

# **Toward an Emancipatory Social Science**

## **Part One: The Road Not to be Taken**

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### I

In these lectures I shall set out and defend a conception of an emancipatory social science. The form I articulate is that of a Marxian emancipatory social science and I will search for something of contemporary relevance. It, as a Durkheimian, Weberian and Habermasian social science, also is that of a comprehensive and systematic social science trying to show what the structure of societies are and how they function and to characterize how social life is in different societies at different times for different peoples differently situated. I shall in the first lecture come to grips with historicist Hegelian Marxism which, besides being a philosophy, tries to articulate an emancipatory social science. It was the account of Marx and Engels and of the dominant Marxist tradition, though I do not suggest they all sang the same tune. Not even Marx and Engels. They did not. But they all, as distinct from utopian socialists, sought to develop scientific accounts in what for them found its scientificity in what they called the dialectical method (Wood 2004, 195-226). And their social science, they thought, was rooted in it. It was crucial, they also thought, that their economic-political-historical accounts, which were also revolutionary, would take a recognizable scientific form while remaining resolutely a dialectical one. Moreover, their account would not just be a philosophical and/or a moralizing narrative. It is the trajectory of epochal historical social change as construed by historicist Hegelian Marxism (classical Marxism) and emancipatory social science that goes with it that will be at the center of my attention in this first lecture.

In the second lecture I shall come to grips with analytical Marxism. It is a form of Marxism that is sometimes derided (falsely, I believe) as being a purely Scholastic academic Marxism of the seminar room. (It is that but not just that.) I shall characterize and criticize some things in it and defend others and argue, honing in on my own form of analytical Marxianism, a form that is historicist and holistic without taking a Hegelian historicist or Hegelian holistic turn, a turn that utilizes a dialectical form. My historicism and holism is something that is standardly rejected by analytical Marxists. But I shall be a maverick here. I shall, however, generally be concerned to defend analytical Marxism and its conception of social science, a social science that travels philosophically light. (Though it should be said this is less so of one of its central framers, namely, G. A. Cohen.)

For both Hegelian Marxist and analytical Marxist accounts there are problems—perhaps devastatingly so—that we must address. We must address, among other things, how they, if they can, can be both a science and be emancipatory. Perhaps ‘emancipatory social science’ is an oxymoron. We can and should agree with Max Weber in rejecting a moralizing social science without agreeing with him that social science must be ‘value free’ or even can be ‘value free’. But we still need to explain how a social science can be emancipatory and remain a science. How it can, if it can, remains ‘a deep problem’ that we should approach with trepidation.

I should also add in making these preliminary remarks that there is a prominent meta-philosophical subtext running throughout these lectures as well as I hope to the point autobiographical remarks. Perhaps it is even too prominent. It is something with me, atypical for a philosopher, which has been an obsession through most of my philosophical life. What is the point of philosophy (if any) is something I can’t help but keep on asking. And if we can give a compelling answer to that question *about* and *of* philosophy, what is it and how should philosophy be done? What kind of avoidances shall we engage in? I shall come to grips again with these and related

matters in the context of discussing the possibility and feasibility of an emancipatory social science and in facing what is sometimes called anti-moralism (Wood 1995; McCarney 2000, 85-119).

In this first lecture I shall take Joseph McCarney as my exemplar of Hegelian historicist Marxism at its best. I have long admired his work. His unfortunately neglected book, *The Real World of Ideology*, is the best book on ideology that I have read (McCarney 1980). It turned around my belief that to have an ideology it was necessary to have a distorted view of the world. It of course frequently—very frequently—is but not invariably. Rather, an ideology is a set of beliefs and practices which answers to or serves class interests and has a distinctive role to play in the class struggle.<sup>1</sup> It is a cluster of beliefs, perceptions and practices that functions, or at least purports to function, to serve the interests of a class or sometimes of several classes. In any class society with its class conflicts there will an ideology. In a capitalist society it will serve capitalist class interests; in a socialist society it will serve socialist class interests. No social theory in class societies, no matter what the beliefs of its articulators, can rise above all ideology. This is as true of Marx as anyone else. To think that we can rise above all ideology is one of the ways an ideology can be illusory as well as give us false beliefs about why we do what we do. Yet one class view can be more adequate—more warrantably assertable—than another. Indeed some class views are not warrantably assertable at all. Marx's class view may be more adequate than Ricardo's or Hegel's views. One class view may in one way or another be distorting and another not distorting at all, though all class views will at least purportedly be in the interests of a class or classes and will be unavoidably perspectival. But a 'distorting perspective' is not a redundancy and a 'non-distorting view' is not a contradiction. A Marxian can and will claim the latter quite consistently, though perhaps mistakenly for Marx's view. That is, he will claim Marx's view is inescapably perspectival but not distortingly so. Marx's view, a plainly pro-proletarian class view, may not be distorted. One crucial task for a Marxist is to show that it is not.

McCarney's *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism* is also a wonderful book (McCarney 1990a). His criticism of critical theory seems to me right on (McCarney 1990a, 17-65). In this too he has changed my mind. I used to think what we as Marxians should be doing now is to articulate or, if you will, construct a critical theory of society working from something like Jürgen Habermas's account of a critical theory before he became so Kantian—a view more clearly and cogently expressed by what I take (controversially) to be his most astute commentator, Raymond Guess, in his *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Guess 1981). I tried in a series of essays to push such an account along (Nielsen 1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1993c). I took it then that the very idea of 'a critical theory of society' was plainly unproblematic and could be unproblematically Marxian. (This does not mean I thought Habermas or any of the Frankfurt School to be giving a Marxian account—the general conception (the form) of critical theory they developed—but that a critical theory could and should be. It could, that is, be utilized by a Marxian.)

However, McCarney has well argued in his *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism* that the very idea of a critical theory of society is both problematic and unMarxist and that it should not be adopted by an emancipatory social science. His argument for this is both astute and complicated. In spite of the fact that it seemed to be obvious that all of us, Marxists or not, who were doing anything of any scope that we conceived of as a social science contributing to emancipation, thought that we were doing critical theory. Indeed, almost by definition, we thought what we were doing should be regarded as a critical theory of society; perhaps we were doing it very inadequately but it would be critical theory all the same. But I now think what I and many others took to be unproblematic—and obviously so—was not unproblematic. Here again my head, though a little less definitively, has been turned around. McCarney has well argued that this very way of conceptualizing things is mistaken or at the very least problematic and it should not be adopted by an emancipatory social science (McCarney 1990a). I now have come to think that McCarney's argument is probably sound. (This 'dark saying' will later be explicated.)

There is another way that McCarney has changed my views. I used to think that when we talk of the contradictions of capitalism or of any mode of production that the term ‘contradiction’ should be taken to signify ‘deep and intractable structural conflicts’. McCarney, building on the work of Roy Edgley (another philosopher I admire), has given us good reason to believe that we are speaking here of literal contradictions. ‘Contradiction’ is used there as when we speak of two propositions being contradictory. To simplify, but I hope not distort his account, we should say that if we can unproblematically speak of propositions being contradictory we can also speak of beliefs (after all, if expressed, they contain propositions) being contradictory. Indeed, we could not have beliefs without having the propositions proper to them. We can also say the same thing of practices which contain beliefs which contain propositions and of forces of production, relations of production, and modes of production which contain practices with clusters of beliefs and again their propositions. The forces and relations of production in revolutionary situations come into conflict and in doing so are said to contain contradictions. ‘Contradictions’ is again used in a straightforward literal sense. (Whether as well they actually contain contradictions or just *intractable* conflicts which for their resolution require a change in the mode of production and with this a revolution are distinct matters. But whatever is said here it doesn’t and shouldn’t require using ‘contradiction’ in some distinct and perhaps esoteric sense.)

In Chapter 6 of *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism* and also in his “An Emancipatory Science of Society” and “Recent Interpretations of Ideology”, McCarney considers (on the road to affirming it) how “a non-normative theory may be conceived as . . . an emancipatory science of society” (McCarney 2007, 225-35; 1985, 77-93). He asks how Marx’s thought can have a practical significance without it being a *critical* evaluation of its subject. How could this coherently be said to be a non-normative matter? To say that it can seems to me to be deeply counter-intuitive just as it also is counter-intuitive to speak of an *emancipatory* science that is non-normative. The very use of ‘emancipatory’ is itself normative.

However, McCarney makes an interesting and indeed powerful case for a Marxian and socialist emancipatory social science that is both emancipatory and non-normative. I shall argue later that McCarney's claim here, as insightful as it is, is in some respects true and in other respects false. It can readily escape the charge of being contradictory by suitable stipulations on either 'emancipatory' or 'normative' but that doesn't end the trouble or even touch what may be the important trouble.

## II

Classical Marxism and much of Marxism practiced today is Hegelian historicist Marxism. McCarney is a distinguished member and practitioner of this. Both Althusserians and analytical Marxists set their faces against Hegelian historicist Marxism and I share that position, though I have great admiration, as I have indicated, for central parts of McCarney's work and gratefully acknowledge the ways he has turned my mind around on several issues. Even though analytical Marxists deeply oppose historicism, I regard myself as both a historicist and an analytical Marxist. But I am neither a *Hegelian* historicist nor any kind of *dialectician*. I think we should be grateful to Hegel for calling philosophers' attention to history—something widely ignored in philosophy. He made us aware of its philosophical import and importantly made us realize that there is no overleaping history: that is, that we cannot attain a view of the world which is in any very substantial sense 'history transcendent'; he also usefully made us see how we can reasonably and fruitfully view philosophy as our time held in thought. But he also often talks in what is at least a seemingly contradictory manner as if reason compels us to go 'history transcendent'. Hegel's historicism (and with it Marx's as well) is flawed. A proper historicism has no room for the Absolute, the totally (*sans phrase*), absolute knowledge, certain knowledge, or any claim to a foundational truth—*the truth*—of everything, to say nothing of being a *redemptive* truth. A proper historicism will be anti-foundationalist, or at least non-foundationalist, realizing that there is no

plausible or perhaps even a coherent claim for philosophical foundations. Philosophy is perspectival and rejects as incoherent such notions as ‘the point of view of the universe’ or ‘the view from nowhere’ (Rorty 2007a, 176-83).

Early analytical philosophy, from Bertrand Russell to somewhat later C. I. Lewis, was foundationalist and tried to reduce things to their alleged atomistic parts or derive or found all propositions from atomic propositions (protocol statements) denoting sense-data or sensibilia or to ‘reduce’ all other objects to sense-data or sensibilia so that we can come to know that the world is really made up of sense-data or sensibilia. (Shades here of Bishop Berkeley and subjective idealism).<sup>2</sup> Calling this *logical* atomism does not help. Sean Sayers is correct in criticizing *that* type of analytic philosophy (Sayers 1990). But logical atomism has few, if any, defenders now. We can even go back to Otto Neurath—a charter member of the Vienna Circle *and* a very active Communist—and see that there have been analytic philosophers who were holists and who vigorously attacked logical atomism, indeed *all* forms of atomism and foundationalism. But this is by now past history. Logical atomists are, if not an extinct species, a very endangered species. Contemporary analytic philosophers (or at least the most distinguished among them) are holist and non-foundationalist. Quine and Davidson are explicitly so, the later Wittgenstein implicitly so. And so also by implication is Rawls (Rorty 1991, 175-96). A maverick analytical philosopher such as Richard Rorty—his challenge to the analytic tradition notwithstanding—is explicitly holistic and historicist without being a relativist, subjectivist, or a philosophical skeptic. And his historicism, as mine, challenges Hegel’s absolutism by claiming that there is no ahistorical worldview that is not so abstract as to come to nothing. Neo-pragmatists such as Rorty reject, as do analytical Marxists, any appeal to something so obscure as dialectics and to the making of obscure claims about the Absolute, the totality and claims to ‘absolute knowledge’. For neo-pragmatists, historicism (with its holism) tells us to expect things to be interconnected and to look for it without making the

metaphysically extravagant claim that everything in the universe is connected to everything else and that that yields a cosmic unity.

For Hegelians, including McCarney, to attain genuine philosophical knowledge is to become aware of the unity of this totality and to realize that reason shows us that this *must* be so—that there is a reason—a ‘rule of reason’—which governs the universe. Hegelian historicist Marxists claim there is and must be a historical process to be identified with the achievement of history’s end, goal or aim, that is, by history’s *telos*. As Andrew Levine puts it in characterizing Hegelian Marxism, “Whatever is entirely self-realized ought to be” (Levine 2003, 72). Indeed, Hegelian Marxists have it that what will become actual must be and in the fullness of time human beings must be entirely self-realized and free (autonomous). Actuality must escape any containment. Reason therefore compels agents to advance history to the point that all teleologically given destinies are realized or what comes to the same thing humankind’s teleological destiny is to make the actual rational thereby undoing the difference between the apparent and the real. But there is no such historical teleology or ends (goals or aims) of history. We don’t understand what it means to say something is entirely self-realized or *perhaps* even self-realized, period. There are no teleological destinies to be realized. History has no such destinies. In so characterizing history, we have at least in effect reified it and treated it incoherently as some kind of person or agent—some kind of ‘super-person’. But there is no such thing. There is no coherent general contrast between ‘the apparent’ and ‘the real’ (Rorty 1982, xiii-xlvii). We have to know the real *what?* Just talking about ‘the real’ (as even Levine does who is no Hegelian) is vapid (Levine 2003, 68). In doing so, philosophy has gone on holiday. Unless such remarks can be radically demythologized or decided these ‘claims’ are not even false but incoherent. They are not even genuine claims. It is difficult for me to believe that such a careful thinker as McCarney can believe them but he at least seems to and he does very little to decode or demythologize them.

Levine is correct in saying (following Hume and a host of others) that there is a *distinction* between what is the case and what ought to be the case. Hilary Putnam is also correct in saying that there is no *dichotomy* between the is and the ought—a *distinction*, yes; a *dichotomy*, no (Putnam 2002). Our language is pervaded by sentences that are inextricably both descriptive and evaluative. If I say ‘Cheney is fanatical’ and ‘Bush is both fanatical and stupid’, I surely have evaluated them harshly but I have also surely described them, though perhaps falsely and perhaps in a *parti-pris* manner. If I do that and, in doing it, falsely describe them, then I shouldn’t have. I should not have made those evaluations and should retract them. But such talk—fanatical or not, false or not—is still *descriptive as well as evaluative*. There a description is also an evaluation. Our language is redolent with such examples. Just go back to Phillipa Foot’s example of ‘that’s rude’.

