

# HISTORY, LABOUR, AND FREEDOM

Themes from Marx

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## HISTORICAL INEVITABILITY AND REVOLUTIONARY AGENCY

1. Marx and Engels considered it inevitable that a socialist revolution would overturn capitalism. They express that belief in the *Communist Manifesto*, when they say that the 'fall [of the bourgeoisie] and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable'.<sup>1</sup> Now, the *Communist Manifesto* is famous as a call to arms. It encourages political activity to bring socialism about, and its very publication was part of just such political activity. But, if the advent of socialism is inevitable, then why should Marx and Engels, and those whom they hoped to activate, strive to achieve socialism? How can their activity be rational, if they think that socialism is *bound* to come? These questions pose what I shall call *the consistency problem*, since they suggest that it is not consistent to believe both that socialism is inevitable and that it is rational to struggle to bring it about. The present chapter is an attempt to solve this problem.<sup>2</sup>

What needs to be shown is that rational people who believe in the inevitability of socialist revolution can also think that they have reasons of a *certain primary kind* for joining the revolutionary movement. It is, of course, possible to believe that the advent of socialism is inevitable while joining the socialist movement for some or other ancillary reason: because you want to march on the winning side, because you find battle against the class enemy exhilarating, because you want to be where the action is, or tell your grandchildren that you were, and so on. When people join the revolutionary movement for reasons of that secondary order, they

<sup>1</sup> *The Communist Manifesto*, 496. Cf. *Capital*, i. 619, where Marx predicts 'the inevitable conquest of political power by the working class'.

<sup>2</sup> To solve the consistency problem, I need to describe beliefs which render it consistent to hold both that socialism is inevitable and that it is rational to strive to bring it about. One may distinguish three degrees of strength in proposed solutions to the problem. Solutions of weakest strength attribute to revolutionaries further beliefs which are merely *logically possible*: even lunatic beliefs can therefore supply a solution of this weakest type. The strongest solutions attribute *true* beliefs, and solutions of medium strength attribute beliefs which are neither merely logically possible, nor definitely true, but *plausible*. It is a solution of that medium degree of strength which I try to provide in this chapter.

need not believe that they are contributing to its success. Marxist revolutionaries plainly do have that belief, and the problem is to reconcile it with their further belief that revolutionary success is inevitable.

Notice that it is not only Marxists who assign inevitability to a goal which inspires them to a great deal of advocacy and energy. Politicians of milder complexion often say of policies which they spend a lot of effort promoting that they are bound to be adopted. The Marxist goal is, of course, grander than that of most politicians, but that has no bearing on the relative conceptual coherence of the Marxist stance. The consistency problem arises both in the dramatic Marxist case and in the more ordinary one.

Some Marxist beliefs about historical inevitability may generate difficulties which do not also afflict drabber political doctrines. Marxists think that a number of large historical transformations which, to others, seem manifestly at the mercy of circumstance, are inevitable, and that distinctively Marxist belief might well raise special philosophical problems: it certainly raises historical ones. But, whatever those problems may be, they are not immediately at issue in the present exercise. My present purpose is to show that the Marxist political practice of trying to bring socialism about is compatible with the Marxist belief that its advent is inevitable. I do not seek to defend that belief itself, although a defence of it against certain charges will emerge as a by-product of my attempt to sustain the stated compatibility claim.

2. One way of handling the consistency problem is *the birth pangs solution*.<sup>3</sup> It runs as follows: 'Although it is inevitable that a socialist revolution will come, it is not inevitable how long it will take for it to come. It is therefore rational for us to dedicate ourselves to the revolutionary movement, in order to make socialism come sooner rather than later. The sooner socialism comes, the smaller will be the amount of suffering imposed on people by continuing capitalist oppression.' The birth pangs solution says that those who believe that socialism is inevitable can hope to cause the transition to it to occur comparatively quickly, even if they cannot, *ex hypothesi*, hope to make the very

<sup>3</sup> The phrase 'birth-pangs' comes from the Preface to the 1st edn. of *Capital* (i. 92).

achievement of socialism more likely. They strive to bring about socialism not because it will not otherwise occur, but because it will otherwise occur later than necessary. (Note that the birth pangs solution does not invoke the consideration that participants in the revolutionary movement can try to reduce the amount of agony that occurs in the course of the revolution itself. This distinct consideration, which the phrase 'birth pangs' readily brings to mind, will be examined in section 5 below).

Since the birth pangs solution attributes to revolutionaries a concern for the welfare of other people, it presupposes that they are not selfishly inspired. But that is not an objection to the solution, since revolutionaries are not, on the whole, selfishly inspired, and, what is here more relevant, Marx and Engels did not believe that they were. Had Marx supposed that proletarian revolutionaries would be actuated by self-interest alone, he could not have thought it 'self-evident that in the impending bloody conflicts, as in all earlier ones, it is the workers who, in the main, will have to win the victory by their courage, determination and self-sacrifice'<sup>4</sup>

Now it might be thought that the birth pangs solution is defeated by the consideration that, even if all prospective revolutionaries would, together, make socialism come sooner, it is still not rational for any of them to devote his energy to the revolution, since the difference one person can make to how soon it is likely to come is too small relative to the costs and risks of revolutionary participation. It might be objected, in short, that the birth pangs solution succumbs to a free rider problem. (Note that the objection does not suppose that revolutionaries are unwilling to sacrifice anything for the cause, but only that, if they are rational, then they proportion the size of the sacrifice they will contemplate to the difference they can expect to make to what happens, and that the relationship between those two magnitudes tells against participation in the present case.)

But even if a free rider problem indeed undoes the rationality of individuals' trying to hasten the transition to socialism, it would not follow that the *inevitability* of socialism renders the birth pangs motivation for revolutionary participation irrational. If a free rider problem looms here, then it does so whether or not socialist revolution is inevitable, and the birth pangs solution was not introduced to solve that further and different problem.

<sup>4</sup> 'Address of the Central Authority to the Communist League', 282.

A simple thought experiment will show that the problem of reconciling the inevitability of revolution with the rationality of engaging in it is independent of any free rider problem that may here supervene. Suppose that, for whatever good or bad reason, all those who want socialism are unalterably committed to acting in such a way that, if all so act, then the goals of each are achieved. That supposition rules out free rider problems by fiat. But, even when they have been thus ruled out, we can still ask the assembled revolutionaries, 'Why are you (*pl.*) engaging in revolution, when you think that the advent of socialism is inevitable?' The birth pangs solution recommends that they answer, 'Because we can thereby hasten its advent', and the cogency of that answer to the consistency question is not impugned if it is incapable of providing each individual with an answer to the different question as to why *he* participates in the pangs-reducing effort.

That different question may be hard to answer, because of the free rider problem, but a proponent of the birth pangs solution is not obliged to answer it. The birth pangs idea does repel the challenge to revolutionaries that their belief in the inevitability of revolution deprives them of reason to struggle. It is not intended to vindicate the rationality of struggling against *every* challenge, and, in particular, it does not have to show how the free rider objection to struggling can be overcome.

Marxist revolutionaries who solve the consistency problem through recourse to the birth pangs solution think it inevitable that a socialist revolution will occur sooner or later, but they do not think it inevitable that one will occur as early as they are trying to make one occur. They are like a team of scientists who think it inevitable that a cure for AIDS will one day be discovered, but who bend themselves to the task of discovering it because they want the cure to come as soon as possible. The birth pangs solution depends on this distinction, between the inevitability, which it affirms, of an event of type *E* at some or other future time, and the inevitability, which it denies, of an event of type *E* within the period in which the agents are trying to make *E* occur. (I mean, by that period, the time within which, if the agents are successful, *E* occurs, and not the time when they spend their *E*-promoting effort, which could wholly or partly precede the period in which *E* occurs.)

