Rousseau, Kant, Hegel

Chris Cutrone

On June 9, 2013, the Platypus Affiliated Society organized a panel discussion on "Revolution without Marx? Rousseau and his followers for the Left" at the 2013 Left Forum in Pace University, New York. What follows are edited versions of their prepared remarks. A full recording of the event is available online: <https://archive.org/details/RevolutionWithoutMarxRousseauandHisFollowersfortheLeft>

Introduction

BOURGEOIS SOCIETY CAME INTO FULL RECOGNITION WITH ROUSSEAU, who in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* and *On the Social Contract*, opened its radical critique. Hegel wrote: "The principle of freedom dawned on the world in Rousseau." Marx quoted Rousseau favorably that "Whoever dares undertake to establish a people's institutions must feel himself capable of changing, as it were, human nature... to take from man his own powers, and give him in exchange alien powers which he cannot employ without the help of other men." Rousseau posed the question of society, which Adorno wrote is a "concept of the Third Estate." Marx recognized the crisis of bourgeois society in the Industrial Revolution and workers' call for socialism. But proletarian socialism is no longer the rising force it was in Marx's time. So what remains of thinking the unrealized radicalism of bourgeois society without Marx? Kant stated that if the potential of bourgeois society was not fully achieved as the "mid-point" of freedom then Rousseau may have been right to prefer savagery against civilization's "glittering misery." Nietzsche warned that we might continue to be "living at the expense of the future:" "Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but at the same time in a meaner style, more basely."[1] How have thinkers of the revolutionary epoch after Rousseau, Adam Smith, Kant, Hegel, Benjamin Constant, and Nietzsche himself, contributed to the possibility of emancipation in a world after Marxism?

Marx and Rousseau

Marx's favorite quotation of Rousseau, from *On the Social Contract*, goes as follows:

> Whoever dares undertake to establish a people's institutions must feel himself capable of changing, as it were, human nature, of transforming each individual, who by himself is a complete and solitary whole, into a part of a larger whole, from which, in a sense, the individual receives his life and his being, of substituting a limited and mental existence for the physical and independent existence. He has to take from man his own powers, and give him in exchange alien powers which he cannot employ without the help of other men.[2]

Marx wrote that this was "well formulated," but only as "the abstract notion of political man," concluding that,

> Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognized and organized his own powers as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power.[3]

What did Marx mean by "social powers" as opposed to the "political power" from which it has been "separated?" A key passage from Marx's Grundrisse articulates well the new modern concept of freedom found in Rousseau:

> The ancient conception, in which man always appears (in however narrowly national, religious, or political a definition) as the aim of production, seems very much more exalted than the modern world, in which production is the aim of man and wealth the aim of production. In fact, however, when the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature—those of his own nature as well as those of so-called "nature"? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which make the totality of this evolution—i.e., the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established yardstick—an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not reproduce in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming? In bourgeois political economy—and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds—this complete elaboration of what lies within man, appears as the total alienation, and the destruction of all fixed, one-sided purposes as the sacrifice of the end in itself to a wholly external compulsion. Hence in one way the childlike world of the ancients appears to be superior; and this is so, insofar as we seek for closed shape, form and established limitation. The ancients provide a narrow satisfaction, whereas the modern world leaves us unsatisfied, or, where it appears to be satisfied, with itself, is vulgar and mean.[4]

As the intellectual historian and critic of Michel Foucault's historicism, James Miller, put it in introduction to Rousseau,

> The principle of freedom and its corollary, "perfectibility," . . . suggest that the possibilities for being human are both multiple and, literally, endless . . . Contemporaries like Kant well understood the novelty and radical implications of Rousseau's new principle of freedom [and] appreciated his unusual stress on history as the site where the true nature of our species is simultaneously realized and perverted, revealed and distorted. A new way of thinking about the human condition had appeared.[5]

Another contemporary intellectual historian, Louis Menand, writing in introduction to the republication of Edmund Wilson's history of socialism, *To the Finland Station*, described this new way of thinking in Marx and Engels as follows:

> In premodern societies, the ends of life are given at the beginning of life: people do things in their generation so that the same things will continue to be done in the next generation. Meaning is immanent in all the ordinary customs and practices of existence, since these are inherited from the past, and are therefore worth reproducing. The idea is to make the world go not forward, only around.
> In modern societies, the ends of life are not given at the beginning of life; they are thought to be created or discovered. The reproduction of the customs and practices of the group is no longer the chief purpose of existence; the idea is not to repeat, but to change, to move the world forward. Meaning is no longer immanent in the practices of ordinary life, since those practices are understood by everyone to be contingent and time-bound. This is why death, in modern societies, is the great taboo, an absurdity, the worst thing one can imagine. For at the close of life people cannot look back and know that they have accomplished the task set for them at birth. This knowledge always lies up ahead, somewhere over history's horizon. Modern societies don't know what will count as valuable in the conduct of life in the long run, because they have no way of knowing what conduct the long run will find itself in a position to respect. The only certain knowledge death comes with is the knowledge that the values of one's own time, the values one has tried to live by, are expunge-able . . . Marxism gave a meaning to modernity. It said that, wittingly or not, the individual performs a role in a drama that has a shape and a goal, a trajectory, and that modernity will turn out to be just one act in that drama. Historical change is not arbitrary. It is generated by class conflict; it is faithful to an inner logic; it points toward an end, which is the establishment of the classless society. Marxism was founded on an appeal for social justice, but there were many forms that such an appeal might have taken. Its deeper attraction was the discovery of meaning, a meaning in which human beings might participate, in history itself. When [Edmund] Wilson explained, in his introduction to the 1972 edition of *To the Finland Station*, that his book had been written under the assumption that "an important step in progress has been made, that a fundamental 'breakthrough' had occurred," this is the faith he was referring to . . . Marx and Engels were the *philosophes* of a second Enlightenment.[6]

Peter Preuss, writing in introduction to Nietzsche's *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, pointed out that,

> Man, unlike animal, is self-conscious. He is aware that he is alive and that he must die. And because he is self-conscious he is not only aware of living, but of living well or badly. Life is not wholly something that happens to man; it is also something he engages in according to values he follows. Human existence is a task . . . The 19th century had discovered history and all subsequent inquiry and education bore the stamp of this discovery. This was not simply the discovery of a set of facts about the past but the discovery of the historicity of man: man, unlike animal, is a historical being. Man is not wholly the product of an alien act, either natural or divine, but in part produces his own being. The task of existing is a task precisely because it is not a case of acting according to a permanent nature or essence but rather of producing that nature within the limitations of a situation. History is the record of this self-production; it is the activity of a historical being recovering the past into the present which anticipates the future.[7]

Lifting the task of human freedom in modern society out of its current historical obscurity today is difficult precisely because we have reverted to regarding ourselves as products of an "alien act," and so proceed according to a model of "social justice" owing to the Ancients' "closed . . . form and established limitation" that loses Marxism's specific consciousness of society in history. But such consciousness of history was not at all original to Marxism but rather had roots in the antecedent development of the self-conscious thought of emergent bourgeois society in the 18th century, beginning with Rousseau and elaborated by his followers Kant and Hegel. The radicalism of bourgeois thought conscious of itself was an essential assumption of Marxism, which sought to carry forward the historical project of freedom.

If, as Menand put it, Marx and Engels were "*philosophes* of a Second Enlightenment" in the 19th century, then what of the 18th century Enlightenment of which Rousseau was perhaps the most notorious *philosophe*? What remains of this 18th century legacy for the struggle to emancipate society today?