If Hegel’s and Marx’s way of viewing things is right, to make such negative evaluations is something we should not do. They are theoretically and practically useless. What I should do instead is explain why such people (in my example, Bush and Cheney) get into the power situations they do, retain for some time that power in a capitalist society and how damaging that is to working people and to the underclass as a whole and how it is that people so situated can be Bushians: how reasonable working class people can do so and not see how much it is against their interests. I should also explain what Bush and Cheney do and why they do it. If this is well done the negative evaluation will just result from that. (I did not say that the evaluation was *entailed* by the description. There is no way, *pace* R. M. Hare, of separating the normative from the descriptive here.) But it is the descriptions *and* the evaluations that together (inseparably together) are doing the work. It is thick concepts that we are relying in here. If they are convincing, they will result in an evaluative response from most people and indeed usually the same one. Moralizing has little use or point, let alone moral philosophy (Nielsen 2009). We can reasonably say that the exploitation of the working class obtains under capitalism but if we see also that exploitation must obtain in some measure under capitalism and usually extensively, we will also recognize that it makes no sense to

say that it ought not to be under *capitalism*, though we could see that the exploitation caused by it is a reason (though perhaps not a decisive one) for bringing, where we can, capitalism to an end. But if we see, let us assume counterfactually, that capitalism can never be brought to an end or be without exploitation, as I think Hegel thought, we, if we are rational, will stop saying it ought to be brought to an end. We will regret that but we will stop saying it is irrational—another normative but also descriptive word—if it must be. *But we will not go on to say, alternatively, that it therefore must be rational.* It may, *pace* the Hegelians, not be rational, but since what must be must be—*que sera, sera*—then, rational or not, there is no sense opposing it. Indeed, there is no sense in saying it is either rational or irrational. We can begin to see how a social science can be non-normative but still emancipatory.

When we clearly see this, we will also see that moralizing will be (or at least should be to the extent we are rational) conceived of very differently than it has traditionally been conceived. There is no point in saying that exploitation *under capitalism* is evil if we think that capitalism is unavoidable. That is like saying that death is evil. McCarney has made this clear. The crucial thing is to consider whether there are any such necessities, as Classical Marxists and Hegelian historicist Marxists believe there are, relevant to their account or whether there are any such *ontological* necessities at all.

I believe Marxianism needs to be reconstructed into saying that such alleged ontological necessities (if they are not *ersatz*) will be empirical necessities or, more probably, reasonable possibilities that are not necessary at all. This takes away from us the claim to strong necessity of Classical Marxism or Hegelian Marxism and in historical materialism as Marx developed it. *It takes away its attempt to escape contingency.* We cannot show that socialism or anything else social is in the cards; that history necessities it. We can only reasonably say, and perhaps show, that socialism, resting on a weaker conceptual of historical materialism that G. A. Cohen and Levine have come to defend, is a reasonable possibility and that it should be fought for. But the latter part of the above

sentence—or so it seems—takes us to ethical socialism—to what Marxists call contemptuously utopian socialism—with all its defects. Defects that Marx and McCarney, following him, point to.

I should point out, following Levine here, that Hegelian Marxists (dialectical and historicist) claim an allegedly strong necessity for the advent of socialism—what, they say, is an *ontological* necessity. These central claims are, they claim, neither logical necessities nor merely empirical necessities. However, even if we can only get empirical necessities, McCarney's point about the normative and the moral might (reasonably might) still hold. If it is an empirical necessity that I must die there is no point in railing against it or trying to escape it or saying it ought not to occur. We again began to see how a social science can be non-normative but still emancipatory, functioning to reconcile ourselves to what must be so. Railing against such necessities is irrational. Here we have a very Hegelian point and, I think, a sound one.

I raised questions above about whether, in the relevant Hegelian Marxist cases, we can even get such empirical necessities, e.g., law-like empirical generalizations sustaining counterfactuals. I do not think we can. But there being such, if indeed there is any such, is compatible with my fallibilism and my type holism and historicism. But Classical Marxists and Hegelian Marxists want something stronger; something that science—at least as normally construed—cannot yield. I think Levine gives good reasons for believing they can't get this. As Levine points out their holism and historicism commits them to the view, derived from Hegel, that “to explain anything it is necessary somehow to invoke everything—because everything is related to everything else in a way that explanations must acknowledge. Adequate explanations therefore make reference not only to parts but also to wholes by implying the reality of the interconnectedness of all things. So understood holism follows from the ontological claim that, in the final analysis, all is One—that everything that exists *expresses* a fundamental, underlying unity” (Levine 2003, 67-8). (A small aside: to say ‘in the final analysis’ is to give up the ghost. Nothing, except sometimes contextually and for certain ends,

is in the final analysis. Argument concerning anything substantive never comes to an end, *full stop*.

We say “in the final analysis” for pragmatic reasons.) Levine goes on to say:

Hegelian historicists therefore take issue, at least implicitly, with the Aristotelian idea, assumed by positivists, that the world consists of discrete parts, ‘natural kind’ divisions, that are each explainable in their own right, without reference to larger wholes. Positivism dispenses with any notion of the whole or, as historicist Marxists usually say, the *totality*. For positivists, a theory of *X*, where *X* is a natural kind division of the real, can be adequate and complete without in any way taking *Y* into account, where *Y* is distinct from *X*. For historicists, on the other hand, explanations must deploy a notion of totality, if they are to succeed. A theory of *X* that does not connect *X* to everything else, including *Y* – if only by revealing *X*’s connection to an underlying unity that somehow encompasses both *X* and *Y* – can never be adequate or complete (Levine 2003, 68).

Suppose the *Xs* are giraffes and the *Ys* are salmon. And suppose one wants to know why giraffes developed such long necks. We explain it by natural selection. Giraffes with the longer necks get leaves from tall trees that are pervasive in giraffe habitats that shorter necked giraffes cannot get. So more of the long necked giraffes survive than giraffes with shorter necks who have less stable and abundant food sources. And the long necked giraffes breed mostly with other long necked giraffes since they were the ones extensively around and thus more readily available while the giraffes with shorter necks, having less access to leaves and having fewer breeding opportunities, do not survive as well and eventually over generations die out. Salmon as well as trees are connected to giraffes, though distantly, for they are—what else is new?—in the same world and they are also connected biologically because way back they both evolved from the same simpler organisms. But do we need to refer to salmon to explain adequately and completely how giraffes got their long necks? We do not. Maybe it makes some sense to say or think that all things in the world (indeed the universe) are connected. But even so, there is no point in invoking it or even thinking it when we are making explanations. We do not need an explanation of why and how all things are connected in order to have a full and adequate explanation of how giraffes got their long necks. Giraffes are at a certain distance from salmon and they are both animals. But so what? We do not need to refer to salmon and a host of other things to explain completely and adequately

how and why giraffes came to have long necks. Even if we did and we go on to try to refer to everything to explain that fact about giraffes we should not because trying to ‘refer to everything ubiquitously’ is a notion of very questionable intelligibility, as is the notion of referring to the *totality* of everything and thinking of it as somehow a unified whole. We do not know in this context what talk of ‘a unified whole’ comes to. Moreover, we do not need to do such things or even be able to make sense of trying to do so, with such a putative ubiquitous reference, so that with it we finally would get a complete explanation of why giraffes have long necks. At least for practical purposes we get on quite well with Darwinian explanations of their long necks. And what is the point of or the rationale for trying to go beyond practical purposes? (Note that I said ‘at least’ and also that I am not claiming that *my* Darwinian explanation is airtight or even very good. It was given for illustrative purposes only. But I am claiming that for biologists in giving their Darwinian explanations that they need not, and indeed should not, go Hegelian. Their explanations can be perfectly complete without such dialectical dances or cosmic holism.)

Even if we talk Hegelish and we think the universe must be a whole that we can comprehend, why must we think it has to be a *unified* whole? Indeed what is it that we are thinking when we try to think either of those two things? A star, by now possibly extinct, whose light took thousands of years to come to us may in some sense be connected with us and our planet. It is or was a certain distance from us. But what sense, if any, is there in saying our planet and the star are part of a unified totality? What sense is there in saying we have here a foundational underlying unity? Do we even understand what we are talking about here? I at least for one do not think so.

It is even less coherent to say that the universe forms an *organic* unity. There are places where the notion of an organic unity makes sense. A human being is in an organic unity. Human beings could not survive--could not even be human beings—without a heart and blood and a lot of other connected bodily things. But a human being also could not survive without oxygen. Oxygen and being a live human being are importantly connected but they are not in an *organic* unity. A

human being also could not survive for long without having been in a society either, but certainly there is no *organic unity* here. We just need a little common sense here—some of Peirce’s critical commonsensism.

Moreover, it is not a matter of choosing between mechanical explanations and organic ones. A society, state, the world, or even the universe is not in any relevant sense either like a frog or a clock. The development of a tadpole into a frog is explained one way; the working of a clock is explained in another. One needs a mechanical explanation for one and for the other an organic explanation. But those are not the only kind of explanations there are. Societies, kinship, states, classes, let alone worlds or the universe, to the extent they can be explained at all, are not explained in those ways. Philosophers’ penchant for using organic, obstetric or mechanical metaphors has hurt our understanding of these things and it does not aid our understanding of a totality at all (assuming that there is anything intelligible to understand here).

This dismissive turn on Hegelianism does not commit us to positivism (though it is, of course, compatible with it). All we need is a dose of critical commonsensism with its technique of translation into the concrete, e.g., I put on my socks before I put on my shoes, so no matter what some philosophers and even some scientists say or might say time cannot be unreal. G. E. Moore *may* have been provincial in certain ways as Gilbert Ryle certainly was being provincial and ethnocentric when he was asked about Eastern philosophy and replied, “The only light that comes from the East is the sun.” (At least this has been attributed to Ryle but it sounds like something he would say.) Moore’s and some ordinary language philosophers’ insistence on translating into the concrete is something different than Ryle’s ethnocentric remark just mentioned. The Moorean or ordinary language philosophy technique need not be at all provincial. Moreover, it should be noted that when Ryle was doing philosophy Ryle himself was very adept at practicing translation into the concrete. This insistence on translating into the concrete has been very salutary in philosophy.

It might be thought that my rejecting such Hegelian interconnectedness is incompatible with my holism but it is not. Holism is not identical with or dependent on Hegelian or classical Marxist holism. Levine puts it very well:

There is another sense of 'holism' that should not be confused with the holism of its historicists. I have in mind claims that are advanced within particular sciences and in philosophical theories of various kinds that expressly or implicitly accept the division of the whole into discrete natural kinds. Holism, in this sense, is the view that, for particular explanatory purposes, it is best (or perhaps even necessary) not to decompose particular wholes into their constituent parts. It was in this sense, for example, that Quine famously maintained that there is no simple correspondence between words and objects. To understand the connections between them, it is necessary, he argued, to look to links between entire theories or even conceptual schemes, on the one hand, and sensory experiences, on the other. This sort of holism is compatible with the denial of the metaphysical notion that, ultimately, all is One. One can therefore be a holist in this sense without also being a holist in the historicist's sense. But even this nonhistoricist form of holism is incompatible with extreme positivist views, according to which there is – or must be – a one-to-one correspondence between words and objects or between facts, however identified, and the real (Levine 2003, 69). [Note here that Levine is identifying historicism with 'Hegelian historicism', something I do not do.]

The above note by me notwithstanding, I am in general in sympathy with what Levine says here. But I want to point, perhaps pedantically, to a few additional differences between us here that might have some significance. Levine is a holist in the sense just explained but not a historicist. I am both, though I am not a Hegelian historicist or holist. Most analytical philosophers who are holists are not historicists in any sense. Quine and Davidson, for example, are holists but not historicists. However, while a Quinean or Davidsonian holist need not be a historicist still she could be, though not a Hegelian one. Quine, as I have said, isn't a historicist in any sense and neither is Davidson. But some generally in sympathy with either of their views might be. I think, as does Rorty, that (though this is controversial) the later Rawls was also a historicist, though not a Hegelian historicist. He was a holist as was the very late Wittgenstein (principally in *On Certainty*) was also a historicist. But neither Rawls nor Wittgenstein would be caught dead making such self-ascriptions. So labeling them as I just did is controversial and *perhaps* mistaken (though Rorty very plausibly attributes this to Rawls; see Rorty 1991, 175-96). Rorty is both a non-Hegelian historicist

and a non-Hegelian holist as I am as well and it fits with Quinean holism as does our fallibilism, contextualism, anti-essentialism, perspectivism, and finitism. A natural kinds conceptualization in the way that Levine characterized it is, I think, fine for at least part of the natural sciences and for biology and botany, but I am much less confident that it works in the social sciences or for talk of society or history in general or even specifically. Even if it does, it does not require a dialectical conception of science going *Geistwissenschaftlich*.

McCarney rightly points out that '*Wissenschaft*' has a wider use than 'science' characteristically has. '*Wissenschaft*' does not carry the strong tendency as 'science' does to take only the paradigmatic, utterly secure sciences such as physics and chemistry as models for what constitutes science. So construed there is a tendency towards scientism. '*Wissenschaft*', according to McCarney, "involves no such partiality. Rather it signifies quite impartially the organized pursuit of knowledge" (McCarney 1990, 121). But while this opens up what counts as science more widely and avoids scientism, namely the claim that what the natural and biological sciences cannot tell us, humankind cannot know, it comes to have the opposite misfortune of being so wide that theology or perhaps even Christian Science becomes a science unless (somewhat controversially but perhaps correctly) we rule out that there can be knowledge there.

The German conception—*Wissenschaft*—is more amenable to the conception of a 'proletarian science', a conception which postulates that the scientific orientation and attitude may come to "permeate the worldview of class subjects" (McCarney 1990, 121). But this looks at least as if it is too wide a conception of what English speakers would call 'science'. Not anything that permeates the worldview of the proletariat need or perhaps even should count as science. At a certain stage of the proletariat's evolution metaphysical or religious views or both may have been a part of their worldview. Perhaps it still is? But these are plainly not scientific worldviews. And their views about personal relations and more generally about how they should live their lives, though in certain respects affected by science, are not scientific views. However, they *may* be

largely justified by science. Moreover, a worldview may not be a scientific one without being anti-scientific or unscientific as my non-scientific naturalism is not, though I trust and hope it is compatible with science (Nielsen 1996, 25-77).