I now want to increase the severity of the consistency problem, by eliminating the distinction on which the birth pangs solution

turns, and thereby disqualifying that solution. I shall now suppose that those who dedicate themselves to the movement believe not only that revolution is inevitable sooner or later but also that a revolution is inevitable within the very period in which they are striving to bring one about. (It does not matter, for our purposes, whether or not they think the first inevitability depends on the second—whether, that is, they think revolution would be bound to come even if it were not bound to come soon.) Under that supposition, the birth pangs solution fails, since it depends on denying the inevitability of the *impending* revolution.

This strengthening of the consistency problem is justified by a fact about the posture of revolutionaries: when they believe that an imminent revolution is inevitable, they are not deterred from fighting hard to bring the revolution about. The birth pangs solution is incapable of dispelling the appearance of irrationality in that relatively familiar combination of belief and action. It must therefore give way to the different solution to the consistency problem which I offer in the next section.

3. We are now contemplating revolutionaries who believe that it is inevitable that there will be a socialist revolution within, say, five years, and that it is rational to struggle to bring about revolution within that very period (and not in order to make it occur earlier in that period than it otherwise would). How can such struggling be rational? Does not the inevitability of the revolution entail that it is going to occur no matter what they, or others, do?

But the inevitability of an event does not, in fact, entail that it will occur no matter what anyone does. For something is inevitable if it is bound to happen<sup>5</sup> (if, that is, it is certain to occur), and it can be bound to happen not no matter what people do, but because of what people are bound, predictably, to do. One reason, moreover, why they might be bound to do something is that it is their most rational course. And that is the reason which operates in the case at hand: I am sure that the ground of the Marxian claim that the advent of socialism is inevitable is that a sufficient number of workers are so placed that it is rational for them, in the light of all

<sup>5</sup> Note that I am not here making the converse claim, that, if something is inevitable, then it is bound to happen. Some people (not including me) would regard the radioactivity case (see sect. 6 below) as a counter-example to that claim.

their interests and values,<sup>6</sup> to join the struggle to bring socialism about. When capitalism is in decline, and socialism is achievable, there are bound to be so many workers who have good reasons for waging the fight against capitalism that a successful socialist revolution will inevitably ensue. If you put the consistency problem to the revolutionary workers, they will say: 'The socialist revolution is bound to happen because we are irreversibly resolved to bring it about, and we are thus resolved because of the excellent reasons we have for bringing it about'.<sup>7</sup>

Now, when this is the ground of an inevitability claim, one cannot say that the inevitable thing will happen no matter what people do, for that would contradict the very basis on which the thing is said to be inevitable. The basis for saying that the advent of socialism is inevitable makes it absurd to ask why people should bother to struggle for it if its coming is inevitable. One does not ask why an overwhelmingly strong army bothers to fight, when its victory is inevitable. For its victory, when inevitable, is not inevitable whether or not an army fights. Its victory is inevitable only if, and because, it will fight. If something is bound to happen, then it is inevitable, but it scarcely follows that it will happen even if nothing (for example, no human being) brings it about. No one concludes that he need not bother to do *A* when he realizes that, because he has such good reasons for doing *A*, he is going to do *A*. I shall call this *the good reasons solution* to the consistency problem.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the birth pangs solution, the good reasons solution meets the condition that the revolutionaries think that the very revolution, identified by the time of its occurrence, for which they will be responsible is itself inevitable.

<sup>6</sup> Not, that is, in the light of their self-interest alone: no such absurd restriction on the ends of rational action is contemplated here. For present purposes, we may, following Elster, define rational action as action which is the best means to realizing (whatever may be) one's goals, given beliefs which are themselves justified by the evidence at one's disposal. See Jon Elster, 'Weakness of Will and the Free Rider Problem', 240.

<sup>7</sup> Note that I do not represent them as saying: 'and we are therefore bound to bring it about'. That self-characterization could be criticized from the Hampshirean point of view which insists that one cannot say of oneself, in a standardly predicting way, that one is bound to do something, for one could only, in saying such a thing, be announcing one's decision to do it. No such Hampshirean objection applies to what I have represented the revolutionaries as saying.

<sup>8</sup> Philosophers versed in the free will controversy might suppose that the good reasons solution embodies a compatibilist attitude to the free will problem. In fact, however, my own sympathy is with incompatibilism, and I show that the good reasons solution does not require compatibilism in sect. 10 below.



In my view, the good reasons solution is an entirely adequate answer to the questions with which this chapter began. I must, however, deal with three plausible objections to it, which are treated in sections 4–7.

4. I begin with the redundancy objection, which is the most potent of the three, and which will, I fear, exact a long and complex reply.

According to the redundancy objection, (almost<sup>9</sup>) no revolutionary who believes that the advent of socialism is inevitable can also think that his participation in the revolution will raise the chances of its success: hence no revolutionary has any reason to join the revolutionary movement (apart from irrelevant reasons of the secondary kind which were set aside at the beginning of this chapter).

To one who gives the good reasons answer to the charge that it is irrational for him to join the revolution when he thinks its success is inevitable, the redundancy objector replies as follows: 'Your answer would stand if you had reason to think that there will be *just* enough similarly motivated revolutionary agents, one of whom is you, for the movement to succeed. For then your participation would be required for the revolution's success, and it would also ensure that success, so that you could both be rationally resolved to participate and (therefore) confident of the inevitability of success. On the unlikely hypothesis that there are *just* enough revolutionaries bent on struggle, the good reasons solution works, because the contribution of each revolutionary is *pivotal*.

'But you have no reason to think that you are, in fact, pivotal. Now, it does not follow from that alone that it is irrational for you to join the movement. You might reason that since you do not know how many others will join, you should participate *in case* you are pivotal, since so much is at stake.<sup>10</sup> But that rationale for participation is unavailable to you once you believe as, *ex hypothesi*, you do, that the revolution is inevitable. *You* cannot think that you might be pivotal. For you might be pivotal only if there might be, without you, just one revolutionary fewer than are needed. But if you believe, as you must to believe that you might be pivotal, that there might be a deficit of one, you must also believe

<sup>9</sup> Possible exceptions are people like Lenin, but, since such exceptional people have no bearing on the argument, I shall ignore them throughout.

<sup>10</sup> See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 73–5.



that there might be a deficit of two. (It is, to be sure, possible to believe that there might be a deficit of one and yet disbelieve that there might be a deficit of two, but reckoning what might happen is in this domain so difficult that no one could reasonably hold that conjunction of views.) But, if there might be a deficit of two, then successful revolution is not inevitable.

'Let me pose the problem in a different way. Revolution is, on your solution, inevitable if and only if either just enough or more than enough workers are resolved to make it happen. But you cannot believe that there might be just enough, since your belief that revolution is inevitable must reflect a belief that there are certain to be more than enough. But then you must believe that your own contribution is redundant, and you therefore lose your reason for participation.'

The redundancy objection presses a particular sort of free rider problem, with two distinctive features. First, the problem is not posed 'neat', but under the assumption that the revolution is inevitable; and second, the problem here is that the individual can make *no* difference to the prospect of success, and not merely, as is generally true in free rider problems, that he can make at most only a tiny difference.<sup>11</sup>

Now, when I defended the birth pangs solution against a free rider problem, I said that the claim that the birth pangs solution rationalizes revolutionary engagement in the face of the inevitability of revolution is not defeated if, for reasons other than the inevitability of revolution, the birth pangs idea fails as an inspiration to rational action (see section 2 above). But it would be a mistake to think that the good reasons solution can be similarly insulated against the free rider problem raised by the redundancy objection. For that free rider problem has an immediate and ineliminable bearing against the good reasons solution.