"Rousseau" continues on page 2

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

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61

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REVOLUTION WITHOUT MARX?
ROUSSEAU AND HIS FOLLOWERS FOR THE LEFT

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Adam Smith, continued from page 3

first time, for instance, the distinction between productive and unproductive labor—is of no concern to the likes of Harvey. At the heart of Smith's project is the attempt to advance, in theory and practice, the radical emancipation entailed in free wage-labor. This social emancipation—that is, the freedom of labor to sell itself on the market unconstrained by the demands of customary privilege—is utterly obscured by Harvey's anachronistic talk of "free-market" regulatory policy. Nor is the more overwrought Marxology of a Michael Heinrich any stronger on the question of Marx's relation to Smith and to bourgeois political economy more generally. Understanding Marx to be anti-bourgeois, Heinrich consigns to the dustbin of "worldview Marxism" all those who might imagine that Marx's thought is in any way immanent to political economy.[9]

As a systematic labor theorist of value, Smith proves himself an indispensable philosopher of the revolutionary Third Estate. For him, the world of commercial society is one grounded in the free labor of a newly emergent class, a class of city-dwellers freed from serfdom and customary claims. The city-dwellers or "bourgeois" of the late medieval and early modern period share in a common freedom, worker and merchant alike. Their society, as Smith outlines in Book Three of *The Wealth of Nations,* emerges as a result of what can only be dubbed a slave revolt in what had been a relatively obscure corner of Europe. This slave revolt, incidentally, has not ceased to this day, and not just in the sense that it has spread from Western Europe to other parts of the world. The masses of humanity, including in Europe and America, have not ceased to demand a world in which they do not require the benevolence or indulgence of the baker, the butcher, the brewer, or anyone else in order to live their lives as they choose under the law. To this day, this emancipation is only available to the broad masses of the population in precisely the way in which Smith demanded it, i.e. by wage labor. To this day, the great democratic demand is that people should be subject to no arbitrary power of wealth, but only to that power that "possession immediately and directly conveys" [48] to the owner of money: command over labor.

What Smith termed "commercial society" is best understood precisely as the interrelationships of people exchanging the products of labor. As he famously wrote:

> When the division of labor has been once thoroughly established it is but a very small part of a man's wants which the produce of his own labor can supply. He supplies the far greater part of them by exchanging . . . Every man thus lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant, and the society itself grows to be what is properly [called] a commercial society. [37]

That such a commercial society is class divided represents for Smith *an achievement*, one that simultaneously exposes as irrational the prescriptive claims of all past ruling classes and, indeed, of the ruling classes of his own day. If we still say that the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class society, those societies and that history is simultaneously worthy of condemnation for having failed to have been. That is because they failed to recognize and realize themselves as class societies, and were thus inadequate to the concept of society itself. In other words, all wealth is originally labor, from which, after the claims arising from "the accumulation of stock and the appropriation of land" [65] are deducted as profit and rents, those who expect in addition, say, personal deference or sexual favors fail to recognize (and must again be made to understand) that this is a class society. As Adorno remarks, crediting the 19th century legal historian J. C. Bluntschli, "society . . . [is] a concept of the third estate."[10]

Though the fact is inimical to most leftists, the historical emergence of freedom was occasioned by the demand for class society. The demand for work, i.e. the demand to be subject only to the social power that properly appertains to money, led to that world-historical liberation from "community" that we call the birth of the modern individual. This demand for freedom from the need to rely upon the benevolence of others, this struggle for free wage-labor, remains the greatest social movement on earth. It should not be thought that workers and those struggling for employment are simply resigned to working for a master. Rather, the worker's demand for work must be viewed as simultaneously a demand for a form of private property adequate to its concept.

Driven to dialectics by his struggle against the French Physiocrats and the British mercantilists, Smith overturns all past political economy. Though his work is chiefly associated with the demand for free markets and the "invisible hand," none of this is in fact peculiar to Smith. Rather, as part and parcel of the project of the revolutionary Third Estate reaching back into the 17th century, these were mainstream concerns of political economy from at least the time of John Locke and Sir Dudley North. Similarly, the character and productive potential of the division of labor, so closely associated with Smith's name, forms a subject of intense reflection and analysis nearly three-quarters of a century before *The Wealth of Nations* in the writings of Sir William Petty. The neglect of what is novel in Smith goes hand in hand with the one-sided rejection of liberalism and of the bourgeois revolutions.

What is in fact central to Smith's work is the fundamental clarification of labor as the category at the heart of bourgeois freedom. This further specification of modern freedom reaches toward Ricardo and the Ricardian theorists of the labor movement, as well as the 19th century more generally, inasmuch as Smith raises not only the question of the emergence of class society, but also of the Third Estate's internal capacity for class division. As Smith notes:

> We have no acts of parliament against combining to lower the [wages of labor], but many against combining to raise it . . . We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters; though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account, that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour . . . To violate this combination is every where a most unpopular action, and a sort of reproach to a master among his neighbours and equals. We seldom, indeed, hear of this combination, because it is the usual, and one may say, the natural state of things which nobody ever hears of . . . [The workers' combinations, by contrast,] are desperate [as they] act with the folly and extravagance of desperate men who must either starve or frighten their masters into an immediate compliance with their demands. The masters upon these occasions are not as clamourous upon the other side, [yet] they never cease to call aloud for the assistance of the civil magistrate and the rigorous execution of [anti-labor laws]. [84-5]

As Smith remarks, clinching the matter, "A man must always live by his work" [85]. And, just as Smith reaches toward Ricardo and Ricardian theorists in his analysis of class formation, so he also connects the revolutionary Third Estate to its progeny and heir, the 19th century workers' movement, by calling not only for the emancipation of labor but also for the fulfillment of that emancipation in the struggle for higher wages and better working conditions. On this matter, *The Wealth of Nations* could not be clearer:

> [A man's] wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him. They must even upon most occasions be somewhat more; otherwise it would be impossible for him to bring up a family, and the race of workmen would not last beyond the first generation . . . differences in the mode of subsistence [of workers] is not the cause but the effect of the difference in wages; though by a strange misapprehension, I have frequently heard it represented as the cause. It is not because one man keeps a coach while his neighbor walks afoot that the one is rich and the other poor, but because the one is rich he keeps a coach, and because the other is poor he walks afoot . . . Is improvement in the circumstance of the lower ranks of the people to be regarded as an advantage or as an inconveniency to the society. The answer seems abundantly plain . . . The liberal reward of labor, as it is the effect of increasing wealth, so it is the cause of increasing population. To complain of it is to lament over the necessary effect and cause of the greatest public prosperity. [85, 93, 96, 99]

Thus, while demanding legal protection for labor's right to organize, Smith could still hope, and moreover hope in good faith, that bourgeois freedom realized in and through the supremacy of economics would one day lead to the emancipation of laboring humanity.

It is the commitment to philosophy and freedom that confers forthrightness upon the great scientific pronouncements of the bourgeois class as exemplified by the author of *The Wealth of Nations*. Such bourgeois revolutionary thought stands, as might well be expected from a self-proclaimed devotee of Rousseau, as an indictment of "the history of all hitherto existing societies," including the mere civilization of Smith's own day. Marxism and its critique of political economy represent the continuation of this revolutionary bourgeois tradition, albeit in changed conditions. Marxism is by no means the repudiation of Smith's radical Enlightenment. For Marxism seeks, in its struggle to advance social-political emancipation, not to redeem history from the wreckage of Smith's "utopianism of process"; rather, it seeks to redeem Smith's thought from the wreckage of history. Under conditions of capital, Smith's thought itself demands its own critique. **IP**

All references to Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in what follows are to the two volume edition edited by R..H. Campbell and Andrew Skinner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). References will be provided in the text in brackets.

