional fulfilment, and aesthetic pleasure).<sup>48</sup> Marx gives no reason to think that a life where many of these needs lay unfulfilled could be a fully satisfying one. Neither does he give any reason to think that meaningful work is a sufficient condition for human flourishing.

Still, it is true that Marx’s vision of the good life contains an extraordinary emphasis on labour. Does this focus mean that Marx overlooks, or fails to give sufficient weight to, other human goods? Would a Marxian perfectionism disqualify other equally valuable ways of living? These are important questions to which we

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<sup>46</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.228.

<sup>47</sup> Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, pp.228-229.

<sup>48</sup> Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, pp.228-229.

shall return. Yet even if we conclude that Marxian perfectionism does fall foul one or more of these criticisms, we need not conclude that Marxian perfectionism is of no value. For, as I shall stress in Chapter 4, work has generally been held in low regard (or simply ignored) in the history of philosophy. Thus, even if Marx goes too far in stressing the importance of work over other aspects of human life, his vision of the good life may still have value in providing a corrective to the prevailing treatment of work in the history of philosophy.

#### 1.4. The Problem of Utopianism

The final problem I want to consider centres on the charge that Marx's vision of the good life is utopian. The charge is complicated by a number of issues, however, so I start with some ground-clearing.

The charge of utopianism is complicated, first of all, by Marx's seemingly paradoxical stance towards utopianism. The paradox is easily seen. On the one hand, Marx plainly did not think of himself as a utopian. In contrast to the socialism of Fourier, Saint-Simon and Robert Owen, Marx saw his own brand of socialism as resolutely anti-utopian: not wishful thinking but 'real, positive science', as he famously puts it.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, however, Marx's texts seem to abound with quintessential utopian claims, for example, about the perfectibility of human nature, and the possibility of material abundance. This leaves us with a puzzle. For although Marx presented himself as an anti-utopian thinker, his own ideal of a future communist society presents us with an ideal which, according to one commentator, is 'more dazzling in its utopianism than even that of even the most utopian of utopian socialists'.<sup>50</sup>

This, then, generates a number of separate questions: (1) On what grounds did Marx reject utopianism? (2) Is that rejection convincing? (3) Was Marx himself a utopian, despite his frequent disavowals to the contrary? (4) And, if so, is Marx's vision of the good life vitiated by that utopianism? In what follows, I provide a response to questions (1) through to (3). Question (4) is not something that we can

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<sup>49</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.37.

<sup>50</sup> K. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.53.

settle here, but in closing I will put forward one way of addressing this question, which will be of use for the chapters that follow.

Let us start by considering why Marx rejected utopianism. In this regard, it is important to note that Marx's understanding of 'utopia' is different way from the everyday use of that term. In everyday use, utopia is often taken to mean a vision of an ideal society that does not yet exist. Marx did not reject utopianism in this everyday sense. Rather, in rejecting utopianism he had something different in mind. In particular, Marx associated utopianism with the creation of *detailed* accounts of an ideal society, that is, with the drawing up of comprehensive blueprints for the future. It is this idea of utopianism – the creation of detailed accounts of a future society – that Marx criticised and rejected. Thus, as Steven Lukes has summarised this view, 'Marx and Engels were not opposed to utopianism in the sense of vesting high hopes in the future: few have held higher hopes than they did. But they did criticise the Utopian Socialists for drawing up utopian *blueprints*'.<sup>51</sup>

Why did Marx reject blueprints? He gives two main arguments. The first is that the drawing up of blueprints is *impossible*, because history will unfold in ways in which we cannot possibly foresee. Thus, in a letter to the Dutch socialist, Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, Marx wrote that the attempt by utopian thinkers to anticipate 'a future revolution's programme of action' is '*of necessity* fantastic'.<sup>52</sup> Underpinning the claim that any attempt to anticipate the future is impossible is a form of historicism – the epistemological view that human understanding is always captive of its historical situation, which it cannot consequently go beyond. Since, on Marx's view, human understanding is always limited to its own time, it would be impossible for him living under capitalism to draw up detailed plans for a future communist society.

Marx's second argument is the stronger one that blueprints are *unnecessary*, because the solutions to major social problems – like the design of a future society – are immanent in the development of history. This view is at the heart of the so-called 'obstetric metaphor' which run through Marx's writings, for example, in the claim, already quoted, that the working-class 'have no ready-made utopias to introduce...but to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society is

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<sup>51</sup> Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, p.40.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, 'Letter from Marx to Nieuwenhuis, 22nd February 1881', *MECW*, volume 46 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1992), p.66.

itself pregnant.’<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere, Marx puts this point in more strongly. ‘Mankind’, he claims:

‘...sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve; since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or are at least in the course of formation.’<sup>54</sup>

Marx’s arguments against blueprints are unconvincing. First, Marx’s claim that the drawing up of blueprints is *impossible*, because human thought is limited to its own time, is open to doubt. In particular, while the historicist claim that human understanding is limited seems plausible, it is not clear that it justifies the stronger conclusion that the drawing up of blueprints is impossible. For even if human understanding is limited in the way the historicist suggests, we may still know enough about the tendencies of human nature and the social world to make the drawing up of ‘realistic utopias’ an eminently possible enterprise.<sup>55</sup> In fact, I think that acceptance of the historicist claim that human understanding is limited, and that history will develop in ways we cannot foresee, would lead us, not to abandon blueprints, but to change the way we consider them. For instance, an awareness of the limitations of human understanding and contingencies of historical development may make us take a more flexible and non-dogmatic approach to the implementation of blueprints.

Second, Marx’s claim that blueprints are *unnecessary*, because the answers to key social questions will be revealed in the course of history, shows an extraordinary confidence in the historical process. This confidence was something of a commonplace in the nineteenth-century, but it is one that few of us share today. As David Leopold puts it, living after the various horrors of the twentieth century, Marx’s confidence that ‘the solutions to the social problems that face humankind need only to be delivered (and not designed) no longer seems a reasonable one to hold.’<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Marx, *The Civil War in France*, p.335.

<sup>54</sup> Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to A Critique of Political Economy*, p.263.

<sup>55</sup> The phrase ‘realistic utopia’ comes from Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 2001), p.4.

<sup>56</sup> Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.294.

More importantly, Marx's rejection of blueprints has also tended to encourage a critical 'lack of attention to questions of socialist design.'<sup>57</sup> Marx wanted to change the world dramatically, yet he declined to specify in detail the ways he wanted it changed. The obvious rejoinder is that history may not – for all of Marx's optimism to the contrary – develop in ways we desire. Famously, in the afterword to *Capital*, Marx said that it was not for him to write 'recipes for the cook-shops of the future.'<sup>58</sup> But, as G.A. Cohen has responded, 'unless we write recipes for future kitchens, there's no reason to think we'll get food we like.'<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, to the extent that Marxism has presented itself as a resolutely anti-utopian theory, it deprives itself of some valuable theoretical resources. I have no space to consider the positives of utopianism in detail, but I mention four, briefly, here. First, utopianism can open our minds to new possibilities, to ways of living that are different from and perhaps better than the way in which we live now. Second, utopianism can play an important role in clarifying our social and political values. Famously, for example, John Rawls invites his readers to imagine themselves in an 'original position', where they abstract themselves from circumstances that are irrelevant to justice (like their race or gender or social class), to see, more clearly, what justice requires. Third, by highlighting the gap between society as-it-is and society as we-would-like-it-to-be, utopianism can provide a useful tool for social criticism. Finally, utopianism can inspire hope, or at least provide consolation, in discouraging times. I am sceptical about whether a purely critical theory – which Marxism has, at times, proudly boasted itself to be – can do that. In these ways, Marxism has, in its embracement of a resolutely anti-utopian outlook, failed to exploit the strengths of utopian thinking.

Let us now turn away from Marx's rejection of utopianism and towards his own alleged utopianism. The first question to consider here is whether Marx was himself a utopian. Naturally, as we have already seen, the answer to this question depends on the definition of 'utopia' that is adopted. If by utopia we mean the creation of *detailed* accounts of an ideal society, the drawing up of blueprints for the future, then the answer is "no": Marx never provides the kind of detailed descriptions

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<sup>57</sup> Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.294.

<sup>58</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, p.17.

<sup>59</sup> Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian*, p.78.

of a future society that are a hallmark of the writings of utopian socialists like Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, for example. But if by utopia we mean a broad vision of an ideal society that does not yet exist, then I believe the answer is unequivocally “yes”: Marxian communism is a vision of human lifestyles and social arrangements, an ideal of what human life could be. In *this* sense, Marx’s vision of a future communist society is, plainly, utopian.

However, the claim that Marx was a utopian is one that should be made with care. For while Marx is undeniably a utopian thinker in the particular sense described above, there is one obstinate myth about Marx’s vision of a future communist society and its alleged utopianism that remains prevalent in the literature. This is the myth that Marx envisioned communism, in the words of Leszek Kolakowski, as a ‘dream offering the prospect of a society of perfect unity, in which all human aspirations would be fulfilled, and all values reconciled.’<sup>60</sup> Consider the claim that communism will satisfy ‘all human aspirations’. No doubt, Marx thinks that some of the most important aspirations that lie unfulfilled under capitalism would be fulfilled under communism. For instance, he thinks that communism will satisfy the deep human need for meaningful work. But there is no exegetical evidence that Marx thought that communism would satisfy ‘all human aspirations’. For even in a communist society that knows nothing of alienated labour or class antagonisms a multitude of frustrations and discontents will remain: some lives will be tragically cut short, some will experience misfortune in love, some will fail in their chosen project of self-realisation. Marx gives no reason to think that such frustrations – part and parcel of human life – will not feature in communism. Neither does he suggest that they will be trivial or insignificant.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism, Volume 1: The Founders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.523; See also K. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, p.62.

<sup>61</sup> What I have said here only responds to the first of Kolokowski’s claims, that communism will ‘satisfy all human aspirations’, and not to his second one, that communism will ‘reconcile all values’. In response to that second claim, I would argue that while it is true that Marx claims that some values are reconcilable, this does not commit him to the more exacting claim that all values are reconcilable. Thus, while Marx does think that individual self-realisation and community are reconcilable (see Chapter 3), this claim still leaves significant scope for conflict between other values (one may think, for instance, that implementing the ideal of self-realisation through labour will come at a cost to economic efficiency).

Let us turn to the final question, of whether Marx's vision of the good life is vitiated by its utopianism. Again, there is some ground-clearing to be done here, since the criticism that a theory is 'utopian' can signal different failings. For example, it can mean (i) that a theory is *implausible*, because the proposals it recommends are not ones that could be realised in a feasible social world; (ii) that a theory is *distracting* and *counter-productive*, because it focuses attention on an unreachable beyond rather than on the possibilities for social change that are more readily available in the present; and finally (iii), that a theory is *dangerous*, because the illusion of a perfect world, where all sources of tension and frustration have melted away, can be used to justify any short-term sacrifice in a vain attempt to bring it to fruition.

Marx's vision of the good life has been criticised in all these ways, but I am inclined to think that (i) presents the most telling criticism. I do not think that (ii) presents a convincing case against utopianism, for there is not obvious reason why utopias must be counter-productive and distracting: it seems possible, for example, to engage in utopian theory to clarify what it is that we ultimately want, while simultaneously seizing the opportunities for social change more readily available in the present. Indeed, one could plausibly argue that utopianism is valuable in this regard, in that it can give necessary direction to those short-term measures. The final point (iii) might seem more relevant to Marx, since it has been pressed against him by a number of critics. Yet, as will be clear from the foregoing discussion, I do not think that Marx was committed to the paradisiacal vision of communism that is sometimes attributed to him. Moreover, I am inclined to think that it is Marx's anti-utopianism, that is, his rejection of the need for detailed ethical reflection on the nature of a future society, rather than Marx's utopianism, that is, his commitment to a broad vision of future lifestyles and social arrangements, that is Marx's more serious theoretical shortcoming.

So, it is, I think, the first charge – of implausibility – that constitutes the most serious criticism of Marx's vision of the good life. The issue of whether Marx's vision is utopian in this particular, negative sense is not one we can settle at the outset. But in concluding this section it will be useful to put forward a threshold of realism that Marx's vision of the good life must meet if it is to represent a serious ideal. The threshold I have in mind, to which we shall return in the course of the thesis, comes from Rawls:



‘We view political philosophy as *realistically utopian*: that is, as probing the limits of practicable political possibility...we ask: What would a just democratic society be like under reasonably favourable but still possible historical conditions, conditions allowed by the laws and tendencies of the social world? What ideals and principles would such a society try to realise given the circumstances of justice in a democratic culture as we know them?’<sup>62</sup>

### 1.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined in some detail a family of objections that are often thought to undermine Marx’s vision of the good life, and argued that, on closer inspection, they may not be as damaging as they first appear. So, for example, while the very idea that Marx has a vision of the good life may seem hard to square with the determinism of Marx’s social theory, I have argued that there are reasons for not taking that determinism entirely at face-value; while Marx’s vision is often thought to be undermined by a one-sided account of the human good, I have argued that Marx’s perfectionism is in fact more pluralistic than its critics have suggested; and likewise, while Marx’s vision is often thought to be undermined by its utopianism, I have argued that utopianism should not be rejected out of hand. In this way, therefore I hope to have eased some of the worries one might have with Marx’s vision of the good life.

As well as defending Marx from certain objections, I have also put forward a number of more positive arguments for thinking that Marx’s vision of the good life may, not only be defensible from certain objections, but merit attention in its own right. So, for example, I have argued that there are reasons for thinking that our own, post-communist age may prove conducive to the examination and assessment of Marx’s philosophical ideas; that Marx’s perfectionism – with its focus on labour – emphasises an important aspect of human life, which philosophers have generally said little about; and that utopianism contains a number of valuable theoretical resources, which Marxists, as much as anyone else, have tended to undervalue.

Finally, I have put forward two desiderata for a defensible vision of the good life. First, following Arnseon, I have argued that a plausible perfectionism must be ‘unspecific or disjunctive in its content’. It must allow for the fact that there ‘are

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<sup>62</sup> Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p.4.

many human goods any of which could serve equally well to frame a rational plan of life'. Second, I have argued a desirable utopianism must pass a certain threshold of realism: it can probe, but not go beyond, 'the limits of practicable political possibility', to use Rawls's phrase. I return to these points in Chapter 5, where I argue that Marx's vision of the good life in the 'Comments on James Mill' comes closest to satisfying these desiderata.

## CHAPTER 2

### ALL-ROUND DEVELOPMENT AND THE ABOLITION OF THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

In the previous chapter, we examined a family of problems associated with Marx's vision of the good life. Having come to a sharper understanding of these problems, we are now in a position to examine some of the specific features of that vision. I start by looking at a central tenet of Marx's individualistic conception of the good life, the ideal of all-round development and the critique of the division of labour. For Marx, self-realisation consists in the all-round development of the individual and realising oneself in this all-round way requires an abolition of the division of labour. Marx makes this claim in the notorious 'hunt in the morning' passage in *The German Ideology*.<sup>1</sup> There, he draws a contrast between capitalist society, where workers are chained to a narrow specialism and develop only a fragment of their many-sided potentials, and a communist society of the future, where individuals are free to choose the work they do and develop their powers in an all-round way.

Marx's thought on these matters has been heavily criticised. For instance, Jon Elster and G.A.Cohen have argued that all-round development represents an unrealistic and not necessarily attractive ideal of self-realisation. In what follows, I argue that the ideal of all-round development is not as implausible as Elster and Cohen suggest. While I shall defend the ideal of all-round development from Elster and Cohen's criticisms, however, I shall argue that Marx was wrong to think that the implementation of that ideal requires an abolition of the division of labour. In particular, I will question whether overcoming the division of labour would create the conditions where the all-round development of individuals would flourish, and whether one could not, in fact, achieve an all-round development of one's powers within specialised activities. In this way, I hope to show that Marx's out and out hostility towards specialism was misguided, and that the ideal of all-round development could be realised by preserving rather than abolishing the division of labour.

I begin (§2.1) by introducing the themes of all-round development and division of labour via a brief discussion of the famous sixth letter of Friedrich

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<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man*. Next (§2.2), I examine Marx's so-called 'hunt in the morning' passage in *The German Ideology*. Terrell Carver has questioned the reliability of this passage as a source of Marx's ideas, but I argue that his attempt to discredit the passage is unconvincing. Having put this issue aside, the chapter then moves on to critically consider the nature of Marxian self-realisation. I briefly (§2.3) consider the idea of the idea that individuals under communism will be free to choose the activities they realise themselves in, before returning to the chief theme of the chapter, the idea of all-round development. My strategy is to defend a moderate version of all-round development from Elster and Cohen's criticisms (§2.4), before going on to argue, contra Marx, that all-round development is compatible with a division of labour (§2.5).

## 2.1. Schiller and Marx on the Division of Labour

### (i) Schiller

In the sixth letter of his major philosophical work, *The Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller drew an influential contrast between the exquisite wholeness that characterised ancient Greece and the thoroughgoing fragmentation of modern society:

‘That polypoid character of the Greek States, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into a whole organism, now made way for an ingenious clock-work, in which, out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical collective life ensued...Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialised knowledge.’<sup>2</sup>

For Schiller, as for many of his contemporaries, the stultification wrought by the division of labour was one of the chief social problems of the day. Its cause lay in the modern division of labour.

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<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, edited and translated by E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p.35

For Schiller, this stultification had both individual and communal aspects. First, with the increasing specialism of modern labour the individual develops ‘nothing but a fragment’ of their many-sided potentials. In marked contrast to the ancient Greek, who did not limit himself to one activity but developed his manifold powers in an all-round way, modern man was stunted: ‘Everlastingly chained’ to his narrow and increasingly one-sided occupation, Schiller writes, modern man is ‘sacrificed to advance the abstract life of the whole’.<sup>3</sup>

As well as the stultification of the individual, Schiller also argues that the division of labour has had a corresponding effect on the community, as the harmony of the Greek state gave way to mechanical society, lacking in social belonging and togetherness.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the intense particularisation of human beings within the division of labour, there no longer exists any kind of commonality between people; and so, in sharp contrast to the Greek state, where each citizen had a deep connection with one another and with the social whole, modern society itself was fragmented. From the botching together of ‘innumerable but lifeless parts’, Schiller says, a ‘mechanical kind of collective life ensued.’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.37

<sup>4</sup> The idea that the division of labour resulted in a stultification of the individual was a common theme in nineteenth century writings. Thus, as well as Schiller and Marx, similar ideas about individual stultification can be found in the writings of Herder and Hölderlin (among others) on the continent, and Adam Ferguson, Thomas Carlyle, and John Ruskin (among others) in Britain.

While these themes were prevalent in a number of works, however, some dissenting figures saw the modern division of labour in a more positive light: not as precluding individuality and social unity but leading to a higher forms of them. Key figures in this respect include G.W.F. Hegel, the French sociologist, Émile Durkheim, and the British idealist, F.H. Bradley.

<sup>5</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.35.

The metaphor of the ‘machine’, employed here by Schiller, was common in nineteenth century writings. As Alex Zakaras notes, for these writers the machine represented the antithesis of the individual: ‘the machine has no distinctive character; its movements are calculated to serve ends that are not its own; it is incapable of growth or development; and efficiency is the sole measure of its worth’. (‘Individuality, Radical Politics and the Metaphor of the Machine’ in Alison Stone (ed) *The Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). p.225).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Durkheim reverses this metaphor, and describes the solidarity of ancient societies as ‘mechanical’, which he contrasts with the ‘organic’ solidarity of modern societies. His idea is that modern societies are composed of a variety of different parts, but that each part fits together to perform some vital function of the organism as a whole. Before him, Hegel had also used the metaphor of the organism to describe modern civil society and its division of labour For a brief but illuminating comparison of

Schiller's contrast between ancients and moderns might seem to suggest that the way to overcome the stultification of the modern world would be to revert back to the Greek ideal where individual wholeness and communal unity were displayed so exquisitely. An argument of this sort would be problematic for two reasons. First, it is not at all clear whether Schiller's portrayal is an accurate one, that is, whether ancient Greece really had the properties Schiller ascribes to it.<sup>6</sup> Second, even if ancient Greece really was as Schiller described it, that does not prove that it could serve as a model for emulation today. For there may be features of Ancient Greece that make it inappropriate for modern conditions (its reliance on slave labour, for example).

However, while Schiller uses the ideal of antiquity as a standard from which to criticise the present, he does not think the Greek model can provide a serious solution to the problems of his own age. To illustrate this point, Schiller gives a historical account of the dissolution of the Greek world, which ultimately, if not at first sight, prepares the ground for a higher form of self and society.<sup>7</sup> For Schiller, Greek society was a high point of human culture, a model of individual wholeness and social unity. But it was a high point that could not be sustained or taken further. Society, Schiller tells us, could only progress by leaving the beauty of Greek life behind, surrendering wholeness and unity, and 'pursuing truth along separate paths',<sup>8</sup> that is, by specialising. This brought individual fragmentation, as we have seen. Yet Schiller also points out that that it made possible tremendous development for the species as a whole. Society made great progress by the specialisation of its functions:

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Durkheim's and Hegel's views on this matter, see Robert Stern, 'Unity and Difference in Hegel's Political Philosophy', *Ratio*, 2:1, (1989).

<sup>6</sup> For scepticism on this front, see G.E.M de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (New York: Cornell Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Thus, Schiller asks:

'Are not those stages which we can distinguish in all empirical knowledge likely to hold approximately for the general development of human culture?

- (1) The object stands before us as a whole, but confused and fluid.
- (2) We separate particular characteristics and distinguish; our knowledge is now distinct, but isolated and limited.
- (3) We unite what we have separated, and the whole stands before us again, no longer confused, however, but all illuminated from all sides.

The Greeks found themselves in the first of these phases. We find ourselves in the second. The third, therefore, we may still hope for, and when it comes we shall no longer yearn for the Greeks to return' (Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.21).

<sup>8</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.41.

collectively modern society had achieved wonders far surpassing anything produced in antiquity. But at the same time these developments had crippled rather than enriched the individual. As J.S. Mill would similarly lament: ‘the greatness of England is now all collective; individually small, we only appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining.’<sup>9</sup>

The nature of the modern social world was thus deeply contradictory. On the one hand, the intensification of the division of labour had created a society of stunted individuals. On the other hand, however, the intense specialisation of human labour had ultimately been progressive, at least for the species considered as a whole. Individual stultification and social progress had come hand-in-hand. For Schiller, the contradictory nature of the modern social world gave rise to an imperative. This centred on the deep need to recapture the individual wholeness that had characterised the Greek world in a higher form, that is, in a way that does not forsake the gains made by specialism. The imperative, in other words, was to preserve the positives of the division of labour while concurrently eliminating its stultifying effects.<sup>10</sup>

(ii) *Marx*

Although there is scarce reference to Schiller in Marx’s writings, there can be little doubting Schiller’s influence on Marx’s thought on these matters.<sup>11</sup> Marx shares Schiller’s concern over the impact of the division of labour on the individual, and agrees that the imperative is to restore individual wholeness in a way that is compatible with the gains made by specialism. But Marx’s thought goes beyond

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<sup>9</sup> J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, edited by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.78.

<sup>10</sup> Schiller is sharper at diagnosing the problems of his age than prescribing remedies, but recent literature on this topic has argued that Schiller seeks to accommodate the division of labour rather than abolish it. For discussion see Douglas Moggach, ‘Schiller’s Aesthetic Republicanism’, *History of Political Thought*, 28:3, (2007).

<sup>11</sup> This may seem surprising, not least because the young Engels draws an unfavourable comparison between Goethe and Schiller, crediting the former with the sharper insight into German political life, and faulting the latter for seeking refuge from the ‘wretchedness’ of German social conditions in the ‘Kantian ideal’ (Engels, ‘German Socialism in Verse and Prose’, *MECW*, volume 6 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), p.259). However, Marx does not criticise Schiller in this way, and while there is little explicit reference to Schiller in Marx’s texts, some of his phrases – including the famous distinction in the third volume of *Capital* between the ‘realm of freedom’ and the ‘realm of necessity’ – have a distinctly Schillerian ring to them. I return to Schiller’s influence on Marx in Chapter 4, §5.

Schiller's in important ways. For Marx gives a more nuanced answer as to why a model from the past could not serve as a model for the present, and offers a more radical solution to the problem of fragmentation: one that seeks to abolish specialism rather than mitigate its harshest effects.

Like Schiller, Marx also – though less frequently – draws on the ancient world as a standard from which to criticise the present. Thus, in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, for instance, Marx quotes the lawyer and historian, Pierre-Édouard Lémontey, with approval:

‘We are struck with admiration...when we see among the Ancients the same person distinguishing himself to a high degree as philosopher, poet orator, historian, priest, administrator, general of an army. Our souls are appalled at the sight of so vast a domain. Each one of us plants his hedge and shuts himself up in his enclosure. I do not know whether by this parcellation the field is enlarged, but I do know that man is belittled.’<sup>12</sup>

However, while Marx is not immune to the allure to the Greek ideal, on the whole his writings are generally more positive than Schiller's about modernity and its prospects. Thus, while he admits that ‘the old view according to which man always appears...as the end of production, seems very exalted when set against the modern world, in which production is the end of man’, he quickly goes on to question whether antiquity really does represent a superior mode of life. After all, asks Marx:

‘...what is wealth if not the universality of the individual's needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive forces etc., produced in universal exchange; what is it if not full development of human control over the forces of nature – over the forces of so-called Nature as well as of those of his own nature? What is wealth if not the absolute unfolding of man's creative abilities, without any precondition other than the preceding historic development, which makes the totality of this development – i.e. the development of all human powers as such, not as measured by any previously given yardstick – an end-in-itself.’<sup>13</sup>

In this way, Marx gives a more sophisticated answer than Schiller as to why ancient Greece could not represent a serious model for modern industrial society. It is Marx's idea that human powers and needs multiply in the course of history: man produces in

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<sup>12</sup> Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, MECW, volume 6, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), p.190.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse I*, MECW, volume 28 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), pp. 411-412.



order to satisfy his needs, but the satisfaction of basic needs gives rise to new needs of a more developed kind, which in turn spur on the development of further productive powers.

Thus, in antiquity, the powers and capacities of the species were only developed in a partial and embryonic way. While individuals in ancient Greece developed their powers to a high level, as a social whole it was limited and underdeveloped. In the modern world, by contrast, the powers and needs of the species are richer and more developed. In industry, human productive powers reach new heights of development, and human needs multiply and become more refined. Under capitalism, however, all of this develops in an estranged way, for the rich development of the powers and capacities of the species occurs in sharp contrast to the impoverishment of the powers and capacities of the individual. Thus, while the Greek world was characterised by rich individual development but only a basic development of the social whole, in the modern world, by contrast, the social whole is richly developed, whereas the individual only develops his manifold powers in an extremely limited and one-sided way:

‘In the bourgeois economy – and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds – this complete unfolding of man’s inner potentiality turns into a complete emptying-out of the individual. His universal objectification as total alienation, and the demolition of all determined one-sided aims becomes the sacrifice of the [human] end-in-itself to a wholly external purpose. That is why, on the one hand, the childish world of antiquity appears as something superior.’<sup>14</sup>

Here, then, we find Marx’s response to Schiller’s question: ‘whence this disadvantage among individuals when the species as a whole is at such an advantage?’<sup>15</sup> It is Marx’s idea that while ancient Greece exhibited a high degree of individual development, it was a basic, underdeveloped social whole. The powers and capacities of the species were at a childlike stage. The intensification of the division of labour under capitalism ‘raises the productive power of labour and increases the wealth and refinement of society’, yet it simultaneously ‘impoverishes the worker and reduces him to a machine’<sup>16</sup> As F.H Bradley glossed this view (which he did not share), ‘the

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<sup>14</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse I*, p.412.