That different bearing reflects the fact that, unlike the birth pangs solution, the good reasons solution offers—indeed, rests upon—an account of why socialism's advent is thought to be inevitable. The good reasons solution has two parts. Its first part says that socialism is inevitable because enough workers have good reason to fight for it. Its second part says that it therefore cannot be

<sup>11</sup> Note that free rider problems in which the individual makes *no* difference are not amenable to the solution expounded in the Parfit pages cited in the preceeding note.

irrational for them to fight for it simply because it is inevitable, since it is not irrational to act for good reasons. In the good reasons solution, the very thing that makes the revolution inevitable makes it not irrational to struggle to bring it about.

The free rider problem facing the good reasons solution pertains to its first part. The redundancy objector can grant that, if socialism is indeed inevitable because workers have good reasons to fight for it, then the consistency problem disappears. But he doubts that workers do have good reasons to fight for socialism, because of the free rider problem. He says that the good reasons solution fails because, if socialism is supposed to be inevitable in virtue of the reasons workers have for fighting for it, then the claim that it is inevitable cannot be sustained.

To show that the birth pangs solution solved a problem which was independent of the free rider problem, I supposed that the assembled revolutionaries, when asked, 'Why are you engaging in revolution when the advent of socialism is inevitable?' could answer 'Because we thereby hasten its advent'. The good reasons solution invites them to answer that question as follows: 'Socialism is bound to come because enough of us have good reasons for striving to bring it about, and we therefore shall bring it about. It follows, trivially, that we do have good reasons for engaging in revolution.' Now collectives of people may, by appropriate action, hasten the advent of outcomes, but, if their members are rational, they do not act to achieve what each of them seeks where it is not rational for any member to engage in such action. It follows that the word 'we', in the answer the collective gives under the good reasons solution, unlike the word 'we' in its birth pangs solution answer, must (at least *inter alia*) be taken distributively.<sup>12</sup> And, since that is so, the free rider problem now possesses an immediate relevance which it lacked in the case of the birth pangs solution.

The redundancy objection proceeds from an unchallengeable premiss and reaches its destructive conclusion through two inferences:

A revolutionary who thinks that the success of the revolution is inevitable cannot believe that his participation raises the probability of that success.

<sup>12</sup> It must, that is, mean 'each one of us', whereas, in the birth pangs solution, it need only mean 'all of us together'.

He therefore cannot believe that his participation makes a (relevant)<sup>13</sup> significant difference to what happens.

He therefore cannot believe that he has a reason (of a primary kind) to participate in the revolution.

The second inference presents the free rider component in the redundancy objection.

Because its opening premiss is unchallengeable, only the inferences of the redundancy objection can be questioned. I first consider, and then set aside, a reply to the objection which rejects its second inference. I then proceed to my own reply, which rejects its first inference.

The second inference depends on a doctrine about rational action which some have challenged. The doctrine says that the only difference that should make a difference to what I do is the difference *I* can make by doing it. According to its challengers, this doctrine overlooks an alternative rationale for doing something: although my action may by itself make no difference, it may be one of a set of actions which *together* make a difference.<sup>14</sup> If those who challenge the doctrine are right, the second inference of the redundancy objection is fallacious, and an articulate revolutionary could reject it as follows: 'Suppose that I indeed make no difference by joining the movement, since more are going to take part in the struggle than are necessary for the revolution to succeed. Yet, although I am surplus to requirements, it is rational for me to enter the revolutionary ranks, because I want to be among those, which is to say all the revolutionary agents, who *together* ensure that the revolution succeeds.'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> A relevant difference here is one which is such that socialist revolution is inevitable when enough people are moved by the attempt to produce that difference.

<sup>14</sup> See statements 4 and 4a on p. 238 of John Mackie's 'Norms and Dilemmas'. Note that Mackie's endorsement of the idea he expounds is incomplete, in that he contends only that things go better if people think in this collective fashion, from which it does not follow that it is a rational way to think. (In *Reasons and Persons* Derek Parfit propounds a similar, but emphatically not identical, doctrine about collective action: see pp. 70–3, 75–86, on the 'third mistake in moral mathematics'. The Parfit position differs from Mackie's in that Parfit is careful to restrict the scope of the 'what we do' rationale to cases where the individual is *not* redundant. What Parfit maintains is, nevertheless, subject to variants of the difficulties (see n. 16 below) which afflict Mackie's position.)

<sup>15</sup> Suppose that I chop off his head while you stick a dagger in his heart. Then each of us ensures that he dies, although neither of us makes a difference to whether or not he dies. Suppose now that *n* revolutionaries are needed for success, and that *m* ( $m > n$ ) in fact participate. Then no one of the *m* makes a difference to whether or not

I do not think that the stated rationale for redundant participation in collective action is tenable. There are a number of apparently strong objections to it, and I do not think that they can all be met.<sup>16</sup> I consequently do not endorse this first reply to the redundancy objection, and I proceed to my own reply, which questions its first inference. I believe that *something* like this different reply is satisfactory (*something* like it, since, as will become evident, the structure of my reply is not as clear as I should like it to be).

My reply says that the individual revolutionary may make a significant difference to what happens even though he does not raise the probability of revolutionary success. To indicate what that difference is, I shall employ a simplifying analogy.

Suppose that there is a car whose battery is low, and, since it is a big car, three people must push it to get it to go. As it happens, there are three people near the car, each of whom very much wants it to move, and the car's situation and their own motivations are common knowledge among them. Then each can consistently believe both that it is inevitable that the car will move and that it is rational for him to join in pushing it: each appropriately motivated person is pivotal here.

But now let us make the example harder, and more closely analogous to the situation of the revolutionaries. Once again, three people are needed to push the car, but now each of four is resolved to push it, provided that at least two others will, and each of them, because their inclinations are common knowledge, believes that it is inevitable that it will be pushed. The redundancy objector asks

the revolution occurs, but each one belongs to a set of coalitions each of which has  $n$  members and each of which ensures that it occurs. Because he belongs to such sets, the individual is among those who ensure that the revolution occurs.

<sup>16</sup> The idea that what I achieve together with others can motivate me even where it would make no difference to what is achieved if I dropped out has psychological reality: I am sure that people have this motivation as a matter of fact, when, for example, they vote in mass electorate constituencies. But I doubt that the motivation constitutes a rational justification for action. Capsule statements of objections to its rationality: i. How should I compare, with a view to deciding what to do, the good effects of my redundant collaboration with others with the good effects I can bring about on my own? ii. Don't I needlessly sacrifice production of those latter good effects by joining redundantly with others? iii. How, without reasoning according to the differences I can make, should I decide which good-effects-producing group to join? iv. Why should redundantly collaborating with other people make sense when no one would suppose that redundantly collaborating with natural agencies does so?

what good reason any of them can have to push when he knows that he is surplus to requirements. If the doctrine about 'what *we* do' were right, then each would have as a reason for pushing that he would then belong to a group which gets the car to go. But I do not think that the doctrine is right, and I therefore offer the following different reply to the objection.

