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ON PUTTING MARX ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL AGENDA

I

Karl Marx in our dominant Anglo-American philosophical tradition is usually regarded as a marginal figure. Richard Miller in his important *Analyzing Marx* wants to show this to be a mistake. He wants to show how Marx should play a central role in philosophy, including analytic philosophy.[1]

Miller himself, as I do as well, operates in the dominant philosophical sub-culture of analytic philosophy. He makes a point about that sub-culture, a point pushed hard by Richard Rorty, namely that analytical philosophy is not held together by a set of common doctrines but "by common standards of successful practice."[2] (4) Even a superficial understanding of the history of analytical philosophy should make the merits of that claim evident. Still even that claim is an exaggeration. Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap are both analytical philosophers but it is not so clear to me that they have common standards of successful practice. The same thing could be said of Stanley Cavell and Adolf Grunbaum. But behind that exaggeration there is an important truth. Generally, but not invariably, people who are analytical philosophers (particularly your typical philosophy professor) have roughly comparable standards for the successful practice of philosophy at least in determinate areas. This is evident when we compare their practice with the practice of other philosophers particularly when we look at philosophy internationally. Extreme examples will dramatize my point but also make it evident. Philosophy as practiced in Tehran and philosophy as

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practiced in Stockholm are rather different as is philosophy practiced in the U. S. A., and philosophy practiced in Bulgaria. What is central to analytical philosophy and what Miller sees as a virtue, as do I, "is a heavy emphasis on clear statements of what one wants people to believe and clear arguments as to why they should believe it, based on premises that would be plausible to many, if not all."(4) Historically British empiricism and logical positivism have set the agenda for analytical philosophy. I suppose no one, not even A. J. Ayer, is a logical positivist anymore. But W. V. Quine dedicated his major work to Carnap and Donald Davidson in turn dedicated one of his major works to Quine. The influence of positivist and empiricist conceptions lie very deep in analytical philosophy.

Miller, like Rorty, wants to pry present philosophical practice away from that influence. Miller thinks that it is particularly disastrous in the philosophy of science.[3] He wants to show "that Marx is best read and best used when the style of analytic philosophy is divorced from positivist substance."[4](4) In doing this he wants to find a space in philosophy for Marx. He wants us to come to treat Marx as we do many other philosophers such as Kant, Hume, Mill or Hobbes. When we do epistemology Hume and Kant are classical figures in that they "represent standard options that a philosopher," doing epistemology, "should consult, interpreting or attacking them, as he or she does philosophy."(4) It doesn't mean that we need at all to agree with Hume or Kant as to their conclusions or even as to their methodology. But they are standard points of departure providing us with serious and nuanced views against which we would have to define ourselves, if we would seriously try to do epistemology. If we were to do ethics, Mill, Kant and Sidgwick would play a similar role. And in the philosophy of mind Wittgenstein, Dennett and Putnam—though contemporary

figures—are similarly situated. And in the philosophy of language, the same would be said for Chomsky, Dummett and Davidson. In social philosophy Hobbes and Mill are secure figures on that list. Miller wants to show that Marx should be an equally secure figure in social philosophy and indirectly in ethics in a way that he is not now (1985) in analytic philosophy and generally in English speaking philosophy. He wants to show why it must be the case that anyone who sets out to do social philosophy seriously must come to grips with Marx in a way analogous to the way in which if someone were to do epistemology seriously he would have to come to grips with Kant or if he were to do moral philosophy seriously he would have to come to grips with Sidgwick. Miller will, while doing that, try to show how in an indirect but striking way Marx is vital to moral philosophy and to thinking about morality generally.

Miller realizes that he is swimming against the stream. For as he puts it :

> .. in English-speaking countries, the relation between Marx and philosophy has been almost wholly antagonistic, at least untill very recently. Almost all analytic philosophers, if they did not ignore Marx's writings, tried to show that Marx fell so far short of proper standards of clarity, plausibility, scientific justification of explanatory adequacy that it would be a waste of time to investigate his theories empirically or to derive their philosophical implications. "Metaphysics" was one of the nicer charges.(4)

Miller maintains that this antagonism should be replaced by cooperation. (5) He belives that Marx's ideas "shed light on leading problems of philosophy, issues that are important not just for Marxists (or anti-Marxists), but for everyone." (5)

Examples here are vital if this is to be at all convincing. Miller provides some and you should reflect on how convincing you think they are.

