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2nd Edition

Allen W. Wood

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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ALIENATION AND CAPITALISM

1 The capitalist division of labor

In Chapter 1, I suggested that we should look on alienation in Marx's mature thought not as an explanatory concept but as a descriptive or diagnostic one. More specifically, I suggested provisionally that we view it as describing the condition of a person who lacks a sense of self-worth or of meaning in life, or else preserves such a sense only by being the victim of illusions or false consciousness. Chapters 2 and 3 have expounded Marx's concept of humanity or the human essence, with a view to extracting his ideas about what people require to lead meaningful or fulfilled lives, and thus about the circumstances which might cause them to be alienated in practical life. The present chapter attempts to say something about Marx's views concerning the social causes of alienation under capitalism.

Marx's thinking on this topic is rich and resists neat systematization. The account we have been developing in previous chapters, however, provides us with one route of access to it. According to Marx, what is vital for the self-worth of human beings and the meaningfulness of their lives is the development and exercise of their essential human powers, whose focus is labor or production. Because these powers are historical in character, varying from society to society and (on the whole) expanding in the course of history, the degree to which alienation is a systematic social phenomenon also varies, as a function both of what society's productive capacities are and of the extent to which the human potentialities they represent have been incorporated into the lives of actual men and women. Generally speaking, the degree of systematic, socially caused alienation in a society will be proportional to the gap which exists in that society between the human potentialities contained virtually in society's productive powers and the actualization of these potentialities by the society's

members. Thus the possibilities for alienation increase along with the productive powers of society. For as these powers expand, there is more and more room for a discrepancy between what human life is and what it might be. There is more and more pressure on social arrangements to allow for the lives of individual human beings to share in the wealth of human capacities which belong to social labor.

Marx's criticisms of capitalism make it clear that he regards it as a social system in which social arrangements have failed utterly to accommodate the potentialities for self-actualization which the social powers of production have put within people's reach. According to the *Communist Manifesto*:

> The bourgeoisie during scarcely a hundred years of its rule has created productive powers more massive and colossal than all past generations together. The subjection of nature's powers, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, . . . – what earlier century dreamed that such productive powers slumbered in the womb of social labor?[1]

In contrast to this unprecedented progress at the level of social production, capitalism has utterly failed to translate its expanded powers into expanded opportunities for individual self-actualization. It has diminished rather than increased the extent to which individual laborers, their intelligence, skills and powers, participate in the potentialities of social production, as well as sharply limiting the extent to which the laboring masses share in its fruits. As Marx puts it in *Capital*:

> Within the capitalist system all methods of raising the productive power of labor are effected at the cost of the individual laborer; . . . they mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a human being, degrade him to an appendage of a machine, annihilate the content of this labor by turning it into torture; they alienate from him the mental and spiritual potentialities of the labor process in the same measure as science is incorporated into it as an independent power.[2]

How do capitalist social relations frustrate the human need for self-actualization? In the present chapter, I intend to identify two related themes in Marx's account of the way capitalism leads to alienation.

But there is some risk at this point of putting too much emphasis on the philosophically interesting evils, and not enough on the drabber ones. Self-actualization and spiritual fulfillment usually do not mean much to people whose more basic physical needs are still unsatisfied. And it is an important tenet of Marx's theory that capitalism cannot exist without imposing a brutalizing poverty on a sizeable proportion of the human race. There are a number of passages in which Marx appears to be saying that the downfall of capitalism is inevitable not because under capitalism people are alienated or spiritually unfulfilled, but simply because beyond a certain point capitalism will prove incapable of supplying the working population with the basic conditions for physical survival. The bourgeoisie, he says, becomes 'incapable of ruling because it is incapable of securing its slaves even their existence within their slavery'. The proletariat will overthrow capitalism (and with it alienation) not in order to lead more fulfilling lives but merely in order to be certain of survival: 'Things have now come so far that individuals must appropriate the present totality of productive powers not only in order to achieve self-activity, but even to make their existence itself secure.'[3]