If an individual pushes, then although, *ex hypothesi*, he does not raise the probability that the car will move, he reduces the burden on each of the other pushers. This suggests a good reason for pushing it, namely, that *each pusher wants to reduce the burden on the others in achieving what they all seek, by assuming some of it himself*. It is that burden, *so described*, that he wants to reduce. He does not want to reduce the burden of the others because he has a general policy of reducing people's burdens, which happens to be activated in this context. A well-disposed passer-by who had no independent concern that the car should move might join in the pushing to help the others, but our pusher joins in because he thereby takes some of the load off the others and thereby contributes to achieving what he and they seek. (If the pushers' motivational structures were like the passer-by's, the car would not, of course, be moving. His is the merely conditional desire to help whoever might be pushing. Theirs is the categorical desire that there be other pushers whom they are helping, a desire which they are all able to fulfil.) Nor is it constitutively his concern simply to alleviate the cost to other pushers of their pushing. Let us assume that, if he mopped their brows, that would reduce their discomfort, but not the amount of effort they must put in. On that assumption, brow mopping would not fulfil his aim, which is, to express it differently, to bring it about that the car moves as a result of others' putting in less effort as a result of his putting in some effort. And the way that he reduces the effort of the others is through his own pushing of the car, through his own input into the achievement of the sought result. That result would, *ex hypothesi*, supervene without his input, but not as he wants to supervene, with less effort from others because of the effort he himself supplies.

The picture offered here, of interlocking mutual assistance, might help to explain the appeal of the 'what we do' doctrine, which I rejected above. In my solution solidarity is, I hope, unmysteriously rational: it is easy to see to what *effect* it is exercised, whereas, in pure

'what we do', it is exercised (literally) to no effect. Still, I have no objection to the suggestion that my own solution is a refinement of 'what we do' theory, that it represents an elaboration of what its exponents have in mind.<sup>17</sup>

The application of the car-pushing model to the circumstance of the revolutionaries is fairly straightforward. Each one of them, in joining the struggle, does not, *ex hypothesi*, render its success more likely, but he puts himself in a position palpably to diminish the burden on other revolutionaries. To see that this is so, observe that a revolution is a concatenation of particular engagements at particular sites. At each such site, a single individual can frequently make the task of the other revolutionaries there easier. To be sure, at some sites swelling the number of agents could be counter-productive, because of crowding effects, so that the revolutionary has to choose his site with care, but there is always an opportunity for him to make a relieving contribution somewhere.

*The reason, then, which each revolutionary has to participate is that he can thereby reduce the burden on other revolutionaries in the task of achieving what they all seek.* And it is, as in the car-pushing case, that burden, so described, which figures in his motivation: he does not join the revolution because he generally wants to reduce people's burdens and the revolutionary process happens to offer an excellent opportunity for doing so. Since each revolutionary is, moreover, sufficiently confident that enough others will be similarly motivated, each can believe that successful revolution is inevitable while rationally deciding to participate in the movement.

The redundancy objector might now say that, even if this reply fashions a solution to the consistency problem, it does not vindicate the good reasons solution as that was originally described. In its initial presentation (see section 3 above), the solution, when stated by the revolutionaries themselves, ran as follows: 'The socialist revolution is bound to happen because we are irreversibly resolved to bring it about, and we are thus resolved because of the excellent reasons we have for bringing it about.' But now the individual seems not to join the movement in order to bring about socialism

<sup>17</sup> See Mackie, 'Norms and Dilemmas', 240 for a comment on his statement 4 which suggests an interpretation of it along my lines, although it is hard to see how the interpretation could be extended to his statement 4a.



but for the seemingly secondary reason that he wants to reduce the burden on other revolutionaries. The goal of achieving socialism seems no longer to play its required central role.

I have tried to forestall that objection by drawing attention to the nature of the burden which the revolutionaries are seeking to reduce: it is the burden of bringing about socialism, considered as such—the burden, that is, of helping to realize what all the revolutionaries seek. The goal of achieving socialism is, consequently, integral to the burden which they want to reduce: what each aims to do, and can do, is to bring it about that socialism arrives with less effort from others because of the effort he devotes himself.

Not all workers will join the revolution for the reason I have stated (or, indeed, for any other reason). So let me say more about the form of the good reasons solution, and about the assumptions it makes about the extent to which people in general and workers in particular are rational. Those assumptions are less extravagant than may thus far have appeared.

Each worker finds himself in a particular objective situation, with a particular set of interests and values, and, consequently, a particular optimally rational course of action.<sup>18</sup> Call his interests and values his *motivation*, and call a motivation which makes participation in revolution rational a *revolutionary motivation*. Then note that the good reasons solution does not say that, given merely their objective situation, workers are bound to have revolutionary motivations. Their motivations connect vagariously with their situations, and, for many workers, participation in revolution will not be their most rational course. What the good reasons solution does say is that, in virtue of the mix of situations in which they are placed, and a predictable distribution of psychological variations, there are bound to be so many proletarians with revolutionary motivations so many of whom are rational that there are bound to be enough who join the revolutionary movement to ensure its success.

No one's situation means that he is bound to have a revolutionary motivation: at the level of the individual, the tie between

<sup>18</sup> Recall the definition of 'rational action' given at n. 6 above, which governs the present discussion.



situation and motivation is neither rationally dictated nor inevitable. But, at the collective level, it is inevitable (though not a dictate of rationality) that there will be enough motivations which rationally dictate revolutionary engagement for a socialist revolution to be inevitable.

The good reasons solution says that participation in the revolution is not, despite its inevitability, irrational, since the inevitability of the revolution is founded on the good reasons those who participate in it have for doing so, and it is not irrational to act for good reasons. The solution does not require that all workers are rational, nor that all rational workers will have a revolutionary motivation, but only that there are bound to be enough who are both rational and possessed of the right motivation for revolution to occur. We need not suppose that the entire proletariat undergoes the socialization which Marx had in mind when he said that workers would be 'trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production'.<sup>19</sup> We need not even suppose, less implausibly, that a large majority of the class undergoes that socialization. All that we need suppose is that a minority of it that is big enough to overturn capitalism will be on the march.

According to the good reasons solution to the consistency problem, socialism is inevitable because of what enough people, being rational, are bound to do. Notice, though, that socialism could be bound to come because people are bound to bring it about other than in exercise of their rationality. A person who acts in intemperate anger against something he hates might thereby be making a quite irrational choice. Suppose now that oppression by capitalists motivates so many workers to act in a violent and irrational fashion that the demise of the system is, in consequence, inevitable. Each agent wants (as it were) to throw a brick at the system. He wants to do that so much that he will do it whether or not he expects anyone else to do something similar, and even though, on his incomplete information, all that he can expect to achieve is a severe punishment. But, when he reaches the street with his brick, he finds many others there who are similarly inclined and equipped, and together their violence brings down the system. In this scenario, socialist revolution is inevitable not despite but

<sup>19</sup> *Capital*, i. 929.

because of what people will do, but it is not a scenario which substantiates the good reasons solution to the consistency problem.

The 'anger scenario' is an element in a different solution to the consistency problem, and not one on which I can rely here, since I do not think that it is an appropriately Marxist solution. In this different solution, socialism comes not because people act with good reasons but because, as it were, they explode; yet it can be rational for an individual to join the revolutionary movement because, for example, he wants to reduce his angry fellows' burden, or because (see section 5) he wants to help to moderate socialism's birth agony. The anger scenario shows how it can be rational for an individual to participate in a revolution whose success he thinks is inevitable, but it does not, *ex hypothesi*, and unlike the good reasons solution, show how *all* the participants in a revolution which *all* think inevitable can be rationally moved to participate in it.

5. Before proceeding to the second objection to the good reasons solution, I want to discuss a strategy, which I did not consider in section 4, for handling the free rider problem which the redundancy objection raises. This alternative strategy emphasizes the fact that an individual can lessen the amount of agony that occurs in the course of the revolution, and, in that sense, reduce the birth pangs of socialism.<sup>20</sup> Recall (see page 63 above) that the revolution concatenates particular engagements at particular sites. If, at a particular site, six revolutionaries are engaged, instead of five, the four counter-revolutionaries there may come more quietly as a result, with a further result being less injury and death, on both sides. This blocks the free rider problem, by showing how one individual's action can make a palpable difference. It would be absurd to ask someone why he bothers to take part, when all he can do is make the tiny difference that 5,000 people die instead of 5,001. His powerful reply will be that saving one human life is an enormous thing for a single individual to achieve.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> This sort of 'birth pangs' consideration was mentioned and set aside in the first paragraph of sect. 2. It differs from the consideration that the individual can try to make socialism come sooner, though there is *sometimes* an extensional equivalence between the two aims.