1. Theodor W. Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory," in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, 93.
2. David Hume to Adam Smith 10/17/1767, in *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 137.
3. Smith's early opinion of Rousseau could not have been higher. Thus in the second essay Smith ever published, he writes,
   > The original and inventive genius of the English has... discovered itself . . . in morals, metaphysics, and part of the abstract sciences. Whatever attempts have been made in modern times towards improvement in this contentious and unprosperous philosophy have been made in England. The Meditations of Descartes, excepted, I know of nothing in French that aims at being original . . . [However,] English philosophy... seems now to be neglected by the English themselves... [and to have been] transported into France..., above all in the late *Discourse* [*on Inequality*] by Mr. Rousseau of Geneva. ["Letter to the *Edinburgh Review*," in W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (eds.), *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 250-51.
4. B. Faujas de Saint Fond, *A Journey Through England and Scotland to the Hebrides in 1784*, vol. 2, edited by Sir Archibald Geikie (Glasgow, H. Hopkins, 1907), 246.
5. Adam Smith to Andreas Holt 10/26/1780, in *Correspondence*, 251.
6. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 306.
7. David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (New York: Verso, 2010), 52.
8. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 175.
9. For the view that bourgeois political economists such as Smith have fallen prey to "an image of reality that develops independently as a result of the everyday practice of the members of bourgeois society," see Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to Marx's Three Volumes of Capital*, translated by Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 34-5.
10. T. W. Adorno, "Society" translated by F. R. Jameson *Salmagundi* 10-11 (1969-70), 144. Elsewhere Adorno elaborates saying,
    > The societalization of society, its consolidation into what. . . is more truly like a system than an organism, has resulted from the principle of domination, the principle of division itself, and it perpetuates it. Society has survived, reproduced, and extended itself, and has developed its forces, only through its division into the opposing interests of those who command and those who produce. [Theodor W. Adorno, Hegel: Three Studies, translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 79].

Nietzche's untimeliness

Sunit Singh

> *Eros and Civilization*: the title expressed an optimistic, euphemistic, even positive thought, namely, that the achievements of advanced industrial society would enable man to reverse the direction of progress, to break the fatal union of productivity and destruction, liberty and repression—in other words to learn [Nietzsche's] gay science.
> — Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civlization*

In [ancient] philosophy the duties of human life were treated as subservient to the happiness and perfection of human life. But when moral, as well as natural philosophy, came to be taught only as subservient to theology, the duties of human life were treated of as chiefly subservient to the happiness of a life to come. . . . [But even] in [what came to be called] the modern philosophy [perfecting virtue] was frequently represented as generally, or rather as almost always inconsistent with any degree of happiness in this life; and heaven was to be earned only by penance and mortification, by austerities and abasement of a monk; not by the liberal generous, and spirited conduct of man.
— Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*

NIETZSCHE BELIEVED that gaining even a modicum of reason and freedom had to be a hard won, blood-soaked, and world-historical affair, but was nevertheless inclined to be as uncharitable in the extreme toward Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "the seducer" behind the idealist and rabble in the French Revolution, as toward the socialists who claimed to be the inheritors of the Jacobin tradition. He identified *Of the Social Contract*—a meditation on the conditions of possibility for the radical self-determination of modern civilization—as putting forward the first image of modern man to inspire mortals to a "transfiguration" of their own circumstances. However, modern man turned out to be a creature afflicted with a fevered historical self-consciousness that periodically flared up in revolutions, "like Typhon under Etna."[1] It was a symptom of this curious sickness, Nietzsche held, that had led the philosophizing son of a watchmaker to characterize man as a creature full of pity or empathy and as capable of perfectibility, while positing an unwarranted faith in nature as an idyll of freedom. Nietzsche saw modern civilization as a chimera, characterized by what Kant had referred to as "glittering misery" and by the creation of invidious interdependencies. Nietzsche therefore reached a conclusion opposite that of the Citizen of Geneva. For Nietzsche, plunging further into the civilization that the latter abhorred "is precisely that which speaks in *favor* of civilization."[2] For moderns, who were proving themselves unable to squarely take on the task of Enlightenment, it was as "reasonable" to consider a return to nature as it was for them to revive Greek tragedy; we moderns had no chance of ever going back to the state of nature—the state of nature was itself a myth that the dialectic of Enlightenment had necessitated.

Despite identifying re proving themselves unable to squarely take on the task of Enlightenment, it never offered a clear resolution to the "the physiological self-contradiction" that defines capitalism. One can admit as much without either attempting to shape Nietzsche on a Marxist lathe—the accusation once leveled at Adorno—or giving in to the idea that Nietzsche was an elitist, anti-democratic, and anti-liberal conservative.[3] The efforts to "let workers be themselves" had failed, Nietzsche wrote in *Twilight of the Idols*, as a result of "the most irresponsible negligence." Nietzsche was apportioning fault for this "negligence" directly on the socialists, who were confounded as to why, in spite of the fact that workers had made enormous strides toward socio-political equality since the industrial revolution, and justifiably wanted more and felt "their existence to be desperate . . . an *injustice*," their demands for "a social democracy" could not be met by the vote and contractual rights. Europe had to answer the workers, while the workers tried to articulate their own demands and to answer, "What do they *will*"?[4] But the socialists—those "superficial, envious, and three-quarter actors" infected with "nihilism"—had turned freedom into an ethic and so crab-walked backward into "a will to negate life."[5] Further, their values were little more than refashioned Christian ideals rather than peculiarly modern aspirations; their certitude that a socialist revolution was inevitable was motivated by the same animalistic instincts that had led Christians to see the Last Judgment as "the sweet consolation of revenge."[6] Such vituperations also masked the actual task of emancipation and left the socialists with the muddle-headed belief that, "[as] time marches forward... Everything that is in it also marches forward—that the development is one that moves forward." Although even "the most level-headed are led astray by this illusion," Nietzsche claimed, "the nineteenth century does not represent progress per the sixteenth . . . 'Mankind' does not advance, it does not even exist . . . . Man represents no progress over the animal: the civilized tenderfoot is an abortion."[7] Despite the touted "progress" of the nineteenth over the eighteenth century, the socialists had overlooked or were unable to recover what earlier revolutionaries, inspired by the notion of the infallible sovereignty of the General Will, had understood—that rather than "dance in our 'chains'" we had to break them.[8]

