INTRODUCTION

The second structural feature is that investment is democratically controlled by society. Thus, it is argued, market socialism contains the best of both worlds (or, in this case, economies). It is supposed to maintain the efficiencies of the market while eliminating or ameliorating the dysfunctions of capitalist systems. For example, social control of investment capital arguably eliminates or at least ameliorates the boom-and-bust cycles of capitalism since it eliminates the phenomenon of the “investment strike” by private owners of capital during economically pessimistic periods. Moreover, it is argued that other phenomena that can be characterized as dysfunctional (such as the sales effect, the denigration of the value of labor, and the rapid depletion of natural resources) can also be eliminated or ameliorated. The argument here is as follows: (1) many of the dysfunctions of capitalism depend upon the tendency of the capitalist market to expand (which is the only sure way to keep the investment climate healthy and thus prevent an “investment strike”); (2) a market socialist economy need not constantly expand to be healthy; therefore, (3) a market socialist economy need not suffer these dysfunctions.\textsuperscript{32}

While it is true that this view will necessitate giving up some of Marx’s arguments against capitalism, based on the evils of the market per se, the Marxist tradition will not lack strong arguments against capitalism. They will be based on such dysfunctions as those mentioned above, as well as on the fact that private ownership of productive property leads to extreme differentials of wealth and power. (I cite additional considerations in chapter 10.)

Although my theory leaves the question an open one, if market socialism can be shown by theoretical arguments and/or historical observation to fulfill best the principles of an adequate moral theory or, more precisely, an adequate theory of social justice, then Marxist orthodoxy must give way. If market socialism can be expected to meet the criteria of a just society more effectively, then the claim that it is preferable must be accepted whether or not the position can legitimately be classified as Marxist. After all, what is ultimately of importance is the correctness of a position or theory, not its pedigree.

\textsuperscript{32} For a more detailed rendering of this argument, see chapters 2, 3, and 4 of Schweickart’s Capitalism or Worker Control?
MARX'S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

of freedom will be more equal, hence better and (one may as well say) more fair.

Thus, although Marx's concept of freedom is broader than Rawls', he can be interpreted, with Rawls, to be demanding a maximum system of equal liberties (or freedoms), but he cannot be interpreted as demanding the maximization of freedom simpliciter. The reason is that in some possible worlds the maximization of freedom will make for an unequal distribution of freedom. In the next chapter I shall offer a more detailed reconstruction of Marx's concept and theory of freedom and show how his notion of economic exploitation is related to it.

Arneson, "What's Wrong with Exploitation?" pp. 220-221.

THREE

MARX'S THEORIES OF FREEDOM AND EXPLOITATION:
A RECONSTRUCTION AND DEFENSE

In this chapter I shall first argue that Marx's concern for human dignity and his (implicit) demand for an equal distribution of the primary good of freedom make him a mixed deontologist. Then I shall attempt to reconstruct his concept and theory of freedom. I argue that freedom, on Marx's view, is to be interpreted as the opportunity for self-determination where this is taken to indicate both negative freedom, i.e., freedom from the undue interference of others, and positive freedom, i.e., freedom to determine one's own life to as great an extent as is compatible with a like opportunity for all. Since Marx is an egalitarian, he is also committed to an equal (or nearly equal) distribution of these social goods. Thus the demand for negative freedom must be interpreted as the demand for a maximum system of equal liberties. Similarly, the demand for positive freedom must be interpreted as including both the right to equal participation in all social decision-making processes that affect one's life and the right of equal access to the means of self-realization. Finally, in societies still characterized by moderate scarcity, the right of equal access to the means of self-realization must be interpreted as entailing, first, the right to an equal opportunity to attain social offices and positions and, secondly, the right to an equal opportunity to acquire other social primary goods (income, wealth, leisure time, etc.). (This is not to say that Marx explicitly takes these positions but only that it is a reasonable reconstruction of his views.) In the final section I shall analyze Marx's concept of exploitation with an eye toward its connection with freedom or other moral values or principles.

Some may object to this reconstruction of Marx's concept of freedom on the grounds that it relies on the concept of justice (namely,
a just or equal distribution of freedom) and the concept of rights, both of which he rejects. In response to this I refer the reader to chapter 8, wherein I take up Marx’s objections to the notion of justice in the distribution of goods and his criticisms of human rights. I argue that his objections are, for the most part, based on misconceptions and fall as indictments against all theories of social justice and human rights, even though they are often telling against what Marx might have referred to as “bourgeois” theories of justice and rights. In addition, I argue that—contrary to his explicit proclamations—Marx is not only concerned with a just distribution of freedom but with a just distribution of social goods in general (i.e., income and wealth, offices and opportunities, leisure time, etc.). Others may object to this reconstruction of Marx’s moral theory on the grounds that Marx is better portrayed as a communitarian. In addition to sharing with communarians a suspicion (or even hostility) toward the concepts of rights and social justice, Marx accepts the value of human community as one of his three primary values. One of the main ways in which communism is morally superior to capitalism, according to Marx, is that it is a genuine community. (Although Marx never explicitly defined “community” in his works, we can take it as designating a group of persons who have common ends, who know they have common ends, and who take deep satisfaction in this fact.)