<sup>15</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.41.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, MECW, volume 3 (London:

higher the organism the more are its functions specified, and hence narrowed...and, though the world grows the individual withers.<sup>17</sup>

From the perspective of Marx's ethical individualism, however, the growth of the world is no compensation for the withering of the individual. Yet, as for Schiller, Marx also thinks that a return to a simpler way of life is neither possible nor desirable. In this way, Marx shares the same problem that animated the sixth letter of Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man*, of how to recapture the individual wholeness that had characterised the ancient Greece in a higher form, in a way that was compatible with the gains made by the modern economy. In other words, the imperative facing both Marx and Schiller centred on the need to preserve the division of labour's productive achievements but eliminate its stultifying effects. It is to Marx's solution to this problem that we now turn.

## 2.2. The 'Hunt in the Morning' Passage

In this section, I consider Terrell Carver's attempt to undermine the reliability of Marx's most famous pronouncement on the fate of the division of labour under communism, and argue that his interpretation fails. While my aim is primarily negative, to show how Carver's attempt is mistaken, I will conclude the section by sketching an alternative reading of the passage.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels make one of their most notorious remarks about communism and the future of the division of labour under it:

'...as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him, and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one 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 a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.'<sup>18</sup>

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Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p.240.

<sup>17</sup> F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1876), p.188.

<sup>18</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

This passage has provoked a huge amount of comment and criticism, and understandably so: for as we have seen Marx's claim is that communism will recapture the individual wholeness of antiquity in a higher form, that is, in a way that will preserve and build on capitalism's productive achievements. Yet in this passage Marx's examples of the activity of individuals are, with the exception of criticising, all typical of pre-industrial societies. Can we take the passage seriously? Did its authors even intend it to be taken seriously?

One important contribution to this debate comes from Terrell Carver, who has questioned this passage's reliability as a source of Marx's ideas.<sup>19</sup> Carver makes use of some philological work by Japanese scholars that shows that this passage was mostly written in Engels's hand, except for a few insertions that were added to the draft by Marx; specifically, 'critical critic', 'criticise after dinner' and 'or critic'.<sup>20</sup> Carver argues that Marx's insertions were written 'humorously in order to send it up, and thus reject it as a serious draft.'<sup>21</sup> For Engels's depiction of communist society was 'reminiscent of the very pre-industrial Utopias that Marx despised', and thus 'fit only for critical critics.'<sup>22</sup> According to Carver, then, Marx's insertions into the text

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<sup>19</sup> Terrell Carver, *The Postmodern Marx* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), Chapter 5.

<sup>20</sup> However, the most recent philological studies of the text show that Marx also inserted the examples of 'hunt' and 'fish' into the text. The first draft of the passage – all written in Engels's hand – read as follows:

'As soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him, and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, or a shepherd, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one 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 be a show-maker in the morning, gardener in the afternoon, an actor in the evening, just as I have a mind.'

Crucially, as well as listing a different set of occupations, the first draft of the passage ends with a full stop after 'just as I have a mind', and makes no claim about an abolition of social roles. That is, the communist described in the first version of the passage occupies multiple roles – they are successively 'a shoemaker, a gardener and actor' – whereas in the second version of the draft communist man is said to 'hunt', 'fish', 'rear cattle' and 'criticise' 'without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic'. In other words, they are not even successively a 'hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic', even though they do hunt, fish, shepherd and criticise. I examine Marx's hostility towards social roles in Chapter 3. For the most recent discussion of the text's composition see James Furner, 'Marx's Sketch of Communist Society in *The German Ideology* and the Problems of Occupational Confinement and Occupational Identity', in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37:2, (2011).

<sup>21</sup> Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, p.107.

<sup>22</sup> Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, p.107.

were designed to ridicule Engels's depiction of communism, for that depiction sounded to Marx's ears very much like Fourier's utopian plans for a future society. When read in this light, Carver argues, 'the relevance of this passage to the issue of a communist division of labour – however it is to be conceived – is now thoroughly compromised.'<sup>23</sup>

All of this may seem to fatally undermine the passage as a source of Marx's ideas about the division of labour and the nature of work a future society. Plausible as this may sound, however, Carver's interpretation is not without its problems, and two points in particular undermine his argument.

The first problem concerns Marx's relationship with utopian socialism. According to Carver, Marx's insertions in the passage 'show Marx sharply rebuking Engels for straying, perhaps, momentarily, from the serious work of undercutting the fantasies of Utopian Socialists.'<sup>24</sup> In this way, Carver follows what we might call the 'standard story', according to which Marx was a relentless and unqualified critic of utopian socialism.<sup>25</sup> This characterisation of Marx's attitude toward the utopian socialists is oversimplified and misleading, however.<sup>26</sup> Far from being an unqualified critic of these thinkers, Marx often credits the utopian socialists, and Fourier in particular, with important insights.<sup>27</sup> For instance, the early Marx claims that it is Fourier's 'great merit' to have revealed 'the contradictions and unnaturalness of modern life',<sup>28</sup> while later on in the *Grundrisse* he commends Fourier for showing that the 'ultimate object is the raising of the mode of production itself, not that of distribution, to a higher form'.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, Marx does not accept the writings of the

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<sup>23</sup> Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, p.107.

<sup>24</sup> Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, p.107.

<sup>25</sup> For a presentation of this 'standard story', see Darren Webb, *Marx, Marxism and Utopia* (London: Ashgate, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> In a recent study of the early Marx, David Leopold has convincingly argued that Marx's assessment of utopianism was far more complex and positive than is commonly supposed (Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, Chapter 5).

<sup>27</sup> In a recent paper, Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch has defended the view that Marx was deeply influenced by Fourier's social theory (Schmidt am Busch, "'The Egg of Columbus'?" How Fourier's Social Theory Exerted a Significant (and Problematic) Influence on the Formation of Marx's Anthropology and Social Critique', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, forthcoming).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted from Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.283

<sup>29</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse Volume II, MECW*, volume 29 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p.97.

utopian socialists in every detail. For instance, he rejects the view – common to both Fourier and Owen – that future communities should be small in scale. Yet what is striking is how respectful Marx is of their shortcomings. In dealing with these writers, Marx consistently makes the point that they cannot be held culpable for their errors, for they simply reflect the limitations of their age. Thus, referring to Fourier, Owen and Saint-Simon, Marx claims that ‘since social conditions were not sufficiently developed to allow the working class to constitute itself as a militant class, [they] were necessarily obliged to limit themselves to dreams about the *model society* of the future’, before going on to add that ‘we cannot repudiate these patriarchs of socialism just as chemists cannot repudiate their forebears the alchemists.’<sup>30</sup>

In this way, Carver’s reproduction of the ‘standard story’ that Marx expressed nothing but hostility towards the utopian socialists seems hard to square with the texts themselves, where a closer reading suggests that Marx’s attitude towards the utopian socialism is more complex and positive than is typically supposed. This presents Carver with a problem, for it is not clear that Marx would want to ‘send up’ the utopian socialists in the way he suggests.

The main point that undermines Carver’s argument, however, is that the passage in question contains ideas that recur throughout Marx’s writings, both in the remainder of *The German Ideology* and beyond it. Thus, the idea that the division of labour is an evil that must be overcome is a theme that Marx returns to on numerous occasions. For instance, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx says that as a consequence of the division of labour man is reduced ‘intellectually and physically to the level of a machine, and from being a man becomes an abstract activity and a stomach.’<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx says that ‘owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him.’<sup>32</sup> Likewise, in *Capital*, Marx claims that the division of labour ‘seizes upon, not only

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<sup>30</sup> Marx, ‘Political Indifferentism’, *MECW*, volume 23 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p.394.

<sup>31</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p.240.

<sup>32</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, *MECW*, volume 6 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp.490-191.

the economic, but every other sphere of society, and everywhere lays the foundation for that all engrossing system of specialising and sorting men, that development in a man of one single faculty at the expense of all other faculties.’<sup>33</sup> (Incidentally, this view also remained also central to Engels’s later outlook. In *Anti-Dühring*, Engels envisions a future society where ‘there will be no professional porters or architects.’ In this society, ‘the man who for half an hour gives instructions as an architect will also act as a porter for a period, until his activity as an architect is once again required.’<sup>34</sup>).

In the same way, the positive counterpart to the critique of the division of labour – the humanist ideal of the many-sided individual – is also central to Marx’s philosophy as a whole; indeed, it is its chief value. Thus, elsewhere in *The German Ideology*, Marx writes that communism will enable individual development ‘in all directions’,<sup>35</sup> and claims that it is the only form of society where the ‘genuine and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase’.<sup>36</sup> Much later in *Capital*, we find the same emphasis on many-sidedness, where Marx looks forward to a society ‘in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.’<sup>37</sup> Moreover, as in ‘hunt in the morning’ passage, Marx continues to link the ideal of all-round development to the overcoming of the division of labour. In the footnotes of *Capital*, Marx quotes approvingly the experience of a French worker who has recently returned from San Francisco:

‘I never could have believed, that I was capable of working at the various occupations I was employed on in California. I was firmly convinced that I was fit for nothing but letter-press printing.... 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, etc. In consequence of thus finding out that I am fit to any sort of work, I feel less of a mollusc and more of a man.’<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, p.359.

<sup>34</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, MECW, volume 25 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1987), p.186.

<sup>35</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.78.

<sup>36</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.439.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, p.588.

<sup>38</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, p.490.

For far from being uncharacteristic, then, the 'hunt in the morning' passage develops ideas about the division of labour and the nature of self-realisation which recur in Marx's critique of capitalism and vision of a future society. In this way, Carver's attempt to dismiss the 'hunt in the morning' passage as a humorous send-up is problematic, for it fails to account for the continual recurrence of its central themes at various other points in Marx's writings.

Nevertheless, this leaves us with a puzzle, for if this passage was intended seriously, a possibility it is difficult to discount, it is unclear how the passage could possibly serve as a model for mass society. Of course, any answer to this problem must be somewhat speculative, for Marx gives us no clues as to why he took hunting, fishing, farming, and criticising as paradigms of communist activity. But let me make some tentative remarks, which may, I hope, shed some light on this matter.

Note, first of all, that it is unclear whether the variegated activity described by Marx serves economic ends, that is, whether it constitutes a description of labour or leisure. Evidence for the latter (leisure) view would come from the claim that 'society regulates the general production', which suggests, perhaps, that society will regulate social labour, leaving individuals 'to do one thing today and another tomorrow' in their free time. On this reading, communist man hunts in the morning, fishes in the afternoon, and criticises after dinner once the necessary work is done. Note that this would make the passage more plausible: since hunting, fishing and criticising are descriptions of leisure rather than labour, one does not have to try and explain how such activities are supposed to yield the level of productivity necessary to sustain modern society.

If, on the other hand, the variegated activities Marx describes do serve economic ends, note that, with the exception of criticising, the activities Marx lists are all ones that are both socially necessary and intrinsically enjoyable, such that it is relatively easy to think of individuals engaging in them, not just because they have to, but because they find the activity at hand intrinsically satisfying. Conversely, had Marx said that communist man will maintain a sewer in the morning, clean the streets in the afternoon, then wash dishes in a restaurant after dinner, his account may have been more representative of the range of work within modern society, but it would have made it incredibly hard to envision people engaging in them 'just as they have a

mind'.<sup>39</sup> In this way, the activities listed by Marx and Engels are all well-suited to a different argument, namely, that communist society will overcome the distinction between work and leisure, in the sense that under communism one's work will be enjoyable and thus carried out for its own sake rather than because it is socially necessary.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Adam Smith had also drawn on hunting and fishing as examples of intrinsically satisfying work, which bridge the work-leisure divide. In a passage from the *Wealth of Nations* (which Marx was surely familiar with), Smith claims that 'hunting and fishing, the most important employments of mankind in a rude state of society, become in its advanced state their most agreeable amusements, and they pursue for pleasure what they once followed from necessity.'<sup>40</sup> It would seem plausible that Marx choose the activities in question precisely for the reason that Smith highlights: namely, that being both socially useful and intrinsically enjoyable they provide a good example of the kind of necessary labour that individuals could, plausibly, freely choose to perform.

More could be said on these issues. However, having shown that we have good reason to take the underlying themes of the passage seriously, I now turn my attention away from questions about the reliability of the passage, and towards the issues it raises with regards to individual self-realisation.

### **2.3. Free Self-Realisation**

In the 'hunt in the morning' passage, Marx draws a contrast between capitalist society, where workers are chained to an exclusive sphere of activity, and develop only a fragment of their creative potentials, with a future communist society, in which individuals have the opportunity to freely choose the work they do, and develop their creative powers in an all-round way. Thus, for Marx, individual self-realisation has two aspects: the free and full self-realisation of the individual.<sup>41</sup> In what follows, I briefly consider the idea of free self-realisation (an idea which I return to, and deal

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<sup>39</sup> Of course, this provides no defence of Marx. The fact that it is incredibly hard to see how these counter-examples could be ones that individuals would willingly perform undermines the claim that the distinction between labour and leisure is one that can be fully overcome.

<sup>40</sup> A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Book 1, Chapter 10, p.229.

<sup>41</sup> Jon Elster, 'Self-Realisation in Work and Politics', p.131.



with more fully, in Chapters 3 and 4), before returning to the central theme of the chapter, the idea of full self-realisation or all-round development.

First, then, concerning free self-realisation, the contrast is between the unfreedom of the present-day capitalism, where each individual has an ‘activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape’, with the freedom of a future communist society, where ‘each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes’.<sup>42</sup> Note that Marx’s complaint here is not directed at specialism as such, but at forced job specialism: the complaint, to reiterate, is that the worker has an activity ‘forced upon him’. To be sure, Marx’s claim is not that workers under capitalism literally have work forced upon them, in the way, for example, that a slave has work forced upon him by his master. For, as Marx recognises, individuals under capitalism have the formal freedom to become capitalists or not to work at all. Rather, Marx’s claim is that, having nothing to sell but their own labour-power, workers have no *reasonable* alternative but to work for a capitalist.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the worker is, as Marx puts it in *Capital*, ‘compelled to sell himself of his own free-will.’<sup>44</sup> The contrast is to a society of the future in which individuals are not so forced, and have the freedom to choose and change their activities as they please.

While Marx’s commentators have been critical of the ideal of all-round development, they have generally been more sympathetic to the idea of free self-realisation. For instance, Jon Elster argues that ‘even though an individual cannot develop all his abilities, he ought to be free to develop any of them...the individual should be free to choose which of his many powers to develop’.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the idea that workers being able to freely choose the activities they pursue has also been emphasised in Kantian accounts of meaningful work.<sup>46</sup>

The idea of free self-realisation seems to me problematic, however. For taken to the extreme, as it is by Marx, it raises problems of economic coordination. If we all choose work ‘just as we have a mind’, then how can we ensure that all necessary work gets done? This problem over production leads to a problem over distribution: if

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<sup>42</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>43</sup> The idea of ‘reasonable alternatives’ comes from G.A.Cohen, ‘The Structure of Proletarian Freedom’, *History, Labour and Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, p.753.

<sup>45</sup> Jon Elster, ‘Self-Realisation in Work and Politics’, p.132.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Norman E. Bowie, ‘A Kantian Theory of Meaningful Work’, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17:9, (1998).

we produce as we please how can we ensure we generate the right mix of products to satisfy society's most elementary needs? Then there is the problem of mundane work: some forms of work are socially important but they are not ones that the individual would freely perform, on account of their being hazardous, fatiguing and mind-numbingly dull, and so on. How can these problems be overcome?

In his rudimentary account of the division of labour, Plato suggested that there is a natural distribution of talents and abilities across society, such that as long as every individual fulfils their natural 'function' all social needs would be met.<sup>47</sup> Plato's belief that the function of individuals and needs of society perfectly align is surely too optimistic. A more Marxist solution is to say that machines will do the 'dirty work' leaving people free to engage in more creative activities. Marxian predictions about mechanisation have not been completely wrong, but they have certainly been a little optimistic: mechanisation has reduced the amount of mundane work in society, but it cannot eradicate it completely. The mechanisation of the productive process itself generates mundane work (machines must be cleaned), and even the most creative pursuits contain some routine tasks (for example, writers must read proofs). Regrettably, mundane work is part and parcel of human existence.

The greater problem, however, is not with mundane work but with the belief that individuals can exercise complete freedom to do 'one thing today and another tomorrow'. For in reality individuals cannot exercise a completely untrammelled choice over the work they do. The range of work open to the individual is always constrained by the requirements of society (that is, by the fields that need ploughing), and the individual's aptitude (some individuals will be ill-suited to performing certain tasks). No doubt, Marx may be right that under capitalism individuals do not have as much freedom at work as would be desirable (they may, for example, lack the educational opportunities to change their specialism). But the problem with Marx's position in *The German Ideology* is that he does not say that workers should enjoy greater freedom over their specialism, but that they will enjoy the complete freedom to choose their specialism on a daily, or even hourly, basis. Such freedom is incompatible with work in modern society.

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<sup>47</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, translated by H.D.P. Lee, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). Book III.

What are the implications of these constraints for Marx's vision of the good life? Clearly, it undermines the model of communism put forward in *The German Ideology*, at least insofar as that passage is interpreted as saying that individuals can exercise a complete freedom 'to do one thing today and another tomorrow.'<sup>48</sup> But although it undermines the picture of the good life Marx develops in *The German Ideology*, Marx does have two of lines of response at his disposal. I give a fuller treatment of these issues in Chapter 4, but let me briefly preface them here.

The first reply would be to accept that work will always be determined by social need, and to look for real freedom and self-realisation outside the working-day, in leisure. This is the option Marx takes in the third volume of *Capital* (hereafter *Capital III*), where he describes work as permanently belonging to a 'realm of necessity', and contrasts it with the 'true realm of freedom', which exists beyond it in leisure.<sup>49</sup> To be sure, work directed at needs under communism is much less alienated than work directed at needs under capitalism, but real freedom – the all-round development of the individual – is enjoyed in leisure when the necessary work is done.

The second, more ambitious, reply would be to accept that work is determined by social need, but to deny that this precludes self-realisation. This is the option Marx takes in the *Comments*, where I am said to gain fulfilment both from the engagement of my powers and capacities in my labour, but also from 'having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *man's* essential nature [*Wesen*], and of having thus created an object corresponding to the needs of another man's essential nature.'<sup>50</sup> Note that in this passage, as in *Capital III*, Marx recognises that work will always be a matter of necessity; here, however, Marx considers the necessity of work to be a source of its attraction.

Both of these models of communist society have their respective merits and shortcomings. The view espoused in *Capital III* would seem to present us with a realistic alternative to capitalism. Work is not 'life's prime want' on this account, but it is rationally planned in a way that overcomes the worst aspects of alienation suffered under capitalism. At the same time, however, this model abandons the

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<sup>48</sup> As stated in the previous section, however, this is not the only possible reading of this passage.

<sup>49</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.227.

central premise of the Marxist vision of the good life, namely, that labour is the prime locus of individual self-realisation. In Chapter 4 we shall consider whether Marx's abandonment of labour as the realm of self-realisation is justified.

The view espoused in the *Comments*, on the other hand, would seem to present us with the more distinctive and philosophically interesting conception of the good life, where it is labour – production for others – that is the activity of self-realisation. But despite the undoubted potency of its central themes, there are serious questions about whether the model instantiated in the *Comments* could be organised on a society-wide basis. I return to this issue in Chapter 5.

#### 2.4. All-Round Development and its Critics

Having considered the idea that individuals will be free to choose their activities, I now return to the central theme of the chapter, the ideal of all-round development. In this section, I defend all-round development from its critics, before going on to question (in §5) whether all-round development really does require an abolition of the division of labour, as Marx himself suggests.

The second part of this contrast in the 'hunt in the morning' passage brings us back to Schiller's theme of wholeness and Marx's humanist ideal of man as a being who most fully expresses and realises his nature by cultivating his powers in an all-round way. In a communist society, we are told, 'nobody has one sphere of activity'. Rather, each becomes accomplished in a range of activities. The communist worker of the future, like the ancient Greek of the past, will exhibit a degree of wholeness that is utterly absent from the modern world.

The idea of all-round development has been heavily criticised. For instance, Jon Elster and G.A. Cohen have argued that it represents an implausible and not necessarily attractive ideal of self-realisation. While both Elster and Cohen agree that the emphasis on self-realisation through labour is a valuable aspect of Marx's philosophical inheritance, they argue that the ideal of all-round development represents an 'extremely utopian' and 'quite implausible',<sup>51</sup> 'unrealizable' and 'not even desirable',<sup>52</sup> ideal of individual self-realisation.

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<sup>51</sup> Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p. 521.

<sup>52</sup> G.A. Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', pp. 142 – 144.

What exactly is wrong with Marx's ideal of all-round development? Taken together Elster and Cohen make three criticisms: first, it denies individual differences in ability; second, it requires an impossibly total development of one's powers and capacities; third, it promotes mediocrity and dilettantism. I consider each in turn.

First, Elster argues that Marx's idea of 'full self-realisation...implies that the individual – each individual – has all the capacities that any other has.'<sup>53</sup> This is a proposition that denies 'genetically determined differences in ability.'<sup>54</sup> As a consequence, it is 'extremely Utopian.'<sup>55</sup>

Does Marx think that each individual has all the powers any other has? Does he deny differences in ability? He certainly thinks that such differences are exaggerated under capitalism. Against Plato and Aristotle, Marx endorses Adam Smith's view that differences in ability are more an effect than a cause of the division of labour: 'a porter differs less from a philosopher than a mastiff from a greyhound. It is the division of labour which has set the gulf between them'.<sup>56</sup> Yet I can find no evidence that Marx believes that individuals share the same potentials or that he denies innate differences in ability.<sup>57</sup> On the contrary, in *The German Ideology* Marx accepts that there will be limits to individual development under communism: not everyone, he says, will be able to do the work of Raphael. The point, rather, is that 'anyone in whom there is a potential Raphael should be able to develop without hindrance'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, communism will promote equality of opportunity, but there will be limits to what individuals can achieve even in a future society. Likewise, in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', Marx criticises Ferdinand Lassalle's demand that workers should receive back the undiminished proceeds of their labour for the way that it permits inequality that results from 'unequal natural endowment'. Lassalle's demand, says Marx:

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<sup>53</sup> Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p.522.

<sup>54</sup> Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p.522.

<sup>55</sup> Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p.522.

<sup>56</sup> Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p.180.

<sup>57</sup> Elster is unsure about whether Marx is committed to this view, but concludes that this idea is implicit in Marx's idea of all-round development, and is the most natural way to read Marx's corpus as a whole, 'which never.... refers to differences in natural talents.' (Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p.88).

<sup>58</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.393.

...recognises no class differences, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly recognises unequal individual endowment, and thus productive capacity of workers as natural privileges. *It is, therefore, a right of inequality, in its content, like every right.* Right by its nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable by an equal standard only insofar as they are subject to an equal criterion'.<sup>59</sup>

In claiming that Lassalle's principle 'recognises unequal natural endowment', Marx is not denying unequal endowments between individuals. Rather, he is saying that while Lassalle's principle does not permit material inequalities that flow from one's class, it does tacitly permit inequalities that flow from one's natural talents, whereas a more advanced principle of distribution – specifically, 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs' – would not permit 'natural' inequalities either. Thus, Marx was a critic of principles of distribution that failed to counteract natural differences in ability; and he was a critic of such theories precisely because he recognised that there will be differences in abilities in all times and places.

Let us turn to the second and, I think, more serious criticism of Marx's position, that the ideal of all-round development is *unrealistic*, because it requires what G.A. Cohen calls an 'impossibly total development of the individual.'<sup>60</sup> According to Cohen, 'Marx wanted the full gamut of each person's talents to be realised.'<sup>61</sup> Regardless of whether that ideal is desirable, 'it is certainly unrealizable, as you will see if you imagine someone trying to realise it, in a single lifetime.'<sup>62</sup>

Now, Cohen argues that the ideal of all-round development is unrealizable, 'because there will never be people of that level of ability.'<sup>63</sup> It is an ideal to which the great mass of humanity simply cannot aspire. He claims that the implicit paradigm of Marx's ideal all-round development is Leonardo da Vinci, an individual capable of excelling in many activities and moving effortlessly between them. But must we interpret the idea of all-round development in that over-ambitious fashion? The key idea of all-round development is that self-realisation consists in the

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<sup>59</sup> Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', *MECW*, volume 24 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), pp.86-87.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', p.142.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', p.142.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', p.142.

<sup>63</sup> Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', p.142.

development of a range of powers and capacities rather than the full development of one or very few. Thus, the idea of all-round development does not demand individuals to achieve greatly in all of their abilities. Rather, it suffices that they develop a range of abilities. By interpreting the idea of all-round development in this over-ambitious way, Cohen overlooks the fact that a degree of well-roundedness is possible in all human lives. For, as Hurka argues, we can all ‘spread our activities between different goods rather than aiming at a narrow specialisation. Even if our specific achievements are not great, their proportion can mirror that of Renaissance lives’.<sup>64</sup>

In reply, however, Cohen could accept that a degree of well-roundedness is possible in all human lives, but question whether the aspiration towards all-roundedness is actually desirable. In particular, he could point out that by attempting to achieve a wide cultivation of one’s talents and abilities over the development of one or very few, the individual, or at least most individuals, will not achieve much in any. This is the crux of the third criticism, that all-round development is *undesirable*, because it would stifle genuine achievement and promote mediocrity and dilettantism. There is, Elster says, a ‘trade-off between depth and breadth of achievement’, between being ‘a jack of several trades and master of (at most) one’. He continues:

‘Activities of self-realisation are subject to increasing marginal utility: They become more enjoyable the more one has already engaged in them... Diversity...is an obstacle to successful self-realisation, as it prevents one from getting into the later and more rewarding stages.’<sup>65</sup>

While I agree with Elster that too much diversity is a threat to self-realisation, I am not persuaded by the unqualified charge that ‘diversity...is an obstacle to successful self-realisation’. True, diversity can be an obstacle to self-realisation: that will be the case when it prevents one from acquiring the fundamentals necessary to participate in activity (to play chess, for instance, one needs a basic grasp of the rules of the game, how the pieces move, etc.). But a moderate degree of diversity can be beneficial for self-realisation. Firstly, and most obviously, variety and time spent away from one’s primary specialism can be invigorating. As Marx writes, ‘free time – which is both

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas Hurka, ‘The Well-Rounded Life’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 84:12, (1987), p.732.

<sup>65</sup> Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.45.

leisure as well as time for higher activity – naturally transforms its possessor into another person; and it is then this person that enters into the process of production.’<sup>66</sup> Secondly, the development of a wider range of talents and capacities can often enhance rather than diminish one’s primary specialism: contra Elster, breadth can contribute to depth. That will be the case with so-called ‘interaction effects’, which occur when insights from one field are applied to another (think, for example, of how the discipline of philosophy has been enriched by insights from the natural and social sciences, religious thought, the arts, political practice and so on).

Moreover, while it is true to a degree those activities ‘become more enjoyable the more one has already engaged in them’, it is not the case that full-time specialisation on one activity is always a recommendable recipe for self-realisation. People who focus on one activity at the expense of everything else can become bored or fatigued. At high levels of specialism activities are often subject to a law of diminishing returns. For example, a historian who spends an hour or two a day on history may easily add another of without negative effect. But it is at least debatable whether a historian who already spends eight hours a day on history would benefit from an extra hour. Arguably, they would be better off doing something else.<sup>67</sup>

## **2.5. All-Round Development and the Abolition of the Division of Labour**

Now, having argued that the ideal of all-round development can be defended from its critics, I want to question Marx’s claim that all-round development requires an abolition of the division of labour. I will argue that it does not: all-round development can be realised by preserving rather than abolishing the division of labour.