Marx does, however, identify some features of capitalist social relations which lead specifically to the crippling of people's powers and the frustration of their needs for self-actualization. One principal theme in Marx's account of the way capitalism 'robs workers of all life content' is the special manner in which it accentuates the division of labor. Modern capitalist manufacture, says Marx, is carried on increasingly by a 'collective laborer', whose actions are the carefully engineered result of the activities of many men, women and children. The labor process is carefully analyzed, its various operations are 'separated', 'isolated', 'rendered independent', and then 'laborers are classified and grouped according to their predominant properties. If their natural specificities are the basis for grafting them onto the division of labor, manufacture, once it is introduced, develops labor powers which are by nature fitted only to a one-sided special functioning.' In this way, 'the individual laborers are appropriated by a one-sided function and annexed to it for life . . . The habit of a one-sided function transforms them into its unfailing organ, while their connection with the collective mechanism compels them to operate with the regularity of the parts of a machine.' Yet 'the one-sidedness and even the imperfection of the detail laborer comes to be his perfection as a member of his collective laborer.'[4]

But the process of capitalist manufacture not only deprives people

of the well-rounded variety of powers and activities which they need to be full human beings; it also tends to render their specialities themselves more and more mechanical, dehumanizing in nature, less and less a matter of developed skills or powers: 'Every process of production is conditioned by certain simple manipulations of which every human being who stands and walks is capable. They too are cut off from their fluid connection with the content-possessing moments of activity and ossified into exclusive functions.'[5] Consequently, capitalist manufacture creates a positive need for mechanical, 'unskilled' labor, a need unknown to pre-capitalist handicraft manufacture: 'If it develops a one-sided specialty into a virtuosity at the cost of the whole laboring faculty, [capitalist manufacture] also makes the absence of development into a specialty. . . . In [capitalist] manufacture the enrichment of the collective laborer, and hence of capital, is conditioned by the impoverishment of the laborer in his individual productive powers.'[6]

It is plain that Marx blames capitalist social relations, and not the technical requirements of modern industry, for the fragmentation of human beings and the impoverishment of their individual powers. Why? Capitalist society is characterized fundamentally by the fact that the means of production are privately owned by a minority of the members of society who, acting largely independently of one another, tend to employ these means in such a way as to maximize the profit each earns on the investment. The nature of the means of production, moreover, is to a considerable extent at the discretion of this capitalist class, since their investment choices ultimately determine the selection of these means from the range of possibilities afforded by the technical capabilities of society, and even exercise a certain influence on the rate and direction of technical developments. These choices, moreover, are in the long run not arbitrary or at the mercy of individual capitalists, but are tightly constrained through competition with other capitalists by the requirement of profit maximization. Those capitalists who choose methods of production which maximize profits will survive and flourish; those who make different choices will lose their capital and the social power it represents. But the division of labor and the nature of individual laboring activity are largely determined by the means and techniques labor must employ. Hence under capitalism the factors which determine the life activities of the laboring majority are not in its hands but in the hands of a minority whose interests are opposed to its own; and the choices made by this minority are constrained by a principle (profit maximization) which is

indifferent to the question whether the lives of wage laborers are rich and fulfilled or degraded and alienated. Of course it might be that self-actualizing labor and maximal profits are facilitated by the same set of productive forces and techniques; but in Volume 1, Part Four, of *Capital*, Marx argues in detail that there is no such happy coincidence, that it is just the kind of production dictated by profit maximization which has led to the alienating division of labor he describes.

Marx believes that far from being incompatible with the technical requirements of modern industry, the potentiality for varied, well-rounded human activity is inherent in modern scientific manufacture itself, and will begin to appear naturally as soon as production comes to be regulated consciously by the workers instead of being driven blindly by dead capital's vampire-like thirst for profit at the expense of human life. 'The nature of large industry', he says, 'conditions change of labor, fluidity of function, all-sided mobility of the laborer.' Every step in technical progress demonstrates this fact, by changing the laboring function required for manufacture, thus rendering whole categories of detail laborers (who have been trained only for one function) productively superfluous, and (under capitalist conditions) doing away with their only marketable skill. 'Change of labor' and 'fluidity of function' are not, however, inherently destructive or crippling. On the contrary, they represent precisely the potentiality for all-sided human development whose suppression under capitalism is a chief cause of alienation:

> But if change of labor now imposes itself as an overpowering natural law, . . . large industry through its catastrophes makes it a question of life or death to recognize the change of labor and hence the greatest possible many-sidedness of the laborer as a universal law of social production, and adapt its relation to the normal actuality of this law; . . . to replace the partial individual, the mere carrier of a detail function, with the totally developed individual, fit for the changing demands of labor, for whom different social functions are only so many modes of activity relieving one another.[7]