The case of anti-Nietzsche

The aristocratic antipathy in which Nietzsche held the Left is presumably one reason behind the leftist "anti-Nietzsche" stance. Others chafe at the fact that Nietzsche was a staunch individualist who clubbed the Marxist social-democrats together with the anarchists as well as with the Christian socialists; Nietzsche was satisfied to say that anarchism held "the same ideal [as socialism], but in a more brutal fashion," while the dogmatic social-democrat who hypostatized class relations was in as much bad faith as the Protestant minister who reconciled men to their wretched fate.[9] Malcolm Bull is the latest leftist to argue for an anti-Nietzsche stance—but with the critical difference that Bull's criticism of Nietzsche is rooted in a conservatism that obfuscates the established tradition of left criticism of Nietzsche, which dates back to the revisionist debate. Bull compares Nietzsche to Durkheim, as both were diagnosticians who theorized that the incompleteness of our transition to modernity had manifested itself pathologically in what Nietzsche referred to as "decadence" or "nihilism," and in what Durkheim called "anomie." However, Bull argues, whereas Durkheim articulated a nervous optimism about "about the totalization of society" based on the cohesiveness of "organic solidarity"—the idea that society is an increasingly complex machine that adds up to more than the sum of its different components—Nietzsche wanted to effect "a return to mechanical solidarity," a hierarchical, caste-based society with a shared collective conscience molded by Brahmanical overmen.[10] Durkheim, in other words, was a theorist of difference. Nietzsche, on the other hand, was a misogynistic romantic not much different from the predatory bird in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that wages "an all-out war against the defenseless" out of sheer hatred. But this misses the fact that Nietzsche was pointing out that there was little evidence society was progressively headed toward "organic solidarity," behind the back of the actors involved, through the dialectic that Kant had termed "unsocial sociability." Instead, Nietzsche had sensed—one wants to say, "presciently"—that modern society had turned self-destructive. Bull attributes to Nietzsche the nihilism that Nietzsche had identified in modern society, and in this comes closer to Heidegger, who criticized Nietzsche for giving up on phenomenology by instead proffering metaphysical answers to confront "nihilism" [the meaningless of life],[11] than to someone like Lukács. Bull is ultimately ambivalent about the idea that the "transvaluation of values" requires a "self-transfiguration" and "self-sublation" of spirit. Yet it is precisely this motif in Nietzsche that resonates with the Left's self-conception of its historical role.

The antecedents of left criticism of Nietzsche date back to the 1890s, when anarchist-inclined advocates of the ideas of Max Stirner publishing in the revisionist organ *Sozialistische Monatschefte* tried to appropriate Nietzsche to their cause. On the "orthodox" side, Franz Mehring mounted the criticism that, after 1848, conservatives had turned away from Hegel only to find their inspiration in Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's break with Schopenhauer, Mehring contended, had only resulted in Nietzsche placing a laurel wreath on the class of exploitation and financial interests instead of on a class of aristocrats.[12] Nietzsche, in other words, failed to appreciate the revolutionary character of the working class and was accordingly seen as putting forward a philosophy of capitalism that was elitist. Nonetheless, Mehring was also clear that, "the Nietzsche cult is still more useful to socialism in another respect." For those still growing up within the upper classes, Mehring remarked, "Nietzsche is only a transitional stage on the way to socialism."[13] What Mehring suggests is that the critique of culture one finds in Nietzsche strikes notes that Marx himself was fond of playing before Engels introduced him to the categories of political economy; Nietzsche echoes Marx the Young Hegelian. A different strain of the "orthodox" criticism of Nietzsche is offered by the late Lukács in the chapter from *The Destruction of Reason* (1952) on Nietzsche as the foundational irrationalist of the imperialist era. Nietzsche had, Lukács claimed, at least for a while, "consider[ed] socialism to be an ally of liberalism and democracy, their consummation carried to radical extremes," but then came to treat the emancipation of workers as "a purely ideological issue....[when in] fact the question had objective economic foundations."[14] After the failure of the revolutions of 1918-19 and the experience of the Second World War, Lukács, in the last, also succumbed to the temptation to see Nietzsche as expressing "certain methodological affinities with Romantic anti-capitalism." Lukács neither made an effort to grasp the depth of the historical divide that separated Nietzsche from Marx nor to rehearse the arguments he had made so ably decades before—precisely that, through their criticisms of the socialists of their age, Nietzsche and Marx were grappling with what Lukács himself had referred to in *History and Class Consciousness* as the antinomies of bourgeois thought. The late Lukács also slides over the pressing query: What is Marxism if not an ideology—if not a "necessary form of appearance" —that demands further development through critique?

Nietzsche after the Left

At a seminar on Nietzsche held in the summer of 1942 in Los Angeles, the conversation between the transplanted members of the Frankfurt School had shifted to trying to appraise whether, in postulating the self-transformation of animalistic man into "superman," Nietzsche had cleft to the notion of utopia, "the sermon on the mount as well as the classless society."[15] Günther Anders was skeptical of the claim. Nietzsche, Anders held, had articulated an affirmative worldview that centered on the idea of *amor fati,* the acceptance of fate. Horkheimer countered that what was apparently affirmative in Nietzsche was in fact an effect of the ideologi-

"Nietzsche" continues on page 4

Nietzsche, continued from page 3

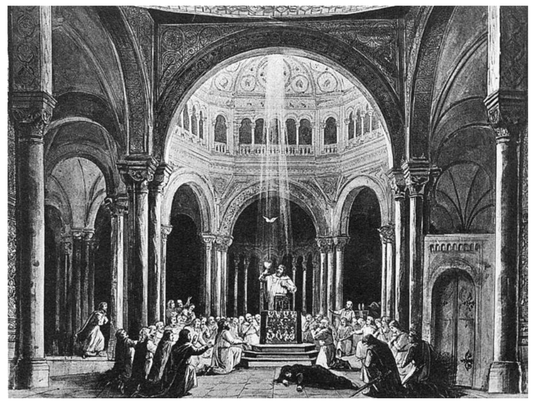
cal character of attempting to overcome capitalism, which as a system of domination was capable of "satisfy[ing] most of our material needs as well as allay[ing] the causes of our fear." "What binds us to Nietzsche," Adorno then remarked, is that "Nietzsche stands in relationship to Bebel [co-founder of the SPD] only in the sense that [Nietzsche] uses [Bebel] to specify things that in reality are ideology." He was successful in "perceiv[ing] that not only democracy, but also socialism has become an ideology." And "in certain critical respects, Nietzsche had progressed further than Marx," in that Nietzsche had identified certain aspects of the dialectic of capital that were not to be found in the critique of political economy. Herbert Marcuse interjected, "If Marx is right, then Nietzsche is wrong." Anders relented slightly: "One can use Marx to interpret Nietzsche, but not vice versa. Nietzsche is not a revolutionary who wanted to transform the world." But Adorno rode the steed hard:

> Nietzsche realized that the idea of socialism is tied to a concept of praxis that is not merely a reflection of society. Marx could only say that it is naturally a reflection of society. On the other hand, it seems that already in Nietzsche's day the whole nexus of concepts like praxis, organization, and so forth, showed a side whose implications are becoming only apparent today. Nietzsche withdrew from the demands of the day for the sake of advancing a number of the categories in question. He understood that, in and of itself, the concept of praxis is inadequate to differentiate between a barbarian and a non-barbarian world. . . . All-inclusive, all-defining praxis has a tendency to continue to reproduce the form of domination over and above domination as such. . . . Nietzsche's aversion to all questions having to do with man's material existence certainly has its negative side, but it also shows that he understood that there is something bad about the concept of total praxis . . . Thus the seriousness of culture. Otherwise one runs the risk of transforming socialism into a pragmatism magnified to planetary dimensions.[16]

Nietzsche, on this view, was a critic of a culture that remains individualistic and a critic of the socialism of the Marxist *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) as an affirmative ideology—as a symptomatic but necessary form of appearance. Adorno was also pointing out that Marx had optimistically hoped that the socialists, through a combination of theory and praxis immanent to capital, might achieve a historical consciousness adequate to the task of getting beyond capital. Nietzsche, on the other hand, had troublingly—in the sense of what is "unfashionable" or "untimely"—raised the specter that the weight of incomplete and thus failed revolutions had vitiated life, led man into "unstable equilibrium between 'animal and angel,'" and forced the recognition that "we are unknown to ourselves." Adorno thus implies that Nietzsche, but also Rousseau for that matter, will remain valid until the desiderata that Marx had identified are fulfilled—a task made exponentially more difficult since the Left lost its will-to-power. Nietzsche, in placing "the whole question of the relationship between communism and anarchism in its second phase," Adorno concluded, had shifted the onus of trying to realize the values of liberal emancipation, by deepening the analysis and critique of capitalism, back onto the socialists.