Marx, we have seen, thinks that realising the ideal of all-round development requires an abolition of the division of labour. For ‘as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity’, which means that they cannot develop anything more than a fragment of their many-sided potentials. But what exactly does an abolition of the division of labour mean in practice? Unfortunately, Marx never presents us with a fully worked-out view. But it is clear is that he is not proposing a return to a simpler division of labour, in which a

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<sup>66</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse II*, p.97.

<sup>67</sup> I borrow this example from Hurka, ‘The Well-Rounded Life’, p.730.



worker makes a product from start to finish. In fact, this was a solution to the problem of the division of labour to which Marx was hostile, as is evident from the following critique of Proudhon:

‘M. Proudhon...takes a step backward and proposes to the worker that he make not only the 12th part of a pin, but successively all 12 parts of it. The worker would thus come to know and realise the pin....M. Proudhon...can think of nothing better than to take us back to the journeyman or, at most, to the master craftsman of the Middle Ages.’<sup>68</sup>

What this seems to suggest is that the Marxian solution will not involve any kind of return to a simpler, pre-industrial way of life. Communist society will be highly productive, perhaps even more so than capitalism; and yet there will be no limitation of individuals to specific lines of activity.

Some commentators have argued that what Marx is essentially proposing is a system of ‘job rotation’.<sup>69</sup> According to this view, a division of tasks remains in the sense that the making of a single product is divided into a number of distinct operations, but task-specialism, in the sense of full-time concentration on one activity, is abolished. Highly specialised tasks remain, then, but no one is fixed to the performance of one single activity.

Marx’s proposal could work in a factory where most of the work is relatively simple and requires little expertise. In the factory I am imagining, it seems plausible to think that moving between *basic* tasks – turning screws, hammering rivets, pulling levers – may be preferable to full-time concentration on just one activity: moving between tasks may partially alleviate the boredom of doing the same thing over and over. In addition, it does not seem implausible to think that a factory that retained a division of tasks but eliminated task-specialism could replicate, or at least come close to replicating, the high level of productivity associated with the division of labour.<sup>70</sup>

Whilst rotating between tasks may be a feasible solution in a factory where most of the work is simple, however, it is not a feasible solution in every sphere of the economy, where work often requires a great deal of skill and expertise. Consider

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<sup>68</sup> Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p.192.

<sup>69</sup> Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.141.

<sup>70</sup> For a brief discussion of the merits and shortcomings of job rotation, see Elster, ‘Self-Realisation in Work and Politics’, pp.144-145.

the division of labour in a hospital or an airport, for example. Taken literally, Marx's solution would see workers move from one task in the morning, to another in the afternoon, to another after dinner, and so on. Now, putting aside whether this kind of extreme generalism is desirable, it is plainly not feasible given the level of expertise that is required to, say, practice neurosurgery or pilot a plane. A system of job rotation is not a workable proposal in every sphere of the economy because some tasks require high levels of specialisation.

Putting aside the issue of feasibility, however, I think we can also question whether abolishing the division of labour is even required for the all-round development of individuals. Marx thinks that all-round development requires the individual to engage in numerous activities. Yet engaging in numerous activities provides no guarantee of all-round development. For the mere fact that a worker moves from one job to another does not ensure that they will develop a wider-range of skills. As Plamenatz argues, 'the worker may move often from factory to factory, from town to town, from one branch of industry to another, and yet find himself doing much the same type of work everywhere.'<sup>71</sup>

Conversely, the idea that all-round development requires engaging in numerous activities overlooks the extent to which complex activities often require the development and successful integration of a wide-range of talents and abilities. To be a doctor, for example, one obviously needs to master a body of knowledge and a range of technical skills; but one also needs to develop certain social and personal qualities to deal effectively with one's patients and get along with one's colleagues. Even activities that are often thought to require a very high development of one skill will typically require the development and integration of several: sports, for example, not only require the development of certain athletic abilities, they also require players to solve tactical problems.

What Marx's position overlooks, then, is the fact that 'specialised labour' varies greatly in kind: some is simple and requires little skill or expertise, other types are more complex and require the development and integration of an array of talents and abilities. Someone who turned screws in the morning, hammered rivets in the afternoon, and pulled a lever after dinner would have developed fewer talents and abilities than someone who was a mere 'specialist' in a moderately interesting job.

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<sup>71</sup> John Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, p.170.

This is not to assert the general superiority of specialism over generalism. It is to merely question the Marxian solution to the problem of the division of labour by pointing out that someone who specialises in one or very few complex activities may achieve an impressive degree of well-roundedness, whereas someone who engages in numerous tasks may not be an all-round man.

However, even the work of the generalist will typically depend upon on a division of labour in a way that Marx failed to recognise. For even those who do not concentrate on a very detailed task will rely on the specialised labour of others. Think, for example, of a historian writing a history of Europe from the fall of Rome to the present-day, and how their project will rely on a huge degree of intellectual specialisation, on others concentrating on, and finding insights in, their own particular area of expertise. The problem with Marx's formulation in *The German Ideology* is not just that he lauds the general superiority of generalism over specialism without good reason for doing so, but that he also envisions a society in which we are all generalists – a point that overlooks the fact that generalism is itself parasitic upon a division of labour.

I have argued that the ideal of all-round development does not require an abolition of the division of labour. But we should also note, if only briefly, that abolishing the division of labour could also threaten other values, like community. As Hegel argued, the division of labour can be a solidarity-producing process. In the division of labour, individuals particularise themselves, that is, focus on some lines of activity over others, where this particularisation brings them into contact with others who ply the same trade and consequently share a similar way of life.<sup>72</sup> It is hard to see how the Marxian solution to the problem of the division of labour could replicate this form of solidarity. For someone who did 'one thing today and another tomorrow' in a system of job rotation would lack the settled pattern of life that is necessary for the formation of working relationships. Thus, as Cohen puts it, Marx's out and out hostility towards the division of labour 'reflects a failure to see how the very constraints of a role can help link a person to others in satisfying community.'<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> This is central to Hegel's idea of the 'corporation' (Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H.B. Nisbet, edited by A.W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §250-§256, pp.270-274).

<sup>73</sup> Cohen, 'Reconsidering Historical Materialism', p.137.

## 2.6. Conclusion

In the present chapter, I have been concerned with Marx's ideal of all-round development, and his claim that the realisation of that ideal entails an abolition of the division of labour. I have examined these ideas in Marx's most famous description of communism, the so-called 'hunt in the morning' passage from *The German Ideology*.

As we have seen, the ideal of the fully developed individual has been criticised by some of Marx's commentators, who have argued that it is an unrealistic and not necessarily attractive ideal of individual self-realisation. However, while these critics undoubtedly raise some important objections to the ideal of all-round development, for reasons given I do not think that they undermine that ideal. Whilst I have defended the ideal of all-round development, however, the last section of the chapter has argued that Marx's out and out hostility to the division of labour is misguided. For I have argued that the ideal of all-round development is only not compatible with the division of labour, but that there are reasons for thinking that the all-round development of individuals may itself rely on a division of labour.

Although the concluding parts of this chapter have been critical, however, the overall message of the chapter is a positive one. Since its inception, Marx's vision of the good life has been hampered by the idea that its implementation requires a complete abolition of the division of labour. Indeed, it is this idea as much as any other that has prevented Marx's vision of the good life from being taken seriously. But, if the arguments of this chapter have been correct, then it would seem possible for us to retain a commitment to the humanist ideal of all-round development without making unrealistic demands about the abolition of the division of labour.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE ABOLITION OF SOCIAL ROLES

In the previous chapter, we examined Marx's claim that communist man will 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner...without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic'.<sup>1</sup> I said that this passage reveals a hope that communist society would overcome the division of labour, and give individuals the opportunity to develop their powers in an all-round way. But I now want to suggest that this passage also grasps at a different idea, namely, that communist society will be free, not only of specialism, but also of social roles. That is to say, there will be no 'hunters' not simply because no one will spend all their time hunting, but also because no one will occupy the role of 'hunter'. This is something that would hold true even if future individuals eschewed varied activities in favour of specialism (something that Marx certainly did not expect): even if one hunted all the time the role of 'hunter' would not be assumed.<sup>2</sup>

Now, Marx's vision of the good life has been interpreted – by followers and critics – in a strongly communitarian light. Thus, for example, Steven Lukes has claimed that Marx's envisioned communism as a society in which 'communal relations undercut rather than override individual interests' making a 'harmony of social (and personal) interests possible at last'.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, the Soviet Jurist, E.B. Pashukanis, has argued that Marx believed that communist society would be inhabited by a new man, who 'submerges his ego in the collective and finds the greatest satisfaction and the meaning of life in this act'.<sup>4</sup> Others have gone as far as to suggest that Marx's vision of a future communist society permits, and maybe even necessitates, the sacrifice of the individual to the community. According to Nicholas Churchich, for example, Marx 'starts with individualism', but 'ends with the sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> For two other accounts of the abolition of roles in Marx, see G.A.Cohen, 'Marx's Dialectic of Labour', pp.205 – 206; and Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, Chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, pp.97-98.

<sup>4</sup> E.B.Pashukanis, *The General Theory of Law and Marxism* (New Brunswick: Pluto, 1983), p.160.

of the individual to the collective and of private interests to the interests of the whole'.<sup>5</sup>

It is the primary aim of this chapter to show that these strongly communitarian interpretations of Marx's vision of the good life are mistaken, and that, on the contrary, Marx's vision is individualistic. To make this claim, I examine Marx's aim to abolish social roles, and show how such an aim is incompatible with communitarian accounts of the good life. Having shown that Marx rejects communitarianism, the chapter moves on to consider how Marx did envision a reconciliation of self-realisation and community under communism. Here, it is argued that there are two models of individual self-realisation and community in Marx: an *individualistic* model, according to which individuals achieve self-realisation through the development of their powers, and only value community instrumentally, as a means for the development of those powers; and a second model, which is neither individualistic nor communitarian, according to which individuals achieve self-realisation by engaging their powers for the good of others, and value community intrinsically, as a constitutive aspect of their good. The chapter ends by considering a communitarian critique of Marx's position on these matters from Charles Taylor and G.A. Cohen, who both argue that Marx's vision of the good life is excessively individualistic. To anticipate my conclusion, I will concede that Taylor and Cohen raise some important worries about the *individualistic* model of the good life, but argue that the second model has more resources with which to respond to their objections.

I begin (in §3.1) by providing a taxonomy of different ways of reconciling self-realisation and community, before going on to show how Marx's desire to abolish roles precludes the communitarian model (§3.2). In the following section (§3.3), I argue that there are two models of individual and community in Marx. Next (in §3.4), I compare Marx's models of individual and community to Hegel's and J.S. Mill's, before going on to consider (in §3.5) a communitarian critique of Marx from Charles Taylor and G.A. Cohen.

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<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Churchich, *Marxism and Morality: A Critical Examination of Marxist Ethics* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 1994), p.165.

### 3.1. Individual Self-Realisation and Community

#### (i) *The Problem of Individual Self-Realisation and Community*

Two values are often thought to be central to Marx's vision of the good life. First, Marx's vision puts an extraordinary emphasis on the notion of individual self-realisation, which as we have seen in the foregoing chapter is typically defined as the all-round development of the individual's powers and capacities. Thus, Marx says that it every person's 'vocation, designation, task' to 'achieve all-round development of all his abilities'.<sup>6</sup> Second, Marx vision is also said to stress the value of community. Thus, as Steven Lukes has put this view, Marx's description of communism sees individuals 'finding their fulfilment in reciprocity and solidarity rather than competition and self-assertion, and in mutual identification in common activities and the pursuit of common purposes'.<sup>7</sup>

Now, it is clear that Marx thinks that these values – self-realisation and community – are not antithetical but deeply complementary. Let us quote three passages in which Marx puts forward this view, to which we shall return. The first is from the 1845 *The German Ideology*, the second is from the 1848 *The Communist Manifesto* (hereafter the *Manifesto*), and the third is from the 1844 'Comments on James Mill' (hereafter the *Comments*):

'Only within community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community...In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association.'<sup>8</sup>

'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.'<sup>9</sup>

'...in the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have

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<sup>6</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.292.

<sup>7</sup> Lukes, *Marxism and Morality*, p.97.

<sup>8</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.78.

<sup>9</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.506.

directly *confirmed* and *realised*...my *human* nature, my *communal* nature’’<sup>10</sup>

Self-realisation and community are attractive ideals. The idea that they can be integrated is a potent one. But is this possible? Is it even desirable?

Insofar as Marx promises a reconciliation of individual self-realisation and community he runs up against one of Isaiah Berlin’s themes: the incompatibility of values. For Berlin, there is simply no warrant in the belief that all values can coexist in perfect harmony. Conflict of values is simply an intrinsic aspect of human life:

‘The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable—that is a truism—but conceptually incoherent; I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some of the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.’<sup>11</sup>

For Berlin, therefore, we are faced with the difficult prospect of choosing between values, where the achievement of some necessarily involves the sacrifice of others. Any argument to the contrary is incoherent, since human goods are plural and incompatible. But it is also dangerous, since once we believe in the idea of a perfect future then any sacrifice, however grave, is justified in bringing it about. Thus, on Berlin’s view, the task of political philosophy is not to uncover the idea of the perfect whole, which can bring contrasting values into harmonious alignment. Rather, it is the more modest aim of balancing the competing claims of different values in a stable, though always uneasy, equilibrium.

As the three quotations above indicate, Marx disagrees. In a future communist society, individuals will realise themselves in community with others. But what exactly is the relation between individual self-realisation and community, on the communist view? How are these values reconciled? Isn’t Berlin right to think that there is a tension, or perhaps even a contradiction, between the values of self-realisation and community?

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<sup>10</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.228.

<sup>11</sup> I. Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 1990), p.13.



(ii) *Three Models of Self-Realisation and Community*

Before we turn to Marx's response to these difficult questions, however, it will be useful to distinguish some of the ways in which self-realisation and community could be reconciled. This will help us get a clearer sense of the way in which Marx envisions a reconciliation of self-realisation and community under communism, and how this differentiates him from the models we find in the writings of Hegel and Mill.

In broad terms there are three ways in which self-realisation and community can be reconciled. The first model starts with the claim that man is an essentially social being, and goes on to claim that individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals that are set for them by the social roles they inhabit (for example, by fulfilling the duties of citizenship within the state).<sup>12</sup> Let us call this the *communitarian* solution to the self-realisation and community problem.

The second model can accept the communitarian claim that man is a social being, who is born into a community with a web of pre-existing roles. But it will argue that individuals have the capacity to question and even reject those roles. Indeed, this model will emphasise that one of the central capacities of human beings is the capacity to develop and pursue their own goals and projects.<sup>13</sup> On this model, individuals are realised, not by fulfilling the goals that are set for them by their social position, but by striving after goals they freely choose for themselves. Let us call this the *individualist* solution to the individuality and community problem.

Note that in the very broad way I have described these positions here, there is considerable scope for disagreement within both the communitarian and individualist schools. Amongst communitarians there will be disagreement about which community – family, church, state, etc. – is preeminently important, and about whether social roles can simply be allotted to individuals (as, for example, in Plato's *Republic*), or whether, by contrast, roles must be ones that the individual can

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<sup>12</sup> Thus, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre writes that: 'I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation...what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles.' (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Duckworth, 1981), p.220).

<sup>13</sup> This idea – that individuals should be able to pursue their own good in their own way – is often described in Rawls's language that individuals have the capacity 'to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue' a conception of the good (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p.525).

reflectively identify and endorse.<sup>14</sup> The same scope for disagreement also exists amongst individualists. But the key thought for our purposes is that communitarians think that individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals that are set for them by the roles they inhabit, whereas individualists, by contrast, think that individuals are realised by fulfilling goals they choose for themselves.

Second, note that communitarians and individualists can endorse the same set of values. For instance, a communitarian ethics can recognise and affirm the value of individual self-realisation. What separates the communitarian from the individualist is not that the latter values self-realisation whereas the former values something else altogether. Rather, it is that the individualists believe that individuals are realised by striving after goals they freely choose for themselves, whereas communitarians, by contrast, argue that individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals that are set for them by their social role. Likewise, individualists need not deny the claim that individual self-realisation can only take place in the community; few, in fact, will do.<sup>15</sup> But the individualist will typically see the value of community in instrumental terms, as a means for the achievement of further valuable ends (self-development or autonomy, for example), whereas communitarians will argue that living in community with others has intrinsic value. To put the same point another way, for the individualist living in community is a means for the pursuit of the good life, whereas for the communitarian living in community with others is constitutive of the good life itself.

Now, on top of these two positions, there is another model of self-realisation and community, which does not fit straightforwardly into either the individualist or the communitarian category. This is the idea that self-realisation and community could be integrated without either value being pre-eminent. One way in which this could be achieved would be to scale back the claims of both self-realisation and community until the claims of each value coheres with the other. This model gets its plausibility from the thought that while strong conceptions of self-realisation and community may pull against one another, diluted versions of these ideals may hang together more easily. But we can also imagine a more uncompromising variant of this solution, which also attempts to integrate self-realisation and community, but without

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<sup>14</sup> For the idea of 'reflective identification', see Michael Hardimon, 'Role Obligations', *Journal of Philosophy*, 91:7, (1994), pp.333-363.

<sup>15</sup> Rawls, for example, says it is 'utterly trivial interpretation of human sociability' that we must live in community to achieve our individual good.' (Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p.143).

any dilution of either value. The idea would have to be that in realising oneself as an individual one could also realise oneself as a communal being. More would need to be said, however, about the overall coherence of these ideals – strong self-realisation and strong community – at a deeper level.

In this section, we have distinguished three ways in which a reconciliation of individuality and community might be conceived: first, a *communitarian* model, according to which individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals set for them by their social role; second, an *individualist* model, according to which individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals they set for themselves; and finally, a third model, which is neither individualist nor communitarian, but instead aims to reconcile self-realisation and community without either value being pre-eminent. Of course, these distinctions are far from exhaustive, and matters will become more complex when we look at Marx, Hegel and Mill. But it at least gives us something of a starting point, and with that we can turn to Marx.

### **3.2. The Abolition of Social Roles**

Where does Marx fit in this taxonomy? As we have seen, Marx is often interpreted as a communitarian. In this section, however, I show how Marx's desire to abolish social roles is incompatible with communitarian accounts of the good life.

As we have seen, communitarians argue that self-realisation can only occur in community, because individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals that are given to them in virtue of the social roles they inhabit. Now, as the three passages I quoted at the outset of this chapter made clear, Marx also thinks that individual self-realisation can only be achieved in community. But this basic point of agreement with communitarianism obscures a more fundamental difference. For whereas communitarians argue that individuals are realised by fulfilling the goals that are set for them by their social role, Marx makes it clear that a future communist society will have overcome roles altogether. For as long as individual activity is set by their social role, says Marx, 'man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity,

which is forced upon him, and from which he cannot escape'.<sup>16</sup> Communism ends this 'fixation of social activity', this 'consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us'.<sup>17</sup> In a communist society, rather than having my activity set for me by social role, I can 'do one thing today and another tomorrow'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as Marx puts this point: 'In a communist society there are no painters but only people who engage in painting among other activities'.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, people paint, but no one occupies the social position of "painter", which carries with it its own set of goals and expectations to which its occupant must conform.

Why does an abolition of roles reveal that Marx rejected the communitarian solution to the problem of reconciliation? The answer is not that communitarians deny the value of creative activity, for communitarians can recognise that value.<sup>20</sup> Neither is it that Marx stresses the need for varied activities, whereas communitarians, following Hegel, stress the need for social particularisation and the virtue of a life devoted to one or very few activities.<sup>21</sup> No doubt, Marx would think there is something odd and incomplete about a life of Gauguin-like devotion to one craft. But that is not the central issue. For the central issue is not about how many activities we pursue, but whether, as Kymlicka puts it, our activities are ones that are 'given to us in virtue of our being embedded in certain communal roles, or whether, in contrast, our activities and projects are to be unconstrained by the existence of such roles'.<sup>22</sup> For Marx, the communitarian idea that our activities should be set for us represents an unacceptable constraint on individual activity. It is Marx's idea that roles always come from outside and free individuals should not be bound by them.

While the idea of an abolition of social roles provides a reply to the objection that Marx's vision of the future society looks to subsume the individual in society, however, the proposed abolition of roles is clearly open to doubt. For it is one thing to affirm the right of individuals to question and even reject their roles, quite another to look to abolish roles altogether. I have no space to consider the many lines of

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<sup>16</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>17</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>18</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>19</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.394.

<sup>20</sup> For instance, MacIntyre has stressed the value of creative activity (see his concept of a 'practice', *After Virtue*, Chapter 14).

<sup>21</sup> I discuss Hegel on the need for social particularisation in §3 of this chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, p.102.

response a defender of social roles could press against Marx,<sup>23</sup> but one obvious problem with it is that it is just incredibly hard to envision how a society without roles could even function. If individual activity is not set by one's social position but freely chosen, then how would social coordination be possible? How could we ensure that all necessary work gets done? How, in a society where people paint but there is no painters, would people be inculcated in painting and other social practices? Commenting on Marx's proposal to abolish roles, G.A. Cohen says that it is 'no great exaggeration' to say that that Marx's 'freely associated individuals' constitute 'an alternative to, not a form of, society'.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, however, Marx never considered how a 'free association of individuals' could coordinate their social existence without a structure of social roles. As a consequence, Marx's abolition of roles remains an intriguing but inadequately thought-out ideal.

### 3.3. Two Models of Community in Marx

Having seen that Marx's desire to abolish roles excludes the communitarian solution to the problem of reconciliation, I will now examine in some detail how Marx did envision a reconciliation of individual self-realisation and community under communism. I will argue that we can find two different answers in Marx's texts.

(i) *Self-Realisation and Community in The German Ideology and The Communist Manifesto*

Let us begin by reviewing the passage from *The German Ideology*, this time in its entirety:

'The transformation...of personal powers into material powers, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one's mind, but can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour. This is not possible without the community. Only within community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes

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<sup>23</sup> For a defence of roles from individualistic objections – including some quasi-Marxist ones – see Hardimon, 'Role Obligations', and Stefan Sciaraffa, 'Identification, Meaning and the Normativity of Social Roles', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 19:1, (2011).

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, 'The Dialectic of Labour in Marx', p.206.

possible only within the community...In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association.<sup>25</sup>

The passage begins by rejecting the idea – a leitmotif of the young Hegelians – that all that is required to overcome alienation and be at home in the world is a transformation of human consciousness. In response, Marx claims that the overcoming of alienation requires a thoroughgoing transformation of the social world itself, specifically, an abolition of the division of labour. This, Marx says, ‘is not possible without the community’. The idea here, surely, is that individuals are incapable of achieving this on their own, that some degree of cooperation is necessary if individuals are to abolish specialism. Individual self-realisation requires community, first of all, in that it is only in community with others that individuals can liberate themselves from the enslaving features of capitalism.

Now, having given one reason why individuality requires community in the *transition* to communism, Marx then goes on to say that individuality also requires community *under* communism: ‘only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions’. Marx does not provide an argument for this view. But notice that Marx describes community, not as intrinsically valuable, but as a ‘means’ to a further valuable end of individual self-development. In other words, Marx’s idea does not seem to be that the maintenance of our communal bonds has value. Rather, it seems to be that living in community with others provides the individual with the various *means* for what is of real value, which is the all-round development of individuals (or, as he puts it here, the cultivation of one’s gifts ‘in all directions’).

Let us now turn to the second famous quotation, this time from the *Manifesto*:

‘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.’<sup>26</sup>

G.A. Cohen has suggested that one way of picturing life under communism, as Marx conceived it in the above passage, is to imagine a jazz band in which each player

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<sup>25</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.78.

<sup>26</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p.506.

seeks his own self-realisation as a musician.<sup>27</sup> Cohen writes: ‘Though motivated to secure his own fulfilment, as opposed to that of the band as a whole, or of his fellow musicians taken severally, he nevertheless fulfils himself maximally to the extent that each of the others also does so, and the same hold for each of them’. Cohen concludes: ‘So, as I understand Marx’s communism, it is a concert of mutually supporting self-fulfilments, in which no one takes promoting the fulfilment of others as any kind of obligation. I do not say that no one cares about the musical fulfilment of the others...But no concern for others is demanded’.<sup>28</sup>

On the model provided here, individuals need the community to provide them with the appropriate context for their self-realisation. To refer back to the jazz band analogy, each musician is dependent on their band mates to create the appropriate context for their own performance. Thus, communist society is characterised by an interdependence of human flourishing, where the self-realisation of others creates the conditions for my self-realisation, just as my self-realisation creates the conditions for the self-realisation of others. Yet, as Brudney notes, ‘no value is placed on creating and maintaining those conditions or on agents’ reciprocal relations.’<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, the model of community in the *Manifesto* is entirely compatible with egoism, in the specific sense that jazz musicians could be wholly concerned with their own self-realisation, and not at all with that of their band mates (at least in so far as their egoism does not undermine the good of the band). Jazz musicians, or members of a team sport, need not have the good of others as part of their own end in acting, in order for their band or team to flourish. Rather, they simply need to recognise the fact that their own self-realisation as an individual is bound up with the self-realisation of others. Perhaps surprisingly, an overcoming of egoism is not a stipulation of Marxian community.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> G.A. Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.122.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*, p.122.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Brudney, *Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.311.

<sup>30</sup> Some have wondered whether a jazz band is an entirely apt analogy for what Cohen has in mind. Keith Graham, for instance, has suggested that ‘a more apt analogy might be that of an original New Orleans jazz band, where there are no solos and all playing is ensemble. If I want to play jazz, then my goal is necessarily a shared one, collective in character, like that of winning in a team sport’. (Graham, ‘Self-Ownership, Communism and Equality’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 64, (1990), p.53).

Where would the Marx of *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto* fit into the taxonomy we provided in 3.2? Marx has a strong notion of individual self-realisation. For Marx, individuals are realised by developing their powers and capacities in a free and all-round way. But the ideal of community in *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto* is a thin one in three respects. First, these visions of communist society are compatible with a purely instrumental view of community, according to which community is valued only as a means for individual self-development. Second, these two passages emphasise self-realisation with others. Our self-realisation takes place with others in that we rely on others to create the appropriate context for our self-realisation. But we need not do anything specifically for others. Third, these snapshots of communist society are compatible with egoism: individuals must recognise that their self-realisation is bound up with others, but they need not care about others – have the good of others as part of their own end in acting – in order to flourish.

(ii) *Self-Realisation and Community in the 1844 Comments*

Let us now turn to the concluding passage to the *Comments*, where Marx invites us to imagine that we had produced as ‘human beings’. In that event, writes Marx:

- 1) ‘In my *production* [I would have] 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*.’
  - 2) ‘In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human need* by my work...of having thus created an object corresponding to the needs of another man’s essential nature.’
  - 3) ‘I would have been for you the *mediator [der Mittler]* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion [*Ergänzung*] of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would
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know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love'.<sup>31</sup>

How does this conception of a future society compare with the descriptions in *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*? This passage retains the focus on labour as an activity of individual self-realisation; here labour is described as an enjoyable activity ('I would have enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity...'), and as an activity through which one manifests one's individuality ('when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses...*'). But the passage contains a different conception of community. First, in contrast to *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*, where Marx describes community as instrumentally valuable – a 'means' to the further valuable end of self-development – in the *Comments* Marx adopts a non-instrumental model of community. In the *Comments*, intrinsic value is placed on creating and maintaining our social bonds, on producing a product that corresponds 'to the needs of another man's essential nature'. Thus, to put the contrast between Marx's different models of a future communist society another way: in *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto* living in community with others provides the individual with the means for the good life, whereas in the *Comments* living in community with others – producing things that other human beings need – is constitutive of the good life itself.