2 Capitalism and freedom

One cause of alienation cited by Marx is the frustration or abortion of human potentialities by the capitalist division of labor. Another, perhaps even more prominent and fundamental in Marx's account, is the

way in which people under capitalism are placed in a condition of degrading servitude, not merely to other human beings, but even more basically to impersonal and inhuman forces of their own creation. *The German Ideology* describes 'alienation' as 'the positing of social activity, the consolidation of our product as a real power over us, growing out of our control'.[8] *Capital* speaks of the conditions of wage labor as 'alienated from labor and confronting it independently', and of capital as 'an alienated, independent social might, which stands over against society as a thing (*Sache*)'.[9]

This use of 'alienation' is clearly an extension of Feuerbach's notion of religious alienation. In religion, according to Feuerbach, the human essence has come to be thought of by people as an alien (divine) being, which dominates them and makes them worthless (sinful) in their own eyes. The difference is that for Marx the human essence is not merely species consciousness but social labor; the alien being, the dominion and the state of worthlessness are thus not unhappy illusions but monstrous realities. In *Capital*, Marx makes the parallel with Feuerbach quite explicit: 'As in religion the human being is ruled by a botched work (*Machwerk*) of his own head, so in capitalist production he is ruled by a botched work of his own hand.'[10]

Under capitalism, production and distribution are not regulated collectively but determined by the interaction of independent individuals as private owners of commodities. This system, its apologists tell us, insures the maximum freedom of individuals to dispose of themselves and their property as they choose. Yet in capitalism, the large scale consequences of all this 'free' behavior, the market mechanism and economic system resulting from it, will fall outside anyone's control, and may react catastrophically on each or all of us in a manner which we are powerless, both individually and collectively, to prevent. This powerlessness is most noticeable in a trade crisis, when many capitalists are suddenly ruined, workers thrown out of employment, not through any natural disaster or any failure on the part of society's productive capacities, but simply by the social disaster inherent in the capitalist trade cycle. The alienating feature, however, is not just that the market system leads periodically to disastrous results. What is alienating is more basically that under capitalism human beings cannot be masters, whether individually or collectively, of their own fate, even within the sphere where that fate is a product solely of human action. As *The German Ideology* puts it: 'Their own conditions of life, their labor and with it all the conditions of existence of modern society, have become something accidental for them, over

which individual proletarians have no control and over which no *social* organization can give them control.'[11]

The two themes I have identified (alienation as frustration of human self-actualization by the division of labor and alienation as the domination of social conditions over their creators) are closely related in Marx's thinking. For one thing, Marx counts the division of labor as one of the inhuman conditions over which people lack control: 'As long as there exists a cleavage between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is divided not freely but naturally (*nicht freiwillig, sondern naturwüchsig*), the human being's own deed becomes an alien might standing over against him, subjugating him instead of being dominated by him.'[12] People are forced into stunting and degrading forms of activity only because they lack control over the social conditions which determine the way labor is divided. From this point of view alienation as frustrated self-actualization through the capitalist division of labor can be regarded as a special case of alienation as the degradation of human beings through subjection to their own creations. But from another point of view, this subjection can also be regarded as a special case of frustrated human self-actualization. The Paris manuscripts complain that under capitalism the worker's life activity is not 'his own activity', not 'self-activity' (*Selbsttätigkeit*) but is rather the 'loss of his self' (*Verlust seiner selbst*).[13] *The German Ideology*, using a slightly different terminology, declares that the proletarian revolution will 'transform labor into self-exercise' (*Selbstbetätigung*), by 'producing the form of intercourse', 'the conditions of [people's] self-exercise will be produced by this self-exercise'.[14]

What does Marx mean by 'self-activity' or 'self-exercise'? I think at least part of what Marx intends to designate by them is a kind of activity or a mode of life which is consciously determined by the agent's own understanding and choice rather than being forced on him or her by alien external factors. I 'activate' or 'exercise' my 'self' when I exercise my essentially human capacity to be practically conscious of my humanity in my activity, giving the form of self-understanding and rational choice to the life I live, and making my plans and deliberations effective in shaping my life. When I do this, I 'make my life activity its own object', in that I bring that activity under my conscious control. At the same time, I 'appropriate' my own life, it comes to belong to me instead of belonging to alien forces which master me instead of being mastered by me. By subjecting human beings to the socially produced conditions of their labor,

capitalism frustrates the exercise of these powers of self-understanding and self-determination, and this is part of the way in which it frustrates their self-actualization.