Nihilism and History

Nietzsche characterized the sustained crisis of culture, civilization, and life—what we might summarize as capitalism—through its symptoms: nihilism (meaninglessness), historical spirit (historicism), and eternal return (endless repetition). "Read from a distant star, the majuscule script of our earthly existence," Nietzsche hypothesized, might lead an extra-planetary astronomer to the conclusion that life on earth was marked by a distinctive asceticism, "a nook of disgruntled, arrogant and offensive creatures" filled with a disgust for everything and gleaning a sadistic satisfaction in their self-inflicted wounds.[17] "For man is more sick, uncertain, changeable, indeterminate than any other animal, there is no doubt of that . . . [H]ow did this come about?"[18] Although man had braved more and "challenged fate" more than all the other animals, as an "experimenter with himself, discounted and insatiable," man was grappling with "animals, nature, and gods for ultimate dominion." The future itself had its "own restless energies" that never left man to himself peacefully, but instead this "future digs like a spur into the flesh of every present."[19] Nietzsche, in attempting to think through the historical inversions, the self-destructiveness, and self-transformation of the manner in which mankind had overcome nature wonders out loud: How are we to cross that abyss? How had our values come to devalue themselves? What makes "history" relevant to the future? Through the eyes of Zarathustra Nietzsche saw that "man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss."[20] [That Zarathustra descends from priestly ascetics rather than aristocrats reveals far more about what Nietzsche thought of himself than do allegories about predatory birds or blond beasts.]



Original stage design by Paul von Joukowsky for Act III of *Parsifal* circa 1882. Nietzsche felt that Wagner's last opera, a story of redemption, had allowed asceticism and nihilism to triumph over art.

As Richard Schacht argues, the development of man, as Nietzsche saw the matter, is not the result of "accidental change, or Heraclitan flux, or the actualization of potentiality."[21] Self-transfiguration involves a transformation of nature, more precisely a struggle to overcome our "second natures . . . [which] are mostly feebler than the first."[22] Or, as Marx wrote in the 1844 manuscripts, "The nature which comes to be in human history...is man's real nature....History is itself a real part of natural history—of nature's coming to be man"—history can be a development *in* but also *beyond* nature.[23] But with the option of going back to first nature foreclosed, man, who is self-conscious of a life led well or poorly, had to treat the symptoms of our modern sickness—which is analogous to the sickness of pregnancy: that which must be labored through to deliver a new life.[24] The contemporary crisis of meaninglessness had to be situated, therefore, as Nietzsche argues in *Beyond Good and Evil*, on the 10,000 year timeline of the history of humanity, for most of which the value of man was tied to the consequences of his actions.

> During the longest part of human history—so-called pre-historical times—the value or disvalue of an action was derived from its consequences. The action itself was considered as little as its origin....[T]he imperative "know thyself!" was as yet unknown. In the last ten thousand years, however, one has reached the point, step by step, in a few large regions of the earth, where it is no longer the consequences but the origin of an action that one allows to decide its value....[which] involves the first attempt at self-knowledge....Instead of the consequences, the origin: indeed the reversal of perspective!...But today—shouldn't we have reached the necessity of once more resolving on a reversal and fundamental shift in values, owing to another self-examination of man, another growth in profundity?[25]

The cultural norms or "morality of mores" of classical antiquity—a primally animalistic attachment to domination—had transitioned, only after extreme reversals, into class society, marked by liberal democratic values. The "slave revolt" had affected the transvaluation of values. What followed was the defection of the clerics to the side of the slaves, which explains the world-historical significance of Christianity, until the passing of traditional metaphysics rendered life meaningless—but this was also "only a transitional stage."[26] The rise of class society, in other words, raises the possibility of a transition to whatever is beyond this life-form, but to realize what Nietzsche cryptically refers to as "the gay science involves accepting a difficult task: replacing the antiquarian historicist sensibilities that were sapping life with a critical approach from a supra-historical stance that revivifies life, giving it a telos, in the Hegelian sense, as a direction, rather than as a final end-point. Nietzsche zoomorphizes us so that as we shed our animalistic nature. We might then continue to ask: Are we late- or first-comers?[27]

Just as the disappointment of the emancipatory aspirations of 1848 had led Wagner to compose *Parsifal* as a tale of salvation, utilitarians "à la Comte and [John] Stuart Mill" had theorized "the insipid and cowardly concept of 'man,'" which, Nietzsche remarked with an acerbic bite, was a notion that was more suited to "the object of a cult."[28] What Nietzsche was saying was that, in regressing behind the 18th century, moderns were left vulnerable to vulgarization of thought by "the cultivated Philistines" [who, Adorno quips in the 1942 seminar, will only disappear when everyone can find "enough to eat"], which was also Nietzsche's own title for the first "untimely meditation" on David Strauss. The socialists in the SPD manifested this self-vivisection in accepting the ideas of the anti-Semite Eugen Dühring, "that Berlin apostle of revenge who employs moral mumbo-jumbo more indecently and repulsively than anyone else."[29] Nietzsche offered a heuristic for this historical devaluation of our values in *Twilight of the Idols*: "Liberal institutions stop being liberal as soon as they have been attained: after that, nothing damages freedom more terribly or more thoroughly than liberal institutions." Yet, "as long as they are still being fought for, these same institutions have entirely different effects and are actually powerful promoters of freedom. On closer inspection, it is the war that produces these effects, the war *for* liberal institutions which, being a war, keeps *illiberal* institutions in place. And the war is what teaches people to be free."[30] Freedom," Nietzsche concluded, "[in] the sense I understand the word: [is] something that you have and do *not* have, that you will, that you win."

If workers, as the socialists claimed, were going to not simply live " . . . one day as the bourgeois do now, but [really] above them, distinguished by their freedom from wants," the socialists had to first shed their urge to "condemn, libel, and denigrate society" and their blind faith in historical development. Nietzsche thus outlines a philosophy of history that calls our attention to the *regression* in "progress." He confronts the vexation: How is this new historical consciousness, the 19th century historicist thought exemplified by the right-Hegelians, disadvantageous to life but also potentially what we require for life? What if moderns lived at the expense of the future? How might our values be the source of enervation? Faced with these difficulties, modern man, who is generationally the result of earlier "aberrations, passions, mistakes, and even crimes," wishes in vain for an existence like that of animals enthralled only in the moment, that is, without a sense of yesterday or the future, thus neither bored nor melancholy.[31] Animals are unhistorical, while man, on the other hand, resists the ever-growing weight of what *was*. "This is why [man] is moved, as though he remembered a lost paradise, when he sees a grazing herd, or, in a more intimate proximity, sees a child, which as yet has nothing past to deny, playing between fences of past and future in blissful blindness."[32] Although we can cultivate a forgetful or unhistorical disposition, or conversely obsess over historical details, both methods risk what Nietzsche calls "a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is . . . [which is] my formula for *amor fati*."[33] The supra-historical task consists in grasping a knife and going at what had come before without reverence.[34] "Our inherited customary nature and our knowledge" had to be brought into conflict, "in fact, even into a war n [in order to] cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature atrophies."[35] A historical genealogy is therefore "an attempt to give oneself, as it were, *a posteriori* a past from which one would like to be descended in opposition to the past from which we descended," although the obstacle was "perceiving not merely the necessity of those sides of existence hitherto denied, but their desirability; and not their desirability merely in relation to the sides hitherto affirmed."[36]