I think it a mistake to speak of ‘a proletarian science’ as distinct from speaking of ‘a form of scientific activity in the service of the proletariat’. Science itself is not proletarian, liberal, fascist, capitalist, or technologically authoritarian. Science has at various times been a handmaiden to all these things. But ‘socialist science’—if we persist in talking that way—should be used (I do not say exclusively) in the service of the proletariat. But that itself is not a scientific judgment but a economic-political-moral judgment: a value judgment in short. And it needs to be justified in the way value judgments are. We do not find out whether a scientific claim is true or warranted by finding out whether it serves the proletariat or any class or group, but by finding out if it is adequately empirically confirmed. This sometimes is a very indirect process but it cannot be bypassed (at least for whole scientific theories) and being in the interests of one or another class cannot be relevant to its claim to be true. We cannot properly say ‘scientifically true from the capitalist point of view, but scientifically false from the proletarian view’ or vice versa. (*If perspectivism entails this then there is something wrong with perspectivism.*) Moreover, we can have a scientific account of socialism without socialism itself being scientific. When we speak of scientific socialism that is what we should mean.

Alternatively, if a Marxist means by ‘proletarian science’ that the proletariat in its maturity will come to have scientific attitudes and a science-friendly materialist (naturalist) worldview, then this may be alright, but it is a misleading way to put the point by saying there is such a thing as a proletarian science. Moreover, it is unclear that all working people who are *in but not of* the capitalist order and are ready, when the occasion is ripe, to make a revolution actually have, let alone *must* have, a scientific worldview. I think it would be a good thing if they did. But that is a different matter. At a certain stage of their evolution metaphysical or religious views may become

part of their worldview but they are plainly not scientific worldviews and a worldview to repeat may not be a scientific one without being anti-scientific (Nielsen 1996, 25-77). To claim that such proletarians have no revolutionary potential until they have a scientific world view is, to understate it, not warranted.

McCarney claims that the possibility of science for Marx arises “whenever the appearance of things fails to correspond to their reality” (McCarney 1990, 122-23). But this itself is a metaphysical conception and a very problematic one at that as Rorty well argues (Rorty 1982, xiv-xvii). There is no *general* notion of the distinction between appearance and reality but only *contextual* ones. We have no reasonable understanding of what we mean by *the real* without some context. There is real wine as distinct from wine without alcohol. There is real cream as distinct from dairy creamer. There is real solidarity as distinct from pseudo-solidarity. And there is genuine scientific socialism as distinct from merely a misleading faint image of one. The last two examples are perhaps somewhat controversial. But all the examples illustrate (*pace* both Levine and McCarney) how ‘real’ is used as distinct from the lack of a coherent use for ‘the real’ *sans phrase*. (It is not used that way outside of philosophy and the use in philosophy is opaque.) We have no coherent conception of ‘the real’, full stop.

‘Science’ is an honorific term and there are very different things legitimately called science, for example astrophysics and social anthropology. It is ludicrously partisan to try to rule out either of those activities as sciences or as (for that matter) legitimate activities. Yet they are radically different—I do not say completely different—in their content, procedures, methods, manner of explanation, and the type of theories they have. The classical pragmatists tried to identify what was scientific or not by their method rather than their subject matter. They tried to characterize something as *the* scientific method. But Kuhn, Bachlard, Toulmin, and Feyerabend have put paid to that. There is no such thing as *the* scientific method but only scientific methods often greatly different between disciplines and sometimes even within disciplines. When we look at the

characterizations of the scientific method given by John Dewey, Sidney Hook, and Ernest Nagel—all classical pragmatists—we get something very vague and platitudinous. It has to be to cover all the range of things they wanted it to cover. We can, of course, give a more specific characterization of what ‘scientific method’ is but it will turn out to rest on a partisan definition of what ‘real science’ is but that is to give a *persuasive* definition that settles nothing. Remember my remark that ‘science’ being an honorific term and Wittgenstein’s remarks about the use of such stipulations.

### III

Before I turn to the three considerations with which I wish to engage McCarney’s work in Section IV, I think, given what I will argue there and the way in which I argue it, it would be useful at this point to tell you something of where I am coming from (to put it in what was once the idiom of radical Californian students). I do this not out of a silly self-indulgence but to alert you to what may on my part be a certain blindness to parts of McCarney’s work. McCarney’s Marxism, as I have remarked, is an Hegelian one and, as far as I can make out, a deeply informed one. But for me as an analytic philosopher (though also a rather atypically formed as well by pragmatism), Hegel as well as Heidegger, Derrida, Althusser, and Adorno (except when he writes with Horkheimer) are black boxes. But I am not a Searle. I do not say they are black boxes for me with either arrogance or pride. I just can make little out of them except for a few striking sayings, e.g., ‘Philosophy is our time held in thought’ (Hegel) or ‘After Auschwitz moral philosophy is impossible’ (Adorno) or ‘We cannot overleap history’ (Hegel again). I am tempted to say I can make nothing of them, but that would be an exaggeration. But I find them very opaque. I think that if anyone is going to write as they did I am not going to read them. They may have some deep and sound things to say but they wrapped them in wool and they have to be painstakingly unwrapped (Findlay 1958; 1964). There are many others who write in reasonably accessible ways that also have some deep and sound things to say, e.g., Hobbes, Hume, Wittgenstein, Rawls, and G. A. Cohen. If some commentators of

the above to me offending collection of philosophers could show me that there was something insightful there that is not otherwise available, then the effort to come to grips with them might be well worth it. But commentators either fail to do so or in interpreting them write intelligible things that other aficionados of these to me offending philosophers claim to be oversimplified and to have missed the deepest insight of their heroes' thought. So I remain stuck. All that aside, it seems to me that the way these allegedly deep and insightful philosophers write violates every norm of what good philosophy and good reasoning or reflective thought should respect. It is hard for me to resist the thought, to echo Wittgenstein, that what can be said can be said plainly and reasonably clearly and what cannot should be passed over in silence

I have also read McCarney's writings on Hegel and I can see from them that Hegel is not at all the buffoon that I took him to be as a smart-assed undergraduate. I thought as did many of my fellow students that Hegel was the guy who said the real was the rational and the rational was the real and that the Prussian state was the best thing since white truffles. The last was just ignorance on our part. McCarney has shown (as have others) how crudely false that is. Moreover, Hegel was anything but an uncritical statist; and to call him a reactionary reveals extensive ignorance of his writings. Moreover, he was not uncritical of the Prussian state or of other authoritarian states. For him freedom, including political freedom, was of paramount importance. Here he had complicated and nuanced views though, after his youth, in some ways his views were deeply conservative, though not reactionary. He was like Michael Oakshott, not George W. Bush.

As for the rational is the real and real is the rational, McCarney in several places has made a painstaking and careful interpretation of it (McCarney 2000, 96-9, 189, 194, 214-17; 2007, 225-35). While what he says is not entirely satisfactory to me, he has at least given us something that, surface appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, is not implausible let alone irrational to say or even a Panglosian optimistic thing to say. Indeed (to me at least) it challenges without being convincing. If I were 20 or perhaps even 30 with some of the understanding I have now, and I were

to start again in philosophy, I would try seriously to study Hegel. But not at the expense of many of the philosophers I have studied, e.g., Hobbes, Hume, Rawls, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Charles Stevenson, and Axel Hägerström. But there are other things I could have well done without, e.g., Alonzo Church on logic and Roderick Chisholm or H. H. Price on perception come readily to mind or Alvin Plantinga on God and modal logic. But it is not because those philosophers were obscure. *Perhaps* this attitude of mine is just a matter of the contingency of interests. Different people are interested in different things. But this was not at all the case with the for me 'black box' philosophers I have mentioned. Many of their interests are mine. It is their way of doing philosophy that is so off putting to me. Still, there *may* be a lot more to Hegel than what meets my eye, or indeed the eye.

However, given my formation, I remain blocked about him. What formed me not only blinds me to Hegel but made me (and still makes me) anti-Hegelian. This blocking formation (a distinctive philosophical enculturation with a certain vintage) was the following: First, pragmatism (though it is important to remember that Dewey—the pragmatist who influenced me the most—wrote his PhD dissertation on Hegel and was initially a Hegelian), logical positivism along with Charles Stevenson and Axel Hägerström on ethics, Pascal, Kierkegaard and Feuerbach (perhaps these three are in synch with the others), ordinary language philosophy, Wittgenstein, Austin, and the early Cavell, Rawls and Hart and later—indeed too much so—Quine and Davidson (very much Davidson) and still later Rorty and to some extent Putnam. This mix—some might think it a lethal cocktail for me—and my utilizing of these diverse influences in forging my own ideas made of me a fallibilist, a non-Hegelian holist, a non-Hegelian historicist, a finitist (not a relativist or subjectivist), a contextualist, a perspectivist, an anti-essentialist and what Peirce called a critical commonsensist, something that not only linked me to Peirce but to certain parts of Moore. (The role that Marx played in this will be discussed later.)

I do not mean to suggest that I at all adequately portray much of my thought or its orientation by rattling off such matters all subject to various understandings and misunderstandings. It certainly cannot replace hard thought and in describing such a development in some ways explaining and detailing what I have said above. And indeed in some ways justifying it. I agree with Hilary Putnam's remark that any philosophy that can be put in a nutshell belongs in a nutshell. I have no time and it is not the appropriate occasion to articulate my own thinking here: to provide the necessary rationale, exposition and justification. I only rattle off these items to attempt to give you some sense of where I am coming from so that you can at least grasp some of the causes of why I am so blocked by McCarney's *Hegelian* Marxism and more generally by Hegelian thought.

However, I am sure that McCarney and I would be on the same side of the barricades and I think that is the most important thing (more on this later). Moreover, we both see ourselves as and are Marxists and scientific socialists. What divides us is Hegel and his (and indeed Marx's as well) dialectical thinking and cosmic holism replete with cosmic teleological explanations and whether to have a sympathy with the conviction on McCarney's part that there is something called ontology that is believed by him as being essential in trying to get a proper grip on history, society and political and economic life and how we should proceed philosophically.<sup>3</sup> He thinks things I have just mentioned are vital for our philosophical understanding and with that vital for our understanding of socialism; but I think they are free spinning wheels that turn no machinery. Ontology, metaphysics and something called dialectical method are all, McCarney believes, essential to Marxism and to a proper understanding of socialism. I think there is incoherence here or at best matters that can be and should be benignly set aside as useless for the theory and practice of socialism, including, of course, a revolutionary socialism. I believe that we can and should do our Marxian thinking without such ontological and dialectical baggage. We should, that is, travel philosophically light. This inclines me toward analytical Marxism, though not to the rational-choice

theory or the methodological individualist theory branch of analytical Marxism (Kumar 2008, 185-211).<sup>4</sup> Like both Andrew Levine and Joseph McCarney being a Marxist or, as I would prefer to call it being a Marxian (on analogy with being a Darwinian rather than being a Darwinist), I defend a scientific socialism and not what has come to be called an ethical socialism or, as Marx and Engels called it, a utopian socialism. (But I do not deny that scientific socialism has a normative aspect but I also believe its scientificity is absolutely essential.)

Analytical Marxism, that is, should be both scientific and normative and indeed should also have in the background a moral point of view (Cohen 1996; Nielsen 1989). But analytical Marxism, Levine argues, threatens to self-destruct, collapsing into ethical (utopian) socialism. And in doing so, he claims, it gives us an analytic version of what Western Marxism generally has become and in doing so collapses even further into liberalism (Levine 2003, 122-66). But this does not square with G. A. Cohen's unequivocal remark "I did not say that liberal egalitarianism carries Marxism's normative commitment. Liberals do not believe that capitalism is a system of exploitation which should be overthrown in favor of a socialist society which is both possible and desirable. I believe all that, which certainly distinguishes my normative comments from liberals'..." (Cohen 1996, 13).

However, what is to count as 'scientific' is contested and scientific socialism, as it was *characterized* by the Soviets and the Second and Third Internationales and somewhat differently by Althusser was a joke. Scientific socialism characterized as it is either by Levine and his collaborators or by McCarney is not a joke (Levine *et al.*, 1992). But they do characterize it *differently* than did the Marxists of the Second and Third Internationales. Yet Levine and McCarney do not agree on the proper characterization of its scientificity either. But both think, as I do, that it is essential that socialism be genuinely scientific. But they do not agree concerning what counts as 'genuinely scientific'. (I will return to that later.)

Given what I have said about my philosophical orientation (e.g., its fallibilism, historicism, holism, perspectivism, etc.), I could not possibly accept Hegel's claim (and supposedly Marx's as

well) that (as Hegel puts it) the sole aim of philosophical inquiry is “to eliminate the contingent” (McCarney 2000, 163). I think it is fair enough to recognize, if one drops ‘sole’ and ‘aim’, that this conception has been a part of the rationalist philosophical tradition and has even wider coinage in philosophy. There is a deep urge among philosophers to go on what Dewey called the quest for certainty and, where they become convinced that that cannot be had, to go into a deep scepticism. The pragmatists—most prominently Dewey—gave up this quest and sought, without dismay or philosophical nostalgia or *angst*, to live with a thorough acceptance of the inescapability of contingency. Moreover, they had no tendency to slip into scepticism and this is importantly true as well of Rawls, Quine, Rorty, and Davidson. They would simply take contingency as pervasive and inescapable. That they take to be obvious. Wittgenstein takes it with *angst* and Rorty *happily*. Both attempt to theraphize away the very idea that there is any coherent alternative to contingency. Contemporary tough-minded philosophical sensibilities have, or so I believe, no room for non-contingency. *Some* may be a bit nostalgic about that. Others will, thinking it a good thing too, sometimes glorying in it—Quine for example—or at least welcome it as an intellectual step forward. Not so Hegel, Marx, McCarney or even in some ways Levine. They still see it as essential and a crucial aim of philosophy, to eliminate the contingent. Non-contingency—some kind of ontology—underpins Hegel’s claim (accepted by Marx) “that world history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom” and that this is the “progress we must come to know” in its necessity (McCarney 2000, 169). Moreover, it partially explains their optimism that the rational will come in time to be; to be that is an actuality.<sup>5</sup> I share the rather common scepticism about such cosmic optimism while remaining steadfastly and robustly socialist and Marxian. But mine is a *Marxianism without guarantees*.

With the eliminating of contingency, *assuming* it can be done or even intelligibly conceived, it will perhaps still be possible to make sense of and see the warrant for McCarney’s key claim that history has an ‘internal necessity’ which “originates in causes inherent in the material itself, in some

imminent power binding its successive moments” (McCarney 2000, 162-63). McCarney goes on to say: “This is the necessity that belongs to what Hegel standardly refers to...as the dialectical movement... [where] history may be conceived as an internally necessary, dialectical progress” (McCarney 2000, 167). (See how Levine handles that without the dialectic. Levine 2003, 145-54.)