Second, while *The German Ideology* and *Manifesto* emphasise self-realisation *with* others (for example, a jazz musician and their band mates), the Marx of the *Comments* emphasises self-realisation *for* others (for example, A cooking B a meal). In other words, the Marx of the *Comments* stresses the fulfilment that comes from the service aspect of work, from the knowledge 'of having satisfied a *human need*', whereas the Marx of *The German Ideology* and *Manifesto* stresses the fulfilment that comes from developing one's powers and capacities alongside (but not specifically for) others. Indeed, the theme that is stressed so strongly in the *Comments* – the fulfilment that comes from serving others' needs – is strikingly absent from the descriptions of a future communist society in both *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*.

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<sup>31</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.228. Note that I have provided three excerpts from this passage here, but that the numbering is Marx's own. The passage is given in full in Chapter 5 §2.

Finally, while the conception of community in both *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto* are compatible with egoism, in the specific sense that individuals could be wholly concerned with their own self-realisation, and not at all with that of their fellows, the Marx of the *Comments* rejects that view. In the *Comments*, Marx describes a future society as one in which people produce for others, where part of the producer's end is to provide others with the products or services they need. In other words, the individuals described in the *Comments* take others' ends as part of their own ends in producing. This is a feature of communist production that is neither mentioned nor required by the models of community in *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*.

Where would the Marx of the *Comments* fit into the taxonomy that we provided in 3.2? What is so interesting about Marx's position in the *Comments* is that it contains both strongly individualistic and communitarian aspects. Thus, on the one hand, Marx emphasises the fulfilment that comes from individual achievement, from developing one's talents and producing a product that manifests them. Yet, on the other hand, Marx emphasises the fulfilment that comes from serving others, from producing a product that satisfies another's need. In this way, the vision of the good life in the *Comments* attempts to reconcile a very strong ideal of individual self-realisation with a very strong ideal of community without any kind of compromise of either value. This mix of individualist and communitarian strands makes Marx's position a potent one. Yet it also makes Marx's position especially vulnerable to Berlinian objections about compatibility of values.

A final point: although I draw a contrast between a text that falls into Marx's 'early' period (the 1844 *Comments*), and two texts that are commonly thought to fall into Marx's transitional or 'mature' writings (the 1845-1846 *The German Ideology*, and the 1848 *Manifesto*)<sup>32</sup> I do not argue that Marx shifts from an early, more communitarian position to a later, more individualistic one. In Chapter 4, I will argue that Marx not only changes his mind on the issue of whether labour or leisure will be the primary site of individual self-realisation under communism, but that he oscillates between these positions throughout his lifetime. Although the exegetical evidence for a concurrent oscillation on these two different models of socialist

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<sup>32</sup> *The German Ideology* is often taken as the text that signals a break between Marx's early and later writings, because it is the text that Marx first provides an outline of his theory of history.

community is less strong, I suspect that Marx's thought is characterised by a similar life-long oscillation on this issue.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.4. Marx and Other Theorists Compared

I now want to try and bring out the distinctiveness of Marx's two models of individual self-realisation and community by comparing and contrasting his thought on these matters to Hegel and J.S.Mill.

#### (i) *Hegel and Marx*

On the face of it there are some striking similarities between Hegel and Marx's ideas on these issues. Like Marx, Hegel also emphasises the importance of individual self-realisation. Thus, as Allen Wood puts it, while Hegel's position is initially difficult to place in the major traditions in ethics, at its core it is 'based on a conception of individual human beings and their self-actualization'.<sup>34</sup> And for Hegel, as for Marx, individuals can only achieve true self-realisation in community, for as Hegel puts this view in the *Differenzschrift*: 'The community of a person with others must not be regarded as a limitation of the true freedom of the individual but essentially as its enlargement. Highest community is highest freedom'.<sup>35</sup> Like Marx once more, Hegel also argues that the achievement of individual self-realisation is a historical accomplishment, one that could only be achieved after a fall from an exquisite but ultimately underdeveloped stage of unity into a long but ultimately

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<sup>33</sup> There is some exegetical evidence that the thick notion of community of the *Comments* endures in some of Marx's later works. For example, some of the themes that Marx emphasises in the *Comments* return in the 1857-1858 *Grundrisse*. There, Marx writes that:

'The fact that this need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other, and vice versa, and that the one is capable of producing the object of the need for the need of the other, and that each confronts the other as owner of the object of the other's need, this proves that each of them reaches beyond the owner's particular need, etc., as a human being [*als Mensch*], and that they relate to one another as human beings [*als Menschen*]; that their common species-being is acknowledged by all'. (Marx, *Grundrisse II*, p.243)

<sup>34</sup> Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.21.

<sup>35</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, translated by H.S. Harris and W. Cerf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.145.

progressive period of alienation and estrangement.<sup>36</sup> Not surprisingly, these points of convergence have led some commentators to claim that Marx's ideas about self-realisation and community are essentially Hegelian in origin.<sup>37</sup> Whilst it is true that Marx is indebted to Hegel in a number of respects, however, I believe that the differences between these two thinkers on the issue of self-realisation and community are more significant (though no less interesting or illuminating for that).

The first of these differences is well-known: whilst Hegel thinks self-realisation is achievable in the modern social world, Marx thinks that self-realisation requires fundamental social and political change. This point must be made with care, however. Hegel does not think that individual self-realisation is possible in just any social world. On the contrary, it is Hegel's idea that self-realisation can only be achieved once the necessary social and political conditions are in place. On this issue, he and Marx actually agree. Neither is it to say that Hegel uncritically endorses the social and political arrangements of his day, for the conception of the rational state in the *Philosophy of Right* is by no means identical to that of nineteenth century Prussia.<sup>38</sup> Yet while it would be a mistake to portray Hegel as an apologist for the actually existing Prussian state, it is true that he believes that he is living at a time of rational social and political institutions, which may be marred by contingent imperfections, but are essentially good and hence worthy of acceptance.<sup>39</sup>

However, this well-known point – that for Marx self-realisation can only be had in a future communist society, whereas for Hegel it is possible in the here and now – conceals deeper philosophical differences. Most importantly, while self-

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, it should also be pointed out that this historical account of individual – where history is said to pass through three major stages of undifferentiated unity, differentiated disunity and differentiated unity – pre-dates Hegel. See Chapter 2, §1.

<sup>37</sup> For two examples of this tendency to Hegelianise Marx's ideas about self-realisation and community, see Sean Sayers *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Carol Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology: Individuality and Community in Marx's Theory of Social Reality* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1980).

<sup>38</sup> Thus, for example, in contrast to the Prussian state of his day, Hegel's conception of the rational state contains a constitutional monarchy, a representative assembly, public trials, and trial by jury. For more on this issue, see Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.24-37.

<sup>39</sup> Thus, Hegel famously declares that 'the state is not a work of art; it exists in the world, and hence in the sphere of arbitrariness, contingency, and error and bad behaviour may disfigure it in many respects.' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, p.279). But this does not cancel Hegel's view that he is living under a time of mature ethical institutions that are worthy of reconciliation and allegiance.

realisation is central to Hegel's ethics and political philosophy, he is not attracted to the ideal of individual self-realisation that features so heavily in Marx's vision of communism: the ideal of the fully developed individual, who has transcended the division of labour and its social roles, to develop his powers and capacities in an all-round way. In fact, Hegel would think that the Marxian aspiration towards all-round development is based on a completely wrongheaded understanding of self-realisation and its requirements. Hegel's reason for rejecting that ideal are set out in section §13 of the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*:

‘A will which resolves on nothing is not an actual will; the characterless man can never resolve on anything... Such a disposition [*Gemüt*] is dead, even if its aspiration is to be beautiful. “Whoever aspires to great things” says Goethe, “must be able to limit himself”. Only by making resolutions can the human being enter actuality, however painful the process may be; for inertia would rather not emerge from that inward brooding in which it reserves a universal possibility for itself. But possibility is not yet actuality. The will which is sure of itself does not therefore lose itself in what it determines’.<sup>40</sup>

The philosophical claim underpinning this passage is one that Hegel makes on a number of occasions, for example, in his discussion of the emptiness of the Kantian moral will,<sup>41</sup> and, as in the above passage, in the discussion of the Romantic complaint against the specialism of modern life. The underlying point is that freedom or self-realisation is not incompatible with ‘particularity’ or ‘determinacy’, the commitment on the part of the individual to specific actions, projects and goals. On the contrary, Hegel maintains, it is only by resolving on something particular, that is, by focusing on some things rather than others in their life, that individuals can take on a meaningful existence at all. To the objection that limiting oneself in this way represents an unfortunate loss of freedom or wholeness, Hegel's reply is that the individual need not experience this as a limitation, because their projects and goals are ones with which they can identify. His example is friendship and love. In friendship and love, the individual commits to a specific other but does not experience their commitment as a limitation, because they remain ‘with oneself’ [*bei sich*] in their determinacy.<sup>42</sup> Freedom is not diminished but enriched in this process.

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<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §13, p.47.

<sup>41</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §5, p.37-39.

<sup>42</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §7, p.42

Whilst Hegel does not base his political philosophy on love, which remains he says at the level of feeling [*Empfindung*], the idea that individual self-realisation requires ‘particularisation’ is also at the heart of his understanding of how the individual is reconciled to the modern social world. Thus, as Hegel puts it in his account of civil society:

‘The individual attains actuality only by entering into existence [*Dasein*] in general, and hence into *determinate particularity*; he must accordingly limit himself to one of the particular spheres of need.... Initially – i.e. especially in youth – the individual balks at the notion [*Vorstellung*] of committing himself to a particular estate, and regards this as a limitation imposed on his universal determination and as a purely *external* necessity. This is a consequence of abstract thinking, which stops short at the universal and so does not reach actuality; it does not recognise that the concept in order *to exist*, must first of all enter into...determinacy and particularity.’<sup>43</sup>

We can, therefore, see how Hegel would view Marx’s aspiration towards all-round development as yet another example of ‘abstract thinking’ which views ‘determinacy’ and ‘particularity’ as something which is to be resisted or overcome. It will be remembered that Marx looked to liberate the individual from the confines of social roles, so that they can do ‘one thing today and another tomorrow’. But Hegel’s reply is that this is a mistaken view of self-realisation. Self-realisation is not, on Hegel’s view, achieved by resisting the constraints of a role, but by fulfilling the duties that flow from the roles one occupies within the three major institutions of modern society: the family, civil society and the state. Within those social roles, individuals have space for their particular concerns and interests, but they can also see those concerns and interests as having a more universal meaning, because of the way in which they contribute towards the common good. Consequently, Hegel’s conception of self-realisation is compatible with precisely those features of modern society that Marx looked to eliminate. For whereas Marx viewed the division of labour and social roles as unacceptable constraints on the free and full development of individuals, Hegel saw them as enabling conditions for self-realisation, the very vehicles through

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<sup>43</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §207, pp.238-239.

which individuals give content to their abstract universality and ‘enter into existence’.<sup>44</sup>

What about Hegel and Marx’s respective ideal of community? A comparison between Hegel and Marx on community is more difficult, for whereas Marx offers only the briefest of glimpses of a future communist society, Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* presents a systematic account of the rational state. However, it would not distort matters too much to see Hegel’s conception of community as something of a middle-way between the rather thin conception of community in *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*, and the rather thick conception of community in the *Comments*. Thus, on the one hand, Hegel would reject the purely instrumental model of community that Marx tilts towards in *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto*. This much is clear from Hegel’s hostility towards the social contract tradition, and its claim that the state is merely an association for serving individual interests.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, Hegel would agree with Marx’s view in the *Comments* that membership in a community is not merely instrumentally valuable but a constitutive aspect of the human good. While Hegel shares a non-instrumental view of community with the *Comments*, however, he would object to the demandingness of the notion of community in that text. For although Hegel believes the ‘highest community is highest freedom’, he denies that the individual need make ‘extraordinary sacrifices’ for the sake of the community.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> This point must be made with care, however, for Hegel denies that individuals can simply be allotted a social or economic role, an idea he associates with Plato and the Indian caste-system (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §206, pp.238). On the contrary, Hegel asserts the modern principle of ‘subjective freedom’, the right of individuals to choose their social and economic activities and roles. Yet we should not overstate what ‘subjective freedom’ requires. For, as Allen Wood writes, ‘Hegel does not sympathize with Mill’s notion that society should encourage individuals to engage in all sorts of eccentric experiments with their lives...[Rather] he thinks their choices must be between recognised ways of life, systematically integrated into the organic system of modern ethical life’ (Allen W. Wood, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, *Philosophy of Right*, p.xx). Once one’s social role has been chosen, Hegel claims, the individual ‘must simply do what is prescribed, expressly stated, and known to him within his situation’; here, the appropriate attitude is one of ‘rectitude’ (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §150, p193).

<sup>45</sup> ‘If the state is confused with civil society and its determination is equated with the security and protection of property and personal freedom, *the interest of individuals [der Einzelnen] as such* becomes the ultimate end for which they are united; it also follows from this that membership of the state is an optional matter. – But the relationship of the state to the individual [*Individuum*] is of a quite different kind. Since the state is objective spirit, it is only through being a member of the state that the individual [*Individuum*] has objectivity, truth, and ethical life’ (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §258, p276).

<sup>46</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §268, pp.288-289. An exception is war.

The ideal of individual sacrifice for the greater good is one Hegel associates with the states of antiquity. While one can find a residual trace of nostalgia for those states in Hegel's writings, his considered view is that they represent an unsuitable model of community for modern individuals and mass society. His own view, by contrast, is that individuals can serve the community in a sufficiently full way by fulfilling the duties that flow from their social role. In this way, then, Hegel would reject as extreme both the individualism of *The German Ideology* and the *Manifesto* and the communitarianism of the *Comments*.

Where would Hegel fit into the taxonomy that we provided in §3.2 of this chapter? Hegel's position is moderately *communitarian*. In comparison to Marx, Hegel has a rather thin notion of individual self-realisation. Hegel rejects the association of self-realisation with strenuous self-development, originality, or eccentricity. Rather, he sees individuals as being realised in and through their social roles. Hegel's view is *moderately* communitarian because while he sees the attraction of the communitarian ideal of service for others, he is more wary than Marx (in the *Comments*) of the strenuous demands that such an ideal could potentially place on the individual.

(ii) *Mill and Marx*

Despite their major political and philosophical differences, and general disinterest in one another's work, Marx's ideal of individual self-realisation has more in common with Mill's than Hegel's.<sup>47</sup> Like Marx, and unlike Hegel, Mill thinks that self-realisation consists in self-development; and, like Marx once more, Mill think this

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<sup>47</sup> Surprisingly, given their huge historical and cultural significance, there has not been that much written on Marx and Mill. For a good discussion of their social theories, see Graeme Duncan's *Marx and Mill: Two Visions of Social Conflict and Social Harmony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). For a comparison of Mill and Marx's attitudes towards socialism and the human good, see John Skorupski, *Why Read Mill Today?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.79-86.

For a brief but illuminating discussion of Hegel and Mill on individuality, see Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, pp. 200-202. Nicholas Capaldi's biography examines Mill's relationship to Romanticism and German Idealism in more detail, though I think he rather over-emphasises the influence of those traditions on Mill's thought (Nicholas Capaldi, *John Stuart Mill: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).



requires development ‘in all directions’ – a turn of phrase both thinkers employ.<sup>48</sup> In *On Liberty*, Mill quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt approvingly:

‘The end of man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal or immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and intransient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.’<sup>49</sup>

Not only do Mill and Marx share an ideal of self-development; they also share a remarkably similar assessment of the fortune of that ideal in their own age. Both believe that theirs is a time of enormous social and economic development. Yet it is also a time where the individuality they prize is stultified and in decline. Differences between individuals have become less and less pronounced, they claim, so that society resembles an undifferentiated heap. Thus, Marx says of Victorian England that: ‘Intense class development, extreme division of labour and what is called “public opinion”...[have] produced a monotony of character that would it make it impossible for a Shakespeare, for example, to recognise his own countrymen’. In his ‘everyday life’, we are told, one “respectable” Englishman is so like another that even Leibniz could hardly discover a difference, a *differentia specifica*, between them.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, Mill says that while the ‘European family of nations’ has historically enjoyed a ‘remarkable diversity of character and culture’, it now has this diversity to a ‘considerably less degree’. Instead, ‘it is decidedly advancing towards the Chinese ideal of making people more alike’.<sup>51</sup> The Frenchmen of the present day resemble one

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<sup>48</sup> As already quoted, Marx says that is ‘only in community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions’, where Mill talks of ‘bold, free expansion in all directions’. (Quoted from Daniel Brudney, ‘Grand Ideals: Mill’s Two Perfectionisms’, *History of Political Thought*, 29:3, (2008), p.594).

<sup>49</sup> Quoted from Mill, *On Liberty*, in *On Liberty And Other Writings*, edited by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.64.

This is not to say that Mill’s notion of individuality is identical with Marx’s in every detail, however. For Mill, the development of the individual’s powers to a ‘complete and consistent whole’ is not only a plea for the cultivation of a wider-range of powers and capacities (as it is in Marx), but also – in more Schillerian vein – for a harmonious balancing between the rational and emotional aspects of human nature.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, ‘The English’, *MECW*, volume 19 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), p.163.

<sup>51</sup> As this quote of Mill’s indicates, both these thinkers also share a rather Eurocentric view of history and progress. Compare Mill’s remarks above on China with Marx’s on the British Rule in India and the Asiatic mode of production.

another more than those of the last generation, Mill claims, and the ‘same remark might be made of an Englishmen in a far greater degree’.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst both Mill and Marx share this pessimism over the present, both are optimistic that a higher level of self-development is attainable. For Mill, as is well-known, the solution for the achievement of self-development is liberty, where this includes both negative liberty from physical inference but also positive liberty as autonomy or ‘self-government’, the capacity to follow one’s own plan of life. In Mill’s hands, therefore, self-development refers not to the development of the self according to a pre-existing template, but, as John Skorupski puts it, the ‘development of the self, *by the self*’.<sup>53</sup> Once more, however, Mill sees his own age as one in which conformity to custom rather than autonomous development reigns:

‘In our times...everyone lives under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual and the family do not ask themselves – what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character or disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? What is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances?’<sup>54</sup>

And yet, while Mill is wary of the threat posed to individual self-development by conformity to communal values, he denies that achieving individuality requires a complete overcoming of custom or indeed an abolition of social roles. Mill is more moderate than Marx in this respect: ‘It would be absurd’, he claims, ‘to pretend that people ought to live as if nothing whatever had been known in the world before they came into it; as if experience had as yet done nothing showing that one mode of existence, or of conduct, is preferable to another.’<sup>55</sup> While Mill is not entirely clear about the relation between individual self-realisation and social roles, it is not too difficult to see what his ideal would be: it would be one in which roles remain, but where none would be uncritically adopted, and where people could follow or depart from them as they so wish. This presents us with a sensible middle-way between

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<sup>52</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, pp.80-81.

<sup>53</sup> John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill: Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.269.

<sup>54</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, p.68.

<sup>55</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, p.64.

Hegel's rather conformist talk of 'rectitude', and his concurrent disparaging of the individual's desire to be 'something special' [*Besonderes*],<sup>56</sup> and Marx's attempt to completely overcome the given.

If Marx's notion of self-realisation is broadly consonant with Mill's ideal of individuality, how do their respective ideals of community compare? The more interesting contrast in this regard is between Mill and the Marx of the *Comments*, that is, the Marx who argues that individuals are realised by developing their individuality in a way that simultaneously serves the common good. Now, Mill is not immune to the allure of communitarian ideals of the sort Marx puts forward in the *Comments*. In *Utilitarianism*, for instance, Mill recognises the 'powerful natural sentiment' in human nature, 'the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures'.<sup>57</sup> Yet Mill quickly goes on to register about that ideal. The worry is not (the more familiar one) that the communitarian ideal is not suitable for, or realisable under, modern conditions, but that its cultivation could become 'so excessive as to interfere unduly with human freedom and individuality'.<sup>58</sup> Thus, whilst Marx is untroubled about the compatibility of individual self-realisation and communal service, Mill is more wary – in good liberal spirit – of the potential for conflict between values. Moreover, when individuality and community do conflict, Mill's view is that the former trumps the latter: 'I fully admit that the cultivation of an ideal of nobleness of will and conduct should be to individual human beings an end, to which the specific pursuit either of their own happiness or of that of others... should, in any case of conflict, give way'.<sup>59</sup> In fact, although Mill is attracted to the communitarian ideal, it is hard to say whether it finds a place in his final system.

Where would Mill fit into the taxonomy that we provided in §2? Mill's position is individualistic. Like Marx, his conception of self-realisation consists in autonomous self-development. But unlike the Marx of the *Comments*, Mill worries about compatibility of autonomous self-development with the ideal of communal service, and so the latter ideal gives way to the former.

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<sup>56</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*. §150, p.193.

<sup>57</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, edited by John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.164. For a focus on the communitarian side of Mill's thought, see Brudney, 'Grand Ideals: Mill's Two Perfectionisms'.

<sup>58</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p.166.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted from Brudney, 'Grand Ideals: Mill's Two Perfectionisms', p.505.

### 3.5. The Communitarian Critique of Marx

In the foregoing sections, I have argued that the communitarian interpretation of Marx is mistaken, and that, on the contrary, Marx's vision of the good life is quite individualistic. Whilst this provides a response to the charge that Marx seeks to subsume the individual in society, however, it also leaves Marx vision of the good society vulnerable to a rather different series of objections: namely, that in its extreme emphasis on individual self-development, it concurrently neglects more communitarian insights. In this section, I consider two criticism of this kind, one from Charles Taylor and another from G.A. Cohen.

#### (i) *Charles Taylor on Marxian Freedom*

In *Hegel and Modern Society*, Charles Taylor argues that Marx held a deeply unrealistic conception of freedom.<sup>60</sup> To make this claim, Taylor draws a parallel between Marx and Kant's view of freedom. According to Taylor, both Marx and Kant conceived of freedom as antithetical to the dictates of nature or one's social role. Truly free activity, for Marx and Kant, was undetermined by natural and social constraints. In this way, neither Marx nor Kant accepted the communitarian idea that we must accept the position that our natural or social position gives to us. Rather, Taylor claims, both 'wanted to overcome the given altogether'.<sup>61</sup>

Now, following Hegel, Taylor argues that this conception of freedom is ultimately 'empty': 'complete freedom would be a void in which nothing would be worth doing, nothing would deserve to count for anything. The self which has arrived at freedom by setting aside all external obstacles and impingements is...without defined purpose'.<sup>62</sup> Complete freedom would be empty, Taylor argues, for it cannot determine what projects we should pursue or why those projects have value: '[such freedom] cannot specify any content to our action outside of a situation which sets

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1979.

<sup>61</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p.156.

<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p.157.

goals for us, which thus imparts a shape to our rationality and provides an inspiration for creativity'.<sup>63</sup>

Instead, Taylor argues, true freedom must be 'situated'.<sup>64</sup> What individuals need is a 'determinate task' that tells them what to create and why it is worth creating it. Taylor claims that this can only be achieved by treating our social roles as 'pre-existing horizons of significance', for it is a feature of such roles that they 'set goals for us'.<sup>65</sup> We must accept the goals that our roles set for us, Taylor argues, for if we do not then we will come to see our natural and social position as unacceptable constraints on the freedom of the will which must be resisted or overcome.<sup>66</sup>

Now, there are passages in which the freedom that Marx looks forward to in a future communist society does look vulnerable to Taylor's objection. One such passage is the one we have considered in some detail in the last two chapters, the so-called 'hunt in the morning' passage in *The German Ideology*. There, it will be remembered that Marx talks of future individuals enjoying the complete freedom to 'do one thing another tomorrow', to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and so on. Yet Taylor might argue that this freedom to do what we please is ultimately empty. For having the complete freedom to do as they please, future individuals lack the kind of 'definite task' which tells them what it is they should do and why it is worth doing it: that is, future individuals lack guidance about whether they should hunt or fish or rear cattle, and why, if they choose to hunt or fish or rear cattle, those activities have value. In this way, Taylor's objection seems plausible.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p.157.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.38.

<sup>66</sup> In this way, Taylor argues that the drive towards complete freedom will ultimately end in Nietzschean nihilism, the elimination of all constraints as arbitrary impositions on the will. MacIntyre arrives at a similar conclusion, where he suggests that we face a choice between 'Nietzsche or Aristotle', that is, between nihilism or a life of communally defined virtue (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Chapter 9).

<sup>67</sup> Another passage of Marx's which might be thought to be vulnerable to Taylor objection is the so-called 'freedom and necessity' passage in the third volume of *Capital*, where Marx describes work as inescapably belonging to a 'realm of necessity', and looks forward to the expansion of the true 'realm of freedom' which lies beyond it, in leisure. The very idea of a 'realm of freedom', in which people produce as they please in a leisure society that is unburdened with the struggle with economic necessity, may also seem empty. I deal with this passage in some detail in Chapter 4.

Whilst Taylor's objection might seem to apply to Marx's position in *The German Ideology*, however, it is less obvious that it applies to his position in the *Comments*. For the future individuals described by Marx in the *Comments* do have a very 'definite task', namely, to engage and develop their talents to satisfy others' needs (think, for example, of a doctor who engages and develops their medical talents in order to treat and cure their patients' ailments). On the face of it, it is a task that does provide an account of what individuals should do (serve the needs of others) and why that activity has value (because it contributes to the fulfilment of others' ends, while also developing one's individuality).

In response, however, Taylor might accept that Marx's position in the *Comments* does provide individuals with something of a 'task', yet still press the point that it is hard to see what that task could actually amount to outside of a society structured by social roles. In particular, Taylor could point out that the instruction 'provide a service to society' is still fundamentally indeterminate (that is, it does not help us determine what to do) and socially unrealisable (that is, it provides us with a duty to others that one cannot fully discharge). Once more, Taylor might claim, these problems can only be overcome by accepting a structure of social roles. For it is a feature of social roles that they delimit one's responsibility (a doctor, for example, is only responsible for his or her patients' medical needs), in a way that allows us to both determine and discharge our duties to others. Thus, Taylor might argue, the only plausible way in which the ideal of the good life in the *Comments* could be realised is in a society that is structured by social roles.

In response, I think we should concede that the discussion in the concluding paragraphs of the *Comments* is a snapshot of the good life rather than a systematic account of a good society. Neither in this text, nor in any other, does Marx make any attempt to think about how the ideal of the good life described in that text could be organised on a society-wide basis. Had Marx thought about that critical issue, he would, for reasons Taylor cites, have been forced to accept the need for roles in a future communist society.

(ii) *G.A. Cohen on Marxian Community*

Let us now turn to a second criticism. In a paper in which he reconsiders his earlier defence of Marx's theory of history, G.A. Cohen argues that Marx's philosophical

anthropology suffers ‘severely from one-sidedness’.<sup>68</sup> Specifically, Cohen claims that with its extraordinary emphasis on the creative aspect of human nature, Marx’s philosophical anthropology concurrently neglects ‘a whole domain of human need and aspiration’ which features prominently in Hegel’s political philosophy.<sup>69</sup> More precisely, Cohen claims that Marx overlooks the need for unhyphenated ‘self definition’: the deep human need to be defined by something larger than oneself which is not of one’s own making. This is a need that has historically been fulfilled by religion or nationalism or some amalgam thereof. Crucially, Cohen claims that the need for self definition is not met by Marx’s Aristotelian emphasis on the development of human powers and capacities, for although such capacity-development is a good, it cannot generate an adequate sense of self: ‘even if a person does gain an understanding of himself through creative activity, because...he recognises himself in what he has made, he typically understand himself as possessed of a certain kind of capacity: he is not necessarily able to locate himself as a member of a particular human community’.<sup>70</sup>

Now, Cohen argues that the defects of Marx’s philosophical anthropology – its neglect of the need for self definition – seeps into Marx’s vision of a future society in two ways.<sup>71</sup> First, Cohen claims that the philosophical anthropology’s extreme emphasis on the creative side of human nature manifests itself the vision of the future’s ideal of individual self-realisation, that is, the idea that self-realisation consists in the all-round development of the individual.<sup>72</sup> It will be remembered from the previous chapter that Cohen thinks that the ideal of all-round development is wildly implausible and not necessarily attractive. However, for reasons given, I have argued that we need not interpret Marx’s idea of all-round development in that over-ambitious way. Second, and more importantly for the theme pursued here, Cohen claims that the philosophical anthropology’s neglect of the need for self definition manifests itself in the vision of the future society’s conception of community. Now,

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<sup>68</sup> G.A. Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, in *History, Labour and Freedom: Themes from Marx* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.137.