My answer to this is twofold. First, while I admit that Marx is strongly committed to the value of human community, it seems to me that he is even more strongly committed to the value of freedom (as self-determination) such that if the two were in conflict he would choose to uphold the latter over the former. In fact, it seems plausible to suggest that insofar as Marx would have been willing to entertain a theory of the right—in addition to a theory of the good—he would have specified that the value of freedom (as self-determination) is the only basis for restricting people’s behavior by means of coercive social sanctions (e.g., laws). It seems that just as he would not have been in favor of paternalistically forcing people to engage in activities by which they would achieve greater self-realization, he would not have been in favor of restricting people’s overall freedom in order to achieve a more extensive or intensive human community.

Second, it seems clear that a communitarian moral theory that has no place for social justice or human rights is simply not adequate with respect to modern mass, pluralistic societies. If Marxists are cogently to defend the positions that socialism (i.e., the first stage of communism) is morally preferable to any form of capitalism (as well as to any form of state-socialism) and the state/government of such a society has legitimate political authority (to which correspond moral obligations on the part of its citizens), they must develop a theory of right: in particular, a theory of social justice and/or human rights. But if democratic socialist societies should come into existence they will undoubtedly exist at the level of the nation-state (or a federation of nation-states) and, hence, will be mass, pluralistic societies. Under these circumstances we cannot expect there to be unanimous agreement among individuals as to the nature of the good (or the good life). Therefore, a purely communitarian moral theory is simply not going to be able adequately to defend these positions. Thus, it cannot be an acceptable moral theory for Marxists or for anyone else who wishes to defend the position that some sort of state and some system of law are morally legitimate in the context of modern mass, pluralistic societies. (I shall present further criticisms of contemporary communitarian moral and social theory—particularly, the theories of Alasdair Maclntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Sandel—in chapters 7 and 9.)

But if Marx had appreciated these facts it seems extremely likely that he would have been amenable to having his theory reconstructed in something like the way I propose. Actually, there is even textual evidence that to a limited extent he did appreciate the problem of achieving genuine community in modern mass, pluralistic societies and the consequent necessity of having rights as social norms (at least in pre-communist societies). As noted toward the end of chapter 1, in the third volume of Capital, Marx had given up on the claim that freedom was to be found in the work process itself (which he now calls the “realm of necessity”) in favor of the view that freedom was to be found in people’s “free” time (which he now calls the “realm of freedom”) during which they could engage in both leisure and creative activities. Perhaps he also had begun to contemplate the view that the value of community could better be met during this time since people would spend significant portions of it within the smaller communities—families, friendship groups, clubs, associations, etc.—to which most of them belong. In any case, this position seems an extremely reasonable one. It certainly seems clear that modern societies will always be large—at least larger than the Greek city-states—and irreducibly pluralistic. Moreover, it seems certain that Marx’s projection that all individuals eventually will transcend the distinction
between the individual and common good (even when voting or participating in governance of the society) or the view that a unanimous—or even "overlapping"—consensus on the nature of the good could be developed in such societies must be considered highly unrealistic. (This is presumably why most communitarian moral theorists—from Rousseau through MacIntyre—have been profoundly pessimistic concerning the human prospect.)

Finally, concerning the necessity or at least the desirability of concepts of rights and justice, it should be noted that in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Marx strongly endorses and defends the political rights and civil liberties demanded by the French democrats during the Revolution of 1848. Moreover, he propounds norms of political and economic justice (for post-capitalist but pre-communist societies) in The Civil War in France and "Critique of the Gotha Program," respectively. In any case, in the present chapter I lay what I hope is a sound basis, first, for the legitimacy of couching Marx's implicit moral theory partially in terms of rights (namely, the rights to equal participation in social decision-making processes and to equal access to the means of self-realization) and, second, for the integration of the concepts of social justice and human rights into what I take to be an adequate Marxist moral and social theory.

**Marx, Human Dignity, and Deontologism**

If the analysis offered in chapter 2 is correct, Marx is not—as I have defined the terms—a consequentialist of any sort. He is, rather, a mixed deontologist. While he does think that the production of the nonmoral good is always a relevant consideration in moral reasoning—the primary (intrinsically valuable) nonmoral goods for Marx being freedom (as self-determination), human community, and self-realization—he does not think it is the only consideration. He also implicitly holds a principle of the distribution of the nonmoral good or at least a principle of distribution of the most important nonmoral good, namely, freedom. Furthermore, the demand for equal freedom itself is not determined by consequentialist considerations (i.e., determined on the basis that the implementation of this principle will maximize some nonmoral good), but flows from the nonutilitarian and nonconsequentialist notion of human dignity.