His first example is Marx on morality. Miller thinks Marx, and Engels as well, are what I have called *anti-moralists*[5] Marx and Engels were, as it were, if Miller is right, the first Marxist anti-moralists. Without elucidation this does not mean much. Miller, for starters, takes it to mean that Marx develops a critique of morality. He criticizes those central categories of moral understanding and appraisal, "justice, equality and the moral point of view, as bases for judging social arrangements." (5) He seeks, paradoxical as this may sound, to *replace* them with other concepts of social appraisal and understanding which he thinks have a more adequate rational warrant and are less ideologically distorted. This is a radical challenge to the very enterprize of moral philosophy. In a political context the moral point of view, Miller argues, does not, and rationally speaking should not in class societies, reign supreme. It is not a point of view which either is or should be always overriding. Rather our fundamental evaluations, in such a context, should be made from another point of view which Miller describes, not without paradox, as being non-moral but still humane

Such a way of characterizing things is both paradoxical and conflicts radically not only with the views of such leading historical figures as Mill, Kant and Sidgwick but also with such contemporary moral philosophers as Rawls, Baier or Gewirth. To shed its paradoxicality and implausible sound, it will need a careful elucidation and this is exactly what Miller seeks to give it in the first and second chapters of *Analyzing Marx*. Such a radical critique of morality, critique which is also pursued, though in importantly different ways by Nietzsche and Freud, should be something that anyone thinking seriously about mora-

lity and ' the foundations of morality ' very much needs closely to examine, particularly given what we know about contemporary culture, about the indeterminacy of foundational claims in moral philosophy and what we know about the pervasiveness of ideology and the mystification that usually goes with it Marx makes us face what is both a fundamental theoretical question and a question of great human importance for anyone who with integrity wants to be serious about the world in which he lives. Marx forces us, in a radical and non-evasive way, to ask the question : *how should institutions be judged?* In his mature writings, he rejects—or so Miller and some other able Marxists read him—the idea that we should assess these institutions from the moral point of view, though it is also important to recognize that he does this without turning to nihilism or a cynical amoralism

We need, of course, to ask whether Miller has got Marx right here. George Brenkert, for example, gives us a quite differnt picture of Marx.[6] But, beyond that, we also need to ask : suppose he has got Marx right, still is this view—this humane replacement of morality—a coherent view which we ought to accept ? It might, we should also remember, be a coherent view and still be coherently rejectable. It might not be a view that we on reflection and with full knowledge would want to accept. The most central question is whether this is the right way of viewing things, the best way of judging institutions, for a thoroughly informed non-evasive person who is also humane. Even if Miller has got Marx wrong here the view itself—taking a challenging strand of Marx—might be the one a non-evasive person should take. There is the possibility that Marx is so indeterminate *on these topics* that there is no getting him wrong or right. Then what would be important is the adequacy *in their own right* of hese projective reconstructions of Marx. Whatever they revea,l

or fail to reveal, about 'the real Marx', what they say themselves should be thought about on its own. The central point is that such a critique of morality—a possibly adequate re-construction of Marx—should be of vital interest to moral and social philosophers. Such a challenge could not be shrugged off by moral philosophers who are serious about their subject.

Miller gives another example : an example he also wrestles with in *Analyzing Marx*. Marx's historical materialsm (his theory of history or theory of epochal social change) is a significant example of a holistic and systematic empirically grounded social science which, if it hangs together and is empirically adequate, would be both of very considerable theoretical interest and have considerable human import. There are reasons–reasons made familiar by people such as Ralf Dahrendorf, Karl Popper, Peter Winch and Isaiah Berlin—to be skeptical of the very possibility of such a social science, but, for reasons made popular by C. Wright Mills, we are also attracted to such grand theory as well. (It is part of the attraction not only of Marx but of Durkheim, Weber, Pareto and Habermas.) As social philosophers we should, Miller remarks, want to explore and assess such a holistic view. (Are, for example, the Popperian criticisms crippling ?)[7] Beyond that philosophers of science should find Marx' theory of history of particular interest for providing, as Miller puts it, "a model of the kind of legitimate theory that positivist philosophy of science excludes .."(5) The philosophy of science can use such a holistic social science as a model in sketching the logical structure of a "post–positivist but nonrelativist philosophy of science."(5)

II

Besides throwing light on leading problems of philosophy, Miller finds Marx's thought important in another way : a way which strikes me, if it really can be pulled off, as even more

important than the first way we have just characterized. Miller believes that "philosophers can use Marx's writing to make a positive contribution to the social sciences."(5) A philosopher with say, a severely Ryleian or logical positivist conception of his discipline as exclusively a *second order* activity—as talk about the would—would balk at this. But since Quine on the analytic and synthetic, we ought to be wary of such restrictions. They may not have much of a rationale and they certainly do not square with what many philosophers—including hard-nosed philosophers, e. g. Hobbes, Locke or Mill—actually did and how they actually saw their role. Be that as it may. Miller does not want to accept such a purely underlaborer role for philosophy or accept such academic isolationism. He remarks :