Conclusion

Nietzsche came of age with the Franco-Prussian War and was lucid while Bismark was Chancellor. His first-hand experience with the savagery of war confirmed Nietzsche as the first anti-German. It also made odious the triumphalism that marked the rise of Bismarck. German self-satisfaction was rooted in a false sense of accomplishment. The French defeat marked the collapse of the revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1871, Nietzsche believed, more than it heralded the advance of authentic Teutonic or Protestant culture. Berlin was a counterfeit new Athens; the semblance of poetry, music, and philosophy was insufficient to the immanence of the task of modern life. The victories on the battlefield were sure to exorcise the spirits of 1848, but perniciously. Nietzsche attacked the evasions of the 1848-revolutionaries-turned-anti-Semites as decadent, in bad faith, mendacious, and desperate to ape the modern. But the socialists, who had turned dogmatic, were equally in bad faith. It is as if Nietzsche were specifically pointing to the Left when identifying "the species of moral masturbators" gesturing like invalid Pharisees filled with "noble indignation." How were the socialists, who were themselves afflicted with the belief that, "[as] time marches forward . . . everything that is in it also marches forward," going to then serve "as physicians, consolers, and 'saviors' of the sick"?[37]

Nietzsche was, in a lot of ways, a typical liberal of the late 19th century, expressing a concern with conformism, mass or herd society, and authoritarianism. His inner affinities and differences with Hegel and Marx can be productively specified in the twist that each delivers to their Rousseauian conviction that a consciousness of history and the task of freedom are interdependent. The main differences between them can be attributed to the events of the mid-19th century that mark a historical watershed, on one side of which stands Hegel, on the other Marx and Nietzsche. Hegel had attempted to supersede the contradiction between romanticism and enlightenment. But whereas Hegel saw the romantic view of history as a necessary stage of modernity, and Marx saw the metaphysics of historical Spirit attendant to the emergence of the state as the rational core of Hegel, for Nietzsche modernity had degenerated into melancholy. Nietzsche was acutely aware of the exhaustion within the bourgeois-democratic revolution, which, unable to manage itself within the framework of parliamentary democracy, had collapsed into Bonapartist authoritarianism under Bismarck.

After 1848, Nietzsche remarked, "workers were enlisted for the military, they were given the right to organize, the political right to vote: is it any wonder that workers today feel their existence to be desperate (expressed morally—to be an injustice)?" As it happened, Nietzsche had reason to doubt whether their demands were pointing toward was the realization—completion and transfiguration—of the values of liberal emancipation. The developments of the last 100 years make the relationship between Nietzsche and Marx inevitably more opaque than it was for the revolutionary Marxists of the early 19th century. Both were harsh critics of the socialists of their day, but whereas Marx (and Engels) saw in the struggle for socialism signs of that struggle "pointing beyond itself," toward the establishment of the classless society, Nietzsche saw only widespread resentment as the final destination of the socialist movements. This major difference, so crucial when the international socialist movement was expanding and a new era of revolutionary history was on the horizon, has receded behind the history of the 20th century. Any attempt to reckon with our present impasse inevitably comes to ask: "What is there to recover?" It is in light of this task that Marx and Nietzsche are not flatly counterposed, but are different critics of an object that disintegrated before it fulfilled its most vital aspirations. **IP**

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13. Mehring quoted in Georg Lukács, *Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter R. Palmer, available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/destruction-reason/ch03.htm>.
14. *Ibid.*
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16. "Need and Culture in Nietzsche," 134-135.
17. Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968), Third Essay §11, 553.
18. *Ibid*, Third Essay §13, 557.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1982), §4, 14.
21. Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, London: Routledge, 1983, 31.
22. Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss,
23. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 90-91.
24. Peter Preuss, "Introduction" in *History for* Life, 1. The pregnancy metaphor occurs in the context of the dissection of *Parsifal* in the important third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, §4, 537.
25. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §32, 234.
26. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §7, 10-11.
27. Nietzsche, *History for Life*, §9, 49.
28. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §340,186.
29. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay §14, 560.
30. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §38, 213.
31. Nietzsche, *History for Life*, §3, 22.
32. *Ibid*, §1, 9.
33. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §1041, 536.
34. *Vide* Chris Cutrone, "Beyond History? Nietzsche, Benjamin, and Adorno," available online at http://chriscutrone.platypus1917.org/?s=nietzsche.
35. Nietzsche, *History for Life*, §3, 22.
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37. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay §14, 561.

Rousseau, continued from page 1

Rousseau in the 18th century

The Classicism of the 18th century Enlightenment had its distinctive melancholy, already, reaching back in historical fragments, broken remnants of Ancient forms, for inspiration to the modern task of freedom. Rilke, at the turn of the 20th century, expressed this wistful sense of modern freedom in his poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo:"

> We cannot know his legendary head
> with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
> is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
> like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
> gleams in all its power. Otherwise
> the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
> a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
> to that dark center where procreation flared. Otherwise
> this stone would seem defaced
> beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
> and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:
> would not, from all the borders of itself,
> burst like a star: for here there is no place
> that does not see you. You must change your life.[8]

The scholar of German Idealist philosophy, Robert Pippin, wrote that after Kant's critical turn,

> some new way of conceiving of philosophy adequate to the realization of the radically historical nature of the human condition was now necessary[.] . . . The problem of understanding properly (especially critically) conceptual, artistic, and social change was henceforth at the forefront[.][9]

This new conception was found in Rousseau. Rousseau wrote that while animals were machines wound up for functioning in a specific natural environment, humans could regard and reflect upon their own machinery and thus change it. This was Rousseau's radical notion of "perfectibility" which was not in pursuit of an ideal of perfection but rather open-ended in infinite adaptability. Unlike animal species, humans could adapt themselves to live in any environment and thus transform "outer nature" to suit them, thus transforming as well their own "inner nature," giving rise to ever-new possibilities. This was the new conception of freedom, not freedom to be according to a fixed natural or Divine form, but rather freedom to transform and realize new potential possibilities, to become new and different, other than what we were before.

Rousseau and Kant

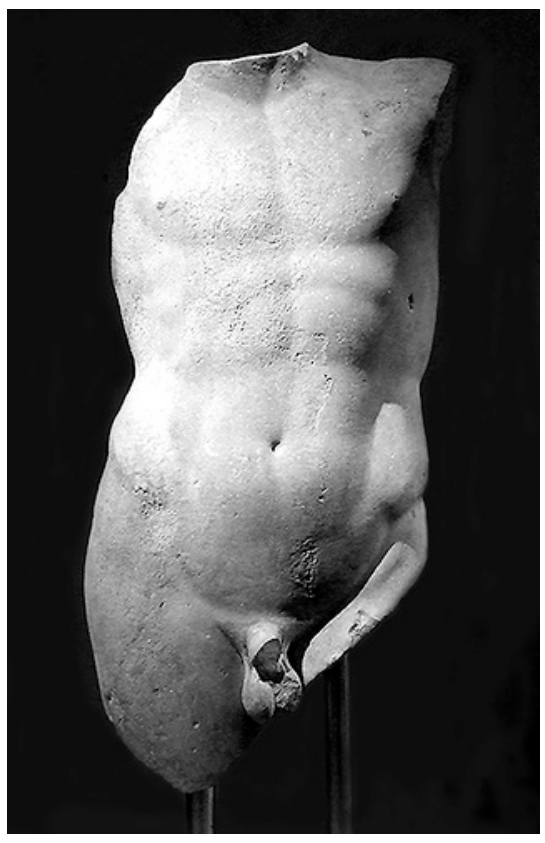
Rousseau understood the most radical possibilities of freedom-in-transformation to take place in society, the site of new and "alien powers which he cannot employ without the help of other men." Rousseau described this as the sacrifice of "natural liberty" for "moral freedom," the freedom to act in unnatural ways. For Rousseau, such freedom was radically ambivalent: it could be for good or for ill. However, the problem of society in which humanity had fallen could only be "solved" socially, not individually. This is why Rousseau was liable to be read later antinomically, as either anarchist or authoritarian: Rousseau gave expression to the radical ambiguity of freedom as it was revealed in modern society, the crossroads of civilization that bourgeois society represented. As Kant put it, in his "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" written in 1784, the same year as his famous essay answering the question, "What is Enlightenment?,"