<sup>21</sup> It is not similarly devastating to point out, in defence of what I called the 'birth pangs solution' in sect. 2, that a single individual can make socialism come five minutes sooner.

Now this is indeed a reason for joining the struggle, but it is not a reason which revolutionaries distinctively have, since there is no more reason to reduce the agony of the revolution if you are in favour of socialism than there is if you are against it. Minimizing the agony of the process is an essentially secondary motive for socialist revolutionaries, considered as such: wanting to minimize it neither makes them revolutionaries nor reflects the fact that that is what they are. The individual cannot both participate in order to reduce the agony of the process and believe that revolution is inevitable because enough will be motivated to participate for the same reason that he has. For that would imply that the revolution is inevitable even if no one is in favour of it, and that implication is plainly absurd.

One cannot similarly dismiss the consideration on which I did rely when I sought to nullify the redundancy objection, namely, that the individual wants to help those who are working to bring socialism about *because* that is their goal. Only someone who favours socialism can have his sort of motivation.<sup>22</sup> A thus-motivated socialist does not enter the revolutionary process without being governed by its goal: his commitment to the socialist goal is part of the explanation of his desire to assist those who are striving to achieve it (by assisting those who are striving to achieve it . . . and so on).

The iteration of the phrase in that last parenthesis exposes the peculiar structure of my reply to the redundancy objection. As I said (see page 61 above), I am not at present able to make that structure as clear as I should like it to be. But something *like* this must, I think, be right. For remember the car-pushing analogy, which raises all the relevant problems.<sup>23</sup> No pusher makes a difference to whether the car will move, or even, we could add, to how fast it will move. Yet each has the good reason to push that it will reduce the burden others shoulder in the achievement of what they all want, and each can be certain that the car will move just because enough others are motivated in exactly the way he is.

There are a number of conditions which an adequate reply to the

<sup>22</sup> It is, in that way, like the motivation of wanting to make socialism come sooner, as opposed to with less bloodshed.

<sup>23</sup> A good way of seeing that the car-pushing case raises all the relevant problems is by supposing that one can make the revolution by killing the President, who is at the bottom of a narrow alley down which the car can be pushed.

free rider objection to the good reasons solution must meet. The reply must identify a reason motivating revolutionaries (*a*) which is consistent with the fact that no individual makes a difference to whether or not socialism comes, (*b*) to which the goal of achieving socialism is nevertheless integral, and (*c*) which each revolutionary can believe is motivating enough others so that socialism is bound to come, as a result of their being so motivated. The agony-reducing reason meets condition (*a*), but not conditions (*b*) and (*c*). It is like the desire to succour the car-pushers by wiping the sweat off their brows, where, as I assumed at page 62 above, that service makes them push with less discomfort, but not more effectively. Both the pure 'what we do' solution and my own satisfy all three of the above conditions. But, unlike 'what we do', my own solution also satisfies a further condition, which I think mandatory: it identifies a pertinent difference which the individual makes through his participation.<sup>24</sup>

6. The second objection to the good reasons solution is the *preventability objection*. I shall develop it as it applies to the case of the overwhelmingly strong army's impending inevitable victory (see section 3 above), which is a model for the good reasons solution.

The preventability objection says that, for something to be inevitable, it must be unpreventable, and that, for these purposes, refraining from bringing something about (when no one else proceeds to bring it about) counts as preventing it. It follows that the army's victory is not inevitable, since its commander could frustrate it, if, as we may suppose, his troops would obey a surprising change of orders. And a sufficient number of other ranks could also prevent their own army's victory, if, as we also may suppose, they are able to act with sufficient co-ordination.

The preventability objector thinks that it follows from the fact that something could be prevented that it is not bound to happen. He is wrong. A thing is bound to happen even if it could be prevented, as long as whoever has the power to prevent it is bound not to prevent it,<sup>25</sup> and that, we may suppose, is true in the case of

<sup>24</sup> It is because it fails to meet that further condition that the unreconstructed 'what we do' doctrine falls subject to the objections listed in n. 16 above.

<sup>25</sup> Someone might think that, if a person really has the power to prevent something, then he is not bound not to prevent it. But that thought is best developed as the freedom objection, which is different from the preventability objection, and which I deal with in the next section.

the army's victory. If something might be prevented, then it is not bound to occur. But the fact that it *could* be prevented does not mean that it *might* be, because of the case in which all those who could prevent it are bound not to. The preventability objection therefore depends upon an invalid inference. If something is bound to happen, and bound not to be prevented, the claim that it is inevitable is not defeated by the consideration that it could be prevented. The military victory is inevitable when the only people who could prevent it are, being rational, bound not to.

The preventability objection misidentifies a relational property of events, which the word 'unavoidability' always signifies, with a non-relational property, which the word 'inevitability' at least sometimes signifies. The words 'inevitable' and 'unavoidable' do not always mean the same thing—which is not to say that they never do—and it is indicative of the semantic difference between them that there are no living words 'evit' and 'evitable' which mean 'avoid' and 'avoidable'. The preventability objector takes inevitability to be unavoidability but that is neither the only sense of 'inevitability' nor its best sense, and it is not the sense which the relevant German term has in its pertinent occurrences in the writings of Marx and Engels.

'Unavoidability' denotes a relational property in that, if something is said to be unavoidable, then we can ask: for whom is it unavoidable? Sometimes the answer will be: for these people, though not for those; and sometimes the answer will be: for everybody. But when something is said to be inevitable, in the sense of the term in which I prefer to use it, it is not inevitable *for* some people and not for others, or even for everyone, since its inevitability is not *in relation* to anyone at all. In the present sense of 'inevitable', if something is inevitable, it is inevitable *tout court*. This is a better sense of 'inevitable' than the sense (if there is one) in which it means 'unavoidable', for it is a defect in any such sense of the term that the words 'evit' and 'evitable' hardly exist. The sense I prefer matches, moreover, the term which Marx and Engels used in the present connection, for the German language nicely marks the distinction between the indicated relational and non-relational properties with the two words '*unvermeidbar*' and '*unvermeidlich*', and it is the latter word which Marx and Engels used in the passages cited in note 1 above.

But, whatever the contested *words* may mean, the substantial point is that one must not confuse the non-relational property I

have in mind with the relational one. Since that is the crucial point, I shall disagree with, but not try further to refute, someone who insists that he finds it more comfortable to deny that, if something is bound to happen, it is inevitable, than to accept that, if something is inevitable, it need not be unavoidable. He can read this chapter as an attempt to show how fighting for socialism can be rational on the part of those who believe that it is bound to come. On that reading of my purpose, the important point made in this section is that what is bound to happen need not be unavoidable. I shall continue to mean, by 'inevitable', 'bound to happen', and anyone who finds that unacceptable can mentally translate the term that way whenever it appears in this chapter.

Now, if there exists a power on someone's part to avoid something, then for him that thing is avoidable. But this need not detract from its inevitability, since to say that something is inevitable is not to say that no one is able to avoid it. That something is bound to happen establishes that it is inevitable, whoever may have or lack the power to avoid it: it might be bound to happen because everyone with the power to avoid it is irreversibly resolved not to use it. The fact that something is inevitable does not settle whether anyone has that power, and we can ask, of something that is inevitable, whether or not it is, for anyone, avoidable. And, while an inevitable event is avoidable for whoever can prevent it, preventability does not defeat inevitability itself.