<sup>69</sup> Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, p.137.

<sup>70</sup> Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, pp.138-139.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, p.137.

<sup>72</sup> As Cohen puts it: ‘the materialism [of the philosophical anthropology] encourages the wish to draw forth everything in the individual’ (Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, p.143).

Cohen is certainly aware of the passages we have been concerned with in the present chapter, in which Marx says, for example, that is ‘only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions’. But Cohen thinks that this reveals that for Marx community is only of instrumental value, a mere means for the development of individual powers and capacities:

‘It is true that for Marx the liberation of the human material is possible only in community with others...but [for Marx] society is required...as a means, to an independently specified (and, I argued, absurd) goal. It is not required, less instrumentally, as a field for that self-identification the need for which is unnoticed in Marx’s vitalistic formulations’.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, on Cohen’s view, Marx’s extreme emphasis on the creative side of human nature gives rise to a deeply impoverished conception of community, where community is only valued instrumentally, as a means for the realisation of further valuable ends.

Now, Cohen’s criticism has considerable force as a criticism of the model of the good life in *The German Ideology*, for in that text Marx does describe community as instrumentally valuable, a ‘means’ for the cultivation of human powers in ‘all directions’. Yet it has less force as a criticism of the *Comments*.<sup>74</sup> For in that text Marx rails against capitalism precisely because it treats our production for others as a means to the realisation of further valuable ends. Under capitalism, says Marx, ‘I have produced for myself and not for you, just as you have produced for yourself and not for me.... That is to say, our production is not production by a human being for a human being as a human being, i.e., it is not *social* production.’<sup>75</sup> Here, the fault of capitalism is not merely that it values the wrong end (namely, profit-making over individual self-development), but the deeper one that it treats what has intrinsic value – the maintenance of our communal life, our production for others – as a mere means to the realisation of further ends. The contrast is to a future communist society, in which I do not produce for others solely for some expected benefit that I hope to

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<sup>73</sup> Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, p.143.

<sup>74</sup> In fact, this is a possibility that Cohen acknowledges in a footnote, where he describes Marx as being ‘less guilty of that neglect [for self definition] in the ‘1844 Manuscripts’ and in the associated ‘Comments on James Mill’, where the need to affirm one’s identity is interpreted as a need for a fulfilling kind of social labour in community with others.’ (Cohen, ‘Reconsidering Historical Materialism’, p.138).

<sup>75</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.225.



receive in return, but in part because I see my production for your needs as having intrinsic value. As Marx puts this point, having produced for you, I would have ‘the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work... of having objectified *man’s* essential nature [*Wesen*], and of having thus created an object corresponding to the needs of another man’s essential nature.’<sup>76</sup> In this way, then, Cohen’s charge that Marx has an impoverished, because instrumental, conception of community cannot be applied to the Marx of the *Comments*.

### 3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that communitarian interpretations of Marx’s vision of a future society are mistaken, and that, on the contrary, Marx’s vision of the good life is, in a certain sense, radically individualistic. To make this claim, I examined Marx’s aim to abolish social roles and showed how such an aim was incompatible with communitarian accounts of the good life. Having shown that Marx rejected communitarianism, the chapter argued that there are two models of future communist society in Marx’s texts: an *individualistic* model and a second one which is neither individualistic nor communitarian, and which was discussed in Marx’s 1844 *Comments*. The chapter ended by considering a communitarian critique of Marx’s position on these matters from Charles Taylor and G.A. Cohen; here it was argued that while Taylor and Cohen raise some important worries about the *individualistic* model, the model in the *Comments* partly escapes their objections (though not, it should be said, without some important qualifications).

In conclusion, however, it is worth mentioning that the position Marx adopts in the *Comments* also has problems of its own, which have not yet been considered. In particular, in the final section of the chapter it was argued that Cohen’s criticism that Marx has an impoverished conception of community cannot be applied to the description of the good life in the *Comments*. Yet although the *Comments* escapes this criticism, it does so at a price. For the *Comments* only escapes this criticism by invoking a very strenuous conception of community (where we produce out of a deep concern – and perhaps even love – for others), a conception which might seem unrealistic and not necessarily attractive as a template for modern society. Thus,

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<sup>76</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.277.

while the model of the good life developed in the *Comments* can respond to the set of communitarian objections we have been considering here, it might seem vulnerable to a rather different set of objections – commonly associated with Hume – about whether widespread fellow-feeling or (in Hume’s term) ‘love of humanity’ is really possible or even desirable in modern society. This is an issue to which we shall return

## CHAPTER 4

### FREEDOM AND NECESSITY IN MARX'S VISION OF THE GOOD LIFE

In the previous chapter, I argued that Marx gives different arguments in different texts as to why community is necessary for individual self-realisation. In this chapter, I will argue that there is a second, related tension in Marx's vision of the good life. This tension centres on the issue of whether it will be labour or leisure that will constitute the realm of individual self-realisation under communism.

Many commentators perceive a major shift in Marx's account of communism: as Marx got older and learned more about economics, he dropped the vision of fulfilling labour that he spoke of in his early writings, and adopted a more pessimistic account of work in a future society, where self-realisation is achieved outside the working-day, in leisure.<sup>1</sup> Other commentators, however, have questioned whether this is really the case: properly understood, they argue, there is no pessimistic shift in Marx's views on this matter.<sup>2</sup> They argue that Marx's view, from his early more philosophical writings to his later economic works, is that labour will be radically transformed under communism so as to be a really free and fulfilling activity.

In this chapter, I give an alternative reading of this debate. On my view, Marx moves between two ways of thinking about freedom and its relation to necessity, which, I shall argue, gives rise to two different models of unalienated labour. The first model states that 'true' freedom can be achieved in what Marx would later term the 'realm of necessity', that is, in labour that satisfies social needs. The second model, by contrast, states that, while there can be a type or form of freedom in labour that satisfies social needs, 'true' freedom is to be achieved outside of this realm, in activities that are undetermined by social necessity. However, on my account, these

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, 'The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity: A Reconsideration', *Praxis*, 5, (1969); M.Maidan 'Alienated Labour and Free Activity in Marx's Thought', *Political Science*, 41:1, (1999); R.N. Berki 'On the Nature and Origins of Marx's Concept of Labour', *Political Theory*, 7:1, (1979); John Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); G.A. Cohen, 'Marx's Dialectic of Labour', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 3:3, (1974); William Adams, 'Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses', in T. Carver (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); James C. Klagge, 'Marx's Realms of "Freedom" and "Necessity"', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 16:4, (1986); Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

two strands cannot be understood in terms of a simple pessimistic shift between Marx's early optimistic writings and his later, supposedly less hopeful texts. Rather, I shall argue that Marx moves between these models throughout his works, never fully settling on one. It is an oscillation rather than a shift.

I will begin (in §4.1) by briefly outlining how this debate has been conducted so far, and will then (in §4.2) give my own reading of the passage in *Capital III* where Marx describes work as inescapably belonging to a 'realm of necessity'. In the following section (§4.3), I contrast this passage with the canonical account of non-alienated labour from Marx's early works, before going on to show (in §4.4) that Marx oscillates between these models throughout his lifetime. Once this interpretive claim is advanced, I then (in §4.5) situate Marx's oscillation within two different lines of thought in the history of philosophy, before considering (in §4.6) some implications of Marx's life-long oscillation between two different conceptions of the good life.

#### 4.1. The Debate So Far

Many commentators perceive a major shift in Marx's account of communism. In his early writings, Marx is optimistic that alienated labour can be fully overcome. In his later writings, however, Marx is often said to take a more pessimistic view of communist society, especially with regards to the role of labour in it. This change of views is said to have crystallised in the third volume of *Capital* (hereafter *Capital III*),<sup>3</sup> where Marx is now said to present a rather gloomy view of labour in a future communist society:

‘...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. 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

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<sup>3</sup> Marx began the process of writing up *Capital III* in the summer of 1864. He completed a first draft by the end of 1867 but never finalised the manuscript. For a more detailed insight into the complex intellectual history of *Capital III*, see Engels's Preface (Marx, *Capital III*, p.5-23).

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 none the less remains a realm of necessity [*Reich der Notwendigkeit*]. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom [*Reich der Freiheit*], which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.’<sup>4</sup>

This passage has seemed to many to provide undeniable proof that Marx did in fact change his views on communism, moving away from the youthful optimism of his early writings to adopt a ‘less hopeful and more realistic’<sup>5</sup> account of labour in a future society in his mature works. Whilst Marx had previously stated that work itself would become a free, non-alienated activity under communism, he now seems to view productive activity as inescapably belonging to a ‘realm of alienation’<sup>6</sup> regardless of the mode of production in which it takes place. To be sure, labour in the ‘realm of necessity’ is much less alienated than labour under capitalism, but there remains a degree of unfreedom even under socialism. For, Marx’s idea seems to be that ‘being a means of life...[labour] cannot be wanted, and will be replaced by desired activity as the working day contracts’.<sup>7</sup> Given that Marx’s earlier writings had seemed to unambiguously suggest that labour would be a realm of freedom and fulfilment under communism, it seems right to conclude, as Plamenatz does, that while ‘it was not Marx’s habit to draw his readers attention to the fact that he changed his mind about a matter of cardinal importance in his theory...it can hardly be denied that he did so in the third volume of *Capital*’.<sup>8</sup>

Now, while the above ‘pessimist’ reading of Marx’s mature view of communist society has generally held sway, other commentators have argued that this reading rests on mistaken reading of Marx’s mature views, and have put forward a more optimistic reading of the passage in question. When the passage is read in its proper

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<sup>4</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

<sup>5</sup> Plamenatz, *Karl Marx’s Philosophy of Man*, p.171.

<sup>6</sup> Marcuse, ‘The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity: A Reconsideration’, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, ‘Marx’s Dialectic of Labour’, p.261.

<sup>8</sup> Plamenatz, *Karl Marx’s Philosophy of Man*, p.171.

light, they suggest, it does not in fact reveal a pessimistic account of work in a future communist society. Crucial to their position is the argument that it is a ‘gratuitous inference’<sup>9</sup> to infer that the realm of necessary labour is a realm of ‘alienation’ or ‘unfreedom’. For Marx, they argue, never describes the realm of necessity in this way. On the contrary, in the very passage under discussion, Marx explicitly talks of freedom in the ‘realm of necessity’.

By reading Marx’s position in *Capital III* in a more positive light, these commentators come to see a good deal of continuity between Marx’s youthful and mature accounts of unalienated labour under communism. On their view, Marx’s position in *Capital III* does ‘not contradict Marx’s earlier views on the subject’<sup>10</sup>. Rather, they should be seen as ‘an elaboration and extension’<sup>11</sup> of his earlier views. Marx’s view, from the first to the last, is that labour will be radically transformed under communism to provide an immense source of enjoyment to the worker.

How are we to make sense of this debate between those who see a pessimistic shift in Marx’s mature views and those who see an enduring optimism in the very same texts? In what follows, I argue that Marx’s views on labour do change significantly in his lifetime, though not in the way that is commonly supposed.

#### **4.2. Freedom and Necessity in *Capital III***

Let us start by taking a closer look at Marx’s distinction of the ‘realm of freedom’ and the ‘realm of necessity’ in *Capital III*. What does Marx mean by these ideas; and what, exactly, is the contrast between the ‘realm of freedom’ and the ‘realm of necessity’?

##### *(i) Labour and Leisure*

Most straightforwardly, the ‘realm of necessity’ refers to work, while the ‘realm of freedom’ refers to time outside the working day, that is, to free time or leisure.

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<sup>9</sup> Klagge, “Marx’s Realms of “Freedom” and “Necessity””, p.775.

<sup>10</sup> Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, p.237.

<sup>11</sup> Klagge, “Marx’s Realms of “Freedom” and “Necessity””, p.775.

However, Marx's use of these terms in this passage is different from the everyday meaning of these terms.

While Marx often uses the concept of work or labour in a very broad way, to refer to a wide-range of creative human activities, here his idea of work or labour is narrow: the 'realm of necessity' refers to labour that is directed at satisfying at basic social needs. Such labour constitutes a 'realm of necessity' for the simple reason that it must be done if society is to sustain itself.

Marx's idea of 'free time' is, perhaps, more sharply at odds with the everyday meaning of 'leisure'. In everyday use, leisure refers to time when one is not working, and from this it is easy to slide into conceiving leisure as a time of idleness and inertia or as time spent on hobbies and trivial pursuits. However, Marx takes a quite different view of leisure and its place in human life. For him, the deep-lying alienation of modern society manifests itself both in its estrangement of human labour and in its degradation of human leisure. With the overcoming of alienated labour, Marx correspondingly expects leisure to take on a very different form and role in human life. In a communist society, leisure will be a time of great exertion and creativity.

In this way, then, the contrast between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom is not a contrast between work and something trivial or inertial. On the contrary, Marx is clear that the 'realm of freedom', like the 'realm of necessity', will be a site of productive activity. Rather, the contrast is between labour that is directed at satisfying human needs and labour that is not so directed.

### (ii) *Two Realms of Freedom*

Now, the really contentious issue here concerns whether, in describing work as belonging to a 'realm of necessity', and contrasting it with a 'realm of freedom' that lies outside of it, Marx was suggesting that work itself cannot be an activity of freedom and self-realisation.

The natural temptation is to see the 'realm of freedom' and the 'realm of necessity' as being opposed to one another, so that the contrast is between a 'realm of freedom', that comprises all that is free, and a 'realm of necessity', comprising its opposite, namely, alienation, unfreedom and such like. As we have seen, this is the inference that has been drawn by a number of commentators who argue that the mature Marx became more pessimistic about the possibility of overcoming alienated

labour.<sup>12</sup> However, this inference seems unwarranted. There is no exegetical evidence to suggest that Marx did acquiesce in the permanence of human alienation, as is alleged. Moreover, a more careful reading of this passage reveals that Marx talks of freedom in the ‘realm of necessity’, and gives us a partial insight into its nature. Freedom in necessary labour, writes Marx, ‘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’.<sup>13</sup>

In this way, the contrast between the ‘realm of freedom’ and the ‘realm of necessity’ is not, as is it sometimes thought to be, a contrast between a realm of freedom and a realm of unfreedom. On the contrary, the contrast that Marx draws here is a more nuanced one. It is a contrast between two different types of freedom. In what follows, I want to suggest that this contrast between the two ‘realms’ of freedom is best understood as a contrast between freedom as collective self-determination, the collective determination of activity as opposed to rule by external forces, and freedom as self-realisation, the development of one’s distinctly human capacities and potentialities. Let us start by looking at freedom in the realm of necessity.

For Marx, the freedom involved in necessary labour is a historical accomplishment in the sense that it has emerged slowly in the course of human history as human beings have attained more and more control over their interchange with the natural world. According to Marx, man’s natural condition in primitive societies is one of unfreedom. In this condition, man’s life is characterised by the perennial struggle to satisfy his most basic physical needs. Over time, man develops the means to satisfy such needs, but the satisfaction of man’s basic needs generates new needs of a more developed kind, which require more effective productive methods for their satisfaction. Again, man is forced to develop more dynamic productive techniques in order to satisfy his expanding needs. In doing so, however, he comes to achieve more and more freedom from the exigencies of his natural condition.

Under capitalism productive power reaches unprecedented levels of development. With the advent of industry, and the introduction of automation into the

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<sup>12</sup> See footnote 1 for an extensive list.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.



process of production, the productive powers of society are higher than at any stage in human history. This should provide the means to humanise labour and reduce the working day. But under capitalism the rich development of the social production is in stark contrast to the stunted development of the individual, and while mankind's mastery over the natural world is greater than at any point in history, man's control over the social world is now at the mercy of the market economy. Thus, 'in our days', writes Marx, 'everything seems pregnant with its contrary':

'Machinery, gifted with wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men.'<sup>14</sup>

Communism transcends this condition. Under communism, capitalism's positive characteristics are sustained but its alienating effects are eliminated. In a communist society the productive powers that have developed under capitalism are harnessed for the common good.

Marx was unsure as to how far productive powers might develop in the future. In his less restrained and more utopian moments, he goes as far as suggesting that a post-capitalist society will see the total liberation of man from the demands of producing the material requirements of society, that is, he predicts the abolition of necessary labour itself:

'Labour does not seem any more to be part an essential part of the process of production. The human factor is restricted to watching and supervising the production process...The worker no longer inserts transformed natural objects [i.e. tools] as intermediaries between the material and himself; he now inserts the natural process that he has transformed into an industrial one between himself and inorganic nature. He is no longer the principal agent of the production process: he exists alongside it.'<sup>15</sup>

In *Capital III*, however, Marx adopts a more restrained and realistic position. There, he has the good sense to argue that man must 'wrestle' with the nature in all forms of

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<sup>14</sup> Marx, 'Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper', *MECW*, volume 14 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), p.655.

<sup>15</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse II*, p.91.

social formation and under all modes of production. The introduction of machinery into the productive process aids and abets human labour, but it cannot eliminate it completely.

What type of freedom is there within the ‘realm of necessity’? The concept of freedom that Marx has in mind here is one of collective self-determination, where socialised man exercises full, conscious control over his economic activity. Man, whose activity has historically been determined by the blind forces of nature, by other men and, under capitalism, by the dictates of the market economy, finally takes control of his life and labour.

Having given his readers a glimpse of the type of freedom in unalienated labour, Marx then goes on to reiterate the point with which he started the passage – namely, that the ‘true realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases.’<sup>16</sup>

What does Marx mean by ‘true’ freedom? I think that the freedom Marx has in mind here is essentially one of individual self-realisation, the deployment and development of one’s distinctly human powers and capacities. This seems to be what Marx has in mind when he glosses the ‘realm of freedom’ as the sphere of life which comprises the ‘development of human energy which is an end in itself’.<sup>17</sup> In this way, we might say that whilst the ‘realm of necessity’ is a realm of self-determination, where man exercises control over their economic activity, it is the ‘realm of freedom’ that is the realm of self-realisation, the sphere of life where individuals develop their distinctly human powers and capacities.

Why is it time outside work that makes up the ‘true’ realm of freedom? Why can’t necessary labour also be an activity of self-realisation? Marx does not give us an answer to these questions. He seemed to think that the answer was self-evident, lying as he puts it ‘in the very nature of things.’<sup>18</sup> Perhaps he accepted that modern industrial production only offers limited scope for the type of creative, varied and interesting work that lends itself to self-realisation. Or, maybe he thought that as labour is determined by what society needs it would rarely accord with what individuals would ideally want to do. Either way, what is apparent is that, in *Capital*

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<sup>16</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

<sup>17</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

*III* at least, Marx looked to leisure as the sphere of life where the individual would do what they wanted to do, unconstrained by economic necessity.

### 4.3. Freedom and Necessity in the *Comments*

In this section, I will argue that Marx's account of non-alienated labour in *Capital III* does represent a significant departure from the canonical account of unalienated labour in the 1844 writings. To make this claim, I will examine the young Marx's fullest account of communist society, the concluding passage to his 1844 *Comments*.

In this passage, Marx invites us to imagine that we had produced as 'human beings'. In that event, writes Marx:

- 1) 'In my *production* [I would have] 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*.'
- 2) 'In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work...of having thus created an object corresponding to the needs of another man's essential nature.'
- 3) 'I would have been for you the *mediator* [*der Mittler*] between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion [*Ergänzung*] of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love'.<sup>19</sup>

While this passage raises a number of issues, I want to specifically focus on whether, in drawing a distinction between the 'realm of freedom' and the 'realm of necessity', and arguing that 'true' freedom is to be found in the former 'realm', the Marx of *Capital III* moved away from the account of non-alienated labour that he had put forward in the *Comments*.

The most immediately striking difference lies in their respective descriptions of labour. In the *Comments*, labour is the primary site of human self-realisation.

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<sup>19</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.228. Note that I have provided three excerpts from this passage here. The passage is given in full in Chapter 5 §2.

According to the *Comments*, individuals in a future society find fulfilment in the productive process, that is, in the activity of labour, and in their finalised product, the result of their labour, which serves as a manifestation of their individuality. In *Capital III*, Marx describes necessary labour in a future communist society as an activity that is free from alienation and exploitation, and carried out under humane conditions. Yet he stops short of describing necessary labour as fulfilling, still less an expressive enterprise which is pleasurable and enjoyable to the doer. In other words, he does not say that work is an enjoyable activity, which is experienced as a ‘pleasure’. Nor does he describe labour as an activity of ‘free expression’, in which one’s individuality is manifested in the products one make. Rather, he describes labour as being determined by necessity and mundane consideration, and looks to time outside the working-day to satisfy the deep human need for creative activity.

This point must be made with care. To be sure, Marx never rejects the core thesis of his philosophical anthropology, that is, the view that creative activity is the defining feature of the human species, and a deeply meaningful and fulfilling activity. Rather, he argues that we cannot realise the inherent creativity of our nature by producing for others in a socialist economy. He looks to leisure, rather than labour, as the sphere of life in which human creativity is to be realised. In other words, Marx does not abandon his philosophical anthropology; he abandons the notion that necessary labour is the most suitable realm for its deployment.

However, there is one crucial way in which Marx’s ideal of self-realisation changes. For, in the *Comments*, Marx not only recognises that labour will always be a matter of necessity; he considers the necessity of work – the fact that it is an activity that must be done to meet vital human needs – to be a source of labour’s attraction. Indeed, the Marx of the *Comments* argues that individuals can only achieve self-realisation by producing for others’ needs.<sup>20</sup> It is only by producing for others that I get the ‘direct enjoyment’ in knowing that I had helped another individual satisfy their needs, and it is only by producing for others that I would be ‘recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature’.

Now, it is worth noting that on the *Comments* account it is left open as to whether it is labour directed at physical needs or labour directed at non-physical

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<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of the early Marx’s view, see Daniel Brudney, ‘Producing for Others’, in H.C. Schmidt am Busch and C.F. Zurn (ed), *The Philosophy of Recognition*, (Plymouth: Lexington, 2010).

needs that is the prime activity of self-realisation. I suspect that Marx's silence on this issue is intended to emphasise the point that there is no significant difference between labour that satisfies basic needs and labour that satisfies social and cultural needs: that is, there is nothing fundamentally different in the production of the basic necessities of life from the production of art, books and plays. All of these types of production can be directed towards the needs of other individuals. Consequently, they all represent suitable vehicles for self-realisation.

What would not lend itself to self-realisation, however, is an activity that does not satisfy anyone's needs, an activity that is done for oneself. Of course, I might enjoy a particular activity that is done purely for myself. But I will only realise my true nature by producing for others, since it is only by doing so that I will achieve the goods of mutual production.

On the *Capital III* account it is left open whether activity in the 'realm of freedom' is directed towards human needs or not. But the contrast between freedom and necessity, and the tone of the passage more generally, suggests that it is activities that are done for oneself that will primarily comprise the 'realm' where human beings achieve self-realisation. Marx implies this when he describes really free activity as activity that is not directed at further valuable ends (an 'end in itself'), which suggests that the activities individuals pursue in the 'realm of freedom' will not be ones that are geared towards economic ends, that is, the needs of their fellows.

The crux of issue here is how, and in what way, I achieve self-realisation. According to the *Comments*, I realise my true nature in labour that is directed at others' needs. According to the *Capital III* account, by contrast, really free activity is done for its own sake, and not imposed by the exigencies of need.

#### **4.4. An Oscillation Rather Than A Shift**

In this section, I examine some of Marx's most illuminating pronouncements on work and freedom under communism, and argue that they reveal that Marx's intellectual development on this matter cannot be understood in terms of a simple shift from an early optimistic position to a later more pessimistic one. Rather, it is a life-oscillation between two different conceptions of the good life.

Let me start with the young Marx's 1844 writings. In the same year that Marx wrote the concluding passage to the *Comments*, in which necessary labour is central

to the realisation of the self, he also developed a philosophical anthropology in the *Manuscripts* by drawing a number of contrasts between humans and animals. Particularly relevant to the theme pursued here is the contrast between the necessity of animal production and the potential freedom of its human counterpart:

‘Admittedly animals also produce...[But]...only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom...Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty.’<sup>21</sup>

According to Marx, both animals and human beings are productive creatures in the sense that they must engage with the external world in order to satisfy their physical needs. But there is something fundamentally different about human production. For although animals and human beings produce, animals only do so when need compels them to, whereas humans can produce in freedom from their physical needs. As the reference to ‘the laws of beauty’ implies, the paradigm of ‘truly’ free activity is art: an activity that is undetermined by the pressures and considerations of physical necessity, an end in itself.

The position that Marx outlines in the philosophical anthropology of the *Manuscripts* is at odds with the contemporaneous *Comments*, for in the latter text Marx explicitly denies that the necessity of labour precludes freedom. However, it fits perfectly with Marx’s position in *Capital III*, for on both accounts really free activity is activity that is free from the exigency of need. Of course, this casts serious doubt on whether we can view Marx’s intellectual trajectory in terms of a simple shift between an early optimism and later pessimism. For, in his insight into the unalienated essence of man in 1844, Marx makes the same argument that he would return to two decades later. In this way, the underlying tension between these two different conceptions of the good life, which many commentators have attributed to a distinction between the ‘early’ and ‘late’ Marx, seems to be simply implicit in Marx’s original position.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p.276.

<sup>22</sup> Further evidence that the germ of the idea Marx expressed in *Capital III* can be traced back to the 1844 writings comes from the ‘Wage-Labour’ section of the *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts*, where Marx quotes the German economist and radical democrat Wilhelm Schulz approvingly. Schulz writes: ‘A nation which aims to develop its culture more freely can no longer remain the slave of its material needs...It needs above all leisure

Let us now turn our attention to the *Grundrisse*, the unpublished notebooks Marx kept between 1857-1858. There, we find the same oscillation between two different conceptions of the good life that was present in the 1844 writings. Thus, on the one hand, in a passage that is congruent with *Capital III* but at odds with the *Comments*, Marx asserts that the real aim of communist society is:

‘...the free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free.’<sup>23</sup>

On this view, it is leisure rather than labour that is the sphere of life in which individuals realise themselves, and the value of communism lies in its shortening of the working-day. As Marx puts it at another point in the same text, ‘the saving of labour time is equivalent to the increase in free time, i.e. time for the free development of the individual.’<sup>24</sup>

And yet, the *Grundrisse*, like the 1844 writings, contains other lines of thought. For, in a passage that is at odds with *Capital III* but congruent with the *Comments*, Marx claims that while it is true that labour is ‘externally determined by the aim to be attained and the obstacles to its attainment’:

‘...the overcoming of these obstacles is in itself a manifestation of freedom – and the external aims are stripped of their character as merely external natural necessity, and become posited as aims which only the individual himself posits, that they are therefore posited as self-realisation [*Selbstverwirklichung*], objectification of the object, and thus real freedom, whose action is precisely labour’.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the view that Marx expressed in the 1844 *Comments*, where labour is the central element in the realisation of the self, can at least be traced to the *Grundrisse* of 1857-1858.

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time in which to produce and enjoy culture’ (Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p.245).

<sup>23</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse II*, p.593.

<sup>24</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse II*, p.97

<sup>25</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse II*, p.530.