> Social and political philosophers and philosophers of science are now separated from social scientists by frustrating departmental divides. Lacking appropriate training, information or professional rewards, philosophers today, quite unlike their most eminent predecessors, find it hard to contribute to actual debates over the nature of social reality. Yet many social scientists suspect that distinctive possibilities of analysis and explanation are being missed as a result of the easy assumptions and the confusions that philosophical reflection should challenge. As the most powerful explanatory framework outside the mainstream, Marx's social theories often yield such alternatives, if reconstructed with the clarity and conceptual resourcefulness of contemporary analytic philosophy (5)[8]

I feel this academic alienation rather keenly myself and I am sure that others do as well. Still, it is a local and historically contingent academic anomaly that has no good philosophical rationale. Here institutional structures impede work in philosophy and indeed the social sciences as well. But note—on Miller's

account—this broader scope for philosophical analysis also keeps intact analytical philosophy's analytical ideals. Miller speaks here in a manner reminiscent of G. A. Cohen, analytical Marxism's most resourceful practitioner, when he speaks of Marx's social theories having this powerful import "if reconstructed with the clarity and conceptual resourcefulness of contemporary analytic philosophy." (4) It is when this is done, Miller tells us, that Marx's account provides a "powerful explanatory framework" in contemporary social science. Miller takes his own Chapters Three and Four as a paradigm case of such work.

III

I have a very extensive sympathy with what Miller is trying to do here. In fact it is roughly in the same way that I try to proceed in my own work and it is how G. A. Cohen, William Shaw, Robert Paul Wolf, Jon Elster and Max Wartofsky proceed.[9] But, it also should be noted, that there are a number of Marxists and Marxist philosophers who are, in some instances to put it mildly, suspicious of the analytical ideal. Some but not all, of the philosophers around the English journal *Radical Philosophy* have that suspicion. Here Jonathan Ree is the most extreme case.[10] But also set in opposition are the Althusserians, both the French originals (who are largely ignorant of analytical philosophy) and the English Althusserians who are not and who are reacting against it.[11] Similar things should be said for the Frankfurt School Marxists: people like Herbert, Marcuse Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. They are not just indifferent to, as the French Althusserians largely are, but they are thoroughly hostile to analytical philosophy. Later versions of critical theory (Jurgen Habermas, Albrecht Wellmer and Kari-Otto Apel) try, in a rather eclectic fashion, to incorporate it—an unkind critic might say rap it in wool—but they hardly utilize its techniques

in their work.[12] They do not write with the same clarity, pugency and rigor as do analytical philosophers, including analytical Marxists. (Just read a bit of Miller or Cohen and then a bit of Habermas or Apel and you will see what I Mean.) However, I do not want to say that I think the only virtue in philosophy is rigor and clarity. But it is certainly one important virtue.

I will not explicate or assess these Marxist or neo–Marxist alternatives to analytical Marxism. I will rather stick with analytical Marxism. The phrase 'analytical Marxism', it should be noted, is my lable for an approach like that of Miller's or Cohen's, though it is important to keep in mind, as Miller wishes to stress himself, that his approach is far less positivistic than G. A Cohen's, but when you compare them both with say Adorno and Althusser you can readily see that the lable 'analytical Marxism' fits them both. The way they reconstruct Marx, the way they talk about Marxist issues and general philosophical issues, in spite of their very deep differences, bears the mark of analytical philosophy. (Similar things could be said for the differences between Jon Elster and G. A. Cohen.) Miller does not mention, let alone deal, with these alternatives, as I just remarked, and I shall not pursue them here. But I think it is wise to be aware of these alternatives and take to heart Robert Frost's "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood and sorry I could not take them both and be one traveller." In trying to think about how to proceed in studying philosophy, it is vital to avoid a one–sided diet.