This is all (unfortunately I believe) accepted by Marx and by Hegelian Marxists (including McCarney). It is best articulated, they take it, by the dialectical method, a method common to Hegel and Marx and distinct from the methodology of our standard scientific culture. But I, like the other analytical Marxists or pragmatist Marxists, have difficulties, to put it mildly, with the dialectical method, and with its cosmic claims. I shall set them out in the next section.

I now want to remark that it is the *manner* and perhaps not (or at least I hope not) the *matter* that bugs me. The manner is at times so obscure—or at least I find it so—that I become completely alienated from such a way of proceeding. Hegel is said to be some sort of historicist, but no historicist, at least as I take the notion, would or could consistently speak of the Absolute, absolute knowledge, the ultimate grounding of things, of totality or of reason just flat out, though they do speak of rationality or reasonableness or intelligence (Dewey’s favorite phrase)—something that people (individuals) can be or have and collective agents can have. By ‘collective agents’ I refer here to peoples who make up a state, nation, class, community and the like at some determinate time and place. But historicists of my sort would not speak—hypothesizing and reifying it—of reason in history (or for that matter unreason in history) or of reason as driving history or peoples or nations, enabling them to grasp the goal or the end of history. History cannot have a goal though individual people and collective agents can. But history is not a collective agent or any kind of agent. And reason is not a collective agent—or any kind of agent—and it cannot have a goal or an end, except as a termination. It makes no sense to say these Hegelian things. Rational and reasonable agents (though not only them) can have an end in both the sense of a goal and a terminus, though not in the same sense of ‘end’. History for them, taken as individuals, has a

terminus: this happens when they die or grow so incapacitated that they are permanently no longer capable of thought at all. And human history has a terminus. (Someday human life will die out.) But it cannot have a goal—an end to be aimed at. History cannot aim at anything.

People can come to recognize that they have class interests and that they are agents whose intentions are deeply conditioned by their history and their class. They can also realize that they can act together as members of that class. They can, as a class, act just as we say corporations can act, though with a different set of interests. Where they are members of the dominated class, people can, though it is typically as a matter of struggle and fighting off an imposed ideology, understand and realize something of their class interests and come to understand that in a socialist society they would be realized more fully. But this is not something reason or the rule of reason so hypothesized and reified can achieve or fail to achieve any more than it can march through history. Indeed reason cannot march at all or rule at all except in the sense that people can come to govern themselves more rationally, intelligently and reasonably. If we want to call this latter ‘the rule of reason’ we can, but this way of talking runs the risk of obscurantism and reification.

We do not understand what is being said when it is said the ‘pure idea’ is dialectical or what it is to have a historical teleology or what it is to speak of the cosmic spirit or of the cosmic idea or of absolute knowledge yielding the whole truth or what it is for history to have a *telos*. We do not understand what it is for there to be *purposiveness without purposers*. We have only a dim understanding of what it is to say ‘World history in general is the exposition of spirit in time’ or ‘the Idea is the proper philosophical meaning of reason’. Such sentences frequently occur in Hegel. And these sentences, to understate it, certainly do not wear their meaning on their sleeves. All of them are opaque. Some of them are very opaque. Indeed, they may be nonsensical—not obvious nonsense as ‘Blair sleeps faster than Brown’ (which anyone who knows English knows to be nonsense except when seen as something like a metaphor). The Hegelian sentences are instead

disguised nonsense which leaves us at sea with the sense for some of us (not for me) that there may be something deep here to grasp. (Remember Stanley Cavell.)

However, is it also not unreasonable to ask someone with the relevant expertise (say, a scholar of Hegel or Plotinus) to elucidate such remarks making plain or at least plainer the meaning they have for the author they are commenting on? When I say that 'Blair sleeps faster than Brown' has no meaning, I recognize that we could always *stipulate* a meaning. 'Sleeps faster', for example, could be taken as metaphorical for 'wakes earlier rested'. An author can do that with his own work (though sometimes it is a cheap way out in philosophy) but a commentator cannot. *Stipulations are not elucidations*. Hegel seldom (if ever) does much in the way of elucidation with his obscure remarks and McCarney does not do much of that either in elucidating or paraphrasing them or even in attempting to show their rationale. But they often are remarks that McCarney takes to be central in Hegel's account. And they cry out for elucidation. But we do not get it, either from Hegel himself or from McCarney.

Still, McCarney for the most part does a good job, as far as I can ascertain, at explaining Hegel. However, at key points his account often affects the reader analogously to the experience of looking up a word she doesn't know in the dictionary and finding it defined in terms of another word she doesn't understand and then finds herself continuing around in the dictionary lost, the same thing being repeated. Take, for example, Hegel's term 'reason' that unlike 'rationality' or 'reasonably' or 'intelligently' is a term we do not understand well if at all particularly in Hegel's work. And given our knowledge of the history of philosophy, we might well be suspicious. But McCarney doesn't explain such troubling terms by any clearer terms or give us, translating into the concrete, a context where the uses of these terms are reasonably clear and point to what McCarney takes to be Hegel's meaning.

Sometimes it is fruitful and not just a positivist dogma to ask for truth conditions or assertability conditions, the testability (confirmability or infirmability) of a putatively factual

candidate for a truth apt claim (Sober 1999; Nielsen 2008). I take it that the Hegelian sentences made above are those sorts of claims. But do we have the faintest idea of how to confirm or infirm them? I think not. Nor are they disguised conceptual truths like ‘What is eternal cannot not exist’ whose truth we can in our armchairs either easily or with some difficulty ascertain. We can, that is, ascertain the truth or falsity of them by reflecting on their use in our language or their lack of use in our language. But when we try to do this with Hegel’s puzzling remarks we usually come up with a blank. They are like a lot of theology is (Nielsen 2008).

#### IV

So it is plainly Hegelian Marxism—what Levine calls historicist Marxism—and not Marxianism *sans phrase* that I want to reject. I had originally intended to try to show how we could ‘translate’ or ‘decode’ the Hegelian side of McCarney’s thought and thereby show how McCarney could say everything he wanted to say without his Hegelianism. But I can’t do that for I would first have to understand these Hegelian matters well enough to decode, translate or rationally reconstruct them. I can’t for I find them at best too obscure to make anything intelligible out of them and I think that is Hegel’s fault, not mine. Of course, the shoe may be on the other foot. The fault may be mine. But I wonder? McCarney, when not on a Hegelian dialectical key, writes and argues clearly, forcefully, and often convincingly. But when he talks Hegelish, this (for me at least) is not so. Why does Hegel express things so obscurely? If he *must* it would be of help if someone would explain why. If it is not necessary then it should be possible to put Hegel’s claims less obscurely.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than following this out I want instead to turn to a further examination of where McCarney’s work has turned my head around, or largely so, and to push the elucidation (perhaps it is a rational reconstruction) a little further to reveal something of its importance and to see if it requires a Hegelian or somewhat Hegelian turn.

But first I want to briefly say something different that may shock. I do not take Marx as a philosopher. Or, if you insist on stressing that side of him, a side he genuinely had (his degree, after all, was in philosophy), I would respond by saying he was a bad philosopher, philosophically formed in an unfortunately philosophical environment by an unfortunate philosophical tradition. I prick my graduate philosophy students and advanced majors a bit—but what I prick them with is what I really think—by saying that Marx was better than a philosopher. He was incredibly all the following rolled into one: a revolutionary, a theorist of revolution, a sociologist, a critic of political economy, an economist, a great economic historian, more broadly a historian, and a radical public intellectual. In short, Marx was a social scientist and a public intellectual forging a scientific socialism and not a utopian one—though this did not keep him from having a vision of how life should be and powerful moral convictions motivating him, his anti-moralism notwithstanding (Nielsen 1988). He did not *just* want to describe, interpret, explain the world, or certain salient parts of the world, accurately and perspicuously. He had, and compellingly, a practical intent as well. He wanted to change the world in certain determinate ways, but not without understanding it. And he wanted to change it in the light of his understanding. This is why I dubbed his social science an emancipatory social science. But, for it to be a science at all, he had to describe, interpret, and explain the portions of the world he turned his attention to as accurately and perspicuously as possible. He was not a Luddite out to change the world without bothering to try to understand it.

With one exception, in my view an unfortunate one, Marx's central canonical conceptions were social science conceptions and not philosophical ones. Consider the things that make him a towering intellectual giant: his historical materialism, his class theory and theory of class conflict and class contradiction, his labor theory of value and account of exploitation derived from it, his account of how capitalism will collapse and his conception of how without economic democracy political democracy fails yielding in our times a plutocracy. The only exception was his conception of dialectics. That is a methodological conception and as well, as McCarney and many others

mysteriously have it, an ontological doctrine. It is these last two conceptions—or so I would argue, perhaps mistakenly—that is of problematic intelligibility and does more harm than good to Marxist thought and practice. And they are his distinctively *philosophical* conceptions. What they set out, though in an incredibly cumbersome and obscure way, is a methodological directive about how we should try to understand the world. If it only came to telling us to view events diachronically as well as synchronically and in doing so to pay careful attention to their history, noting how it reveals class conflicts and noting their effects and the dynamism of such matters, then his dialectics would not take us down the garden path. His account would be empirical and broadly scientific in a standard sense and not lean on the philosophy of history or require an ontology of history or an ontological dialectics, whatever (if anything) those things mean.

All accounts of history are interpretive. We cannot treat history as if it were a grocery list. What we need, at least for a Marxian account, is good scientific theory, something that will make observations, theory-laden as they or at least certain crucial ones will be. Being so, there will be a not inconsiderable number of theoretical accounts that will be equally compatible with the available evidence. We need evidence, of course, to have a scientific theory. We cannot just make up scientific theory out of nothing. But by itself the evidence will never be decisive in determining the warranted assertability of a theory and Marxian theory is no exception. What we do not need is a *philosophical* theory of history: a set of speculative claims without empirical constraints. We need instead causal explanations grounded in observations theoretically arranged. We need to have in giving historical accounts causal explanations of what has been described. ('Linear causation' if you must.) They may be functional ones but to have scientific creditability they must also be straightforwardly causal. Functional explanations that are not also causal are just arm waving.

The dialectical method does not meet such scientific criteria and cannot be a grounding for historical accounts and narratives or a method to be followed in giving such accounts or narratives. It is a philosophical theory alright, but an ontological or metaphysical one up for Wittgensteinian

therapeutic dissolution. If we, Wittgenstein to the contrary notwithstanding, are stuck with a dialectical method of describing things, it will be a method of describing which is cumbersome and useless at best. It is better if it is dropped from the Marxist canon.

I think McCarney has well shown how deeply Hegelian Marx was. I think that in doing this he has given us a painstaking and excellent exegesis, intellectual historians should be grateful to him. (I do not sniff at intellectual history, though I do not practice it myself.) Like McCarney and Levine as well, I am interested, as of course Marx was, in pushing the socialist project along. In trying to help sustain it and develop it. Even though in these days its present prospect is bleak, I am, as McCarney and Levine are as well, concerned to help establish it as a sound scientific social theory that will be, directly or indirectly, of use to the struggling masses if some come on stream. I want to be one of the spokespersons for these masses or, as McCarney put it, their mouthpiece. To put it just this way is, while I think correct and Marxian, nevertheless it is still in some ways worrisome and perhaps unfortunate. Are we to become the propagandists and 'sweet singers' for the causes of the masses? Are we to become a kind of secular preacher? This, of course, must be avoided. We must instead both serve them *and* keep our critical faculties, intellectual integrity and seek to develop an emancipatory social science on sound scientific grounds. Indeed, that is the only way we Marxian intellectuals can properly serve the masses. But are we again to become critical theorists (something that McCarney well criticizes)? Are we to tell the masses what their needs really are and what they must do? We can and should, particularly when our place in the division of labor has given us some at least putative insight in such contexts, tell our comrades what we think and why. But we certainly must not become a kind of Grand Inquisitor propagating a royal lie or something that could not withstand critical attention. That is plainly something we must not do and not just because it is patronizing, arrogant and dishonest. We must still say what we honestly think and try to justify it. But if our comrades think otherwise, then, after discussion and a vote, if we are defeated we must still stand unequivocally with them or, where there is no chance of voting, do

something that is a near equivalent expressing our own beliefs but also showing respect for and solidarity with our comrades. Where we can, and that is what they wish, we must serve as one of their spokespersons, though we should not crucify our intellects in doing so. We should not say that the policy adopted is the policy we personally think is best to adopt. Though we should not go out of our way to express our dissent we should, if asked, say what we honestly think—we should also say that the policy adopted has been democratically decided on and that is the one we—the cadres—should support. But, if asked, we should say it is not the policy that we personally think best. When rebuffed in this democratic way, we must not take our marbles and go home no matter what our misgivings. Sometimes it can be tragic for ourselves and our comrades. Rosa Luxemburg so acted in solidarity with a policy concerning which she disagreed with that her comrades had voted to accept, though not without her dissenting vote, and acting on this policy resulted in her death and the crushing of the movement of which she was a part. Still, this is a lesson in democratic centralism or, if you will, democracy. When a workers' council (what the Russian Communists called 'a soviet') of which we are a part democratically decides on something, we must go along with it unless it violates some very fundamental human rights not in conflict with other equally fundamental human rights. (Where such rights conflict we have what is indeed a tragic situation. Don't say they never do.) One who does not understand that does not understand what collective action comes to or its rationale and does not understand what it is to be democratic.

McCarney may well be right: a scientific socialism will not, as I thought for most of my life, be a critical theory of society. It will be a scientific social theory which will be emancipatory in another way. It will not tell the mass of people what their needs are, or really are, but will help them to recognize what these human needs are and also help them and ourselves to see what their and our needs are behind their alienated form. But—and there is a fine line to draw here—this should not come finally to on the part of intellectuals just a *telling to* but our role as public intellectuals could help us and our comrades to see, for example, what our consumerist orientation,

so dear and so necessary for capitalism, does to us. People can come to see that shopping until they drop is not a way of meeting their genuine needs or is a way to live nor is going into a cycle of painful indebtedness because we just come compulsively to feel we need more things and can't keep our credit cards in our pockets. They will see, and we will see, that there is no need or point or lasting satisfaction in satisfying those media-instilled artificial needs and in seeing this they may come to begin to see that we need a very different kind of society than a capitalist one. They, and we, may come to have a better understanding of a realized or self-fulfilling life. We may thus come to see what an emancipatory thrust is for them and for us.