Perhaps, then, Marx oscillated in the 1844 writings, oscillated again in *Grundrisse* of 1857-1858, but then decisively settled on the so-called ‘pessimistic’ position we have been considering in *Capital III* of 1864-1867, where self-realisation is achieved after the necessary work is done. Certainly, this is the view Marx expressed in the 1862-1863 *Theories of Surplus Value*:

‘Free time, disposable time, is wealth itself, partly for the enjoyment of the product, partly for the free activity which – unlike labour – is not dominated by the pressure of an extraneous purposes which must be fulfilled, and the fulfilment of which is regarded as a natural necessity or a social duty, according to one’s inclinations.’<sup>26</sup>

However, the idea that Marx decisively settled on a ‘pessimistic’ appraisal of labour appears to be compromised by the famous passage from the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ (hereafter the *Critique*). There, Marx had predicted that:

‘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...only then can...society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!’<sup>27</sup>

On this account, communist labour is both a ‘means of life’, a way of sustaining the species, and ‘life’s prime want’, a vehicle for human self-realisation. Under communism the realms of freedom and necessity are conjoined. Of course, this is the very idea that Marx excludes in *Capital III*, where he draws a firm line between the realms of work and leisure. But Marx penned the *Critique* in 1875, eleven years after *Capital III*. In this way, the idea that we can view Marx’s intellectual development in terms of a simple pessimistic shift between the youthful optimism of the early writings and the gloomy pessimism of his later works would appear to misconstrue the exegetical evidence. For, in this, one of his last works, Marx is optimistic that human needs can be met by self-realising labour, ‘life’s prime want’.

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<sup>26</sup> Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value, MECW*, volume 32 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), p.391.

<sup>27</sup>Marx, ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’, p.87.



It might be argued, however, that while the *Critique* could be interpreted as a call back to Marx's position in the *Comments*, it could also be interpreted as being congruent with Marx's position in *Capital III*. For, the *Critique* might be interpreted as saying that labour will be desirable only in the sense that it will be elevated from its position as an activity of alienated toil under capitalism to that of a collectively affirmed necessity under communism. Communist labour would be desirable not because it is fully self-realising, but because in comparison with capitalist labour it offers an opportunity for collective self-determination.

This interpretation cannot be sustained, however, for the labour described by Marx in the *Critique* is not only more desirable than capitalist labour but the preeminently desirable activity of communist society; indeed, it is 'life's prime want'. Accordingly, Marx does not postulate as the aim of communist society the reduction of labour to a minimum, for labour contains genuinely free and self-realising activity.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.5. Situating the Oscillation Historically

There is something intuitively plausible about the standard story of Marx's intellectual development. According to the standard story, as Marx got older, he came to adopt a more sober and realistic account of communist society, especially with regards to the role of labour within it. The mature Marx, who was less romantic and more learned in economics, came to see that, while the burden of labour could be reduced, work could not be transformed into an activity of self-realisation. Plausible as the standard story is, however, as we have seen it cannot be squared with a careful reading of the texts, which reveals that Marx's intellectual movement on this matter is less simple and more uneven than the standard story suggests.

However, this leaves us with the difficult job of explaining how, and why, this oscillation took place. Of course, any answer to this question must be somewhat speculative; but let me make some tentative remarks, which may, I hope, shed some light on this matter.

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<sup>28</sup> A degree of ambiguity remains, however, since Marx does not specify in this passage why communist labour has become pre-eminently desirable, that is, why it is 'life's prime want'.

The prevailing view in the history of philosophy has seen necessary labour as antithetical to freedom and the good life for man. These ideas can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, who both argue that the highest type of life for human beings is the contemplative life, and that this correspondingly requires leisure and exemption from necessary labour. Thus, in *The Republic* Plato argues that the philosopher-kings, who govern in virtue of their superior rational endowment, should be free from the performance of necessary labour so as to cultivate their rational capacities more perfectly.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Aristotle recognises that the maintenance of the *polis* relies upon labour, but he too considers such activity to be antithetical to a life of the highest form of ‘excellence’ [*arete*]. Thus, Aristotle cautions that citizens ‘must not lead the life of artisans for such a life is ignoble and inimical to excellence. Neither must they be farmers, since leisure is necessary both for the development of excellence and the performance of political duties.’<sup>30</sup>

Philosophers in the Kantian tradition, though plainly very different in other respects, express similar views on labour. On Kant’s view, motivation by need is heteronomy; the free will determines itself in abstraction from all such motivations.<sup>31</sup> Labour, activity directed at needs, represents a form of unfreedom. Whilst post-Kantians typically aimed to soften the austerity of the Kantian picture, they generally continued to define freedom in opposition to necessity. Schiller, for instance, contrasts really free activity, which he terms ‘play’ [*spiel*], with labour. ‘An animal’ Schiller says, ‘may be said to be at work, when the stimulus to activity is some need; it may be said to be at play, when the stimulus is the sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action.’<sup>32</sup> Crucially, on Schiller’s view it is play rather than work that leads to self-realisation, since it is only in the former

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<sup>29</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, translated by H.D.P. Lee, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.369.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, translated by Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.1328.

<sup>31</sup> For discussion of this aspect of Kant’s thought, see Allen Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chapter 8.

<sup>32</sup> Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.207. It is also had to resist a comparison between Marx’s contrast between the ‘realm of necessity’ and the ‘realm of freedom’ with Schiller’s contrast between a ‘State of compulsion’ [*Staat der Not*] and a ‘State of freedom’ [*Staat der Freiheit*].’ (Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.23).

activity that the individual engages the whole of their nature.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Fichte sees work as an externally imposed natural necessity, which he contrasts with leisure, defined as free time for ‘arbitrary ends’.<sup>34</sup> For Fichte, the aim of society should be to reduce necessary labour to a minimum to correspondingly enlarge the realm of leisure that lies beyond it. The mechanisation and division of labour represent positive developments, on Fichte’s view, in so far as they contribute to this end.

Thus, for the prevailing view in the history of philosophy freedom from work is necessary if human beings are to develop the highest aspects of their nature. This view can, however, be contrasted with a second line of thought, which has seen necessary labour in a more positive light: not as precluding freedom but as potentially enhancing it.

The key figure here is Hegel. Hegel’s most famous discussion of labour comes in the master-slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he famously argues that it is the slave who works on the world rather than the master who merely consumes what has been made for him who realises the higher degree of freedom. By working to satisfy his master’s needs, Hegel argues, the slave comes to control his own desires, while also developing a sense of self by fashioning an object that is not immediately consumed but worked upon and transformed. ‘Through the rediscovery of himself by himself’, Hegel says, ‘the bondsman realises that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own.’<sup>35</sup>

These themes are developed further in the discussion of social labour in *The Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel argues that although social labour is conditioned by needs it can nevertheless betoken freedom. Hegel emphasises the fact that in the modern world a worker’s product does not typically satisfy their own needs but is ‘strictly adapted...to the enjoyment of others.’<sup>36</sup> Far from seeing this as an unfree

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<sup>33</sup>‘It is precisely play and play alone which of all man’s states and conditions is the one which makes him whole...man only plays when us is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only a human being when he plays.’ (Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, p.105).

<sup>34</sup> Quoted from David James, ‘Conceptual Innovation in Fichte’s Theory of Property: The Genesis of Leisure as an Object of Distributive Justice’, *European Journal of Philosophy*, (forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V.Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.118-119.

<sup>36</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §199, p.233.

aspect of modern labour, however, Hegel argues that working for others is potentially liberating. By working to satisfy the needs of others rather than merely consuming what is present in their immediate environment, the worker is liberated from the ‘immediacy’ of his natural condition. Furthermore, by working to satisfy others’ needs, workers are forced out of his particular standpoint and made to adopt a more social outlook – one which takes into consideration not just their own needs but also those of others – in their productive activity. Crucially, Hegel thinks that it is only by adopting this more social outlook that individuals can overcome their alienation from the social world.<sup>37</sup>

We can therefore distinguish two different lines of thought on work and freedom in the history of philosophy: the prevailing view which sees the best type of human life as being free from necessary labour, and an Hegelian view which sees necessary labour as potentially freedom-enhancing. What I now want to suggest is that we can situate Marx’s oscillation between two different conceptions of labour within these two traditions in his history of philosophy.

In arguing, as he does in *Capital III*, that truly free activity can only take place outside of necessary labour, Marx put forward a thesis that was broadly congruent with the prevailing view in the history of philosophy. To be sure, the Marx of *Capital III* would reject aspects of that view. For instance, he would reject the idea – central to Plato and Aristotle – that the supreme human life is one of contemplation. Equally, he would reject the Kantian view that necessary labour – in so far as it constitutes motivation by needs – is completely lacking in freedom. For the Marx of *Capital III*, by contrast, the good life consists in creative activity and, although the ‘realm of necessity’ cannot be fully free, it can nevertheless contain a form of freedom. However, in putting forward the shortening of the working-day as the chief aspiration of communist society, as he did in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx accepted the key thought running through these otherwise disparate works in the history of philosophy – namely, that the highest aspects of our nature are developed outside the realm of

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<sup>37</sup>Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §192, p.230. This point is made by Michael Hardimon, who emphasises the role of self-transformation in Hegel’s reconciliation of individual and society. Part of the process of reconciliation, Hardimon argues, involves a transformation of consciousness where one moves from an initial state in which one regards oneself as an ‘atomic individual’ to a state in which one regards oneself as an ‘individual social member’. Social labour contributes towards that end (Michael Hardimon, *Hegel’s Social Theory: The Project of Reconciliation*, pp.140 -143).

necessary labour. To put things another way, while Marx disagreed with philosophers in the prevailing view about what the good life consisted in, he agreed that freedom from work was the condition most congenial to it.

The conception of the good life in the *Comments*, by contrast, contains a more fundamental rejection of the prevailing view in the history of philosophy. For, in that text, Marx rejects the claim that it is life outside labour that is the true realm of freedom and fulfilment. On the contrary, it is labour that constitutes real freedom, the good life for man. This also constituted a more Hegelian position. For, in the master-slave dialectic, and in the discussion of social labour in *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel had argued that although labour is determined by social needs, it could nevertheless be a free and self-realising activity. This surely influenced Marx's idea that though 'the volume of labour itself appears to be externally determined by the aim to be attained...the overcoming of these obstacles is in itself a manifestation of freedom' – not only freedom, we should add, but 'real freedom', 'self-realisation'.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Marx is quite explicit about his debt to Hegel in this regard. 'The importance and final result of Hegel's *Phenomenology*', says Marx, 'lies in the fact that it grasps the nature of labour'.<sup>39</sup>

My suggestion, then, as to why Marx oscillates between these two models of unalienated labour is that he was influenced by two different lines of thought in the history of philosophy. At times, he endorsed the Hegelian idea that though labour remains determined by social need, it can nevertheless constitute real freedom. At other times, however, Marx was less Hegelian and more conventional, that is, he put forward an account of self-realisation in leisure, an account that had much more in common with the prevailing view in the history of philosophy, which has seen life outside labour as the true realm of freedom and fulfilment.

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<sup>38</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse I*, p.530.

<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that Marx accepts Hegel's account of labour in every detail. For after crediting Hegel with understanding the nature of work, Marx quickly goes on to criticise Hegel for the way in which he 'sees only the positive and not the negative side of labour' (Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p.276).

#### 4.6. Some Problems with Marx's Two Models of the Good Life

In this chapter, I have been concerned with the exegetical question of how, and in what way, Marx's views on freedom and necessity change during the course of his lifetime. But Marx's oscillation between two different conceptions of freedom and necessity also raises a number of non-exegetical questions, which are of interest in relation to his own philosophy but also more generally. These questions include which of the two accounts provides the more feasible and desirable foundation for a Marxist vision of the good life. They also include the question of whether the two visions of the good life could be brought together and harmonised. I return to some of these issues in Chapter 5, but allow me a brief comment on them here.

For some commentators, the vision of the good life Marx puts forward in *Capital III* represents a less utopian and more realistic account of communist society, where Marx finally comes to terms with what is actually possible within the confines of a modern economy.<sup>40</sup> Work is not 'life's prime want' on this model, but it is rationally planned, and it leaves plenty of time for us to pursue other activities, in leisure, which are more conducive to self-realisation. As a consequence, it provides a coherent and not overly utopian alternative to capitalism.

Marx's position in *Capital III* seems to me unsatisfactory, however. The first problem concerns the claim that work inescapably belongs to 'realm of necessity', which cannot, in consequence, be fully free. But why can't necessary work be fully free and self-realising? As G.A. Cohen argues, there is no reason why an activity can't be both necessary and fulfilling: eating can be enjoyable despite being necessary, and cooking can be extremely rewarding.<sup>41</sup> To be sure, the 'realm of necessity' will be with us under all conditions and all social formations. But it does not follow that it will therefore never be really fulfilling.

Furthermore, I think we can also question the desirability of a 'realm of freedom', free from necessity and determination. One problem is motivational: why will communist workers strive to develop their powers in the realm of freedom? According to Marx's theory of history, man has developed his powers in the struggle

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<sup>40</sup> For one such argument, see A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* (London: Pluto, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, 'Marx's Dialectic of Labour', p.261.

with necessity, by striving to meet one another's basic needs. Commentating on earlier phases of history, Marx had argued that, on those rare occasions when nature has provided man with the necessities of life, she [nature]:

“keeps him [man] in hand, like a child in leading-strings”. She does not impose upon him any necessity to develop himself...It is the necessity of bringing a natural force under the control of society...that first plays the decisive part in the history of industry.’<sup>42</sup>

Historically, Marx argues, man has developed his powers through the struggle with necessity. But as the communist working-day contracts, and the realm of leisurely abundance grows, what will provide man with the impetus to develop his powers in the future?

Relatedly, I wonder whether there is not something rather empty and arbitrary about the untrammelled freedom that Marx looks forward to in *Capital III*, where we can produce as we please in a sphere of life that is completely undetermined by external pressures and considerations. I think that Marx was ultimately attracted to this conception of freedom because he thought that human creativity had always been determined by external circumstances: in pre-capitalist societies, man lived at the mercy of the blind forces of nature; in capitalist society man exerted greater control over the natural world, but lived at the mercy at the market. In *Capital III*, Marx looked forward to the enlargement of a sphere of life that was completely free of determinations of this sort, a sphere of life where human beings would enjoy ‘true’ freedom unhindered by any kind of external pressures, natural necessity or social duty. But what this argument overlooks, however, is Marx’s argument – made most cogently in the *Comments*, but recurring at various points – that the struggle to satisfy social needs may itself provide the ground for a more satisfying form of freedom.

If Marx’s position in *Capital III* is unduly pessimistic about what is attainable in necessary labour, Marx’s position in the *Comments* would, on the face of it at least, appear to suffer from the opposite shortcoming of being overly optimistic that all labour can be transformed into a fulfilling activity. For, in truth, necessary labour varies greatly in kind. Some is creative and intrinsically pleasurable, and thus it would be wrong to suggest, as Marx does in *Capital III*, that labour qua labour cannot

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<sup>42</sup> Marx, *Capital I*, p.515.

be intrinsically satisfying. Other forms of labour, however, seem to be inherently unattractive, on account of their being physically dangerous, fatiguing, mind-numbingly dull and so on, and thus it would seem wrong to suggest, as Marx does in the *Comments*, that all work can give rise to a rich development of human powers.

Whilst I shall give a fuller response to this worry in Chapter 5, it is worth noting, if only briefly, that the Marx of the *Comments* does have some lines of response at his disposal. For instance, he could point that even though the work itself may not be intrinsically pleasurable, the worker can enjoy the fulfilment that comes from the knowledge that they had provided a service to society, that is, from the knowledge that they ‘had satisfied a *human need*’ in their work. Alternatively, he could point out that unattractive labour will not be experienced as ‘alienation’ under communism, because it will be equitably distributed across society as a whole, so that no one individual has to spend their entire working life performing the same, soul-destroying task.

Let us briefly consider the final question, whether the two visions of the good life could be harmonised. One way in which this could be achieved would be to collapse the distinction – firmly recognised in the third volume of *Capital* – between labour and leisure. Perhaps this is one of the things that Marx has in mind in when he says, as we saw in Chapter 2, that future individuals will ‘hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind.’<sup>43</sup> Under communism, a gloss on this passage might run, individuals realise themselves in varied activities that are freely chosen, done for their own sake and in their own time.

The problem with this solution is not that it is impossible to imagine how any forms of work could transcend the distinction between work and leisure; academia may provide a rough example of what Marx has in mind, in so far as academics find it hard to think of their research as fitting straightforwardly into the category of ‘work’ or ‘leisure’. Rather, the problem is that it is incredibly hard to see how some forms of work (for example, the work done maintaining a sewer) could transcend the distinction between work and leisure in the way that Marx might be seen to suggest. For although such activities are socially important they are not ones that individuals would willingly or freely perform, for their own sake, and in their own time, on

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<sup>43</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.



account of the horrible conditions in which they must be performed. The distinction between work and leisure therefore looks entrenched.

What this does not rule out, however, is a more moderate reconciliation between these two visions of the good life, which would preserve the distinction between work and leisure, but see the good life as containing activities in both realms. On the view I am imagining, individuals could realise their social nature by fulfilling a worthwhile role for society in their labour, and supplement the rich development of their powers and capacities in their free time. Something along these lines would appear to represent a coherent middle-way between the two views on freedom and necessity that Marx oscillated between throughout his lifetime.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that there is an unresolved tension in Marx's thought between two accounts of non-alienated labour. In *Capital III* Marx argues that, while there can be a type or form of freedom in the 'realm of necessity', 'true' freedom is to be achieved outside of this realm, in activities that are undetermined by the necessity of economic activity. In the *Comments*, by contrast, Marx argues that 'true' freedom can in fact be achieved in labour that satisfies our physical needs; and, indeed, he sees the necessity of labour as a source of its attraction. While this might suggest that Marx became more pessimistic about labour in his later years, I have argued that this is not so, and that the 'standard story' of Marx's intellectual development misconstrues the exegetical evidence. Rather than a straightforward shift between two different positions, I have argued that Marx's writings are characterised by a life-long oscillation between the two positions. Further, I have suggested a possible reason for this oscillation, namely, that the unresolved tension in Marx's thought reflects a more general tension in the history of philosophy, which Marx failed to resolve.

Finally, I have given some reasons for thinking that Marx's position in *Capital III* is inadequate. Marx's argument that work inescapably belongs to a 'realm of necessity', and cannot therefore be fully self-realising, rests on the fallacious argument that activity that must be done cannot be fully fulfilling. But, for reasons given, I am also unconvinced about the very desirability of the idea of a 'realm of freedom', free from all necessity and determination. In the following chapter, I will argue that Marx's position in the *Comments* provides us with a more desirable and

feasible account of freedom and its relation necessity than the position that Marx oscillated towards in the third volume of *Capital*.

## CHAPTER 5

### ‘LET US IMAGINE THAT WE HAD PRODUCED AS HUMAN BEINGS’

In the foregoing chapters, I have examined in some detail the major aspects of Marx’s vision of the good life. Through an examination of Marx’s ideas about the division of labour, social roles and freedom and necessity, I have provided an interpretation of Marx as an individualistic thinker, whose views about the good life under communism change in crucial respects throughout his lifetime.

As well as this interpretive thread, the foregoing chapters have also identified a family of problems that Marx’s vision of the good life run up against. Thus, I have argued that Marx provides an inadequate response to the problem of the division of labour (Chapter 2), an impoverished account of human community (Chapter 3), and an unsatisfactory argument for why leisure constitutes the true ‘realm of freedom’ (Chapter 4). In this chapter, I focus attention on the concluding passage to the *Comments*, the highly evocative but textually opaque passage in which the Marx invites us to imagine that we had ‘carried out our production as human beings’. There, I will argue, Marx puts forward a vision of the good life that contains more resources with which to respond to the family of problems facing Marx’s other conceptions of the good life under communism.

After a brief review of the foregoing chapters (§5.1), I provide (in §5.2) a brief exegesis of the vision of the good life in the concluding passage of the *Comments*. Next (in §5.3), I focus on the issue of what is distinctive about that vision, before going on to show (in §5.4) how that vision has the resources to respond to the family of objections that have been shown to undermine Marx’s other accounts of communism. While the vision of the good life in the *Comments* has the resources to respond to these problems, however, it also encounters problems of its own. I consider these problems, and some lines of response at Marx’s disposal, before summarising the chapter’s core claims (§5.5).

#### 5.1. Review of Previous Chapters

Before we look at the concluding passage to the *Comments*, it will be useful to provide a brief review of how the argument has developed in the foregoing chapters. In these chapters, I identified a family of problems that Marx’s vision of the good life

runs up against, and which, I now want to suggest, Marx's position in the *Comments* can respond.

What are these problems? After an introductory chapter, in which I looked at some of the larger problems that Marx's vision of the good life runs up against, I started in Chapter 2 by examining Marx's notorious claim in *The German Ideology* that communist man will 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner...without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic'.<sup>1</sup> I said that this passage reveals a hope that communist society would overcome the division of labour, freeing individuals from the constraints of specialisation, and giving them the opportunity to develop their powers in an all-round way.

Here, I was especially concerned with Marx's idea of 'all-round development': the idea that self-realisation consists in the all-round development of the individual's powers and capacities. I defended this ideal from some criticisms made by Jon Elster and G.A. Cohen. While I defended the ideal of all-round development, however, I questioned the claim that all-round development requires an abolition of the division of labour. Contra Marx, I argued that moving between numerous activities does not ensure all-round development, whereas specialising on complex tasks often calls on a wide-range of talents and abilities. Ultimately, I argued that Marx's out and out hostility to specialism was misguided, for the ideal of all-round development does not require an abolition of the division of labour.

Chapter 3 looked at Marx's claim that: 'In a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities'.<sup>2</sup> I suggested that this claim goes beyond a hope that specialisation will be abolished, to suggest that social roles will also be overcome: that is, there will be no 'painters' in a communist society not simply because no one will spend all their time painting but also and more intriguingly because no one will occupy the social role of 'painter'.

In this chapter, I used the idea of an abolition of roles to focus attention on the individualist side of Marx's thought – a side that has tended to be overlooked in the literature leading to some serious misinterpretations of Marx's ideas about communism. At the heart of Marx's vision of the good life, I argued, is a quite

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<sup>1</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>2</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.394.

extraordinary focus on the individual. However, while this provides a reply to the common charge that Marx's vision of the future subsumes the individual within society, I argued that it also leaves Marx vulnerable to a potentially surprising objection: namely, that in its excessive concentration on the individual, Marx's vision of the good life provides an impoverished account of human community. It was claimed by G.A. Cohen that such impoverishment manifested itself in the way that Marx only valued community instrumentally, as a mere means for the development of the individual's talents and abilities. While I conceded that this criticism has considerable force as a criticism of the good life in *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*, I argued that the same criticism does not have force as a criticism of the *Comments*, for in that text it is clear that Marx has a much richer, non-instrumental conception of community in mind.

Chapter 4 examined the well-known passage in the third volume of *Capital* where Marx describes work as belonging to a 'realm of necessity', and talks of the 'realm of freedom' that exists beyond it, in leisure.<sup>3</sup> At the interpretive level, I argued that the position Marx adopts in that text does indeed represent a significant departure from the position he occupies at other points, where it is labour rather than leisure that is the 'realm' in which individual's achieve self-realisation. However, on my view, this is not a simple shift from an early, optimistic Marx to a later, more realistic one. Rather, it is a life-long oscillation between two different conceptions of the good life.

In the critical comments at the end of Chapter 4, I suggested that Marx's position in *Capital III* is deeply problematic, for it rests on the fallacious argument that activities that must be done cannot also be truly fulfilling. But I also suggested that the very desirability of a 'realm of freedom' is questionable. In particular, I argued that there was something rather empty and arbitrary about the 'leisure' view of freedom that Marx desires in *Capital III*, where we produce as we please in a sphere of life unconstrained by the external pressures of everyday life. I wondered whether one would strive to develop one's powers, and be able to take on a meaningful existence, in the leisure society depicted by Marx.

Put in somewhat schematic terms, then, we can say that a plausible and desirable conception of Marx's vision of the good life would have to satisfy the

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<sup>3</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

following desiderata – desiderata which some of Marx’s other accounts of communist society have failed to meet. First, it would have to be one that could accommodate the division of labour. Modern societies rely on an incredible degree of specialisation. A vision of a good of the life that is strictly opposed to the division of labour cannot serve as a serious model for modern society. Second, Marx’s vision of the good society needs a plausible non-instrumental conception of community. The instrumental conception of community of *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto* fails in that regard. Third, Marx’s vision of the good life needs to provide a plausible answer as to whether labour or leisure constitutes the ‘realm’ of individual self-realisation. Marx’s argument in *Capital III* does not meet this requirement, for it is based on the fallacious argument that necessary activities cannot be self-realising, and propounds as an ideal a leisure society which is both unfeasible and not necessarily attractive.

On top of this, we can add two further desiderata, which were discussed in Chapter 1. These are, first, that a plausible perfectionism or theory of self-realisation should (in the words of Richard Arneson) be ‘unspecific or disjunctive in its content’,<sup>4</sup> and, second, that while a vision of the good life can be utopian to a degree, it should pass a certain threshold of realism: it should be pitched at the level of what Rawls has called a ‘realistic utopia’.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, a plausible and desirable conception of the good life would have to do more than satisfy these desiderata alone. However, these desiderata give us a starting point, and with that with we can turn to the concluding passage of the *Comments*.

## 5.2. Production as Human Beings

Towards the end of the *Comments*, Marx invites the reader to imagine that we had ‘produced as human beings’. In that case, Marx says:

‘Each of us would have *in two ways* affirmed himself and the other person. 1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality*, its *specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my*

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<sup>4</sup> Arneson, ‘Meaningful Work and Market Socialism’, pp.524-525.

<sup>5</sup> Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p.4.

*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*. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *man's* essential nature [*Wesen*], and of having thus created an object corresponding to the needs of another man's essential nature. 3) I would have been for you the *mediator* [*der Mittler*] between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by you yourself as a completion [*Ergänzung*] of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal* nature [*mein wahres Wesen, mein menschliches, mein Gemeinwesen*].<sup>6</sup>

It makes sense to read this passage as the positive counterpart to the account of alienated labour that Marx developed in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, which were written during the same months of 1844.<sup>7</sup> Like the alienated labour fragment, where the worker is described as suffering from four conditions of alienation, Marx's account of unalienated labour also develops in four stages.<sup>8</sup> Unusually, the entire passage is written in the first-person.<sup>9</sup>

The first condition concerns the fulfilment individuals receive in and through their labour. Marx makes two points. First, I would enjoy labour itself, the process of production. As Marx puts it, I would have 'enjoyed' an 'individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity'. Of course, this is in marked contrast to alienated labour, where the worker was said to 'not affirm himself but deny himself...not feel content, but unhappy...not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortify his body and ruin his mind'.<sup>10</sup> Second, Marx claims that in unalienated labour I would have

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<sup>6</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', pp.227-228. The numbering and italics in this passage is Marx's own.

<sup>7</sup> Both the *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the 'Comments on James Mill' were notebooks Marx kept in Paris between April and August 1844.

<sup>9</sup> David Leopold speculates that the young Marx's use of the first-person perhaps reflects a tendency on his part 'to identify the potential fulfilment of productive activity with his own experience of the satisfactions of creative intellectual endeavour.' (Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.233).