> The vitality of mankind may fall asleep... Until this last step to a union of states is taken, which is the halfway mark in the development of mankind, human nature must suffer the cruelest hardships under the guise of external well-being; and Rousseau was not far wrong in preferring the state of savages, so long, that is, as the last stage to which the human race must climb is not attained...[Mere civilization,] however, is nothing but pretense and glittering misery. In such a condition the human species will no doubt remain until... it works its way out of the chaotic conditions of its international relations.[10]

Rousseau was profoundly inspirational for Kant with respect to the fundamental "philosophical" issue of the relation of theory and practice. Specifically, Rousseau originated the modern dialectic of theory and practice, what Rousseau called their "reflective" and Kant called their "speculative" relation. In Kant's First Critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and his summary of his argument there and reply to critics of it, the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant articulated the "conditions of possibility" for concepts or categories of understanding as being those of practice.

What this meant in Kant was that, while "things-in-themselves" were inaccessible to us, things do become objects of our theoretical understanding, by virtue of being objects of our practical engagement: Objects were "concrete" in the sense of being concretions of the various practical and thus conceptual relations we have with them. Furthermore, as Hegel put it, in the *Science of Logic*, objects were not "identical" with themselves—there was a non-identity of an object and its own concept—because they were subject to transformed, that is, changed, practices. So, objects were not approximations of always inaccurate theoretical models of conceptual understanding, but our concepts change as a function of changes in practice that were nonetheless informed by theoretical concepts. Concepts were "inductive" rather than "deductive" because they were not abstractions from empirical observation as generalizations from experience, but rather objects were "concretions of abstractions" in the sense of being determined in a web of practical relations. Rationalist metaphysics had a real basis in issues of practice. Furthermore, such practical relations were social in nature, as well as subject to historical change—change that is brought about subjectively by agents of practice who transform themselves in the process of transforming objects. What objects are for subjects changes as a function of changing practical relations.

In his essay "What is Enlightenment?," Kant had articulated a distinction between "public" and "private" reason in order to demonstrate that, enmeshed in the web of practical relations in society, we are condemned to exercise merely "private reason" in pursuit of our self-interest as individual "cogs in the machine" of society. It was only in the exercise of "public reason" that we



Torso of Apollo

were potentially free of such self-interest determined by our positions in society, to exercise reason as "anyone"—as any rational subject or any political citizen—from a position transcendent of such compromised interested practice. For Kant, such exercise of "public reason" expressed, however indirectly, the possibility of changes in social practice: the way things "ought" to be as opposed to how they "are" at present.

Hegel and the philosophy of history

Hegel built upon Kant and Rousseau in his pursuit of the "philosophy of history" of accounting for such change in freedom, or "reason in history." The issue of Hegelianism is a notoriously but ultimately needlessly difficult one: how to include the "subjective factor in history." Hegel's sense of the actuality of the rational in the real turns on the relation of essence and appearance, or, with what necessity things appear as they do. What is essential is what is practical, and what is practical is subjective as well as objective. In this view, theoretical reflection on the subjective dimension of experience must use metaphysical categories that are not merely handy but actually constitutive of social practices in which one is a subject.

Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, had raised a hypothetical "state of nature" in order to throw his contemporary society into critical relief. In so doing, Rousseau sought to bring society closer to a "state of nature." Liberal, bourgeois society was a model and an aspiration for Rousseau. For Rousseau, it was human "nature" to be free. Humans achieved a higher "civil liberty" of "moral freedom" in society than they could enjoy as animals, with mere "physical" freedom in nature. Indeed, as animals, humans are not free, but rather slaves to their natural needs and instincts. Only in society could freedom be achieved, and humans free themselves from their natural, animal condition. When Rousseau was writing, in the mid-18th century, the promise of freedom in bourgeois society was still on the horizon. Bourgeois society aspired to proximity to the "state of nature" in the sense of bringing humanity, both individually and collectively, closer to its potential, to better realize its freedom

For Rousseau, in his reflections *On the Social Contract*, society exhibited a "general will" not reducible to its individual members: more than the sum of its parts. Not Hobbes's "Leviathan," but rather a "second nature," a rebirth of potential, both collectively and individually. Human nature found the realization of its freedom in society, but humans were free to develop and transform themselves, for good or for ill. For Rousseau and the 18th century revolutionaries he inspired, to bring society closer to the "state of nature," then, was to allow humanity's potential to be better realized. But, first, society had to be clear about its aims, in practice as well as in theory. Rousseau was the first to articulate this new, modern task of social freedom.

The question Rousseau poses, then, is the speculative or dialectical relation of theory and practice, today. How might we raise the originally Rousseauian question of critical-theoretical reflection on our practices, from within the conditions of "second nature" that express our condition of freedom—including our self-imposed conditions of unfreedom? That is the issue of "public reason" today, as much as it was in Rousseau's time

As Hegel put it, in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*,

> When we look at this drama of human passions, and observe the consequences of their violence and of the unreason that is linked not only to them but also (and especially) to good intentions and rightful aims; when we see arising from them all the evil, the wickedness, the decline of the most flourishing nations mankind has produced, we can only be filled with grief for all that has come to nothing. And since this decline and fall is not merely the work of nature but of the will of men, we might well end with moral outrage over such a drama, and with a revolt of our good spirit (if there is a spirit of goodness in us). Without rhetorical exaggeration, we could paint the most fearful picture of the misfortunes suffered by the noblest of nations and states as well as by private virtues—and with that picture we could arouse feelings of the deepest and most helpless sadness, not to be outweighed by any consoling outcome. We can strengthen ourselves against this, or escape it, only by thinking that, well, so it was at one time; it is fate; there is nothing to be done about it now. And finally—in order to cast off the tediousness that this reflection of sadness could produce in us and to return to involvement in our own life, to the present of our own aims and interests—we return to the selfishness of standing on a quiet shore where we can be secure in enjoying the distant sight of confusion and wreckage . . . But as we contemplate history as this slaughter-bench, upon which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals were sacrificed, the question necessarily comes to mind: What was the ultimate goal for which these monstrous sacrifices were made? . . . World history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom—a progress that we must come to know in its necessity . . . The Orientals knew only that one person is free; the Greeks and Romans that some are free; while we [moderns] know that all humans are implicitly free, qua human . . . The final goal of the world, we said, is Spirit's consciousness of its freedom, and hence also the actualization of that very freedom . . . It is this final goal—freedom—toward which all the world's history has been working. It is this goal to which all the sacrifices have been brought upon the broad altar of the earth in the long flow of time.[11]

Hopefully, still. | **P**

1. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in Walter Kaufmann, trans. and ed., *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecco Homo* (New York: Random House, 2010), 20.
2. Quoted by Marx in *On the Jewish Question* (1843), available online at: < http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>.
3. Marx, *On the Jewish Question*.
4. Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, available on-line at: < http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ >.
5. Introduction to Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), xv.
6. Foreword to Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station* (New York Review of Books, 2003), xv-xviii.
7. Introduction to Nietzsche, *The Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1980), 1-2.
8. Trans. Stephen Mitchell, available online at: < http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15814>.
9. Robert Pippin, "Critical Theory and *Critical Inquiry*: A Short History of Non-Being," *Critical Inquiry* 30.2 (Winter 2004), available online at: < http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v30/30n2.Pippin.html>.
10 . Kant, "Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784), trans. Lewis White Beck. in Immanuel Kant, *On History* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1963). available online at; < http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/universal-history.htm>.
11. Hegel, *Reason In History, A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), available online at: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/introduction.htm>.