If this interpretation is correct, then Marx's emphasis on 'self-activity' or 'self-exercise' involves an affirmation of the value of human freedom, and belongs to a definite tradition of thinking about what this value consists in. Freedom for Marx is self-determination, the subjection of one's self and its essential functions to one's own conscious, rational choice. This concept of freedom, in such philosophers as Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, is given such names as 'spontaneity', 'moral liberty', 'autonomy' and 'being with oneself' (*Beisichselbstsein*). For these thinkers, as for Marx, freedom in the 'negative' sense, the absence of constraint or coercion on individuals, has value mainly because it provides the opportunity for the exercise of freedom in this deeper, 'positive' sense. Marx's adherence to this notion of freedom is explicit: to be free 'in the materialistic sense' is to be 'free not through the negative power of avoiding this and that, but through the positive might of making one's true individuality count'.[15]

In most modern thinkers before Marx, however, the conception of positive freedom is given a predominantly individualistic and moralistic interpretation. To be sure, they note that the exercise of this freedom requires the satisfaction of certain social (especially political) conditions. But they conceive self-determination itself chiefly as the inner volitional disposition of individual human agents, their mastery over their impulses and passions through rational self-knowledge and moral fortitude. Given Marx's materialist conception of human beings as socially productive beings, he cannot be content with an introverted, spiritualistic sort of self-determination. For Marx, true self-determination must rather consist in the imposition of human control on the social conditions of human production.

Marx often insists that social institutions and relations of production are not facts of nature but historically transient social forms which are the products of human activity every bit as much as wheat, cloth or machinery.[16] He does so in part to give the lie to those who would defend existing institutions by declaring them unalterable; but his purpose is also to make clear how much is required if human beings are to have genuine freedom or self-determination. If social relations are human products, then people cannot be accounted free until they create these relations with full consciousness of what they are doing. Human freedom requires not only that people should not

be (as Locke says) subject to the arbitrary will of others; it requires also that the social relations in which they stand should be products of their own will. To recognize this fully is already to see through the sophistry which represents capitalist society as free because its relationships result not from coercive laws or the will of rulers but (apparently) by accident, from unregulated economic decisions made by individuals. As Marx puts it: 'In imagination (*Vorstellung*), individuals under the dominion of the bourgeoisie are freer than before, because their conditions of life are accidental to them; but in reality they are more unfree, because they are more subsumed under a reified social power (*sachliche Gewalt*).'[17]

Because freedom for Marx requires the conscious production of people's social relations, it is something which can be achieved only in community with others, and cannot be attained by retreating into oneself or by the exercise of one's self-determination within the confines of a jealously guarded 'private domain' in which society does not interfere. Yet Marx does not neglect to emphasize the complementary point that no society can be free unless it 'gives to each the social room for his essential life expression'.[18] There can be no genuine freedom unless men and women have the opportunity to exercise choice over their own lives and develop their individuality fully and freely. Marx is the consistent foe of political repression, press censorship, and other such measures which curb the free development and expression of individuals. He has only contempt for any brand of communism which would turn the state or community into 'the universal capitalist' by imposing a uniform, impoverished mode of life on all members of society alike.[19] There can be no doubt that for Marx individual liberty is necessary to a free society. But it is equally evident, to Marx at least, that the liberty proclaimed by bourgeois liberalism is not sufficient for genuine (that is, positive) freedom.

Human freedom can be attained only when people's social relations are subject to conscious human control. Therefore, it is only in communist society that people can be truly free, because human control over social relations can only be collective control, and only in communist society can this control be exercised by and for all members of society: Communism, says Marx, 'consciously treats all natural (*naturwüchsig*) presuppositions as creations of earlier human beings, divesting them of their natural character (*Naturwüchsigkeit*) and subjecting them to the might of the united individuals'. Only communist society can do this, because communist society will be a classless society, in it people will 'participate in society just as individuals. For

it is the unity of individuals (of course within the presupposition of developed productive powers) which gives individuals control over the conditions for their free development and movement.'[20] Up to now, the class character of society has precluded the possibility of this unity, and hence of the freedom which can be attained only through it: 'The apparent community in which individuals have united themselves up to now always made itself into something independent over against them, and since it was always a unity of one class standing over against others, it was at the same time for the dominated class not only an illusory community, but a new fetter as well.' Further, because individual self-expression and self-actualization are possible only through the capitalist division of labor, even individual freedom will become possible only with the collective human control over people's conditions of life:

> The transformation of personal power (relations) into reified (*sachliche*) ones, . . . can only be abolished by individuals subsuming these reified powers again under themselves and abolishing the division of labor. This is not possible without the community. Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his abilities on all sides; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community.[21]

Marx does not conceive of social control over the means of production as the exclusion of individuals from ownership of what they produce and use. On the contrary, it is capitalism which involves such an exclusion, since it delivers the means and objects of production over to a class of nonworkers. Communism, as Marx sees it, will be a system of 'individual property for the producer', based on 'cooperation and the possession in common of land and the means of production'.[22] The means of production must be owned collectively, because in modern industry labor is directly social, and the disposition of the means of production is always an act affecting society as a whole. Such acts, in Marx's communism, will be performed consciously. Decisions about them will be made democratically, by society as a whole, and not by a privileged class, acting contrary to the interests of the laboring majority and subject to the alien constraint of profit-maximization.

Marx's critique of capitalism is based on some familiar philosophical value conceptions, such as self-actualization and positive

freedom. But it is wrong to conclude from this, as some writers on Marx appear to do, that his denunciations of capitalist alienation invoke or presuppose a conception of a future communist lifestyle or future social arrangements, and 'ideal' of what human beings could, would and should be. Marx never describes future social arrangements in detail, and the main point he makes about them is that they are bound to change in ways we cannot now foresee. Further, Marx often explicitly repudiates the intention of formulating 'ideals' of future society. As early as 1843 Marx writes to Ruge that any honest social reformer 'must admit to himself that he has no exact view about what ought to be. But again this is just the advantage of the new trend, that we do not dogmatically anticipate the world but only want to find the new world through a critique of the old one.' *The German Ideology* denies that 'communism' is an 'ideal' or 'state of affairs which ought to be brought about'. Communism rather is 'an actual movement which is abolishing the present state of affairs'. 'The workers', says *The Civil War in France*, 'have no fixed and finished utopias to introduce by popular decree, . . . no ideals to realize.' The task of the working class is 'only to posit freely the elements of the new society which has already developed in the womb of the collapsing bourgeois society'.[23]

The plain import of these passages (and others like them) is that Marx does not pretend to know what the lifestyle or social arrangements of future society will be like. He evidently believes that these matters are dependent largely on the further growth of our knowledge, and hence beyond our power to forecast. Marx's desire to overthrow capitalist society is not motivated by any ideal picture of communist society, but by the real alienation and deprivation of people in capitalist society, together with the conviction that these conditions result from capitalist social arrangements. Marx views his task not as one of concocting 'recipes for the cookshops of the future', but rather one of identifying the historical tendencies and social movements which promise to bring down the outmoded society and point the way to a future in which people will enjoy more of such goods as self-actualization and freedom.[24] It is wrong to think that Marx's judgment that the victory of the proletarian movement will bring about a world which is richer in these goods commits him to having some more definite conception of what this world will be like.

3 Assessing Marx on capitalist alienation

The issues involved in assessing Marx's thoughts about alienation under capitalism are difficult and complex. I think in the end most of these issues are empirical ones, but this does not mean that they are clear cut or easily resolved. Any adequate assessment of Marx's views at this point would certainly take up far more space than I have already used in expounding them. Even then, I suspect, any assessment seasoned with the proper scholarly caution would probably be inconclusive. It is unlikely that anyone, in Marx's time or today, knows enough to be entitled to a strong opinion for or against what Marx says about alienation and its social causes. If many people (the present writer included) do hold strong opinions, this is largely because the only alternative to committing oneself in practice for or against Marx would be to take no effective stand whatever on the social reality around us. In the present section I will try to identify (but not to resolve), some of the main issues raised by Marx's account of alienation as it has been expounded here.

Marx's account of alienation in capitalist society aims at substantiating three principal theses:

(1) The vast majority of people living under capitalism are alienated.
(2) The chief causes of this alienation cannot be removed so long as the capitalist mode of production prevails.
(3) Alienation as a pervasive social phenomenon can and will be abolished in a postcapitalist (socialist or communist) mode of production.