<sup>10</sup> Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p.274.

objectified ‘my *individuality*, its *specific character*’<sup>11</sup> in my product. This idea – that labour is an activity through which the worker develops a sense of self – goes back to Hegel’s master-slave dialectic.<sup>12</sup> There, Hegel had argued that by working an object that is not immediately consumed but worked upon and transformed the slave comes to recognise himself in what he has made. The same is true of Marx’s communists. In unalienated labour, my product would serve as a manifestation of my individuality. Again, this is in contrast to alienated labour, where workers were said to look at their product as they would an ‘alien object’.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst the first condition is essentially concerned with the fulfilment individuals receive in the process and result of production, conditions 2 through to 4 stress what we might call the social aspects of communist labour. The second condition seems straightforward: I produce a product that you need, and I would take pleasure in your use and enjoyment of my product. In your use of my product I would gain ‘immediate satisfaction’ from the knowledge that I had produced an object that satisfied ‘the needs of another human being’.<sup>14</sup>

Straightforward though this seems, we need to be clear about the intended contrast with capitalism. An example might help. Consider two doctors, Smith and Jones. Smith is indifferent to his patients. He treats them all impersonally as ‘cases’. He is concerned to treat their various illnesses and ailments, but only because he wants to make money and a reputation. Jones is different. She cares about her patients and treats them all as individuals. She is deeply concerned to treat their various illnesses and ailments, and while she enjoys the money and reputation that comes with her role, her primary motivation for being a doctor is that she is eager to engage her talents for the good of others.

Note that the two doctors, as I have described them, could be equally proficient at meeting their patients’ needs. No doubt, we will think that Smith is bound to be a worse doctor than Jones. We may think, for example, that Smith’s instrumental attitude towards his patients will manifest itself in an overly cool bedside manner, or that insofar as Smith is motivated by the goods of money and a reputation he will have no reason not to cheat and deceive his patients to attain his

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<sup>11</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.228.

<sup>12</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p.118.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p.272.

<sup>14</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.228.



ends.<sup>15</sup> But the difference between the two doctors, as I have described them, is not between the quality of their practice, but their motivation to practice. For Smith the major motivation to practice is to realise the goods of money and reputation, whereas for Jones the major motivation is to use and develop her powers for the good of others.

The contrast between these doctors is surely too schematic (surely not all workers under capitalism take a purely instrumental attitude to consumers?), but it neatly captures what Marx thinks will distinguish communism from capitalism. According to Marx, under capitalism individuals produce for one another not out of a commitment to their fellow human beings, but because they want to further their own egoistic ends: ‘I have produced for myself and not for you, just as you have produced for yourself and not for me.... That is, our production is not production by a human being for a human being as a human being, i.e., it is not *social* production.’<sup>16</sup> Under communism things will be different. In communist society, individuals produce for others not because they want to further their own egoistic ends, but because others need their service and they, in turn, want to provide it for them.<sup>17</sup>

Note, then, that Marx’s objection to market exchange does not depend upon its economic consequences. For the eighteenth century political economists, the genius of the market was that it harnessed self-interest for the greater good. We produce out of self-interest and this provides benefits for all: ‘Private Vices, Public Virtues’, as Mandeville famously put it. For Marx, however, there is something wrong about a society in which we produce only for what we get in return, even if, as Mandeville had claimed, the end result is a boon for all involved. In a good society, Marx claims, we produce for others out of a commitment to our fellow human beings, not out of base self-interest.

This last point should be made with care, however, for it would be wrong to suggest that the model Marx lauds in the *Comments* requires altruistically labouring

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<sup>15</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre makes this point (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p.188).

<sup>16</sup> Marx, ‘Comments on James Mill’, p.225.

<sup>17</sup> Marx’s idea has resurfaced in contemporary political philosophy in G.A. Cohen’s description of a camping trip that is organised on socialist principles. According to Cohen, participants on the camping trip adopt the ‘antimarket principle according to which I serve you not because of what I get in return by doing so but because you need or want my service, and you, for the same reason, serve me’ (G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.39).

for the common good. It is true Marx thinks that capitalist production is self-interested, in that the primary goal of the capitalist producer is to make profit, and that communist production would be more altruistic in this regard, in that part of a communist's motivation in producing would be to help others satisfy their needs. But it would be wrong to think that communism requires a complete overcoming of self-interest in favour of altruism. For, on Marx's view, communist production is motivated both by a desire to produce something that is useful to others, but also by a desire to deploy and develop one's powers and capacities. To put things another way, my aim in producing is to realise myself as an individual by developing my creative powers, but also to realise myself as a communal being by engaging those powers for the good of others. It would be a mistake to see either one of these aspects – individuality or communality – as pre-eminently important for Marx.

In conditions 3 through 4 matters get more complex. Marx talks of producers being 'the *mediator* [*der Mittler*]' between the consumer and the species, and of producers and consumers 'completing' one another in the consumer's use of the producer's product. Marx makes clear that under communism the producer-consumer relation will be a close one: having produced a product that satisfies your needs, I 'would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love'.<sup>18</sup>

While Marx's ideas here are not fully transparent, the central idea seems to run as follows. Suppose that I am a producer and you are a consumer. As we have seen, one of my ends in producing is to produce in a fulfilling way. But another equally significant end of my production is to produce a product that satisfies another's need. Since (according to Marx) producing for others is a deep human need, your use of my product to satisfy your needs would also satisfy one of my deepest needs. That is to say, because producing for others is not simply an end I have contingently but is rather an essential end for human beings, your use of my product would be the 'completion' of my essential nature. At the same time, as a dependent being incapable of meeting your needs on your own, you have a need to be produced for by others. Thus, by producing for you, I would have helped you attain your ends. In this respect, our ends as producers and consumers are not conflicting but deeply complementary and interlocking: I have a deep need to produce for you, and thus your use of my product helps me attain one of my ends; and you have a deep need to

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<sup>18</sup> Marx, 'Comments on Mill', p.228.

be produced for by me, and thus my production for you helps you attain one of your ends.

Now, as our example of the two doctors attests, your needs could potentially be met by different producers with different intentions. But part of what makes our exchange especially fulfilling is that I have produced for you with the specific intention of meeting your needs, and that both you and I recognise and affirm this fact. Thus, you recognise that I have produced for you, that a major aim of my labour was to satisfy your needs. Knowing that I have produced for you provides you with a source of pleasure; and naturally enough, it makes you feel grateful towards me.<sup>19</sup> Finally, knowing that you appreciate what I have done for you provides me with an additional source of fulfilment. As Marx puts this point, having produced for you I am ‘felt by you yourself as a completion [*Ergänzung*] of your own essential nature’. Consequently, I ‘know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love’.<sup>20</sup>

An example might help us get a fix on what Marx has in mind. Suppose I make gourmet sandwiches for my girlfriend to take to work.<sup>21</sup> I do so not for what I expect in return, or because it is my duty as her lover, but because I know she needs some lunch and I want to provide it for her.<sup>22</sup> On her side, the sandwiches satisfy her needs. Moreover, she enjoys the sandwiches more than the shop-bought ones she normally eats, not only because they taste better, but also because she recognises that they were

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<sup>19</sup> The idea that it is natural for us to feel gratitude to those who consciously benefit us has been emphasised by Rawls: ‘we acquire attachments to persons and institutions according to how we perceive our good to be affected by them...Because we recognise that they wish us well, we care for their well-being in return’ (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p.494).

<sup>20</sup> It is hard to resist a comparison with Hegel’s discussion of mutual recognition in the master-slave dialectic. There, Hegel had also described full recognition as a state in which subjects ‘recognise themselves as mutually recognizing one another’ (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p.112). The same idea – that we must recognise others’ recognition of our productive activity – is central to Marx’s ideal of producing for another.

<sup>21</sup> As we have seen, it is central to Marx’s account that I really ‘put myself into my labour’ and express my individuality in my product. One may think that making sandwiches does not satisfy this aspect of the picture. Yet one can imagine a situation in which, for example, one bakes one’s own bread and grows one’s own ingredients, so that it does not seem implausible to say that the sandwich really does embody one’s individuality. Still, it is true that doing very simple and wholly unindividuated tasks for others (e.g. making a cup of instant coffee for a friend) would not satisfy the relevant criteria.

<sup>22</sup> It is worth stressing that this is not something that I merely happen to want to provide for you, in the way, for example, that I may have a passing impulse for ice cream. Rather, on Marx’s view, my motivation to produce for you runs deep.

made for her.<sup>23</sup> She feels grateful to me for having taken the time to prepare her favourite sandwiches, and knowing that she appreciates what I have done provides me with an additional source of fulfilment.

While the above example is helpful in getting a fix on what Marx has in mind, however, it might not seem the best example to stress the realistic nature of the ideal of producing for others. For it might be pointed out that there are a number of special features of love that distinguish it from relations between producers and consumers in mass society (not least that lovers know one another personally and have deep affection for one another) that consequently cast doubt on the plausibility of the ideal as a template for modern society. Thus, even if the ideal of producing for another can illuminate acts of kindness and generosity amongst family and friends, we might nevertheless worry, as Jon Elster has done, that ‘it remains totally unclear...how this ideal can be carried out under conditions of large-scale industry’.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, this worry would seem all the more pertinent given Marx’s striking invocation of love in the passage (...I would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love’), which might appear to suggest that the ideal of producing for another really is based on love. This is a worry to which we shall return (in §4, iv). For the time being, however, let us bring the central features of producing for another together in a more schematic way:

According to Marx, producers:

1. Enjoy the process of production, the making of a product.
2. See their finalised product as a manifestation of their individuality.
3. Produce with the intention of satisfying another’s need, not as a means to some further valuable end (e.g. making a profit), but because they recognise that another needs their service.
4. Derive pleasure from the knowledge that their labour has satisfied another’s need.

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<sup>23</sup> Note that it is not enough that a producer makes a product specifically for someone else. For example, a stalker could make sandwiches specifically for my girlfriend, but that will be creepy rather mutually confirming. It is also important that the consumer wants to be produced for by the producer.

<sup>24</sup> Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, p.454.

5. Recognise that the consumer of their product appreciates what they have done for them.

According to Marx, consumers:

6. Are not self-sufficient, and hence need to be produced for by others.
7. Recognise that others have produced for them, with the specific intention of satisfying their needs.
8. Derive pleasure from the knowledge that they have been produced for by others.
9. Feel grateful to the producer for having produced for them.

On Marx's view, one can only realise one's nature if all these steps are met. Obviously enough, this means that one cannot achieve self-realisation by engaging in menial labour, for it would lack the requisite complexity to develop one's powers and capacities. Neither could one cannot achieve self-realisation if one's labour, however intrinsically satisfying, is not directed towards another's essential need, for then one would not attain the satisfaction that comes from producing for others. But even if these necessary conditions are met, that is, even if one's labour is creative and interesting and directed toward another's need, one's self-realisation as a producer is still not assured. For even if one produces for others, one's self-realisation as a producer is still reliant on gaining appropriate recognition from others. Thus, as Brudney puts it, 'not only must producers produce with particular intentions (to make something *for* others); consumers must consume with a particular set of beliefs (about the intentions of producers); and producers must have particular beliefs about consumers' beliefs (about their, the producers' intentions)'.<sup>25</sup> Only then, Marx maintains, would one's self-realisation be complete.

Could the demanding model of producing for others be applied on a society-side basis? We have already encountered Elster's scepticism about this. But let us return to our example of the doctor. Jones enjoys the exercise of her talents and abilities in the practice of medicine. Although the role of 'doctor' is one she shares with others, she finds her own way of inhabiting the role, her own way of being a doctor. So as well as developing her talents and abilities, she also expresses her

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<sup>25</sup> Brudney, 'Producing for Others', p.152.

individuality in the particular way she practices medicine. While she enjoys these aspects of her job, however, another equally significant reason for her becoming a doctor was that she was eager to use her talents for the good of others. She derives great pleasure from meeting her patients' medical needs, from treating their various illnesses and ailments. For the patient, their need is met by Jones's labour. Now, the patient is aware that a number of doctors have the requisite aptitudes and abilities to meet their medical need. But part of what made the care they received better was the fact that Jones did not treat them impersonally as just another 'case', but seemed to care specifically for them. Consequently, they feel grateful to Jones not only for meeting their medical need but also for the highly individualised care she gave them. Finally, Jones recognises that her patient appreciates her care, and this appreciation provides her with an additional source of fulfilment.

What this shows is that some economic roles even under capitalism replicate the structure of producing for others that Marx instantiates in the *Comments*. The idea that people work not on the sole basis of cash reward, but because they want to develop their talents for the good of others; that producers derive fulfilment from meeting another's need; that consumers feel grateful to producers for the fact that they have met their needs; and that both producers and consumers need to have their activities recognised and affirmed by each another: these ideas all seem plausible when applied to the doctor-patient relationship. The question, to which we shall return, is whether other economic roles can replicate, or be transformed so that they replicate, that structure.

Having given a brief overview of its central features, we are now in a position to turn to the issues of how the vision of the good life in the *Comments* is, first, philosophically distinctive, and, second, able to respond to the family of objections that have been shown to undermine some of Marx's other conceptions of the good life.

### **5.3. The Distinctiveness of the *Comments***

In this section, I argue that Marx's vision of the good life in the *Comments* is distinctive in two ways: in its claim about the activity of human self-realisation and in its conception of human community. I consider each point in turn.

(i) *Necessary Labour*

The first way in which the conception of the good life in the *Comments* is distinctive concerns its claim about the activity of self-realisation. What is that activity, exactly? Daniel Brudney says that for the 1844 Marx the activity is necessary labour. That seems right; but Brudney quickly goes on to attribute to Marx a rather limited conception of what counts as “necessary”:

‘In 1844 Marx is clear that in a communist society individuals would produce with the intention to make products that would be useful for others. It is at least debatable whether nonnecessary labour has this structure. Arguably, an artist creates without regard to whether her product will satisfy anyone’s needs. Arguably, art is something one does for oneself.’<sup>26</sup>

There are two claims at work in this passage: that art is an activity ‘one does for oneself’, and that art is an example of non-necessary labour. Both are open to doubt. First, the claim that an artist creates ‘without regard to whether her product will satisfy anyone’s needs’ seems ill-judged, given that many artists do claim to produce with an eye to satisfying cultural needs. At the very least, it is not necessarily the case that artists create for themselves. Second, the claim that art is non-necessary would seem to take a rather impoverished view of human needs. True, art is not strictly necessary for the survival of the human species in the way, for example, that farming or housing is. But, as Marx recognised, what counts as “necessary” is highly elastic.<sup>27</sup> In conditions of acute material scarcity, the ‘realm of necessity’ is limited to those activities strictly necessary for the survival of the species. But beyond such conditions, human needs are expansive, and products that were once a luxury become a necessity. Under communism, Marx envisions the expansion of human needs to be quite far-reaching: ‘In place of the wealth and poverty of political economy’, he says, will come ‘the rich human being and rich human need.’<sup>28</sup>

It is important to note that this is not merely an exegetical issue; for how we interpret the idea of ‘necessary labour’ has implications for the scope of Marxian self-

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<sup>26</sup> Brudney, *Marx’s Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, p.163.

<sup>27</sup> As Marx writes, ‘with [mankind’s] development the realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants’ (Marx, *Capital III*, p.807).

<sup>28</sup> Marx, *Economical and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, p.306.

realisation. For Brudney's Marx, the human self-realisation activity is 'labor that overcomes natural necessity, the labor that bends the natural world to the human will in order to ensure the species' survival'.<sup>29</sup> This is a very narrow conception of self-realisation for modern society, where the majority of people are not directly involved in labour that 'bends the natural world' to meet physical needs. Such a view would illegitimately disqualify as vehicles for self-realisation labour that meets less basic social and cultural needs (teaching, for example). On my interpretation, however, labour that meets physical needs and labour that meets less basic social and cultural needs are all potential vehicles for self-realisation, for they are activities through which individuals can develop their individuality and satisfy the needs of others. This broadening of Marx's notion of the self-realisation activity has important implications for the attractiveness of the vision of the good life in the *Comments*, as we shall see in the following section (§5.4).

The idea that human beings realise themselves in necessary labour is distinctive. For, as we have seen in Chapter 4, the prevailing view in the history of philosophy has seen necessary labour as antithetical to the good life for man. These views were central to Plato and Aristotle, and philosophers in the Kantian tradition have expressed similar ideas, in that they have defined freedom in contrast to natural necessity. In Chapter 4, I argued that Marx himself provides a (less harsh and more nuanced) variant on this position when he describes work as inescapably belonging to a 'realm of necessity', and looks forward to the 'true realm of freedom' that lies beyond it, in leisure. The conception of the good life in the *Comments*, by contrast, contains a more fundamental rejection of the prevailing view in the history of philosophy. For, in that text, Marx rejects the claim that a leisure society represents an ideal for human self-realisation. On the contrary, necessary labour – activity that satisfies human needs – constitutes the realm of self-realisation.

(ii) *Community*

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<sup>29</sup> Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, p.161.



The second way that the ideal of producing for others is distinctive concerns its conception of community.<sup>30</sup> We can see this by comparing it to what I previously called (in Chapter 3) an individualist and a communitarian conception of community. The individualist view I am imagining sees humans as dependent beings that need one another's products in order to flourish. Thus, the individualist position agrees with Marx that community is a necessary condition for individual self-realisation.<sup>31</sup> However, on the individualist view, no intrinsic value is placed on the establishment and maintenance of our communal bonds. Rather, individuals only require the community instrumentally, to provide them with the various means they need to achieve their self-realisation. Thus, if the various means provided for by community could be realised another way – if, for example, individuals had the good fortune to be genuinely self-sufficient – individuals would not have lost anything of value.

The contrast with the ideal instantiated in the *Comments* should be clear. For on the view Marx puts forward there, community is not just a necessary but ultimately contingent means to some further valuable end. Rather, community is intrinsically valuable, a constitutive aspect of the individual's self-realisation. Production for others is constitutive of individual self-realisation in the sense that it is only by producing a product that satisfies another's need that individuals can flourish. Hence, there is no way in which Marx's communists can realise themselves outside the community. If future individuals somehow became self-sufficient their self-realisation would be critically incomplete.

In this way, the conception of community in the *Comments* has more in common with communitarian conceptions of community. Like the Marx of the *Comments*, communitarians have criticised individualists for the way in which they have only valued community instrumentally, as a means for the realisation of further valuable ends. Like Marx, they argue that this is a deeply impoverished conception of community. Like Marx once more, they argue that community is not only instrumentally but also intrinsically valuable.

And yet, while the Marx of the *Comments* shares a thick, non-instrumental conception of community with communitarians, his conception of a future communist

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<sup>30</sup> In thinking through these issues, I have found Daniel Brudney's work especially helpful. Daniel Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, Chapter 5.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Rawls says it is 'utterly trivial interpretation of human sociability' that we must live in community to achieve our individual good' (Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p.143).

society differs from that of communitarians in three important respects. First, it will be remembered from Chapter 3 that Marx rejects the communitarian idea that the way to overcome alienation and achieve self-realisation is by fulfilling the duties that flow from one's social role. For Marx, by contrast, the value of communism partly lies in the fact that it liberates individuals from the web of roles thought of as constraining them.

Second, while Marx and communitarians share a non-instrumental conception of community, Marx's account of how communal bonds are generated is different from that of communitarians. Communitarians typically see individuals as being bound together by the fact that they share a substantive way of life that is given to them by their shared history and common culture. On Marx's view, by contrast, individuals are bound together by what we earlier called their interlocking ends: that is, by the fact that qua producer I have an essential need to produce for you, and that qua consumer you have an essential need to be produced for by me, so that my production for you helps both you and I satisfy some of our deepest needs as human beings. Thus, whereas communitarians emphasise the importance of a shared history for generating social bonds, Marx puts the emphasis on reciprocal dependence in meeting one another's essential needs and completing one another's essential nature.

A third difference concerns the structure of communal ties. Communitarians, we have seen, typically see individuals being bound together by the fact that they share a substantive way of life that is given to them by their shared history and common culture. Consequently, they typically see individuals as being bound together *en masse*, for example, as citizens of a state, followers of a religion, supporters of a political cause, members of a family, and so on. By contrast, the communal tie Marx lauds is one-on-one. Of course, Marx thinks that while I have produced for you, you will also produce for me (or at least someone), so that communist society would be bound together as a whole (perhaps this is what he means when he says that 'this relation would be mutual: what applies to me would also apply to you'<sup>32</sup>). But even so, the specific bond Marx prizes is one-on-one. In this way, the conception of community in the *Comments* is closer – in structurally terms at least – to the ties of love and friendship than the ties typically favoured by communitarians.

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<sup>32</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.277.

So, in the *Comments*, Marx rejects the standard individualist view that community is only of instrumental value. But while Marx shares with communitarians the view that living in with community with others is constitutive of the good life, the conception of community in the *Comments* differs from the standard communitarian view in three important respects. In this way, Marx provides a rich, non-instrumental conception of community that is distinct from the two conceptions of community which have been salient in Anglophone political philosophy in the last thirty years or so.

#### **5.4. The Attractiveness of the *Comments***

In this section, I argue that the model of producing for others that Marx puts forward in the *Comments* has the resources to respond to the family of problems that have been shown to undermine some of Marx's other accounts of communism (for example, the 'hunt in the morning' passage in *The German Ideology*, and the 'realm of necessity' passage in *Capital III*). Unsurprisingly, however, the model of producing for another encounters problems of its own. I also consider these problems and point to some lines of response at Marx's disposal.

##### *(i) Perfectionism*

In Chapter 1, I quoted Richard Arneson's claim that 'to be remotely plausible any perfectionist doctrine would have to be very unspecific or disjunctive in its content: there are many human goods any of which could serve equally well to frame a rational plan of life.'<sup>33</sup>

Now, I think that the model of producing for another in the *Comments* represents the richest and most plausible foundation for a Marxian perfectionism. In *The German Ideology*, Marx argues that individuals are realised by engaging in varied activities, that is, by hunting, fishing, rearing cattle, criticising, and so on. In *Capital III*, Marx argues that while individuals may attain a degree of fulfilment in the 'realm of necessity', self-realisation is to be had outside when the necessary work is done. These conceptions of the good life have their differences: the former

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<sup>33</sup> Arneson, 'Meaningful Work and Market Socialism', pp.524-525.

emphasises the need for varied activity, the latter the importance of non-necessary activity (i.e. leisure). But they share the more fundamental view that self-realisation consists in the development of creative powers and capacities.

The conception of the good life in the *Comments* is different. On that view, part of what makes labour valuable is – as in *The German Ideology* and *Capital III* – that it is an activity through which we develop certain powers and capacities. But another equally significant part of what makes it valuable is that it is an activity through which we satisfy others' needs. Neither the conception of the good life in *The German Ideology* nor the one in *Capital III* reserve any role for that type of fulfilment. In this way, the conception of the good life in the *Comments* takes a broader view of the different types of fulfilment than can be had through labour.<sup>34</sup>

This has important implications for Marx's ideal of self-realisation. Marxian perfectionism, we have seen, has been criticised for being insufficiently pluralistic, that is, grounded on a one-sided account of the human good. One important instantiation of this charge has come from feminist political philosophy. The charge is that Marx's conception of good life, with its enormous emphasis on creativity, concurrently neglects more service-orientated work that has traditionally been done by women. Alison Jagger puts this point as follows:

‘According to the Marxist conception of human nature, human beings create themselves and their world by labouring to transform nature to satisfy their needs. Although this account is apparently gender neutral, Marxists in fact have interpreted “labor” to mean primarily the production and exchange of objects – the kind of work they associate with men...they exclude much women's work from the category of labour...So women are excluded from history and even from full humanity. The traditional Marxist account of human nature is in fact andocentric and constitutes the conceptual basis for a political theory that is profoundly gender-biased.’<sup>35</sup>

Insofar as Marx associates the good life exclusively with the creative development of individuals, then he would illegitimately exclude ‘women's work’ from a life of self-

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<sup>34</sup> In addition, it is also worth pointing out that the model of the good life in the *Comments* also recognises – in a way that Marx's other descriptions of a future communist society do not – the fulfilment that stems, not from producing for others, but being produced for by others. That is, the fulfilment that comes from the recognition that others care about one's well-being.

<sup>35</sup> A. Jagger, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1983), p.79.

realisation. That is not the case with the conception in the *Comments*, however. For, in that text, Marx argues that self-realisation consists in activity that calls on the development of certain powers and capacities but also serves the needs of others. This encompasses a wide-range of activities: the traditionally male-dominated ‘production and exchange of objects’, but also the more service-orientated work that has been traditionally been done by women. Indeed, one may think that the model of producing for another especially well with “women’s work”, for it has tended to have the done-for-others structure that Marx lauds.

(ii) *Utopianism*

In Chapter 1, I argued that while utopian political philosophy can provide us with some useful theoretical resources, and should not be dismissed out of hand, to be useful it would have to pass a threshold of realism: it would have to be what John Rawls has called a ‘realistic utopia’.

Now, although the model of producing for another may look utopian in certain respects, there is one way in which it is less utopian and more realistic than the position that Marx would adopt in other works. Marx’s vision of a future communist society is often said to rely on a ‘technological fix’<sup>36</sup> to overcome what Hume famously called the ‘circumstances of justice’, that is, circumstances of limited generosity and moderate scarcity. Thus, as Marx puts it, the full development of the productive forces is ‘an absolutely necessary practical premise’ for the realisation of communism, ‘because without it privation, *want* is merely made general, and with *want* the struggle for necessities would begin again, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored.’<sup>37</sup> In this way, a full communist society is often said to be one that is ‘beyond justice’ in the sense that the circumstances that generate the need for justice are surpassed.

Not surprisingly, Marx’s ideas about abundance have been criticised for being excessively utopian.<sup>38</sup> Marx wrote as if the earth’s resources were inexhaustible but,

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<sup>36</sup> This phrase comes from G.A.Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*, pp.116-144.

<sup>37</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.49.

<sup>38</sup> Another line of criticism is that the achievement of abundance and the transcendence of justice are not only unrealistic but also undesirable. Thus, for example, Rawls writes: ‘The

as Cohen says, we can no longer sustain that ‘extravagant, pre-green, materialist optimism, because the planet earth rebels: its resources turn out to be not lavish enough for continuous growth.’<sup>39</sup> This has important implications for Marx’s vision of a future communist society. Since, as Peter Singer puts it, ‘everything Marx says about communism is premised on material abundance’,<sup>40</sup> our loss of faith in its attainment may appear to undermine everything he wrote about communism.

The point I make here is not just that Marx makes no technologically utopian claims about abundance in the *Comments*, but that the model of producing for others actually *presupposes* conditions of moderate scarcity. According to the *Comments*, individuals realise themselves by producing things for the needs of other human beings. They could not realise themselves if God were to rain manna from heaven, for that would make production for others superfluous. In conditions of Elysian abundance, individuals would not experience the pleasure of satisfying another’s needs: they would feel themselves to be critically incomplete. It is only in conditions of moderate scarcity that individuals can achieve self-realisation, for it is only in such a world that human beings have needs that demand satisfaction. It is, in other words, in the ‘circumstances of justice’, and not in a world beyond them, that future individuals achieve self-realisation. In this respect, Marx’s position in the *Comments* puts forward a less utopian and more realistic vision of the good life than that which aspires towards in some of his other works.<sup>41</sup>

While the model of producing for another may not be technologically utopian, however, there may be other ways in which it may appear to be more utopian than the visions of the good life that Marx tilts towards at other points in his life. In particular, one may think that its model of community relies on utopian claims about the perfectibility of human nature, not least because of Marx’s striking invocation of ‘love’ to describe how consumers would feel towards producers. This is a question to which we shall return in a following sub-section (iv).

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evanescence of justice, even of distributive justice, is not possible, nor, I think, is it desirable.’ (Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p.177).

<sup>39</sup> Cohen, *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*, pp.127-128.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Singer, *Marx: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.84.

<sup>41</sup> This would also have implications for the issue of the evanescence of justice. Since the model of producing for another is one that presupposes circumstances of justice, one may also think that the value of justice itself must also be retained.

(iii) *Division of Labour and Mass Production*

In Chapter 2, I argued that a plausible conception of the good life must be able to accommodate the division of labour. Modern societies rely on an unprecedented degree of specialisation. A vision of a good of the life that is strictly opposed to the division of labour cannot serve as a serious model for modern society.