Some inevitable things—such as all, or, anyway, most, volcanic eruptions—are unavoidable for everyone. Most inevitable military victories, and also the advent of socialism, if it is inevitable, are, by contrast, not unavoidable for everyone. The victory of its opponent is unavoidable for the other army, and for all coalitions in the resolute and overwhelmingly strong army which are unable to frustrate its victory, including almost all members of that army taken singly. On a Marxian view, the advent of socialism is, analogously, unavoidable for the capitalist class, and for each member of the working class, but it is not unavoidable for the working class as a whole. Action-dependent occurrences in history are, unlike volcanic eruptions, never unavoidable for everyone, but, where they are bound to occur, they are nevertheless inevitable.

People who think that a civil war in Northern Ireland is now inevitable need not think that it is unavoidable. For they might



think that Northern Irish Protestants have the power not to resist an evolution towards rule by Dublin, and that Northern Irish Catholics have the power to accept Protestant rule, even though each group is bound not to do those things. Note that one could say, *in anger*, that a civil war is now inevitable: one's belief that it is (though inevitable) avoidable would explain one's anger.

My claim that the inevitable (i.e., that which is bound to happen) may be avoidable should not be confused with an uncontroversial statement, which the same words could be used to express. It is not controversial to say that a resident of Northern Ireland could avoid its inevitable civil war by emigrating, or that drivers can sometimes avoid an inevitable landslide by detouring around it. The unavoidability claims which, in my controversial submission, are not entailed by corresponding inevitability claims are best expressed in sentences of the forms 'it is unavoidable for *x* that *e* will occur', or 'the occurrence of *e* is unavoidable for *x*', as opposed to in sentences of the form '*e* is unavoidable by *x*'. I controversially say that there can be people for whom the occurrence of something inevitable is avoidable, and not merely that people can sometimes avoid an inevitable occurrence.

If I am right, that something which will happen is unavoidable for everyone is not a necessary condition of its inevitability. And it might be argued that it is not a sufficient condition of it either, if what is inevitable is bound to happen. For an actual occurrence which was not bound to happen might nevertheless have been universally unavoidable, in the here relevant sense that no one could have prevented it. In illustration of this claim, consider the case of a mass of radioactive substance which is so placed that, if it undergoes a certain amount of decay before 9 o'clock, then a certain number of lambs on a nearby farm will undergo genetic damage. Suppose that it is now ten minutes to nine, and that it is impossible for anyone to get to the substance within ten minutes, because everyone is too far away. Now the probability of the required amount of decay occurring before 9 o'clock is, according to quantum physics, less than 100 per cent, and we may suppose, for vividness, that it is even less than 10 per cent. Nevertheless, if the decay will occur, it will occur no matter what anyone does, and so, therefore, will the unwanted genetic damage. Suppose that the decay and the damage will indeed occur. Then although the genetic damage is now universally unavoidable, it is (though going to



happen) not bound to happen, and, so one might think, it is therefore not inevitable. It would follow that universal unavoidability is not a sufficient condition of inevitability.

But whether or not universal unavoidability is, as I just suggested, insufficient for inevitability, I am confident that it is not necessary for inevitability, and that is enough to silence the preventability objection to the good reasons solution.

The preventability objector denied that the army's victory was inevitable. His ground for saying so was that a number of people could have prevented it. He might also have suggested that it was not inevitable on the partly similar ground that a freak snowstorm could have prevented it. Whoever finds the first suggestion more powerful than the second will probably sympathize with the freedom objection, to which I now turn.

7. I have argued that, if the advent of socialism is inevitable, then that is because enough workers have good reasons for fighting for it, and that it is therefore not irrational for them to fight for the society whose advent they think is inevitable: its advent is inevitable precisely because, being rational, they are bound to fight for it. Now someone might agree that inevitability does not require unpreventability, but he might still object to the good reasons solution on the following grounds, which compose what I shall call the freedom objection.

The good reasons solution founds the inevitability of socialist revolution on the development of revolutionary motivations<sup>26</sup> which elicit revolutionary action from rational individuals. The freedom objector begins by insisting that rational action is, by its nature, free action, and that, when an action is free, then, although the probability that it will occur may be very high, it is never as high as 100 per cent.<sup>27</sup> But if the probability of an occurrence is less than 100 per cent, it is not bound to happen, and it is therefore not inevitable. It follows that inevitability cannot be founded on

<sup>26</sup> The concept of a revolutionary motivation is explained at p. 64 above.

<sup>27</sup> Or he might say, instead, that rational action is preceded by a free choice, which, being free, cannot occur with 100 per cent probability. It here makes no difference at what point in the run-up to rational action a certainty-defeating exercise of freedom is claimed to occur.

rationality in the way I suggested. The very thing which is supposed to show that socialism is inevitable ensures that it is not.

The freedom objection conjoins four claims:

1. If an action is rational, then it is free.
2. If an action is free, then the probability of its occurrence is less than 100 per cent.
3. If the probability of an occurrence is less than 100 per cent, then it is not bound to happen.
4. If something is not bound to happen, then it is not inevitable.

I shall address the first three claims of the freedom objection in a moment. But I want first to note that its fourth claim might be challenged. It will be challenged by those who disagree, in a particular way, with my handling of the radioactivity case in the foregoing section. I said that the genetic damage was universally unavoidable but, because not bound to occur, not inevitable. But some will think that it suffices for the inevitability of an occurrence that it will happen and that it cannot be stopped. They can infer that, since that is sufficient for inevitability, it is not necessary, in addition, that what is inevitable be bound to happen. Their position entails that although the genetic damage was not bound to occur, it remains true that because, as a matter of fact, it was going to occur, and could not be prevented, it was inevitable that it would occur. If they are right, the occurrence of the damage was an event which, though inevitable, was not bound to happen, and claim (4) fails.

In my opinion, this challenge to claim (4) is ineffective: I think it brings inevitability and unavoidability too close together. But even if the radioactivity case does show that being bound to happen is not required for inevitability, so that claim (4) fails, the freedom objection against the good reasons solution can be saved. For the inevitability claim regarding the advent of socialism *is* based on a belief that it is bound to happen. Hence the challenge to (4), while it might be thought to raise an interesting question about the concept of inevitability, does not substantially do away with the freedom objection. The objection sustains itself under this modest restatement of (4):

- 4a. If something is not bound to happen, then it is not inevitable for the reason Marx and Engels supposed they had for

thinking that the advent of socialism was inevitable (i.e., that it was bound to happen).

Since Marx and Engels confidently predicted the revolution they said was inevitable, precisely by saying that it was inevitable, they thought that it was bound to happen. If you say, in advance of its occurrence, that something is inevitable, then you must believe that, unlike the perhaps inevitable genetic damage, it is bound to happen. But how can a revolution be bound to happen in virtue of human rationality when, to rehearse the freedom objection's first three claims, rationality entails freedom, freedom entails less than 100 per cent probability, and the probability of something which is bound to happen is 100 per cent?

Does rationality entail freedom? Some would deny that it does, but I am not going to resist the freedom objection by joining them, since, whether or not rationality entails freedom, I am sure that Marx and Engels thought rational revolutionary action was in a central sense free, and, I think, in that sense of 'free' in which, according to some, if an action is free, then the probability of its occurrence falls short of 100 per cent.