These three theses are obviously interrelated. (1) is more or less presupposed by both (2) and (3). But (1) itself, as Marx understands it, is also dependent on (2) and (3), and on his grounds for holding them. In support of (1), a Marxist might cite widespread feelings of disorientation and dissatisfaction among people living in capitalist societies, or he might point to the preoccupation of philosophers, artists, social thinkers and popular consciousness with the problem of alienation, whether in an overtly Marxian or in various non-Marxian forms. But these considerations, however well substantiated, would not strictly show that alienation, as Marx understands it, exists in capitalist society. By the same token, a critic of Marx cannot successfully rebut (1) merely by arguing that people in capitalist societies are on the whole satisfied with their lives, even if a convincing case for this could be

made out. Alienation, as Marx conceives of it, is not fundamentally a matter of consciousness or of how people in fact feel about themselves or their lives. Alienation is rather a state of objective unfulfillment, of the frustration of really existing human needs and potentialities. The consciousness people have of this unfulfillment is merely a reflection of alienation, at most a symptom or evidence of it. Marx's real grounds for believing that people in capitalist society are alienated is not that they are conscious of being alienated, but rather the objective existence of potentialities for human fulfillment that must be frustrated as long as the capitalist mode of production prevails.

As we saw in section 2, Marx has no very definite conception of postcapitalist society or of the possibilities for fulfillment which he believes will be actualized in it. Hence Marx does not believe (3) because he has some clear idea of the ways in which socialism or communism will provide people with opportunities for self-actualization. Rather, he seems to believe (3) because he is confident that people can achieve a fulfilling life when the main obstacles to it are removed, and because he thinks he has identified these obstacles: they are the outmoded social relations of bourgeois society.

The most direct way of attacking Marx's theory would be to deny that people really are alienated under capitalism, that people in capitalist society really do fall far short of actualizing their human potentialities. We could do this and still admit that many people in capitalist society are dissatisfied with their lives, so long as we hold that this dissatisfaction is due to causes other than the actual frustration of genuine potentialities of the sort Marx believes in. We could even go so far as to admit that people's dissatisfaction is due to their belief that they are being prevented by capitalism from actualizing their essential powers, so long as we hold that this belief is mistaken, perhaps that it is a tantalizing illusion disseminated by dangerous social malcontents.

It is often said that Marx is too optimistic about the inevitability of historical progress, and that the twentieth century's bitter experiences have taught us that the potentialities for human fulfillment in mass society under industrial technology are not nearly as great as nineteenth century thinkers (including Marx) believed them to be. These common opinions can easily be pressed into service against Marx's account of capitalist alienation. For if they are correct, then Marx's belief that most people in capitalist society are alienated is based on an exaggerated estimate of the human potentialities of modern society.

Marx certainly does not defend his nineteenth century optimism against twentieth century objections. Nothing he says (perhaps

nothing he could say) rules out the possibility that he is wrong to believe that the colossal and unprecedented expansion of society's productive powers during the capitalist era has created comparably colossal and unprecedented potentialities for human self-actualization. But it is not so obvious as many of Marx's critics might like to suppose that his belief is unrealistic or excessively optimistic. Modern technology increases people's ability to exercise control over nature, over themselves and over their relations with each other. It shortens the time required for people to produce the necessaries of life, and thus gives people at least potential mastery over time, over the hours, days and years which are the substance of human life. If technology also adds to people's needs, it is evident (at least to Marx) that some of these needs expand and enrich human life, and that freed from the influences of an alienating social order, people could exercise rational control even over the creation of new needs.

Further, modern science has increased our knowledge both of ourselves and of nature outside us, providing us with what we apparently need most to make wise use of our increased powers. Modern society has become mass society just because science and industry have increased people's powers of communication with each other, and intensified the web of human interdependence. Marx's confidence in the human potential of modern science and technology is initially plausible. To reject it is to embrace the paradox that increasing people's powers, their self-understanding and their interdependence has no tendency to enrich their lives, their freedom and their community. The burden of proof seems to be on anyone who would defend such paradoxes. It is not obvious that events in our century have rendered them more defensible than they were in Marx's time.

Especially important for Marx's conception of our potentialities for freedom is his belief that the values of individuality and community are reconcilable, that postcapitalist society can simultaneously achieve greater individual autonomy and greater social unity than people's productive powers and social relations have hitherto permitted. Marx's critics have been particularly suspicious of his silence concerning the social decision procedures through which free individuals are to achieve the rational collective regulation of their associated labor. At least since Rousseau, philosophers and political theorists have set themselves the problem of finding a form of human association which could unite individuals, putting the common might of society at the disposal of each while at the same time leaving all completely free to follow a self-chosen plan of life. To many it has seemed highly

questionable whether such an association is possible even in theory, let alone in practice. They are bound to be skeptical of Marx's apparent presumption that modern technology puts the goal within reach, and the abolition of capitalism is all we require to attain it.