Miller's own way of using Marx's writings to make a positive contribution to the social sciences come in the middle sections of *Analyzing Marx* where he talks about political power. (I refer to chapters 3 and 4.) But he remarks that similar "analyses of Marx's ideas might have a liberating effect" in other domains as well. His examples are "breaking the deadlock between

'formalism' and substantivism?' in economic anthropology, or in determining the scope and limits of economic theory, in a world where equilibrium arguments are increasingly vacuous and the impact of international politics on economic processes is increasingly pervasive."(6)

IV

Miller also contends that analytical philosophy has an important contribution to make to Marx interpretation and to Marxist social theory. (6) In making a case for this Miller starts by remarking that "interpreters of Marx are confronted by two very different kinds of passages; general formulations that are highly condensed, fragmentary or metaphorical, often all three, and discussions of particular phenomena that are richly detailed, often quite plausible and utterly contrary to natural readings of the general formulatios." (6) Faced with this there are two corresponding temptations "and most interpreters succumb to one or the other." Miller describes them in the following manner and then shows how it leads interpreters who have so succumbed into a *cul de sac.*

> One can derive the underlying theories from the general statements, taken in isolation. Or, appreciating the diversity and plausibility of many of the specific discussions, one can dilute Marx into mere common sense. These temptations are especially powerful in the three areas I will examine, morality, political theory and history. Either Marx has one grand general argument to offer against morality, say, that moral ideas are shaped by social interests and hence are ideological. Or he was simply claiming that contemporary moralities placed too great an emphasis on property rights or social harmony. Either he regards politics as a passive reflection of economic necessities. Or he merely warns us to be sensitive to the influence of

> economic interset groups on political decision making. Either he takes the desire to produce more efficiently as the driving force of history. Or he regards the economic factor as an important and often underrate aspect of large–scale change. The neglect of Marx has partly resulted from a situation in which such choices dominate sympathetic Marx interpretation. Most people, reflecting on the realities of social change, find the grand statements implausible, the modest ones truistic. (6)

Miller does not think that this is just a matter of the state of Marx's texts : that many were not completed or are first drafts or that he was too influenced by Hegel. There is that—or at least some of it—but, more importantly, the difficulties here have something to do, as well, with the nature of social reality, something the positivists missed but some Wittgensteinians, such as Peter Winch or Charles Taylor, have a better feeling for.[13] What Miller has in mind here is the fact that "statements about general kinds of social processes must be vague to be true and must be applied to particular events with unpredictable provisos, specifications and hedges" (7) Miller thinks once we are aware of this we can come to see that "analytic philosophy offers a promising style of interpretation, here, since it demands clarity, tolerates abstraction and complexity, and responds to the impact of contexts on what people mean." (7) He thinks with that technique we can extract "plausible but distinctive theories" from Marx's texts. (7) We need not fall back on either grand but implausible general statements, such as 'all morality is ideology' or on common sense truisms such as economics is important.

Using this style of philosophy, Miller hopes to give both accurate and significant readings for Marx's account of morality, his theory of the state and for his theory of history.

V

Consider Marx's account of history and Marxist readings of it. Miller, in trying to show how analytical philosophy can do good work in the service of social science, wants to replace one very influential conception of Marx on history with another. (Both of these conceptions occur within analytical Marxism.) He wants to replace what he calls, the 'invisible hand conception'—a conception he thinks is the dominant one with us—with a conception which is more political. The invisible hand conception thinks of the mature Marx as being in "a special but important sense anti-political." By this is meant the following: it is our pursuit of independent economic self-interest that changes and shapes society. (8) Politics, as a quest for power, has, on such a conception, a subordinate role in social change. It is not class struggle but the building up of the productive forces through the efficient pursuit of individual self-interest that is the motor force of history.

Behind this economistic 'invisible hand' reading of Marx lies, Miller claims, some confused conceptions about how Marx was an economic determinist. Miller thinks that in certain ways—that is given a certain understanding of the notion—Marx was an economic determinist, but in other ways—ways that are important for a proper conception of the role of politics in social life—he was not. The way in which it is true—and importantly true—Miller expresses as follows:

> ...the most important features of a society are ultimately determined by its mode of production, that is the relations of control, the modes of cooperation and the technology that govern material production. More specifically, while a society is stable, the system of political and ideological institutions and the climate of respectable ideas are such as

> to serve the function of maintaining the dominance of the economically dominant social group, the group who mainly extract the surplus from those directly engaged in material production. If radical change comes about through processes internal to a society, it is due to self-destructive tendencies of the mode of production. Because of the nature of the mode of production, processes that initially maintained the old relations of control eventually give a non-dominant group the ability and the motivation to destroy the old system of relations and dominate a new one. In the ensuing struggles, the crucial alliances are determined by people's class situations, their locations in that network of relations of control. (9)

This clearly treats the mode of material production as primary and this is what rationalizes calling Marx an economic determinist. But Miller thinks that to use that term here is misleading. Marx does not believe "that the pursuit of immediate economic self-interest spontaneously produces radical social changes."(9) He does not believe "that political organization with large-scale social goals is unimportant." (9–10) He does not hold the economistic thesis "that economic developments make political revolution superfluous..."(9) He does not think, in typical situations, that deliberations over one's political commitments are pointless. And he does not think "that the pursuit of more efficient production is the basic mechanism for change."(10) These beliefs of Marx all count, Mller maintains, against calling him an economie determinist and the last claim counts against calling him a technological determinist as well.