But are they right? Must an action which is rational and (in the putatively consequent sense) free be less than 100 per cent probable? Some philosophers think that, being free, it cannot be 100 per cent probable; some that, though free, it can be;<sup>28</sup> and still others that, being rational, it must be 100 per cent probable, as long as no other course is also rational. For these last philosophers rational action is, though free, necessitated by the demands of reason, and, for an Hegelianizing subset of them, it is free *because* it is necessitated by the demands of reason.<sup>29</sup> And even if we do not sympathize with the stated Hegelian claim, we can understand the idea that, if a being is rational, and the factors affecting its decision make just one decision rational, then anyone who knew what all those factors were could predict its decision with certainty.

Now I shall not venture an opinion on these matters. For suppose

<sup>28</sup> For a plausible argument to that effect, see Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 64. Philosophers who think that a free choice can be 100% probable might press a different freedom objection from the one developed here. They might claim that a free choice is, even when 100% probable, nevertheless avoidable, and, therefore, not inevitable. My reply to that objection was given in the previous section.

<sup>29</sup> For this view, see Brand Blanshard, 'The Case for Determinism', 27 ff. Thomas Nagel would, I think, reject Blanshard's view; see his *View from Nowhere*, 116 n. 3.

that the most adverse answer (to, that is, the good reasons solution) is right, namely, that if an action is free, then it is not 100 per cent probable. Then either its lesser probability is consistent with its being bound to happen,<sup>30</sup> in which case the objection fails, or, so it seems to me, it must be consistent with the supposed freedom of rational action that it is *virtually* predictable and, therefore, *virtually* bound to happen. If it detracts from your freedom to say that you will certainly choose the item you love and not the item you hate from a two-item menu, it detracts from your rationality to say that the probability of your doing so falls *appreciably* below 100 per cent.

I conclude that, if workers fight for socialism because it is rational for them to do so, then, even if it follows that socialism is not 100 per cent predictable, it may nevertheless be overwhelmingly likely and, therefore, at least virtually inevitable. But there is no reason to think that Marx and Engels either meant or needed to mean something stronger than virtual inevitability when they said that a socialist revolution was inevitable. So even if true inevitability cannot be founded on human rationality, the inevitability Marx and Engels had in mind can be.

Note that the modest concession in deference to those who affirm (2), which the defender of the good reasons solution here makes, to wit, that socialism is only virtually inevitable, does not do away with the consistency problem. You do not credibly answer the question why you fight for socialism when its coming is inevitable by pointing out that it is only virtually inevitable.

8. I have tried to show that action can be rational even when the agent undertakes it on behalf of a goal whose achievement he thinks (virtually) inevitable. But I do not defend the idea that the inevitability of a goal's achievement can *make* it appropriate to work for such a goal. It can be both rational and honourable to work for a goal whose achievement is inevitable, but it is either irrational or dishonourable to work for it precisely *because* its achievement is inevitable. To support socialism just because its advent is inevitable is to display either irrationality or a disreputable wish to be on the winning side because it is the winning side.

<sup>30</sup> I insert this disjunct for argumentative completeness only: I do not believe that it describes a consistent possibility.

Nothing in the works of Marx and Engels warrants attribution to them of the view that its inevitability is a good reason for pursuing a goal. The idea that they thought so is an invention of enemies of Marxism. But various thoughts with which the misattribution I have just rejected might be confused may help to explain its persistence.

The first thought is that it is, of course, irrational to try to prevent the coming of something which is (known by the agent to be) inevitable (though it is not irrational to try to postpone its coming: if a deluge must come, and I can affect whether or not it will be *après moi*, I have a good reason to build a dam). But the irrationality of trying to prevent the inevitable does not entail that it is irrational *not* to work for it, nor that it is rational to work for it *just because* it is inevitable.

A second relevant consideration is that embattled revolutionaries might reflect that the advent of socialism is inevitable in order to reassure themselves that their effort is not futile. They might note, exultantly, that history is on their side. But it is not dishonourable to take comfort from that thought, as long as history is not on their side *simply* because they wish to be on its side, and they have carried out that wish.

I emphasize 'simply' because of a third consideration, which is that Marx and Engels believed that the tendency of history is progressive. As history proceeds, increasingly higher levels of productive power are attained, with widely liberating consequences. Hence, if a social transformation is inevitable, it will follow, on the historical materialist theory, that it is not only inevitable but welcome. One might then say that one is working for the transformation because it is desirable, and that *it is desirable because it is inevitable*, meaning, however, by the italicized clause, that its inevitability is evidence or proof that it is desirable, as opposed to what constitutes it as desirable. One would not then in any disreputable sense be working for it because it is inevitable. Yet one might say that one is working for it because it is inevitable, where that carries a non-disreputable meaning. It is a general truth that, in a sentence of the form 'I choose O because it is F', the feature denoted by 'F' need not be what makes O worth choosing, but just a feature which indicates that O has a further feature which makes it worth choosing. I might say that I shall travel in that aeroplane because its tail is red, even though it is not its red tail, but

the associated fact that the aeroplane belongs to British Airways (who take good care of you) which makes it worth choosing.

9. I have up to now supposed that, when Marxists say that a socialist revolution is inevitable, or historically necessary, what they say entails that a socialist revolution will happen. But terms like 'necessary' and 'unavoidable' and (perhaps somewhat less naturally) 'inevitable' can also be used in a sense in which that entailment is lacking, and not because, in the case of 'unavoidable', the unavoidable thing is not unavoidable for everyone.

To begin with a banal example, notice that the sentence 'The repair of the roof is now unavoidable' does not, in its most familiar occurrences, entail that the roof will now be repaired. It has that entailment only in the unfamiliar case where what is meant is that no one could prevent the resolute workmen from repairing the roof. Usually, when a roof's repair is said to be unavoidable, or necessary, or, this being less common, inevitable, what is meant is that no alternative to repairing it is acceptable. One could also say, in that case, that its repair is imperative, so I shall use the (somewhat inelegant) phrase *imperative inevitability* here. Something is imperatively inevitable when whether or not it occurs is within human control and no alternative to its occurrence is acceptable.

Sometimes, when Marx and Engels said that socialism was necessary, they meant that without it there would be barbarism, or, at any rate, a terrible waste of human potential.<sup>31</sup> They meant that it was imperatively inevitable. Under that meaning of inevitability, the inevitability of the revolution is an excellent reason for bringing it about, and the consistency problem with which this essay began does not arise. If the roof's repair is now (in this sense) unavoidable, then that is an excellent reason for repairing it.

Here is an important example of Marx's use of 'historical necessity' (*historische Notwendigkeit*) in an imperative sense. Having said that capitalism is an historical necessity, he adds that it is 'merely an historical necessity, a necessity for the development of productive power from a definite historical starting-point or basis, but in no way an *absolute* necessity of production'.<sup>32</sup> Whatever else

<sup>31</sup> See KMTH 159–60.

<sup>32</sup> *The Grundrisse*, 831–2.



Marx meant here, he meant that, unless capitalism had supervened on pre-capitalist class society, human productive power would never have reached the desirably high level at which class society and, therefore, capitalism, are no longer necessary for productive progress.

If we call this *imperative* inevitability, we can call the inevitability discussed in sections 1–8 *predictive* inevitability. We can then say that it is a Marxian thesis that, because socialism is imperatively inevitable, it is, in virtue of human rationality, predictively inevitable. If socialism is necessary because no alternative to it is acceptable, necessary (or unavoidable), that is, in a sense in which one who says so does not commit himself to saying that it is (virtually) bound to come; then it is, as a result, necessary in just that further and predictive sense: people are too rational to permit barbarism to occur when they can choose socialism.<sup>33</sup>

Within predictive inevitability, we can distinguish between *categorical* inevitability, which has been the main topic of this chapter, and *conditional* inevitability, which should not be confused with imperative inevitability, and which has not yet been discussed. An event is conditionally inevitable if it is bound to occur should certain conditions, which might not obtain, in fact be realized. Many of Marx's predictions about the future of capitalism, in its later stages, are conditional inevitability statements, since their truth is intended to be conditional on the persistence of capitalism (and, perhaps, on other things too). Examples are his statements that capital will become increasingly concentrated, that the economy-wide rate of profit will decline, and (the exegetically problematic thesis) that workers will undergo increasing misery. In making these forecasts, Marx was not rejecting the possibility that a socialist revolution would occur so soon that their categorical counterparts would be falsified: (some of) the projected eventualities would be robbed of the time they need to unfold by an early socialist revolution.