However, we do not need moral theory or any kind of philosophical theory or moralizing for that (Nielsen 2009). Rather, we need a talking straight—as difficult as that is—about what our lives are like and what they could be like. And that an emancipatory social science will endeavor to do. But we must not turn our social science into what Max Weber detested, namely, a *moralizing* social science. That would be a pseudo-science. But we must also remember (*pace* Weber) that we can't have a normatively neutral social science either if it is to be emancipatory or even *adequately descriptive and interpretive*. We can't have it anyway given the blending of the descriptive and the evaluative in our everyday discourse (Putnam 2002, 28-45). Also 'emancipatory', of course, is not a normatively neutral word. This poses a problem for us that McCarney helps us resolve. I want to follow how he does it out and give it my own twist.

McCarney comes to grips with this in several places as I have indicated. I shall now concentrate on his "An Emancipatory Science of Society" (McCarney 2007. See also Nielsen 2007). McCarney correctly remarks that Marx "rather conspicuously fails to characterize his own work as a critique of capitalism, or of society more generally, though such a form of description was readily available to him" (McCarney 2007, 226). McCarney, again correctly, goes on to remark:

The situation is even more troubling than this suggests. For we encounter not just silence in this area but a systematic hostility toward the kind of evaluative or normative language that seems indispensable for any social critique. This hostility is most marked in the case of

moral evaluation in particular but the point holds quite generally. The attitude in question may readily be illustrated from all phases of Marx's intellectual career. Thus, quite early in it he asserts that "the communists do not preach *morality* at all," and that the rise of their views "shattered the basis of all morality." At the other end he attacks the "ideological nonsense about right and other trash so common among the democrats and French socialists." The young Marx insists that communism "is not an *ideal* to which reality would have to adjust itself but rather the real movement that abolishes the present state of things." Many years later he assures us that "the workers have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant." It would be easy but scarcely fruitful to multiply such declarations. The lesson they enforce is in any case very widely recognized. It is that whenever Marx addresses in any self-conscious way the question of the theoretical needs of the workers' movement, and, by implication, the character of his own theoretical contribution to that movement, his chief concern is to repudiate any moral, or more generally normative, dimension. This kind of consistency has surely to be respected (McCarney 2007, 226).

Marx, as we have seen, realizes that what is ideological is meant to serve the interests of one or another class or classes. He does not limit ideology to serving the capitalists, landowners, and feudal lords. Socialists and Communists have ideologies too. But an ideology *may* have *no cognitive defect* (*pace* what is generally thought). Science—genuine science—may also be ideological. Marx treats classical political economy as having both an ideological and scientific character and being none the worse for that. David Ricardo is portrayed by Marx as at the one and the same time "a great scientist and a pillar of bourgeois ideology" (McCarney 2007, 227). McCarney sees ideology—all ideology—as answering to class interests, or at least trying to. And it answers to class interests most paradigmatically by having a *legitimizing* role in a society. It attempts to confer "legitimacy on the social practices and institutions that constitute those interests and denying it to whatever is opposed to them" (McCarney 2007, 228). But this legitimating operation, Marx recognizes, is a normative one. But Marx insists that his own work cannot be normative for he has explicitly repudiated in his theoretical work the taking of a normative approach or stance (Nielsen 1988).

This raises a puzzle about Marx's work. How could he have thought of it consistently and coherently as "having a practical significance without being a critical evaluation of its object" (McCarney 2007, 228)? It is not unreasonable for people to think the very idea is oxymoronic. It is natural to think that 'emancipatory but not normative' is contradiction in terms. Moreover, if

ideology crucially has a legitimating role and if, as Marx has it, that is a normative one, how could an *emancipatory* social science avoid it?

McCarney, going against the grain, argues that it is not oxymoronic and that Marx's way of viewing things has a good claim to being correct. Here Marx, McCarney has it, owes a debt to Hegel. McCarney claims "that a certain conception of the theory-practice relationship constitutes the core of his [Marx's] Hegelianism and embodies the sense in which he remains all his life a faithful Hegelian" (McCarney 2007, 228).

What is this conception and how plausible is it? First note what *may* be simply a personal idiosyncrasy of both Hegel and Marx but one which McCarney claims turns out to have a significant theoretical ground. Both had a kind of aristocratic disdain for the habit of complaining and fault-finding, of despising the world and retreating into idealistic dreams. They had a kind of proto-Nietzschean antipathy towards the spirit of criticism in the sense of negative evaluation. The kind of criticism, as Marx put it in *Capital*, "that knows how to judge and condemn the present but not how to comprehend it" (Marx 1976, 174). This betokens an inability on the part of these critics to do justice to the situation at hand. It is a failure of insight that never gets to the heart of the matter. Scientific understanding requires a deep and probing understanding of the matter being inquired into. (Indeed that may be a grammatical remark in Wittgenstein's specialized sense.)

But with the *Wissenschaft*-ish way of characterizing science in the manner in which McCarney does, he goes on to characterize the dialectical character of such a science. If in his judgment science is to be properly done in such contexts it must be a dialectical scientific theory, a *Wissenschaft*ish way "insofar as it surrenders to the life of its object and seeks to bring that life into the life of consciousness" (McCarney 2007, 246). But this science, whether aptly described or not, is not normative. We "must not seek to supply a normative commentary [Hegel has it] but to mediate the stages of the life of the object" (McCarney 2007, 230). Marx, McCarney continues, thoroughly grasped, ingested and clearly expressed that side of Hegel's dialectic and had himself such a

conception of science. This made for him the very idea of critique very different than the one usually accepted and practiced.

In Marx's 'critique of critical criticism', as Marx called it, he employs this Hegelian conception of what he regards as a genuine dialectical science. Let's try to see what this comes to by proceeding indirectly. McCarney, quoting Marx, contends that the "proletariat is necessarily driven to rebellion by the contradictions of its existence. But it is not a question of what a particular proletarian or even the whole of the proletariat regards as the proletariat's aim" (McCarney 2007, 230). Rather, as Marx puts it, it "is a question of *what the proletariat* is, and what in accordance with this being it will historically be compelled to do" (McCarney 2007, 230). Marx views all this—the very condition of the proletariat—as somehow historically necessary. In fact, his talk here sounds very essentialist and perhaps Marx was in this sense an essentialist. McCarney obscurely claims it has an ontological necessity. Ontological or not, he is taking it as historically necessary: as something, whether we like it or not, that will just come to be. With this necessitation (or supposed necessitation) of what the proletariat's condition of life is, then, if it is so understood, it is easy to understand why someone who believes it, as Marx did, will reject, and rationally so, moralistic beliefs in that domain. What is the use of saying that something ought to be different when it can't be otherwise? If such necessitation obtains, ought-talk is without sense or at least application. It has no practical use.

What is needed instead is a "certain cognitive achievement on the part of the proletariat, its becoming aware of its own nature and the nature of the situation in which it finds itself" (McCarney 2007, 230) and then for it to act in accordance with this recognition and to hurry along the inevitable, which is also emancipatory for the proletariat—the vast mass of the people including what was called the *lumpen proletariat* and now is more commonly called the rest of the underclass.

I have argued that the necessities that Marx portrays are, if necessities at all, *empirical* necessities—empirical in their logical status like all human beings are mortal or all sugar dissolves

in water. They are neither logical necessities nor ‘ontological necessities’ but rather deeply entrenched empirical necessities. Indeed, they are historical empirical necessities—or, more accurately, candidate ones which may actually be empirical necessities (Nielsen 2007).

Still, recognizing they are such necessities or purported necessities, we should also realize that it is pointless to make a moral or any kind of normative critique of them. It is too much like making a moral critique of the fact that we must die. The thing to do, as both Hegel and Marx argue, is to try to understand why these historical necessities (if they really are empirical necessities) are necessary and how this will play out in our social lives and with what effects. Moral theory or moral critique and a critical theory of society is at best an irrelevancy in such a situation and at worst an encumbrance. Of course, this claim could and should be challenged as to whether, empirical or not, these claimed Marxian necessities are necessities at all. But this is to challenge, perhaps legitimately, a key part of the classical Marxian framework itself. Again, this can and should be done, but this is not to imply or to give to understand that it can be done successfully. And it is not—directly at least—a moral challenge. And this last point is the most central consideration here.

However, as McCarney notes, this is exactly what Western Marxists and analytical Marxists do. They have critically examined classical Marxism and in the light of that have given up on the revolutionary role of the proletariat. It is not, they claim, the agency that will lead us to a change in the productive forces and the productive relations in such a way that it will lead to socialism. Even more broadly, they will deny, as Levine denies, that there is any longer a proletariat or say, as McCarney says, that there is a proletariat but, following István Mészáros, that it is a fragmented and divided one (more on this later). This, of course, is a different problem than the more exegetically internal theory-practice problem we discussed above. But if there is no proletariat or no proletariat like the old industrial proletariat that can and will carry out the transformation from capitalism to socialism, still McCarney’s turn—and I have come to follow him here—is to make the non-

normative move that I have just described as the only kind of critique available to those making Marxian assumptions. (Whether those assumptions should be made is still another matter.)<sup>7</sup>

What McCarney has been talking about in articulating an account of how a practically oriented emancipatory theory can and should be non-normative is on the mark only if the necessities that he and I (following Marx) claim to be necessities really are necessities. But if there is no proletariat (no working class that is *in* but not *of* the society in which they are enmeshed) or no working class that will become revolutionary, then McCarney's solution is merely one for another possible world where such necessities obtain. But it is intended not as philosophical speculation but as a real world solution. But, true or false, it shows us, in a logically coherent way, how an emancipatory theory could be, and should be, *if certain conditions obtain*, emancipatory without being normative. My problem here is that there are no adequately good reasons for thinking those conditions obtain: that those alleged necessities, claimed empirical necessities or otherwise necessities, obtain.

## V

This leads us to a consideration of that matter. I think, like Levine, that the most important challenge to Marxians (analytical or not) is to face this ramified challenge concerning the proletariat, or, *sans* the proletariat, what else can take us (if anything can) to socialism. It is to this problem that I now turn.

Levine correctly sees this problem as one of great significance for the future of Marxism. He introduces this problem as follows:

It was the idea, also consistent with mainstream thinking, that the working class, the agent of radical social transformation in traditional socialist theory, had become 'integrated' into the existing order. Partly thanks to victories won by the labor movement, and partly due to changes in the nature of work itself, it had *dropped in* – inserting itself into the existing order, thereby gaining a stake in its perpetuation. That the working class in the West was not revolutionary was beyond dispute. For all but the most doctrinaire, it was no longer even, strictly speaking, a proletariat, a class with 'nothing to lost but its chains'. As

remarked, this stubborn fact posed a challenge to the socialist project, and especially to Marxism. It rendered the notion that the agent of social change must be in civil society but not of it – that, like the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution, it must take control at a political level of a society it already effectively constitutes – increasingly untenable. In these circumstances, the move that Marcuse and others made was a last desperate attempt at finding a revolutionary agent in Western societies. If the existing order no longer produced its own ‘gravediggers’ in the way that Marx thought it did, then its gravediggers must be willed into being. Otherwise, an indefinite capitalist future awaits – a future of totalitarian repression, if all goes badly, or of ‘the American dream’ turned nightmare, if all goes better; of barbarism or inauthenticity and pervasive alienation (Levine 2003, 54-5).

A few pages later Levine asks, “How much of ‘classical’ Marxism can survive the absence of a genuine proletariat” (Levine 2003, 60)? Without such a proletariat—a proletariat that is a class *in* civil society and *not* of it—is there any hope of so transforming society and moving to socialism? Levine remarks, “The New Left effectively accepted the fact of the proletariat’s absence, but without relinquishing the revolutionary impulse emblematic of the socialist tradition, and without giving up other socialist goals either” (Levine 2003, 60). Herbert Marcuse is the central and paradigmatic intellectual figure here. Levine remarks of the New Left that its efforts were “based mostly on wishful thinking and were ultimately in vain” (Levine 2003, 60). The New Left apart, is it the case that absent *such* a proletariat—*such* a working class—that the task of establishing socialism is in vain?

However, before we turn to that crucial question I cite two more comments from Levine to round out his thinking about the proletariat. He says of both analytical Marxists and Althusserian ones, both coming after Hegelian historicist Marxism—the Marxism that is clearly the continuator of Classical Marxism—that “they were...accommodations to a world without a proletariat or its functional equivalent—without agents with interests and capacities sufficient for constructing a socialist and then communist order” (Levine 2003, 72). He says later in his *A Future for Marxism?* that “both historicist and Althusserian Marxists had to grapple with the problems caused by the all-too-evident loss of an agent” (Levine 2003, 119-20). Levine adds, “If a proletariat had ever existed

in the way that Marx and his immediate co-thinkers envisioned, by the mid-twentieth century it was gone” (Levine 2003, 120).

A working class, of course, exists and neither McCarney nor Levine is going to deny that. It would be idiotic to do so. There are a great mass of people, the vast majority of people, who own little or no means of production—certainly not enough to live on—and they must and do sell (when they can) their labor on a capitalist labor market. But just from this, which defines the working class, they are, as Levine clearly shows, still not a proletariat in the sense that Marx had in mind. To be what Marx and Marxists mean by a proletariat they must also be, as we have seen, *in* but not *of* capitalist society. That is the proletariat that at least seems to have disappeared and it was a proletariat that was crucial for achieving socialism.

The working class, as McCarney argues, is fragmented and large remnants of it, perhaps all of it, has been integrated in one way or another into the capitalist order. Most working class people now at least in the North have some stock in capitalist society. (I don’t mean by this that they have stocks.) They no longer have nothing to lose but their chains. They may lose their houses or jobs. Moreover, to return to the notion of their fragmentation, within the working class, the number of industrial workers—those among workers the best situated to carry through a revolution—has declined and the number of service workers has increased and there is as well an increasing number of agricultural workers, now increasingly relieved of any individual ownership of the land they work on. These different workers often have different interests—interests that sometimes conflict. It is not easy for them to merge into workers forming a common front. This is even more evident between workers in the North and the South. And globalizing capitalism exacerbates that. Capitalists can and do move many of their factories to the much lower wage regions in the South. The North, of course, then, as far as workers are concerned, loses them. This goes with good capitalist rationality. Capitalists, as always, go on seeking to maximize their profit or at least what they take to be their secure profit, though, as we are now seeing with what has been called ‘disaster

capitalism', sometimes greed gets the best of them. Our increasingly global capital with its multi-nationals and trans-nationals greatly facilitates this. Workers in the North fear, and not without reason, losing their jobs to what now are potential workers in the South while these potential workers in the South are desperate to get jobs. They are in many respects like the reserve industrial army of times past. Moreover, with capital going increasingly global with globalization, the many worldwide different and conflicting ethnicities are making for increasing and often violent conflicts *within* the working class itself. This militates against working class solidarity. Often their nation, religion or ethnicity takes precedence in their minds over their class. For all these reasons it would seem that the proletariat—a class (to repeat) in capitalist society but not of capitalist society—has disappeared and an alternative transformative trajectory is not clearly on the horizon. Some would say it is not at all on the horizon.