He thinks a failure to recognize these things stands in the way of appreciating Marx's "insights in moral philosophy and political theory."(10) We should also recognize that systems of

control, as in relations of control in the mode of production, are "in a broad sense political as well as economic."(9) The subordination of the political to the economic, if that is the right word for it, is simply, but importantly, this: "The main features of separate political institutions are explained as due to the need of the economically dominant group to maintain their dominance; alliances in revolutionary periods are primarily explained on the basis of class situations."(9)

Miller belives that the correctness of his claim that Marx was not an economic determinist or a technological determinist will be important, if not decisive, for what he wants to say about what he takes to be Marx's criticisms of morality as a basis for social choice. The important of Marx's critique of morality and the replacement he gives for morality in political life cannot be properly understood or its force appreciated if "Marx is supposed to have subordinated conscious political deliberations to the pursuit of immediate economic interests...."(10) Furthermore, the latter itself cannot be understood as having much force, if technological determinism is not assumed. But to assume technological determinism here is to assume that Marx regards "the pursuit of material efficiency as the engine of social change."(10) Against this, it is Miller's fundamental claim that the "more political Marx is more accurate as exegesis, more useful as social science and more illuminating as a resource for philosophy."(11)

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NOTES

1. Richard Miller, *Analyzing Marx* (Princeton, New Jersey : Princeton University Press 1984), Page refereneees to *Analyzing Marx* will be given in the text. Further relevant works by Miller are : "Marx and Aristotle : A kind of Consequentialism" in *Marx and Morality*, Kai Nielsen and Steven Patten (eds.), (Guelph, ON : Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy 1981), pp. 323–352, "Rights and Reality," *Philosophical Review*, (July 1981), pp. 383–407 and "Rights or Consequences," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. VII (1982), pp. 151–174.

2. Richard Rorty, *Consequences or Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MN : The University of Minnesota Press 1982), pp. 211–230.

3. This is evident in the third section of his *Analyzing Marx* and in his "Fact and Method in the Social Sciences" in *Changing Social Science*, Daniel R. Sabia, Jr. and Jerald Wallalis (eds.), (Albany, NY : State University of New York Press 1983), pp. 73–101.

4. Here Miller is in clear contrast with another important analytical Marxist, G. A. Cohen. See Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford, England : Clarendon Press 1978) pp. ix–x and his "Reply to Four Critics," *Analyse & Kritik*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1983), pp. 195–222.

5. Anthony Skillen, *Ruling Illusions* (Sussex : Harvester Press 1977) pp. 122–177 and his "Workers' Interests and the Strains of Marxian Anti-Moralism" in *Marx and Morality* and Andrew Collier, "The Production of Moral Ideology," *Radical Philosophy*, No. 9 (1974), his "Scientific Socialism and the Question of Values," *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, Vol. LVII (1983).

6. George Brenkert, *Marx's Ethics of Freedom*, (London, England : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

7. Richard Hudelson, "Popper's Critique of Marx," *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 37 (1980) and his "Marx's Empiricism," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 32 (1982) and Kai Nielsen, "Cultural Pessimism and the Setting Aside of Marxism," *Analyse & Kritik*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (June 1985), pp. 75–100.

8. But isn't this still a second-order rule for philosophers? It is Marx's social theories—his social science—which yield the alternatives. Philosophers give us a more cleaned up version to make it more effectively do the work of giving us a powerful explanatory framework for looking at social science. The work of G. A. Cohen and Jon Elster is paradigmatic here.

9. The work of G. A. Cohen, William Shaw, Robert Paul Wolff, Jon Elster and Max Wartofsky is what is being referred to here.

10. See Jonathan Ree, "Le Marxisme et la Philosophie Analytique," *Critique.* (August–September 1980), pp. 802–817.

11. Timothy O'Hagan, "Althusser: How to be a Marxist in Philosophy" in *Marx and Marxisms,* G. H. R. Parkinson (ed.), (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press 1982), pp. 243–264. For a perceptive discussion of Althusser's views see Alex Collinicos, *Althusser's Marxism* (London, England: Pluto Press 1976). Some, though by no means all, of the philosophers writing in *Radical Philosophy* are what I have characterized a English Althusserians.

12. For a brief discussion of both the Frankfurt School and Habermas and the links between them see Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School.* (London, England: Tavistock Publications Ltd. 1984).

13. Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1958 and Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in *Interpretive Social Science,* Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (eds.), (Berkeley CA: University of California 1979), pp. 25–71.