10. I have sought to reconcile the Marxist belief in the inevitability of the advent of socialism with the Marxist commitment to bringing socialism about. I have not tried to establish that the

<sup>33</sup> The texts cited at *KMTH* 159–60 can be understood as asserting predictive inevitability on the basis of imperative inevitability.



inevitability belief itself is true, but I have, implicitly and incidentally, defended it against certain charges. That is because of the leading role which rationality plays in my solution to the consistency problem.

The belief that socialism is inevitable may be resisted for a number of reasons. When it is defended by reference to rationality, it will be resisted by those who do not believe that socialism is in the interests of the workers, and by those who think that, even if it is in their interests, it is not rational for them to struggle for it, because the relevant free rider problem is insoluble, or because the costs of transition to socialism make the struggle for it a bad bet.<sup>34</sup> I do not, in this section, address those reasons for thinking that the advent of socialism cannot be inevitable, two of which go beyond the scope of this chapter, and one of which (the free rider problem) was treated in section 4.

What I seek to do here is to allay suspicions about Marxist inevitabilitarian claims which reflect over-assimilation of inevitability to concepts distinct from it. Three such concepts are unavoidability (as explicated above), nomological determinism, and automaticity. People sometimes oppose the belief that the advent of socialism is inevitable because they mistakenly think that it presupposes or implies claims about unavoidability, nomological determination, and automaticity which they regard as false and/or dangerous.

Having dealt with the difference between inevitability and unavoidability, I turn here to nomological determination. (I call it *nomological* determination in deference to those who think that a future event might be determined because it figures in the uniquely rational course of a rational agent, and not in virtue of laws of nature.) An event is nomologically determined if and only if the statement that it will occur is entailed by laws of nature and statements describing antecedent conditions. The thesis of *determinism* says that all events are nomologically determined.

<sup>34</sup> This last reason for saying that the workers' interest in socialism need not generate an interest in struggling for it is independent of the free rider problem. The idea is that the power of the capitalist class to resist the revolutionary movement and to commit sabotage against a fledgling socialism means that socialism's birth agony will be so severe that it is not, on balance, worth fighting for. On the suggested gloomy hypothesis, no revolutionary would stand to gain from the struggle for socialism, even if all workers were to join that struggle. This can be called the 'Przeworski problem', because of Adam Przeworski's brilliant exploration of it in his *Capitalism and Social Democracy*.

Now whether or not determinism is true, and whatever the consequences of believing it may be for our practice of holding people responsible for their actions and for our sense of ourselves as deliberately choosing agents, it is emphatically false that Marx and Engels based their belief in the inevitability of socialism on determinism. Had they done so, they could not have distinguished between the advent of socialism, which they thought inevitable, and the time and manner of its advent, which they did not think inevitable. To prevent misunderstanding, I emphasize that I am not saying that, if they had affirmed determinism, they could not have believed that the way socialism would come was partly a matter of free human choice. That inference requires a denial of compatibilism, or an attribution to Marx and Engels of a denial of it, where compatibilism is the doctrine that genuinely free choice is compatible with determinism. And while I happen myself to be an incompatibilist, the main claims of this essay do not oblige me to take a position on the truth of compatibilism, or on the question whether or not Marx and Engels accepted it.<sup>35</sup> My present point is the simple one that, since Marx and Engels did not think everything was inevitable, they could not have derived the inevitability of what they did think inevitable from determinism (whether or not they believed in determinism), for if that makes anything that happens inevitable, it makes everything that happens inevitable.

What is the relationship between the claim that an event is nomologically determined and the claim that it is inevitable? If an event is nomologically determined, then, so I believe, it is bound to happen, and, being an incompatibilist, I also believe that no one can prevent it. Hence nomologically determined events are, I believe, inevitable, on any view of what inevitability is.<sup>36</sup> But it does not follow that they are *historically* inevitable. For we can reasonably restrict that predicate to inevitabilities which are such in virtue of broad historical conditions, as opposed to just any conditions at all. Suppose that it was nomologically, because neurologically, deter-

<sup>35</sup> I affirm that belief in inevitability is consistent with the rationality of striving to bring the inevitable about. That consistency claim requires compatibilism only if inevitability entails nomological determinism and rational action entails genuine choice, and I affirm neither of those entailments in this chapter.

<sup>36</sup> That is, both on the view of inevitability according to which the genetic damage of p. 71 above was inevitable (because it could not have been prevented) and on the view of inevitability according to which (although it could not have been prevented) it was not inevitable.

mined that Napoleon would suffer a lapse of concentration at a crucial moment at Waterloo, and therefore lose the battle he would otherwise have won, and that, only because of all that, it was nomologically determined that the Metternich reaction would come to prevail. Then if, as I believe, what is nomologically determined is inevitable, all that would be inevitable, but it would not be historically inevitable, since not the broad historical situation but facts which, relative to it, were accidents, would have ensured the fateful chain of events. If the kingdom was lost for the want of a horseshoe nail, its loss might have been inevitable, but the point of the poem is that it was not *historically* inevitable.<sup>37</sup>

Turning to the converse implication, let us ask whether the inevitability of an event (and, therefore, its historical inevitability) implies that it is nomologically determined. The implication will be denied by those who think that unpreventability suffices for inevitability (see page 73 above), and by those who think that, when something is inevitable in virtue of human rationality, it need not be nomologically determined.

Even if everything which is inevitable is nomologically determined, the doctrine of historical inevitability, as it was held by Hegel and Marx, does not entail the thesis of determinism. For, although they thought that the main course of history was inevitable, they did not think that everything in history was inevitable. The issues of determinism and historical inevitability in the Hegelio-Marxian sense should not be identified, as they *sometimes* are by Isaiah Berlin, to the detriment of his famous lecture on this subject.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, a word about a less common confusion. Inevitability and automaticity are distinct, so a certain picture of history is not imposed upon us even if everything that happens in history is

<sup>37</sup> 'For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; / For want of a shoe, the horse was lost; / For want of a horse, the rider was lost; / For want of a rider, the message was lost; / For want of a message, the kingdom was lost; / And all for the want of a horseshoe nail'. It was, perhaps, inevitable, once the nail was gone, that the kingdom would be lost, but, if I am right, it was never *historically* inevitable.

<sup>38</sup> The identification is implicit at *Historical Inevitability*, 33; but note, too, p. 25, where Berlin acknowledges that Hegelio-Marxian historical inevitability is consistent with the existence of human free choice. Since Berlin is an incompatibilist, what he there acknowledges entails, for him, that historical inevitability is consistent with the falsehood of determinism.

For illuminating remarks on determinism and historical inevitability see Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*, 113–16.

(historically) inevitable. The proposition that something will happen inevitably neither entails nor is entailed by the proposition that it will happen automatically. It could be true that the machine will shut itself off automatically, even though it is not bound to shut itself off, since someone might (but in fact no one will) disturb its operation. And economic processes under capitalism might have automatic but non-inevitable results, since the mechanism producing them is amenable to interference, and people are not bound not to interfere with it. And if socialism were inevitable for the sorts of reasons canvassed in this chapter, it would not follow that it would come automatically. Much struggle would nevertheless be needed.