At issue is whether the vision of the good life in the *Comments* is compatible with a division of labour. Now, explicit discussion of the division of labour does not feature in the *Comments*. Unlike some of Marx's other discussion of a future communist society, where the fate of the division of labour enjoys a salient role, the *Comments* are silent on this issue. So the question is whether a division of labour is incompatible with the central tenets of that vision. Now, the model of producing for others is not incompatible with a division of labour where the specialised labour is interesting and creative to the doer and also serves the needs of others; indeed, the discussion of the doctor in §5.2 provides an example of one such specialism that fits that model. Neither is it incompatible with a division of labour in which a worker does not fashion a product from start to finish, but plays a role working alongside many others in the creation of a product; for even if a worker only plays a small role in the creation of a single product, they may nevertheless be able to identify with the output of their fellow workers, and hence realise themselves through their co-operative activity (think, for example, of a large team of research scientists all involved in finding a cure for cancer). But what the model of producing for others is incompatible with is the kind of division of labour characteristic of mass production – a division of labour that leads to high productivity but also de-skilling of the worker and the creation of entirely uniform products. This kind of mass production violates a number of aspects of our model: workers would not be able develop powers and capacities through their work, still less see their product as a manifestation of their '*individuality, its specific character*'; consumers would not be able to recognise the fact that someone has produced specifically for them; and consequently neither producers nor consumers would be able to express the kind of recognition of the other that Marx thinks essential for communist self-realisation. We can therefore see that Elster's worry that it is 'unclear...how this ideal can be carried out under conditions of large-scale industry' is not entirely wide of the mark.

What does all of this imply for Marx's vision of the good life? Marx described communism as a form of society which will be just as productive as capitalism, and perhaps even more so, but not suffer the alienated labour which the capitalist mode of production had forced upon its workforce. Communism will provide opportunities for interesting and creative forms of work, yet it will forego none of the benefits of advanced capitalism. But in reality it is clear that highly productive labour brings alienation in train, and that any attempt to implement the Marxian ideal of non-alienated labour would come at a cost to economic efficiency. Is the conclusion to be drawn that Marx's ideal of non-alienated labour should be jettisoned? Not necessarily. For, as Cohen argues, efficiency is 'only one value, and it would show a lack of balance to insist that even small deficits in that value should be eliminated at whatever cost to [others]'. He continues:

'...efficiency, in the relevant sense, only means providing the goods and services that you want when you do not take into account (other aspects of) the quality of your life, and the quality of your relations to your fellow citizens. Why should we make *no* sacrifice of the former for the sake of the latter?'<sup>42</sup>

(iv) *The Conception of Community*

In Chapter 3, I examined a criticism from G.A. Cohen which said that in his extreme emphasis on the creative side of human nature, Marx concurrently failed to give due emphasis to the deep human need for non-instrumental community with others.

Now, while I conceded that Cohen's criticism had considerable force as a criticism of the vision of the good life in *The German Ideology* and *Manifesto*, I argued that the same criticism could not be made of Marx's position in the *Comments*: for in that text Marx recognises the need for non-instrumental community with others. However, while the ideal in the *Comments* can answer this objection, it may appear vulnerable to a different one. For, in the *Comments*, Marx makes very strenuous assumptions about the kind of concern that future individuals will have for one another. For instance, Marx says that producers will want to produce things for others, that the needs of others will motivate their production, and that consumers will feel immense gratitude to producers for their products. At one point in the passage,

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<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?* p.74.



Marx even invokes love to describe how consumers will feel towards producers. Knowing that consumers appreciate what producers have done for them, producers would know themselves to be ‘confirmed’ in the consumers’ ‘thoughts’ and ‘love’.

Insofar as Marx thinks that love for others is possible amongst strangers in mass society, he runs up against one of Hume’s themes: the limits of benevolence. Hume claims that humans are benevolent creatures but that the capacity for benevolence is limited. On Hume’s view, the capacity is limited not in the sense that we can only act benevolently towards a certain number of people, but in the sense that we can only be genuinely benevolent towards those who we know personally. Thus, Hume claims, ‘in general it may be affirm’d, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to oneself’.<sup>43</sup>

In a recent paper on this topic, Daniel Brudney has pressed this Humean point against Marx. Brudney claims that Marx’s idea that we can produce for strangers out of love involves a category mistake: ‘I can surely love my neighbor’, says Brudney, but ‘if the focus is my relation to billions of unknown, distant others, love seems to be in the wrong category.’<sup>44</sup> This is because ‘love needs to latch onto something individuated’, and strangers, by definition, are wholly unindividuated.<sup>45</sup> Hence, Marx’s idea that we will produce for distant, unknown others out of love is conceptually incoherent.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p.309.

<sup>44</sup> Brudney, ‘Producing for Others’, p.161.

<sup>45</sup> Brudney, ‘Producing for Others’, p.161.

<sup>46</sup> Note, however, that Brudney does not think that this is a devastating problem for Marx’s vision of the good life, nor for cosmopolitan visions of global community more generally, for such visions – of global community – can be rescued by substituting the concept of ‘love’ for that of ‘concern’. This is because while ‘love fits with a class of feelings that require individuated objects...concern is in a class that can also take unindividuated objects’. Hence, ‘the best way to reconstruct Marx’s view here is in terms of concern rather than love’ (Brudney, ‘Producing for Others’, pp.161-162).

In response, Heikki Ikaheimo has recently argued that Brudney’s substitution of love for concern is inadequate as a reconstruction of Marx but also on its own terms. It is inadequate as a reconstruction of Marx, because one could have concern for non-human objects (e.g. the rain forests of Sumatra), whereas Marx makes it clear that it is essential that individuals relate to one another as ‘human beings’. It is inadequate on its terms, because while ‘non-personifying concern’ (Ikaheimo’s term) is better than mutual indifference, it has the potential to be ‘commonsensically insulting, often humiliating, and ethically deeply problematic’. Ikaheimo explains:

Now, I think that Marx's idea in the *Comments* is not that future individuals will have the same depth of feeling that lovers have for one another, but that they will replicate the structure of loving relationships on a society-wide scale.<sup>47</sup> As we have seen in §5.2 of this chapter, it is central to Marx's vision of the good life in the *Comments* that producers and consumers have ends that are not antithetical but interlocking: as a producer, I have a deep need to produce for you, such that your use of my product can be said to 'complete' my essential nature; and as a consumer, you have a deep need to be produced for by me, such that your use of my product can be said to 'complete' your essential nature. To put the same point another way, then, we could say that it is central to Marx's vision of the good life in the *Comments* that producers and consumers are reciprocally dependent on one another for the realisation of their essential nature. Love is often thought to share this structure of reciprocal dependence and mutual completion.<sup>48</sup> It seems plausible to me to think that Marx's invocation of love in the passage was intended to serve as an intuitive example of an already existing social relationship that fulfils the structure of producing for others.<sup>49</sup>

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'In being valued instrumentally or "intrinsically", one is not thereby an object of personifying, unconditional concern for happiness or subjective well-being, nor is one thereby seen in light of any person-making significance either. Neither of these attitudes is as such a personifying attitude and neither of them necessarily implies the presence of personifying attitudes – or of recognition – that is. And to the extent that one is the object of attitude-complexes that lack the personifying attitudes of recognition, one is...being reified or thingified' (Heikki Ikaheimo, 'Globalising Love: On the Nature and Scope of Love as a Form of Recognition', *Res Publica*, 18:1, (2012), pp.21-22).

<sup>47</sup> David Leopold also suggests that we should not take Marx's invocation of love entirely at face-value: 'The picture', he writes, 'is probably best understood as one of mutuality rather than intimacy' (Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx*, p.234).

<sup>48</sup> For instance, the idea that love involves some form of mutual completion goes back to Aristophanes' famous speech in Plato's *Symposium*. There, Aristophanes introduces the idea that human beings are half of what they used to be, and that each person is consequently searching for their 'other half' in order to be complete once more. (Plato, *The Symposium*, translated by W. Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), pp.58-65).

<sup>49</sup> It is worth pointing out that in the *Philosophy of Right*, a work that Marx studied in some detail in 1843, Hegel had also used the idea of love as an intuitive example of a relationship that manifests his preferred concept of self-realisation. Hegel writes:

'...we already possess this freedom in the form of feeling [*Empfindung*], for example in friendship and love. Here, we are not one-sidedly within ourselves, but willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing ourselves in this limitation as ourselves.' (Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*. §7, p.42).

It is worth emphasising, however, that while the ideal of producing for others shares this structural similarity with love, it is quite different to love in other respects. One important difference concerns the degree of responsibility in romantic love and in producing for another. Romantic love is often thought to involve a special degree of responsibility for the other, namely, a responsibility for the whole person.<sup>50</sup> As a lover one's responsibility extends to the whole life of one's partner. This is not the case in producing for another. In producing for another, the degree of one's responsibility is more limited: as a producer, I am concerned, not with your life as a whole, but with the particular needs my production serves (for example, a chef's responsibility does not extend beyond his diner's culinary needs). A second important difference centres on the scope of one's concern. The specific kind of responsibility instantiated in romantic love – the kind that takes on responsibility for the whole of the other's life – is exclusive: a lover has the specific kind of responsibility they have for their loved one and no one else.<sup>51</sup> By contrast, the specific kind of responsibility instantiated in producing for others – the kind that is limited to a specific subset of their producers needs – is more diffuse: potentially at least, one could have this responsibility for many others.<sup>52</sup> In these ways, then, the ideal of producing for another is less demanding – requires a more specialised but also less exclusive form of responsibility – than romantic love.

So, as I see it, the vision of the good life in the *Comments* shares a structural similarity with friendship and love, but nothing more substantive than that. In particular, I do not think that Marx is committed to the implausible idea that communists will genuinely love one another. If my arguments for this are correct, then the right question is not Hume's one of whether a 'love of mankind' is genuinely possible, but whether the structure that is associated with love can be applied on a

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Admittedly, though, Hegel is much clearer than Marx that the 'rational state' cannot be based on love.

<sup>50</sup> For the claim that love involves this kind of holistic concern for the other, see Christopher Bennett, 'Liberalism, Autonomy and Conjugal Love', *Res Publica*, 9, (2003), pp.295-296.

<sup>51</sup> Bennett, 'Liberalism, Autonomy and Conjugal Love', p.296.

<sup>52</sup> The number of people one could potentially have this concern for would, however, be constrained by the highly individualised concern which Marx thinks will be a feature of communist production. For example, if a doctor is given too many patients, they may not be able to treat them in the individualised way Marx desires, and may revert to treating them more brusquely as just another 'case'. Still, it is, I think, true that the kind of responsibility instantiated in producing for others is much more diffuse than the more exclusive responsibility that is characteristic of romantic love.

society wide-basis. That is a significant qualification. Even so, it is undeniable that the ideal of community here is a demanding one.

(v) *Freedom and Necessity*

In Chapter 4, I examined Marx's views on freedom and necessity, that is, his views on whether activity that must be done can also be free and fulfilling. On that issue, we can, I think, distinguish three different views in Marx's texts:

- (i) The view of *The German Ideology*, where Marx says that future individuals will 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind.'<sup>53</sup> Here, when individuals produce 'just as they have a mind', which is to say freely, they choose to perform necessary labour. On this model, people hunt and fish, but they do not hunt and fish because they want to supply their fellows with food. Rather, they hunt and fish because they find hunting and fishing to be intrinsically enjoyable. It is, on this view, a fortuitous coincidence that the activities they freely chose to do are also the ones that supply their fellows with the material goods necessary for their survival.
- (ii) The view of *Capital III*, where Marx describes work as belonging to a 'realm of necessity' even under communism, and contrasts it with the 'true realm of freedom', that lies beyond it in leisure.<sup>54</sup> Here, while necessary labour is carried out under more humane conditions than under previous phases of human history, real freedom starts when activity that is determined by necessity ceases, that is, in leisure. On this model, people hunt and fish because they have to, that is, because their fellows need food, and while such activity can contain a species of freedom, real freedom – the self-realisation of the individual – is enjoyed when the necessary work is done.
- (iii) The view of the *Comments*, where Marx says that I derive pleasure both from the exercise of my powers and capacities in my labour, but also from the knowledge that I had produced an object that satisfied 'the needs of another human being'.<sup>55</sup> Here, as in *The German Ideology* but unlike *Capital III*, Marx thinks that necessary labour can be really fulfilling. But, unlike *The German Ideology*, Marx thinks that necessary labour is fulfilling in virtue of its necessity, that is, because it is an activity that must be done. On this model, individuals hunt and

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<sup>53</sup> Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.47.

<sup>54</sup> Marx, *Capital III*, p.807.

<sup>55</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.227.

fish, but part of what makes hunting and fishing enjoyable is that it provides their fellows with the food they need.

So there are three different models of freedom and necessity. The question, then, is which provides the most plausible and desirable conception for a good society.

In this regard, (i) seems unrealistic. To be sure, it is not unrealistic to think that some people will freely choose to perform necessary labour, for some necessary labour is desirable (e.g. cooking). Neither is it unrealistic to think that more necessary labour will be desirable in the future, for one could plausibly argue, as Marx does, that what counts “necessary” expands over time, so that a future ‘realm of necessity’ will come to include more creative activities (e.g. art). Neither, finally, is it implausible to think that people may ‘freely’ choose to perform unpleasant necessary labour, for they may have good reason to do so (for example, they may recognise its social importance or be compensated with additional leisure time). Rather, it is implausible to think that people will ‘freely’ choose to engage in necessary labour – all necessary labour – because they find it intrinsically enjoyable. To see the implausibility of this view, we only need to replace ‘hunting’ with ‘cleaning the streets’, and ‘fishing’ with ‘maintaining a sewer’. Then, Marx would be committed to the view that people will sweep the streets or maintain a sewer, not because they recognise it as an activity that must be done, but because they find such activities intrinsically enjoyable. I take it that the picture now looks less attractive but also more obviously unrealistic.

In contrast, the account developed in (ii) is a good deal more realistic, for it accepts that a good deal of work will not be intrinsically enjoyable even under communism, and thus looks to leisure rather than labour for individual self-realisation. However, while that is not a positively unattractive, it seems to me inadequate for at least three reasons. First, as we have seen, it rests on the fallacious argument that activities that must be done cannot also be truly fulfilling. Second, for reasons given, it is questionable whether the leisure society it holds up as an ideal is an attractive one. Third, even if we think that its view of a leisure society is attractive, it is not really that different from non-Marxian conceptions of the good life, for they have also tended to see leisure as the ‘realm’ of human existence that is most conducive to self-realisation. To put the same point another way, accepting this as the model of the good life would entail giving up on the Marxian idea of self-realisation

in labour – that is, on the idea that labour is not only an activity of need satisfaction, a means to a further ends, but a valuable activity in itself.

What about the view in (iii), that is, the ideal of producing for others? First, compared to (i), the ideal producing for others provides a more realistic conception of the good life. As in (i), Marx thinks that necessary labour will be fulfilling under communism; but – unlike (i) – part of what makes labour fulfilling is that people recognise labour's necessity, its vital role in meeting human needs. This seems plausible. After all, even under capitalism many people – nurses, teachers, social workers, fireman, for example – derive fulfilment from the knowledge that their labour serves a socially useful end; indeed, the usefulness of their work even seems to compensate for the less attractive aspects of their work, like long hours and low pay. Second, compared to the conception of the good life in (ii), the ideal of producing for others provides the more interesting and philosophically distinctive conception of the good life. The position developed in (ii) is coherent, but it is a retreat from the ideals that Marx's expressed in the *Comments* (and other writings), where it is necessary labour that constitutes the good life for man.

Nevertheless, while the ideal of producing for another seems more plausible and attractive than the position staked out in (i) and (ii), it also has problems of its own. One is that while producing for another is more realistic than (i), it is still overly optimistic in thinking that individuals can produce in interesting and creative ways and yet cumulatively generate the mix of products and services that society needs. It is not too hard to envision a situation where 'the labour that individuals want to do' and 'the labour that society needs' come apart. For instance, it does not seem at all implausible to think that there may be no social need for some people's free creative labour (think of a designer whose passion for art nouveau is totally out of sync with current trends in design), or, alternatively, that there may be social needs which the free creative labour of individuals will not meet. Put differently, it seems eminently likely (to use one of Marx's more famous phrases) that 'from each according to his abilities' may not in fact make the distribution 'to each according to his needs' possible.

A second related problem concerns the persistence of unpleasant labour. It is an unfortunate fact that some of the things that society needs can only be secured through inherently unpleasant labour (think, for example, of the work done

maintaining a sewer). Marx could respond to the unpleasant labour problem by suggesting that even if one's work is not intrinsically enjoyable, people can still attain a degree of fulfilment from their work comes from the knowledge that they had provided a service to society: that is, from the knowledge that they 'had satisfied a *human need*' in their work, and 'created an object corresponding to the needs of another man's essential nature'.<sup>56</sup> The fulfilment that comes from serving others is not in doubt. Yet I suspect that there are limits to the redemptive power of service: someone who spends their entire working life engaging in unpleasant labour is unlikely to be happy in the knowledge that they are providing a service to society. To be plausible, I suspect that Marx's argument in the *Comments* would have to be supplemented with arguments about a fair distribution of unpleasant labour. That is to say, unpleasant labour would have to be equitably distributed across society as a whole (or compensated through other means), so that no one individual has to spend his or her entire working life performing the same, soul-destroying task.

## 5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been concerned with the vision of the good life that Marx formulated in the concluding paragraphs of the *Comments*, where Marx invites us to imagine that we had 'carried out our production as human beings'.

Here, I have argued, Marx puts forward a vision of the good life that can respond to the family of objections that have been shown to undermine some of his other visions of a future communist society. First, it was argued that in the *Comments* Marx takes a broader view of the human good, which not only consists in the development of certain creative powers and capacities (as seemed to be the case in some of Marx's other descriptions of communism), but also in producing for others' needs. Consequently, the *Comments* provide a foundation for a richer and more inclusive account of Marxian perfectionism. Second, it was argued that the *Comments* – unlike some of Marx's other descriptions of communism – do not rely on a utopian 'technological fix' to solve the 'circumstances of justice'; on the contrary, the *Comments* actually presuppose conditions of moderate scarcity. In this respect, the ideal of producing for others provides a more realistic and less fanciful vision of the

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<sup>56</sup> Marx, 'Comments on James Mill', p.227.

good life than Marx tilted towards at other points. Third, it was argued that the vision of the good life in the *Comments* is compatible with a division of labour, albeit one of a certain kind, and that this redounds to its plausibility as a conception of the good life for modern society. Fourth, it was argued that the *Comments* provide what the brief descriptions of future communist society in *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto* lack: namely, a model of non-instrumental community. Finally, it was argued that the *Comments* provide a more satisfactory response to the issue of self-realisation and necessity than that which he put forward in the ‘hunt in the morning’ passage and the famous description of labour as a ‘realm of necessity’ in *Capital III*.

Whilst the vision of the good life in the *Comments* can respond to this family of problems, however, we have also seen that it faces some problems of its own. Thus, for instance, we have seen that while the ideal of producing for others is compatible with a moderate division of labour, it is not compatible with the kind of intense division of labour that is characteristic of mass production. This does not mean that Marxists must give up on their conception of the good life, for, as Cohen puts it, efficiency is only one value amongst others. But it does mean that Marxists must give up the claim that communism will be just as efficient as capitalism. Second, we have seen that while the ideal of producing for others puts forward a non-instrumental conception of community, we may worry that it is an unrealistic model for modern conditions. I have given some reasons for thinking that Marx is not committed to the idea that communists will love one another, but it is undeniable that he thinks that strong communal bonds will obtain. Third, we have seen while the idea of producing for others puts forward a more plausible and attractive conception of self-realisation and economic necessity, it still exhibits an unreasonable confidence that we can produce in interesting and creative ways and yet cumulatively generate the products that society requires. To be plausible, the ideal of producing for others would have to provide an account of how creative activity and the demands of society can be balanced and coordinated.





## CONCLUSION

My aim for this thesis has been to provide an interpretation and critical examination of Karl Marx's vision of the good life. Having discussed these themes at length in the foregoing chapters, the core claims can be quickly summarised here.

The first claim concerns how Marx's vision of the good life should be understood. No doubt partly as a result of the Soviet communism, where individuals really were treated as dispensable cogs in the socialist machine, Marx's vision of a vision of a future communist society has also been interpreted in a strongly communitarian light. I have argued that this is a misinterpretation of Marx's ideas about the good life under communism, and that, properly interpreted, it is far more individualistic than is commonly supposed. Indeed, I have argued that ethical individualism pervades Marx's writings about the good life. Thus, we have seen that Marx's rejection of the division of labour is underpinned by the individualistic view that the enrichment of the powers and capacities of society cannot come at the expense of the powers and capacities of individuals (Chapter 2). Likewise, we have seen that Marx rejects the communitarian idea that self-realisation consists in fulfilling a worthwhile social role; on Marx's view, by contrast, really free activity is unconstrained by the existence of roles (Chapter 3). Even Marx's life-long oscillation between two different conceptions of the good life (which we examined in some detail in Chapter 4) is itself generated by a concern for individuals – specifically, a concern over whether labour or leisure is the 'realm' most congenial to their free and full development. By focusing on these themes in the foregoing chapters, I hope to have provided a vindication of Marx as an individualistic thinker against overly communitarian readings of his account of communism that have historically held sway.

The second interpretive claim concerns Marx's intellectual development. Since the publication of the early writings in the 1930s and the subsequent translation of those writings into English in the 1950s and 1960s, this has been one of the major debates in Marx scholarship. Is the transition from the early to the late Marx to be viewed in terms of continuity or rupture? Is there one Marx or two? My contribution to this much-debated issue is limited to Marx's ideas about the good life under communism, but it suggests that Marx's ideas on these matters are not of a piece. Thus, we have seen that Marx gives different answers as to why community is

necessary for self-realisation (Chapter 3), and different answers, too, about whether labour or leisure is the primary site of self-realisation in a future communist society (Chapter 4). However, the claim that these changes can be allotted to the ‘early’ and ‘late’ Marx is at odds with the exegetical evidence. Instead, I have argued that some of the tensions and inconsistencies that commentators attribute to the supposed break between the early and later writings are implicit in the early writings, while the later writings are also not free from oscillations and discordant elements. Of course, it may seem surprising that a would-be systematic thinker like Marx did not work out a consistent account of the good life under communism. But given the diverse influences upon Marx’s thought (some of which we tracked in Chapter 4), and his extreme reticence for detailed ethical reflection on the nature of a future society, the fact that some discordant elements remain is, perhaps, not wholly unexpected.

On top of these interpretive claims, the thesis has also contained a more critical component. More precisely, it has examined in some detail Marx’s most extensive descriptions of descriptions of a future communist society, and argued that the model Marx puts forward in the *Comments* represents the best foundation for a Marxian account of the good life. Needless to say, not everyone will find my arguments for this compelling. For those who take a more pessimistic view of modern labour, the ideal developed in *Capital III*, where the emphasis is on reducing time at work to extend the real ‘realm of freedom’ that lies beyond it, will represent the superior ideal. For others (though surely not many), hunting in the morning may still represent the ideal to which Marxists should aspire. But for reasons given I think the model in the *Comments* is Marx’s richest and most normatively attractive conception of the good life. To be sure, it is an exacting ideal and questions about its feasibility as a model for mass society remain. But I have given some reason for thinking that it may be less implausible and more feasible than it may initially appear.

Since the fall of Eastern European communism, when Marx’s relevance as a social and political theorist could no longer be taken for granted, it has become customary for commentators to conclude their critical assessment of Marx by asking the question that the Italian idealist Benedetto Croce first asked of Hegel: *What is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Hegel?* It is now our turn to do the same. So, with regards to the topic pursued here, what is living and what is dead in Marx’s vision of a future communist society?

We have seen that a lot of what Marx says about communism does not survive unscathed. For instance, a future communist society could not abolish the division of labour. Nor could it abolish social roles. Nor could it be one in which machines do all the dirty work, leaving us free to engage in whatever activity we please. Nor could its work be free of alienation and yet forego none of the productivity and efficiency of capitalism.

In this way, a plausible Marxian conception of a future society would be quite different to the one envisioned by Marx. It would retain a division of labour and a structure of social roles. It would also, though I have said little about this topic in the foregoing chapters, retain a role for justice to adjudicate between claims – the evanescence of justice sometimes envisioned by Marx being, as Rawls puts it, neither possible nor desirable.<sup>1</sup> It would provide an account of how unpleasant work would be distributed, and seriously consider how self-realising labour and production for needs would be coordinated in mass society.

To the dyed-in-the-wool Marxist this may sound overly concessionary. But in reply we should note that rejecting these aspects of Marx's vision of the good life does not mean reproducing them in their existing form. With regards to the division of labour, for instance, a better Marxian solution to the problem of specialism would focus on how the division of labour could be transformed so as to provide all individuals with the opportunity to engage in more interesting and creative forms of work. Likewise with regards to social roles and justice: a more plausible Marxian view would provide a 'Marxist conception of social roles' and 'Marxist conception of justice' rather than putting forward as a prescription of a future society their abolition (in the case of social roles) or evanescence (in the case of justice).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, p.177.

<sup>2</sup>A second, more sober, objection would claim, not that my account is too concessionary, but that, in rejecting large parts of Marx's vision of the good life (e.g., his abolition of the division of labour and its roles), I may have put forward a more plausible account of a good society, but it would no longer be *Marx's* account of a good society. In reply, I would claim that while significant aspects of Marx's vision of the good life have been jettisoned, the underlying values (e.g. all-round-development, community) have been retained and, indeed, defended. What have been rejected in the foregoing chapters is not the values to which Marx subscribed, but the means through which he sought to realise them. To take an example from Chapter 3, it is the division of labour, and not the ideal of all-round development, which has been rejected. In general, then, my approach has been committed to Marx's values, but not at all reverential to Marx's way of implementing them.

It is interesting to note that the retention of these aspects of the modern social world bring Marx's vision of the good society closer to Hegel's. The idea that the division of labour is a central, ineliminable aspect of modern life; that social roles are necessary, not only for social coordination, but also for self-realisation and community; that at least some circumscribed role for rights and justice is necessary for any serious political philosophy for the modern world: these are all central aspects of the rational state as described in the *Philosophy of Right*. They are aspects of Hegel's political philosophy that Marx rejected for being insufficiently radical, yet they are ones that a plausible Marxian view must now accept.

Thus, much of what Marx says about communism is dead. Yet significant aspects of Marx's vision of the good life remain alive. First, Marx's humanist ideal of self-development is alive. The emphasis placed on all-round development (discussed in Chapter 2) may be a touch overdone, but it is not as implausible as its critics suggest. A moderate version of that ideal – stressing the value of well-roundedness over a narrow cultivation of one's powers – constitutes a worthy ethical ideal.<sup>3</sup> Second, the conception of community in the *Comments* is alive. In particular, the position that Marx adopts in the *Comments* (discussed in Chapters 3 and 5), which stresses the themes of reciprocal dependence and mutual completion, could provide the foundation for a philosophically distinctive and normatively attractive conception of community. I have addressed some issues of its feasibility as an ideal, but it will be clear that more work needs to be done on the issue of how that ideal could be applied to mass society and implemented institutionally. Finally, the emphasis Marx's vision places on labour is alive. Given the enormous significance of work in people's day-to-day lives, the paucity of philosophical interest in work – both historically and contemporarily – is striking. Whatever one thinks of Marx's own ideas about labour, he surely deserves credit for inviting us to think harder about a central but philosophically neglected aspect of human existence.

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<sup>3</sup> It also differentiates Marx's vision of the good life from Hegel's. For, as we saw in Chapter 3, the ideal of all-round development was not one that Hegel was attracted to.

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