Moreover, socialism not only must be democratic but it must also be practical (politically and economically aware and transforming) or it will not be. Socialist social science not only wants to churn out predictions of explanatory interest systematically integrated but it also wants to help change the world and change it in a socialist direction. But in doing that it needs a credible account of how to change it in that direction. It had one with Classical Marxism's conception of the proletariat as the agent struggling for radical change and capably of carrying it out. It had, that is, in the time of its flowering, a plausible account of how this change would take place. But with the proletariat gone in the sense described above, what is to replace it? Or can it be resurrected?

Vladimir Lenin, Georg Lukács, and the young and still radical Sidney Hook all argued that the working class could not by itself gain a revolutionary consciousness and that it must be brought to this by a party of dedicated Marxist revolutionaries. Rosa Luxemburg thought this to be a mistake. Such a vanguard is tragically liable to substitute the party for the class. It would, as the socialist anarchists argued before Luxemburg and Simone Weil afterwards, become a dictatorship *over* the proletariat rather than a dictatorship *of* the proletariat. 'Dictatorship' is, to put it mildly, a

misleading term here. But when Marxists speak of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' they meant it to signify a class—a proletarian class—mass democracy. It would indeed suppress the capitalist class and the great landowners, remembering their many criminal acts but also seeing that it was necessary to do this to achieve a secure socialist society. But otherwise it would be a political and economic democracy (Levine 2003, 146-71; C. B. Macpherson 1966). It would be a political and economic democracy *of and by the people*.

However, this did not happen. In the Soviet Union after a good start—the very early years of the revolution—it became a dictatorship *over* the proletariat (and a brutal one at that) and not the class democracy of the proletariat. This was exactly as Rosa Luxemburg had predicted. *Perhaps* if the rising Soviet Union had been left alone—something capitalism would never do—it might have become a genuine socialism. But from the very beginning it was not left alone and capitalist countries made relentless war against it. (This is the only place where we are justified in killing capitalists, namely killing them when they make war against us or when they otherwise try to kill us or torture us. Otherwise, killing them would be too close to genocide.) It was attacked both from within and from without. Given this and the smallness of the Soviet proletariat, the establishing and sustaining of socialism would have been very difficult, to put it mildly, but whether it could have been accomplished will never be known. Russia, to say nothing about the Soviet Union, was a vast peasant society with a small, very wealthy, landowning class and a very small proletarian class. (It had a vast underclass alright.) It is very unlikely that a proletarian democracy or any kind of democracy could arise and be sustained in such a situation. In spite of the slogan 'All power to the Soviets'—honestly meant by some—what Luxemburg feared came to pass. It was not just because it was a peasant society—mainly recently freed serfs—that it didn't happen. It was also relentlessly harassed by the imperial capitalist order, as Cuba has been and still is, until many years later a sclerotic Soviet Union fell. This does not even remotely justify Stalin's atrocities or the Maoist ones

in China. Neither the Soviet Union nor China can be our model for socialism, though we should study carefully what went on there and why (e.g., Andreas 2008).

Right after World War II in France and Italy—and to some extent in Germany as well—there were masses of people ready to go for socialism. They had, that is, a socialist consciousness and a commitment to radical change. They were ready to make a socialist revolution. Many were workers who were proletarians in Marx's strong sense. They were *in but not of* the capitalist order and they wanted out and they wanted capitalism ended and socialism to replace it. They wanted to transform the capitalist order to their order, namely a workers' democracy. But the United States (with the complicity of the local capitalists and right and centrist political elites with their political parties in these European countries) had a very strong presence there with its far greater wealth boosted by the U.S.'s war economy—something that gave it far greater economic strength and with that greater political clout than the other great nations devastated by the war. It meant that the United States was calling most of the shots because of its economic and political power. (The United States, of course, was not devastated at all by World War II; its wealth was enhanced.) Socialist impulses under these circumstances lost out, not because they were mistaken but because of U.S. power which was intensely capitalist power. What quickly followed was the American-led golden age of capitalism (1946-60). In such a situation, revolutionary impulses came to have little appeal. Instead, there was a growing *embourgeoisment* of the working class and decline and pessimism on the Left as well as harassment of it. The flurry of Left activity in the West during the late 60s and early 70s was principally a matter of students—mainly middle class students and some non-middle class Afro-Americans—and never effectively penetrated the working class or the *lumpen proletariat* (unemployable members of the underclass).

The most central thing to recognize is that the vast numbers of working class people did not then and do not now constitute a proletariat in the Marxist sense and they were not politically motivated. When we look at things globally, we have a multitude of unemployed or marginally

employed people or in the situation unemployable people. Some in the Third World living on the equivalent of one U.S. dollar a day and even more living on the equivalent of two U.S. dollars a day. People in Haiti are eating mud cakes baked in the sun not for nourishment but to stave off the pangs of hunger. The 'really poors' of the world, to use a South African phrase, are too busy just trying to survive from day to day to revolt. It is very unlikely that intellectuals, students or the peasants of the Third World will become that revolutionary force. Cuba is to many of us an exemplary example of a small and poor society maintaining socialism against great odds and with a decent though hardly an abundant life for their people. (Cuba, however, is exemplary in health care and education.) They maintain this even when they are a small socialist island literally next to the United States, that great imperial capitalist power implacably out to undermine them (Castro 2007). This struggle to hold on to its socialism has so far been successful. But Cuba is in no position to spearhead a revolution, though there are amicable and mutually supportive and mutually beneficial relations between Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. Its resources are limited but Cuba's persistence and what is going on in South America are helpful signs for us on the Left. South America is populated principally with Second World countries which are more industrialized than and not as impoverished as those of most of the Third World. Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has many countries which are very impoverished—some hardly worth exploiting—and not very industrialized or sometimes not even industrialized at all. So there is an important difference between Second and Third World countries. But there is, encouragingly, a potential for going socialist in South America, particularly if the countries of South America work together.

In South America there are many industrialized countries though still countries with large peasant and indigenous populations. There is a lot of rising radical consciousness there, though it takes diverse, more or less radical forms. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Paraguay seem, at least, to be going in a somewhat social democratic direction. (Perhaps Ecuador is now going in an actual socialist direction. Social democrats, we should not forget, have been known to morph into

socialists. But it can, and often does, go in the other direction too. Venezuela and Bolivia, by contrast to the above mentioned countries, are clearly on a socialist track. Moreover, more generally throughout South America there is—or so it seems to an outsider—a Leftish leaning and a pan-South American ethos that might produce what Simon Bolivar wanted, namely a United States of South America and it might go firmly Left and so united it has the capacity to sustain socialism. This is now a dream and a hope but it might turn into a reality. In countries like Columbia—countries that are right-wing comprador states of the United States—there is (it is particularly plain in Columbia) a very strong contesting of the Rightists. Moreover, and distinctly, in social democratic countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, if the social democrats cannot deliver (or only minimally) the goods and thereby integrate or more firmly integrate the working class into capitalist society, perhaps these countries will go genuinely socialist and we might realize Bolivar's dream. This, from where we are now, can only be speculative. Many things can happen, including some untoward things. But remember that there are social democrats who are genuine social democrats. Unlike Blair, Brown, Royale, and Kichner they honestly and regretfully believe that for the foreseeable future there is no feasible road to socialism and try instead to tame capitalism giving it a more human face. There is with such people still a commitment to the Left. But social democracy has only been successful where there was the threat or a perceived threat of a Red Menace in the background. If the United States becomes a little less Neanderthal, as it *might* with Obama, this may unintentionally in one way or another have the effect of ending movements to the Left as Roosevelt's policies did in times past. I doubt that Obama is aware of that possibility or, if aware, very much taken up with worrying about it. His concern is to halt the ascendancy of a very Neanderthal and destructive Right and to make some modest renewal in the United States. Still—and this is my central point—we have never seen a social democratic surge forward where there was not a fear of a Red threat or its like. (Is what I have been saying any reason for Americans not to vote for Obama or for others not to hope they will do so? I don't think so. It is usually bad tactics,

and *perhaps* bad morals as well, to wish for evil to temporarily obtain or be sustained in the hope that it will spark a revolt which will bring about a considerable change for the better. Remember the German communists' disastrous slogan right after Hitler's ascension to power: 'After Hitler, then us.' Usually things are not that extreme. But it is usually counterproductive to welcome reaction to bring about a Left turn. I think Immanuel Wallerstein's notion that in 'the democracies' of the North the very short term strategy should be to support the lesser evil knowing that all realistically possible choices are in some way or other unsavory (Wollarstein 2008).

However, about the United States crushing movements on the Left, particularly in South America, it is salutary to remember that South America is a rather big and formidable continent, particularly if it stands united against U.S. threats. The Americans can't manage to crush resistance and stabilize things in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Imagine doing it for the whole of South America from the Mexican border with the United States to the tip of Argentina/Chile! Now the United States tries to do it, in more or less subtle ways with individual countries in South America and sometimes for a time they succeed, e.g. in Colombia. But if there becomes a whole united South American bloc, this will become much more difficult. It is a significant opportunity for us.

Moreover, if the American Empire is in decline, as Eric Hosbaum and some others reasonably think, this opens up more windows. Some think (probably as a bit of wishful thinking) the American Empire is in steep decline. But at least it *may* very well be in decline. Obama, like FDR was before him, may be a savior capitalism, making up for Bushian extremely conservative neo-liberalism as FDR made up for Hoover. Obama may reason, as Roosevelt reasoned, that half a loaf is better than none and not only get off South America's back, but by being more multilateral and by giving massive aid, this may lead to a considerable improvement of the life conditions for South Americans (for example) and thereby giving more workers a stake in capitalism and thereby de-radicalizing a critical mass of South Americans. This happened in Europe and North America after World War II. Maybe the same or similar strategy will work again. Capitalism has been bailed

out in such a way before. But there is no guarantee that this or any such tactic will work for them now as there is no guarantee of the triumph of socialism. Contingency is the name of the game.

Perhaps under some circumstance like this South America will not go in something like the Chavez-Castro path but it may instead pervasively develop instead a mild form of social democracy making its peace with a compromise with capitalism. But that will require concessions on both sides and that may help the working class. There are all sorts of scenarios we can dream up here, some more plausible than others and some (not necessarily the same ones) more hopeful for the Left than others. But still we are inescapably, as we always are, enmeshed in contingency and we can have no secure knowledge of where the so-called 'cunning of reason' will take us. Put more literally, we do not know what the future will bring. I think the conviction of Classical Marxists and their historicist Hegelian Marxist continuers that they know that history must go the way they think or hope it will is a rationalistic dream.

If I were a betting person or just a betting person, I would bet that we will not get socialism, not even an *ersatz* socialism. But, as I have repeatedly remarked in many of my writings, we are not just neutral observers and perhaps interpreters and explainers of the world; we are also agents acting in the world with a vision of the kind of world we would like to see and with some of us beliefs about and a commitment to do what we can do to help bring it about. (Indeed, to be moralistic for a moment, we should do that.) As agents we must—a moral 'must'—go on struggling to make a more reasonable and better world than the horror we have now and have had repeatedly throughout human history. As Hegel well called it, history is among other horrible things, a slaughter bench. This may suggest to some of you that I am opting for ethical (utopian) socialism or copping out Hegelian fashion with resignation or to a reconciliation of political forces—of classes. I am not doing any of these things. I agree with both McCarney and Levine about what they consider the helplessness of Western Marxism and even with Levine concerning what he calls second phase

analytical Marxism as it has with some morphed into ethical socialism and sometimes into just a liberalism. And I agree that this is not a good thing for the Left.

However, consider this: we can moralize—reasonably moralize—as much as we like and poverty—the extreme poverty that we now actually have—and steep exploitation do not end or even get seriously, if at all, ameliorated. We can develop moral or normative political theories and advocate them until we are blue in the face and perhaps sound ones or at least plausible ones at that. But the world does not change. Think, for a prominent example, of the fate of John Rawls and those—many of them very able—who philosophize more or less in his wake. Rawls developed a nuanced and powerful account of social justice and its place in morality and public life. It was, as became clear in his later work, for distinctively liberal (i.e., social democratic, not neo-liberal) societies. It was (*pace* John Gray) as much for Norway as for the political elites of the Eastern seaboard of the United States. It is a very carefully worked out and very complex but still a plausible normative moral and political theory and with Rawls and some Rawlsians a hope for a realistic utopia. It may, however, be vulnerable to the very trenchant and in effect radical criticisms of Raymond Geuss (Geuss 2008). Yet it—as well as for the other theories made more or less in the light of his—has not changed the world for the better. No realistic utopia Rawlsian style is in sight (though that would perhaps not surprise Rawls.) Society in the United States and societies throughout the world are less liberal (social democratic) and more inegalitarian and exploitive now than when Rawls started to write in the late 1950s. His liberal egalitarian theory—an *ideal* theory for a liberal (social democratic) society—has gone along in a progressive minded way while the society in which he lived along with most fo the world has grown markedly more inegalitarian, exploitative and less progressive or at least less progressive in the most essential ways. (This doesn't mean we should not welcome gay marriage and more open borders between European countries and perhaps across the world.) His own home country has not only become more conservative but Neanderthally reactionary. The world in most ways—but not in all—is a worse

place now than when he started to write in the 1950s. The United States besides being conservative is still also a reactionary, still racist, flag waving, chauvinist place. You should notice that Obama had to drape himself in the flag and his opponent ran on the slogan 'America First'. And we must not forget what his running mate was and why she became his running mate. And we also must not forget the United States is a world empire. Obama, I believe, wishes to turn some of this around a bit. And we can hope and not unreasonably expect he will be able to some extent to do so. But he has a very long way to go. The country he will soon govern is very reactionary. He will not take us—nor does he intend to—to what the socialists want. (To call him a socialist as some of his opponents did is simply absurd.) But to return to Rawls—*perhaps* Rawls did not want to change the world. But what is the point of a normative political theory, particularly a social democratic one as his is, if it does not affect (or try to) in some way the social world it is in? Isn't it pointless if it has no potentiality, directly or indirectly, to have any effect on making the world a little better place (Guess 2008)?

*Pace* John Roemer, ethical socialism will not be the force to lead us to the Promised Land. It is not that what he says about morality is false, let alone meaningless, but that it does and can do little to change things. It is, as I have said elsewhere, too much like fiddling while Rome burns (Nielsen 2009).