Marx does say very little about the political or administrative structure of postcapitalist society, beyond insisting that it will be democratic, and will involve control by 'society itself' rather than by a separate political mechanism or state bureaucracy. Fundamentally, however, he does not see the problem as a procedural one at all. For Marx, the chief obstacle both to individual freedom and social unity is the division of society into oppressing and oppressed classes. Of course as long as we tacitly assume a class society, the goals of freedom and community will look both separately unattainable and diametrically opposed. In a society where one individual's freedom is not necessarily another's servitude, and where people have no motives to use community as a pretext for advancing some people's interests at the expense of others, questions of social decision making will not appear to people in the form of theoretical paradoxes or insoluble technical problems.

Marx also refuses to address himself to procedural questions because he regards them as premature. Such questions presuppose that we who ask them are all people of good will, pursuing a disinterested search for the right way to live together. They presuppose also that the object of such a search is, at least in its fundamentals, something which can be determined independently of detailed information about the technical resources available to society as regards its material production. Both presuppositions, in Marx's view, are false. As long as class society persists, the viability of any political mechanism will necessarily be a function not of its suitability for promoting genuine liberty or community, but only of the class interests it serves. Only after the abolition of class society can people begin to decide, on the basis of the productive capacities then at their disposal, how they will live together as free individuals.

We have been considering challenges to Marx's account of capitalist alienation based on the denial that people in capitalist society are really alienated. But many of Marx's critics might be prepared to admit that alienation is a serious problem of modern society. The question remains whether it is capitalist social relations as such which are responsible for it. Most political moderates and reformists live on the hope that the evils of modern society can be abolished, or at least greatly mitigated, without abandoning the framework of commodity

production and private ownership of the means of production. These hopes are often matched with the fear that a socialist revolution would do little or nothing to abolish alienation, and might even undermine such freedom and productivity as capitalism has.

Other critics, even more pessimistic, sometimes wonder whether alienation can be abolished at all, at least within the framework of a modern, sophisticated and technologically developed society. Existentialists have in effect interpreted alienation as an ineradicable fact of the human condition, built into the ontology of our existence or the transcendental structure of consciousness. Their views are sometimes continuous with older religious ones which treat alienation as a consequence of our sinful nature, remediable only by supernatural means. Social pessimists (such as Freud) have seen alienation as the inevitable result of subjecting our animal nature to the confinement of a social order. Others (in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau) have viewed alienation as the price we must pay for living in a society which is too far from nature: a society too large and sophisticated, too developed scientifically and technologically, too dependent on complex forms of human cooperation.

Marx does believe that alienation can be overcome in a modern, complex and industrialized society. But he is not necessarily committed to denying that there might be causes of alienation other than those specifically identified by his theory. The main burden of Marx's message is that capitalist social relations are the most pervasive and obvious cause of alienation, which must be abolished first, before lesser or more hidden causes can be dealt with. But there is no reason why Marx might not grant that such traditional social ills as religious fanaticism, racism and sexual oppression also contribute to alienation, and would have to be fought against even under socialism.

Marx's explanation of alienation might also be challenged in some of its details. It is arguable, for instance, that Marx's views about the capitalist division of labor, whatever truth they might have had in his own century, are now obsolete. Certainly it would be difficult to maintain that capitalism still exhibits a tendency to turn all labor into the unskilled mechanical sort, to 'make the absence of development into a specialty'. But even if this point is no longer defensible, Marx's explanation of alienation in terms of the capitalist division of labor may still be tenable. For the constraint of profit-maximization may still exercise a powerful (and harmful) effect on the nature of laboring activity, and inhibit the development of a well-rounded humanity on the part of workers. If this is so, then Marx's explanation of alienation

in terms of the capitalist division of labor may still be essentially correct, even if the specific details of his account are not. Marx is always the first to insist that capitalism is not an immutable system, but one which is undergoing constant change. It would not be inconsistent with his views to recognize that his account of alienation in nineteenth century capitalist society might not be applicable in detail to its descendants in later centuries.