Adam Smith, Revolutionary

Spencer A. Leonard

> By exposing the historical necessity that had brought capitalism into being, political economy became the critique of history as a whole
> — Theodor W. Adorno, "Reflections on Class Theory"[1]

Unlike Jean-Jacques Rousseau or even Friedrich Nietzsche, Adam Smith is a thinker few on the contemporary left will have much time for. This tells us more about the impoverishment of the currently prevailing intellectual environment than about the persistent, if ever more obscure, influence of bourgeois radicalism on the Left. Today, of course, it is fashionable to have 'a critique of the enlightenment' or, alternatively, to defend it against an array of enemies, including postmodernism, religious conservatism, and academic obscurantism. Those currents of the contemporary Left that still seek to lay claim to the Enlightenment must fend off Smith, because, like Rousseau, his is an Enlightenment that cannot be upheld simply as an affirmation of "reason" or the demand for "human rights." Smith's Enlightenment demands to be advanced. His 1776 treatise, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, is not a product of the Scottish Enlightenment but of the cosmopolitan radical Enlightenment, stretching from the coffeehouses of Rotterdam to the meeting rooms of Calcutta. If that cosmopolitan Enlightenment project remains "unfinished," it is because the course of history since the publication of Smith's magnum opus failed to fulfill and indeed undermined the radical potentials of the 18th century.

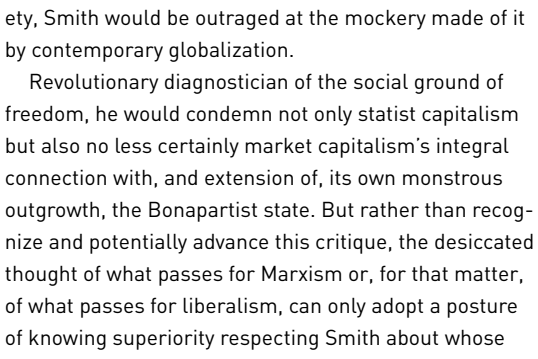
Smith's powerful influence upon French revolutionaries such as the Abbé Sieyès and the Marquis de Condorcet, and through them upon Immanuel Kant, Benjamin Constant, and G. W. F. Hegel, are not as well known as they should be, but that need not detain us from coming to terms with the profound radicalism of his thought. Less well known still is the respect that Smith and his close friend, David Hume, held for Rousseau's works. Hume, refusing to allow his famous public quarrel with Rousseau to cloud his judgment, contended that the Genevan's major works were "efforts of genius" in a letter to Smith.[2] This was an estimate Hume doubtless knew would find favor with his friend, since as early as 1756 Smith had written an article that is perhaps the earliest acknowledgement of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, singling that work out as the act whereby the Francophone world re-established its supremacy in philosophy for the first time since Descartes, displacing the preeminence of English political and social thought that had lasted for almost a century with the writings of Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, and others.[3] Nor did Smith's devotion to Rousseau, proclaimed in his very first publication, abate towards the end of his life. For we have the testimony to the contrary of Faujas de Saint-Fond from 1784: "'When I was taking tea with him, [Smith] spoke to me of Rousseau with a kind of religious respect. 'Voltaire sought,' said he, 'to correct the vices and the follies of mankind by laughing at them, and sometimes even getting angry with them; Rousseau, by the attraction of sentiment, and the force of conviction, drew the reader into the heart of reason. His *Contrat Social* will in time avenge him for all the persecutions he has suffered[.]'"[4] Smith's profound sympathy with Rousseau's epoch-making philosophy found its highest expression in the radical political economy put forward in *The Wealth of Nations*, which laid the groundwork for the revolutionary wave of the late 18th and early 19th centuries no less than did the *Discourse on Inequality and the Social Contract*. Indeed, Smith, as much as Georges Danton or Maximilien de Robespierre, was a leading bourgeois revolutionary.

In order to fully grasp the radical specification of Rousseau's call for the conscious advance of human freedom contained in Smith's work—that is, in order to grasp the work's bourgeois-revolutionary implications—readers and interpreters must get beyond the outward sobriety of *The Wealth of Nations* to the "very violent attack . . . upon the whole commercial system" that lies at its core.[5] Living in the most revolutionary society of his age, Smith was nevertheless not complacent. He, no less than Rousseau, demanded a revolutionary transformation of his society, railing with all his strength of intellect against what Rousseau called "our absurd civil institutions whereby the real welfare of the public and true justice are always sacrificed to some apparent order, which is in reality detrimental to all order and which merely gives the sanction of public authority to the oppression of the weak and the iniquity of the strong."[6] It was in full recognition of the flagging of British philosophy and, with it, of the British revolution, that Adam Smith wrote a work that was, in its way, not only the most revolutionary of 1776, but also the crucial text, along with the Abbé Raynal's *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, linking Rousseau to the French Revolution and German Idealism.

Smith is one of those indispensable 18th century thinkers who articulates unmistakably that century's critique of our own interminable 20th century. Profoundly, even originally, aware of the depth of the self-transformative potential of humanity, Smith demands that we transform ourselves. Author of one of the greatest acts of public reason ever penned, Smith demands that our time too make a thoroughgoing attack upon the entire commercial system. Prophet of cosmopolitan civil society, Smith would be outraged at the mockery made of it by contemporary globalization.

Revolutionary diagnostician of the social ground of freedom, he would condemn not only statist capitalism but also no less certainly market capitalism's integral connection with, and extension of, its own monstrous outgrowth, the Bonapartist state. But rather than recognize and potentially advance this critique, the desiccated thought of what passes for Marxism or, for that matter, of what passes for liberalism, can only adopt a posture of knowing superiority respecting Smith about whose thought it does not have a clue.

Take, for example, the prominent Marx scholar David Harvey, whose writings are part of the gospel of the contemporary academic and activist left. Harvey describes Smith as a "liberal utopian" committed to a theology of "perfectly functioning markets and the hidden hand."[7] A spokesman for the capitalist class, Harvey's Smith promotes their exploitative system as a "utopianism of process" from which he helpfully "derive[s] a political programme," the essence of which Harvey states as follows: "Give free markets room to flourish, then all will be well with the world." By way of closing, Harvey does not fail to instruct his reader that "this, of course, is the ideology that has become so dominant in



Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* shows an 18th century pin factory and the tools used therein.

certain of the advanced capitalist countries . . . these last 20 years." Smith represents a set of policy prescriptions against which, presumably, the Marxist David Harvey has others to oppose. And, surely, we can all agree that "Marx mounted a devastating attack upon this utopianism of process in *Capital*."[8]

But Harvey should not be singled out. Rather, he expresses something like the conventional view of the matter—while we might puzzle over Marx's relationship to, perhaps dialectical appropriation of, Hegel's dialectic, Marx's critique of political economy is an attack, a refutation, or at least a criticism. It would be truer to say that *Capital* is closed to Harvey, despite his being that book's "leading interpreter" in these spiritless times, precisely because *The Wealth of Nations* is impenetrable to him. That Smith represents a major stage in the development of the labor theory of value—formulating for the

"Adam Smith" continues on page 3