I do not know what in our situation (I speak here of the world), if anything, will bring us to socialism. I don't even have any good hypotheses or even remotely compelling conjectures. I have pointed to, among all the dark things, some happier *possibilities* (as has Levine, though I am more pessimistic than he is and he is not exactly jumping with optimism). I have no idea how probable or plausible these happier possibilities are of coming to fruition. Take, for example, my optimism about South America and my worries about it. This makes me more sceptical than McCarney or even Levine. (I don't here speak of philosophical scepticism. I think of it as an absurdity.) But of scepticism about our ability to know how the world will go or even probably go. (I mean in the next

25 to 50 years.) But we do know that socialists must (again a moral 'must') go on struggling to make socialism prevail and to make it prevail in a reasonable form. However, the actual realistic alternative to capitalism may not be socialism but a technologically based post-capitalist authoritarianism. The post-capitalism which may follow may at its worst be barbarianism *tout court* and at its best be a bureaucratically constricted alienated non-democratic existence in the North and barbarianism in the South. Capitalism—its distinctive mode of production—will not be eternal. No mode of production will be. And its replacement may be socialism. But that is not written in stone, Hegelian Marxists to the contrary notwithstanding. If, in Engels's phrase, we care about the possibility of a decent life for ourselves and as many others as possible, we socialists must struggle for socialism and the demise of capitalism even when the odds are very much against us.

## VI

I think McCarney would agree with me on much of what I have said in the last section. We *may* disagree on exactly what a contemporary socialism would look like but that is a friendly disagreement among comrades that can perhaps with effort be worked out. Where we disagree, I believe, is on *philosophy* and the importance of it for political life. I am resolutely a therapeutic Wittgensteinian about this with what I have elsewhere called my anti-Philosophy philosophy stance (Nielsen 1994). McCarney takes an ontological stance with a commitment to a philosophical dialectical method. I have tried to give some arguments why we should not take that path but instead take a different (*perhaps* in some ways more radical) path traveling philosophically light. This way of proceeding is, I have argued, recognizably Marxist (or Marxian as I prefer to call it) and it squares well with treating Marx not as a philosopher but as a social scientist articulating an emancipatory social science in the service of socialism. McCarney, I believe, would agree with the latter part of that sentence though not with the first part about philosophy and he would include in his science a 'dialectical science' that I would argue is neither a science nor a very coherent notion.

I have tried to give reasons for my claims. If my claims, indeed all or any of them, are too strong (which I, of course, do not think they are or I would not hold them), then I would retreat to claim that this 'dialectical method' is both obscure and useless.

Scientific socialism is something on which McCarney and I both agree we socialists need. We agree we should not be mere utopian (ethical) socialists or let socialism reduce itself to that. But, as I have argued, scientific socialism has no need for dialectics. Moreover, I think it is a burden to us. It just causes unnecessary and distracting problems, typically (to use McCarney's phrase) meta-theoretical problems which we could do without. (I do not say that of all meta-theoretical problems and claims. A good bit of what is going in this lecture is meta-theoretical and I hope and believe it is not altogether useless.)

I have argued that we can coherently keep (perhaps with the exception of the labor theory of value) what I have called the rest of Marx's canonical theses, though somewhat reduced along the lines that G. A. Cohen and Levine specify, without have any truck with his Hegelian dialectics or any dialectics (Lenin and indeed Marx to the contrary notwithstanding). Most Marxists, except the analytical ones, would disagree. And some formerly analytical Marxists (e.g., Elster) have come to believe that carefully analyzed these canonical theses wither away. But, the last sentence aside, as activists fighting for the coming to be of socialism, nothing would matter very much where we stand on this intellectual issue. To argue that proceeding in the way I have and (generally speaking) all analytical Marxists have, gives us—I mean here we socialists—a clearer conception of how we should proceed for socialism to be achieved. But we can agree to disagree about dialectics without our political and economic practices or concrete analyses being affected.

In the beginning was the *act*, not the *word*. Put less metaphorically, words and acts go together. There would be no words without acts and no acts without words at least in the background, though there would be movements. (A newborn baby makes some of them but the baby cannot yet act.) There is no language (e.g., English, French, German, etc.) without speech acts

and speech acts are acts. But this is just all philosophy. It, like anything anywhere, but particularly in philosophy, might be mistaken. Francis Fukuyama to the contrary notwithstanding, philosophy, let alone liberalism, will not last forever, not even to when human beings all shuffle off the stage which, given global warming, may be sooner than we would otherwise think. I do not think we know, though we cannot unreasonably conjecture and believe, that the mode of production following the capitalist mode will be a socialist one. It is a conceptual truth that it will be post-capitalist. Moreover, it is inevitable (empirically speaking) that eventually there will be a demise of the capitalist mode of production. But we cannot be at all sure, as I argue in the previous section, that our future will be a socialist one. It could be a number of things including a technological authoritarianism with an almost fascist-like quality.<sup>8</sup> We cannot know that history or 'reason' is on our side. Fallibilist that I am, I do not think that we can avoid this. Contingency is inescapably with us human animals. That notwithstanding, I am utterly determined and committed to do all that I can to help bring about a firmly socialist future. (That may, and probably will, come to very little. But then I am an individual actor in the world with things I very much care about at issue. And this motivates my trying to make a socialist reality so. I do not say that it is the most rational thing to do but it is not unreasonable.)

## VII

### **A Meta-philosophical but Politically Relevant Interlude**

I am too much of a Wittgensteinian to have any confidence in constructive philosophy at all, particularly grand scale metaphysical or epistemological theories or comprehensive moral theories or normative political theories. My philosophy, though not my Marxianism, is negative and therapeutic. It seeks to get the fly out of the fly bottle, as Wittgenstein famously put it. I use conceptual therapy to try to free people, including myself, from philosophical perplexities and obsessions and to help us to live, and reasonably so, without great cosmic assurances. To do so I

describe the uses of words or the uses of whole sentences or (alternatively put) I try to clarify concepts where these things stand in need of or are *thought* to stand in need of clarification and I try to live with the consequences of this clarification taken to heart. Where we are blocked concerning the uses of words in science and everyday life, including in our morality and politics, I seek sufficient clarification to unblock us. (Complete or perfect clarity is a philosophical illusion.) McCarney also regards his work—at least in *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*—as a *second-order* task. He calls it a meta-theoretical task designed to clarify and elucidate concepts and theories, principally those of Marx and Hegel, and to the ways people have reacted to Marx and Hegel. Mine is a *second-order* task as well, though in a broadly Wittgensteinian and Rortyan fashion. I see no conflict between going Wittgenstein's or Rorty's way in philosophy and Marx's way in social science and over politics and economics. Since the Wittgensteinian one is *second-order* and the Marxian one usually is not, I am not caught in a Habermasian pragmatic contradiction.

So McCarney and I differ over philosophy, as I remarked in the last section, but not, or not vitally, over Marxian matters except over the dialectical method and perhaps—I do not know—over the labor theory of value. I don't know what McCarney's position is here. And I don't know enough economics myself to reject the labor theory of value, let alone replace it with another economic theory or some modification of it. But I am suspicious of it—it sounds to me like metaphysics—and I am most tempted by some form of market socialist account like David Schweickart's and, in some respects, but not all, John Roemer's (Schweickart 1996 and 2002; Roemer 1994). Both of them are market socialists and it seems to me, perhaps in my ignorance, that that is a more efficient way of allocating and distributing goods than in a non-market way and could readily be utilized without thereby engulfing itself in capitalism's market orientation that seeks to make all human beings not only into commodities but also into consumption addicts—addicts wishing for and feeling the need for 'new things' all the time (Schweickart 1998; Ollman 1998). I see why capitalism needs that, but

I do not see how socialism does and, market socialism or not, I do not see why it should. Why can't we socialists, as Schweickart and Roemer think we should, use markets for allocating goods without becoming consumption addicts? People in a socialist ethos would not need or want all those new and usually useless things that are pushed on them in a capitalist society and a socialist media would not so push it. We, under such conditions, would not be shopping addicts. There was a time when we needed growth but we in the North do not need it now and for people so situated it tends to cause alienation and waste. Indeed it is destructive for us. In the South growth will still be needed for a time. For capitalism, of course, consumerism is something that is required—at least as it operates now. (It is difficult—but perhaps not impossible—to envision how it could be any other way in a capitalist order.)

So McCarney and I differ over philosophy, including whether Marxism needs a distinctive methodology and ontology. He thinks, as all Hegelian Marxists do, that a distinctive methodology is something Marxism and socialism needs. And he also thinks that Marxism needs a first-order ontological philosophy. I think, like Marx and Engels had it in the *German Ideology*, that philosophy is to science what masturbation is to sexual intercourse. Moreover, he believes that Marx had such an ontology and that it is foundational for Marxism and crucial for a proper understanding of the world. I believe none of these things and I further believe that such notions lead Marxism and socialism astray into needless perplexities and into making the obscure claims that Classical Marxists and Hegelians take to be essential while in my view they do no more harm than good to the very scientificity and coherence of Marxism and socialism. This scientificity is something which both McCarney and I (and Levine as well) believe to be essential for socialism. I believe that these ontological and dialectical mysteries get in the way and should be benignly set aside and I further take it that that is something, and commendably so, that is in the spirit if not the letter of analytical Marxism. I try with regard to Hegel and McCarney's account of Hegel and about his articulation of Marx's *philosophy* (which he sees as deeply Hegelian) to practice this conceptual therapy on it

without mischaracterizing or in any way distorting McCarney's account. It is, of course, not for me to judge how successful I have been.

Philosophy (more accurately, *some* philosophy) unfortunately fascinates me. But I have come to think, rather ambivalently, as does Rorty (though Rorty is without my ambivalence) that philosophy is (or at least should be) a transitional genre (Rorty 2007a, 89-104). For Rorty it is transitional to literature and a literary culture; for me it is transitional to social science and I hope to an emancipatory one (Nielsen 2007; Rorty 2007b). Indeed, I am inclined to think with David Harvey that what philosophy more generally should principally morph into is a new kind of social science, namely an amalgam of geography, social anthropology, and history (including economic history) (Harvey 2000). Marxians will add macroeconomics and some (Elster, Cohen, Roemer) microeconomics as well. But generally the new social science discipline should be a creative integration of geography (as now practiced), social anthropology, and history (particularly but not exclusively economic history). The small residue that is left for philosophy as it has been will become what I have characterized in a Wittgensteinian manner as being a conceptual therapy, a form of *second-order* conceptual or linguistic analysis of language where it is *felt* by some (including sometimes ourselves) to be troubling. But that does not do (or try to do) a foundationalist job or a founding job—some illusory underpinning of both our scientific activity and our everyday life conceptualizations. The study of the history of philosophy should also remain as a part of our cultural heritage. But that is a part of history—cultural history—and should not be taken as a search for truth, let alone *the* truth or 'an ultimate truth' and above all not for a *redemptive* truth. It should not be regarded as a philosophical investigation but a historical study of what once were philosophical investigations. (However, to do it properly requires some understanding of philosophy just as to do the philosophy of biology requires some understanding of biology.)

I should also stress that philosophy as a transitional genre could—and I think should—split differently in both Rorty's and my directions and that can do this without conflict and with its being

the case that both are preserving something important but different, that comes now from philosophical aspirations but, after the transition has been firmly made, will take more significant ways, i.e., with literature and literary culture, on the one hand, and with social science on the other. With the social science part being much as Harvey characterizes it and I have gestured at above. Philosophy will, I hope, morph in those two directions. (There may be other directions as well.) In trying to make sense of our lives and of our condition both of these activities are essential and have their *origins* in both religion and philosophy, though by now their time should be past. Moreover, these activities are not conflicting and need not be at cross-purposes.

So for me, Marxism or Marxianism (as I prefer to call it) becomes emancipatory social science. Fitting with that and with what I have just said above, a few autobiographical remarks will, I think, help—perhaps only causally help—to further an understanding of the position I take and why I take it.

I was not a red diaper baby. I grew up in a small town in the U.S. Midwest during the Great Depression in a reasonably affluent bourgeois family that never suffered, as far I can remember, from the Depression. But many of my school chums and their families did. They lived in poverty, some more so than others, but there were many that lived in great poverty. They lived in scarcely heated houses with scant furniture and cupboards nearly bare. Their mothers had gaunt features pinched with hunger and worry and their fathers were unemployed and many of them on the road looking desperately for just any kind of work, usually without success. (There were no social safety nets then.) The condition of these families made a great and lasting impression on me and made me think—though I don't remember with guilt—how unfair it all was. Why couldn't they—indeed everyone—live like I did? (I don't mean I lived sumptuously but I lived well.) I thought it was so wrong that they didn't. It is there I expect the roots of my socialism can be found. I had gentle and kindly parents who cared for me, an only child, so I didn't revolt against them, capitalist-oriented as they were. But I couldn't understand why they just accepted the situation as if nothing was wrong

and with the feeling that nothing could be done about it anyway. But I think this is like many of our compatriots now think (mistakenly) about global poverty (Pogge 2002). When I was a little older and was in high school I came across some writings of Norman Thomas—who was, I would guess, a social democrat though I confusedly thought of him and that he thought of himself as being a socialist—and I came to think of myself (I suspect rather incoherently) as a socialist and I could not understand why everyone wasn't. It just seemed so obviously right.

After my war experience, I went to university and read rather desultorily some Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and even some Stalin, along with a lot of rather different thinkers including John Dewey and Thorsten Veblen. I became rather more coherently a socialist and while an undergraduate in university I actively participated in the Henry (not George) Wallace presidential campaign. Henry Wallace was a former Vice-President in the Truman Administration. He tried to form a rather more leftish (but not very leftish) Third Party. But Wallace accepted support from the Communist Party of the United States and that enabled the two major parties (firmly capitalist parties) with the help of the media to destroy Wallace's Third Party. Active in the Wallace campaign, I met Paul Robeson briefly and introduced him at a rally. During the war I had seen Robeson play Othello. So in two quite different ways I was awed and inspired by him. I decided I should become as much like Paul Robeson as I could.

However, as I read more, including Sidney Hook who put me on to the bad sides of Stalin and to the often nefarious tricks of the various Communist parties, I slid back into being a social democrat, or as I thought of it then, a liberal socialist. I thought we should just hold on to our brains and go at things gradually. I believed then that we in the United States (I was then an American citizen) should make reform after reform until in ten years we would become like Sweden. Then we would—or so I thought then—be as socialist as we reasonable could be. I persisted in thinking of myself, in spite of that plainly social democratic orientation, as a socialist but as a mild one—a socialist who firmly took a liberal path. I continued to think in this way through my last years in

graduate school and my first years of teaching. I didn't then think, naïve as I was, of it in that way then, but I now reasonably conjecture that that liberal turn of mine saved my neck for by then McCarthyism was becoming a reality. But for that time—though not out of fear but out of conviction—I remained comfortably and safely a social democrat under the illusion that I was a socialist. I passed up through the professorial ranks and became a full professor at New York University and Chair of the Washington Square department. I was saved with all that gradualism ingrained in me mostly by the influence of pragmatism.

The Vietnam War turned, and decisively, my head around. I became an activist in the anti-war campaign, involved in resistance, speaking and protesting, as Hilary Putnam did, all over the place while longing, if only I had a little time, to do some philosophy again which by that time had become for me analytic philosophy with a pragmatist turn. Finally, I got so fed up with the United States that I left for Canada, thinking it would be a different place and there I began to study and teach Marx jointly with a more orthodox Marxist philosopher and a close friend. (He was a Marxist in spite of the fact that his D.Phil. from Oxford was under the tutelage of Gilbert Ryle.) We jointly gave a course on Marx and Engels one term each year and in the other term a more advanced seminar on a different Marxist author and/or usually on a different Marxist topic. In that way we bootstrapped ourselves into a better understanding of such matters and at the same time taught our students—I don't know how competently—something of Marxism and the Marxist tradition. (We had no professors in our student years who gave us anything like such instruction.) In the first year after I arrived in Calgary, the advanced seminar was on Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. Later, we assigned G. A. Cohen's classic book on historical materialism and in what perhaps was the last year—I don't remember that accurately—the topic was Jon Elster's *How to make Sense of Marx*. (I agree, by the way, with what McCarney says about Elster's book in his article on analytical Marxism. See McCarney 1990.)

I would never have taught those courses if the Political Science Department at the University of Calgary (where I taught in the Philosophy Department) had not been infested with Straussians and that there was no one, as far as I could ascertain, to teach Marx or the Marxist tradition. There was, that is, no one but us to teach Marx and the Marxist tradition. We wanted students to get a somewhat more fair-minded and accurate account of Marx and Marxist tradition. If the two of us did not do it, no one would. This, I should add, is characteristic of most universities in Canada and the United States; there are only a few Marxists or Marxist sympathizers to teach such courses. As for the University of Calgary, it is now with our retirement simply not taught at least in the Philosophy Department. I do not think this is atypical of the North American Anglophone scene or of the Francophone scene. (Still, more generally it is a little better now but not much.) But for me, to go back to myself, I would not without that teaching have gained the somewhat detailed knowledge of Marx that I came to have. I would have gone on in my radical ways with my half-formed knowledge of Marx and with a radicalism formed more by Noam Chomsky than by the Marxist tradition. (I don't by this mean to suggest that reading Chomsky is a bad thing. I think he is a very good thing indeed, an indispensable thing.) I would have gone on teaching Hart, Rawls, Barry, and Dworkin and sometimes even meta-ethicists such as Stevenson, Nowell-Smith, Hare, Mackie, Foot, and Railton as well as giving seminars on Wittgenstein and Austin. But in retrospect I am very glad that I did this teaching of Marx and Marxism for I found studying Marx and Marxists not only good for my students but for me repeatedly enlightening. It gave, I hope, some rational and reasonable substance to what otherwise would have remained my rather Luddite but passionate socialism. Still it did not make me at all into what Elster has called a Marxist fundamentalist or into any kind of fundamentalist or even into a foundationalist. Rather, it strengthened my fallibilist non-Hegelian perspectivist historicism. *In that way* I am a rather sceptical Marxian but a committed one all the same, though I have a deeper distrust of theory,

particularly of grand social theory, than most Marxians. (Thanks here to Wittgenstein, Toulmin, and Rorty.)

To return again to our joint teaching, we taught Marx, as I have remarked, each year and each time in re-reading or reading something different of Marx's or Engels' texts I learned something new and valuable. I came to see what a very powerful figure Marx was and how he astutely worked together theory and practice. I even toyed for a while with the idea of becoming a Marx scholar but decided that my German wasn't good enough to do it adequately. (It was a little bit late in the day for me to become proficient. I didn't have Marx's language learning talents.) Moreover—and this fits in with what I have been saying about philosophy and social science—I wanted to do some Marxist social science myself rather than just analyzing Marx or some Marxist philosophers or indeed any philosophers. My interests shifted away from studying Marx or Marxist philosophers (even analytic ones) to examining globalization, imperialism, the effects and sustainability of neo-liberalism, and the geo-political scene. I wanted to study such things from a broadly Marxian perspective. Marxian-oriented social scientists such as David Harvey, Adam Freeman, Boris Kagalowsky, George Bello, Colin Leys, Leo Panitch, Peter Gowan, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Samir Amin gripped my attention and gave me a better understanding of what problems I should investigate and how.

With the sort of work these and others like them are doing—and they are not carbon copies of each other—it seems to me that this is where it is at much more than with the philosophical examinations, even astute ones, engaged in trying to reconstruct Marxist philosophy or work out a socialist theory of justice. I want to study such problems as Harvey *et al.* study them and in broadly the same manner on my own. Darwinian biologists don't typically spend their time sorting out Darwin or present-day physicists in sorting out Newton. Those are jobs for historians of science. Some of the scientists may never have read Darwin or Newton and be none the worse for that as scientists. Why shouldn't the same thing or a similar thing be true for Marxian social scientists?

The analogy isn't exact but it is close enough, I think, to be relevant. We Marxists or Marxians should roll up our sleeves and do something analogous to what Darwinian biologists do. This, I think, is the way to push Marxianism and socialism forward. I say this somewhat (but only somewhat) ambivalently because I think we need as well, given the state of our social science, *second-order*—what McCarney calls meta-theoretical work—on what is involved in characterizing and conceptualizing Marxism and socialism, including conceptualizing it as scientific and explaining how it is and how it can be, if it can be, an emancipatory social science without being normative. It is also relevant that the development of the social sciences—even economics—is not even remotely as advanced (and perhaps never will be) as physics or even biology. This being so, it makes study of their founding fathers (Marx, Durkheim, Weber) more relevant than it otherwise would be.

These matters are all at the center of McCarney's concerns and he has contributed much to how these problems are to be broached. I would only add that it is only by setting aside a *purely* ethical socialism—a utopian socialism—that we can even begin taking on McCarney's ideas. I am thinking here particularly of his claim, powerfully if perhaps not altogether convincingly argued, concerning how Marxism can be emancipatory without being normative. But, to return with a conflicting note, remember Marxism and socialism have a vision of the world. Dare I say a vision of how the world should be?

We still arguably should find it useful and desirable to have something like G. A. Cohen's and John Roemer's normative political claims that we can use in a justificatory account—an account concerning, as an important example, the contention that egalitarian justice is also, and desirably, rooted in socialism while accepting Marx's and McCarney's argument against moralizing socialism. It is crucial to see if the Cohen-Roemer type claims and McCarney's claims can be made compatible. That is, are McCarney's claims and an egalitarian socialism compatible? Can we coherently articulate such a reading? (But see here Raymond Geuss 2008.)

We should remember that radicalism had a beginning with the slogan 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' (solidarity) and that this has always been a part of the socialist tradition. Still, such considerations pale in significance to the social science issues that Harvey, Panitch, Gowan, *et al.* raise. No doubt we have a division of labor here and that it would be a good thing to have both. My reaction—perhaps too strong—is rooted in my intuition about their comparative urgency. (But again intuitions can be unreliable. See again Geuss.)

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the conference where I presented an initial version of this lecture, John Clegg also presented a careful account of Marx's own conception of ideology which in effect cast seriously into question whether the account McCarney and I have given of ideology was Marx's. His textual evidence was thorough. Perhaps what McCarney and I were talking about fit better with Lenin, Trotsky and Luxembourgh than with Marx. If this is so, as it now appears to me to be, it is still no reason to drop that conception of ideology except as a characterization of Marx's conception. It seems to me, Marx aside, that it is a very useful conception of ideology to hold on its own: useful for the Marxian project and indeed more generally.

<sup>2</sup> There is still something analogous to that in G. A. Cohen's and Jon Elster's penchant to move from the complex to its parts and to go from macro-mechanisms to micro-mechanisms.

<sup>3</sup> Though McCarney makes frequent references to ontology in *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*, he never defines or characterizes what he means by 'ontology'. In his *Hegel on History* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000) he is more explicit. There (p. 17) he tells us rather conventionally that ontology is a theory of being and this leads us to a familiar difficulty—I would say an insuperable difficulty—of determining what being is. (What do we mean by 'being' as distinct from talking of beings?) A little later he tells us that ontology is a general theory of what there is (p. 36). But this sounds like an *ersatz* and impossible-to-carry-out allegedly empirical enterprise, but not an ontological theory or anything that could be philosophical. Perhaps, alternatively, this is the same as Quine's remark (I suspect a tongue-in-cheek) that ontology is the claim that what there is is; that it is what we can quantify over, i.e., to be is to be the value of a variable. But this, of course, tells us nothing, as Quine well recognizes. Is McCarney following Quine here? He doesn't say so. If he means to gain the necessity that supposedly goes with ontology and he is saying that ontologists are saying that whatever is is, he has a tautology on his hands and a rather odd one at that. Surely he wants something more substantial than that but what is it? To deny what there is is, itself is oxymoronic. (It may be moronic as well.) If he means to say that ontology is a general theory of what there is, then to try to carry it out is (among other things) to try to do the impossible task of listing all that there is or even to show what that could come to. If this is something we could in principle do, then we must be able to make sense of this notion. Hilary Putnam has said (and rightly) that we cannot count all the objects (things) in a room, to say nothing about in the universe. (We have to first decide what is to count as an 'object', e.g., a speck of dust? There is not going to be any agreement here or an understanding of how we can get one except arbitrarily by stipulation. See Putnam 2004, 52-85.) To say that we could do it in principle is just arm waving. Being able to determine all that there is in the universe is clearly nonsense. One is put in mind of Hobbes's remark that there is nothing so absurd that some old philosopher has not said it.

McCarney is a Hegelian Marxist. Perhaps a theory of being is a theory of dynamic becoming (pp. 53 and 62). But since we do not understand what is meant by 'being' we cannot understand 'being is becoming'. Suppose we try to say the flow of reality is becoming. But what is that? And becoming what? And what if it is replied, 'Just becoming'? Again, we have something unintelligible as we also do when we try to substitute 'potentiality' for 'becoming'.

Suppose we say instead, as Hegel does, that reason rules the world and therefore world history has been rational in its course? The rational is said to be the substantial and this somehow and somehow is necessary and it is the real: I know not *how* or even if this is intelligible and I know not *what* this is and I know not *that* it is intelligible or, if intelligible, how or that it is a necessary truth. The substantial and the real stick in the gore (Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, as cited by McCarney, p. 81). We just chase ourselves around in a circle trying to understand one meaningless term in terms of another meaningless term, e.g., the substantial in terms of 'the real'. We can't understand the one unless we can understand the other. But we are given no way of understanding either and more broadly for a host of similar terms so we cannot even get started: we cannot find a foothold. This is not the way to do philosophy or anything else. I fear I can making

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nothing of this Hegelian ontology. Perhaps it is my fault? Most crucially the part I have tried but failed to understand is what is said by McCarney to be “invoking the central thesis of Hegel’s ontology, the thesis that reason is that through which and in which all reality has its being and substance” (p. 81). And that is said to be the grounding for the claim that “reason rules the world and *therefore* world history has been rational in its course” (p. 81). But reason cannot (logically cannot) either rule the world or march through history or for that matter fail to do either of these things. An emperor or Hitler or the Americans or the capitalists or the proletariat possibly could. People or peoples could do these things but history can’t, logically can’t. But that people can is certainly not necessarily so and if they contingently can do so it very well might not result in a rational state of affairs. Hitler might just have pulled it off. But that would not have shown its rationality. Hegelish may itself be irrational talk. To me at least it is baffling when McCarney uses ‘Hegelish’; when he does not, he writes clearly and to the point. It seems to me that when he goes Hegelish we get absurdity and, more likely, unintelligibility. But am I being blockheaded?

<sup>4</sup> Chandra Kumar (2008) forcefully argues that analytical Marxists can and should dissolve rather than resolve the putative dispute between methodological individualism and methodological holism rather than try to resolve it as Cohen, Roemer, and Elster do in favor of methodological individualism and that no obscurantism is involved in such a dissolving move. Marxists, including analytical Marxists, can benignly neglect such subjects.

<sup>5</sup> This led one of the early analytic philosophers to turn his attention to Hegel to remark at the end of an explication of Hegel, “To be a Hegelian in fact means to be a consistent rationalistic optimist, to lay stress on all the indications of deepening rationality in the world, and to understress, or explain away, whatever seems of a contrary tendency” (Findlay 1964, 340). However, contrast McCarney (2000, 83-101; 169-99). See also Findlay 1958.

<sup>6</sup> Some of them have been put relatively clearly. See Allen Wood and John Rawls. But there remain some crucial ones that are, as far as I know, put clearly neither by Hegel himself nor by his commentators. For useful comments on Hegel see Wood 1990, Wood 2001, Wood 2004, Rawls 2000, 329-71.

<sup>7</sup> There are at least two things which must be addressed here. (i) I speak vaguely of ‘our comrades’ or of workers’ councils, the Soviets of which we are a part. ‘Our comrades’ can be indeterminate. I would say ‘the party of militant workers and militant unemployed people who are committed to socialism’. These are the people who are socialist militants. But in speaking of ‘workers’ I mean that in the broadest sense to include farm workers and service workers—the whole of the working underclass. (ii) The sticking in solidarity to what has been democratically decided by our comrades like any other value judgment takes a *ceteris paribus* clause. If our comrades vote for genocide we must not go along and must do whatever we can to stop it. But there are extreme cases where one human right conflicts with another. But where we have disagreements of a lesser kind, we must not withdraw if the vote goes against us; *au contraire* we must support the collective democratic decision wholeheartedly. Still, we have indeterminacy here. What is to count as an ‘extreme case’?

<sup>8</sup> I say ‘fascist-like’ because I do not think that history exactly repeats itself. But for just an utterly timely reminder, McCain and his running mate speaking to ultra-conservative audiences experienced when they mentioned the name Obama the chant coming from some of the audience ‘Obama, terrorist, terrorist’ and they did not protest. This is ‘fascist-like’, not just ignorance.

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