There is, in fact, much textual evidence that Marx accepted the evaluative notion of human dignity. As Eugene Kamenka writes, Marx "is simply not concerned to portray communism as a society of plenty; he is concerned to portray it as a society of human dignity: a society in which labour acquires dignity and becomes free because it is carried out by full and conscious participants in a community given over to co-operation and common aims." (emphasis added).

As George Brenkert notes, the concept of human dignity is closely related to the Kantian tradition of treating individuals as ends in themselves: "Marx conceives . . . communism to consist of a society of men living as men, as ends in themselves. That is, a central feature of Marx's ethics is the notion of human dignity, of man as an end in himself." Brenkert claims, further, that "Marx does indeed appeal to consequences to determine certain judgments. But the nature and context of this appeal is within Marx's mixed deontological theory, which is centered on the notion of treating man as an end in himself, as having human dignity."

The notion of the dignity of human individuals can be traced throughout Marx's works. In a short essay entitled "Reflections of a Youth on Choosing an Occupation," which he wrote just before graduating from the Trier Gymnasium in 1835, he states, "Dignity elevates man most, bestows a high nobleness to all his acts, all his endeavors, and permits him to stand irreproachable. . . . Only that position can impart dignity in which we do not appear as servile tools but rather create independently within our circle. . . . a position without dignity lowers us. . . . Then we see no aid except in self-deception." Marx adds: "The most natural result of lack of dignity is self-contempt, and what feeling is more painful?" In a letter in 1843 he claims that "freedom, the feeling of man's dignity, will have to be awakened again" (all emphases added).

In a passage written during his early polemic against religion as the enemy of humanism (which could be mistaken for one of Nietzsche's), Marx writes, "The social principles of Christianity

---

1 The satisfaction of these values obviously depends on a satisfactory status in terms of human health and welfare. These goods (health and welfare) are, it would seem, instrumentally though not intrinsically valuable for Marx.

4 Ibid., p. 433.
5 Marx, "Reflections of a Youth on Choosing an Occupation," p. 38.
6 Ibid.
MARX’S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

preach cowardice, self-contempt, debasement, subjugation, humility, in short, all the properties of the canaille, and the proletariat, which does not want to be treated as canaille, needs its courage, its consciousness of self, its pride and its independence, far more than its bread.” In a famous passage in “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction,” he speaks of “the categorical imperative to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being.”

In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts he writes that “the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume, the more values he creates, the less value—the less dignity—he himself has” (emphasis added). In The Holy Family he speaks of “an independent moral, based . . . on the consciousness of human dignity.” Furthermore, in his early and transitional works he utilizes the term “dehumanization” (and its cognates) a great deal and in his later works often speaks of not only the misery, oppression, and exploitation of the proletariat under capitalism but also of its degradation. These concepts are much more readily connected up with the concept of human dignity than with the strictly utilitarian conceptual framework of the maximization of desires or happiness.

Furthermore, Marx’s concept of human dignity seems to be associated with the Kantian thesis that men ought to be treated as ends in themselves and never as means only. In “On the Jewish Question” Marx explicitly utilizes this Kantian terminology: “in civil society [man] acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers.” Furthermore, “contempt for theory, for art, for history, and for man as an end in himself . . . is the real, conscious standpoint and the virtue of the man of money.” To treat all human beings as ends in themselves is, according to Kant, to be a universal and, consequently, free being. Marx seems to agree with this view.

Somewhat more surprising, perhaps, is that Marx even ex-

THEORIES OF FREEDOM AND EXPLOITATION

presses a certain admiration for the retributive theory of punishment as found in Kant and Hegel. Like them, he bases this admiration on the concept of human dignity and—it should be noted—human rights. In a New York Daily Tribune article printed February 8, 1853, Marx writes:

Punishment in general has been defended as a means either of ameliorating or of intimidating. Now what right have you to punish me for the amelioration or intimidation of others? And besides there is history—there is such a thing as statistics—which prove with the most complete evidence that since Cain the world has been neither intimidated nor ameliorated by punishment. Quite the contrary. From the point of view of abstract right, there is only one theory of punishment which recognizes human dignity, in the abstract, and that is the theory of Kant, especially in the more rigid formula given to it by Hegel. Hegel says: “Punishment is the right of the criminal. It is an act of his own will. The violation of right has been proclaimed by the criminal as his own right. His crime is the negation of right. Punishment is the negation of this negation, and consequently an affirmation of right, solicited and forced upon the criminal by himself” (emphasis added).

But, as Jeffrie Murphy points out in his article “Marxism and Retribution,” even though Marx appears to think the retributive theory of punishment is formally correct, he does not view it as materially correct, i.e., as acceptable for the type of society to which it was supposed to be applied in Marx’s day—or in ours, for that matter. This judgment seems to be based on Marx’s belief that capitalist societies—and probably class societies generally—breed crime and criminals in two ways. First, they cast many people into poverty and desperate circumstances so that it is small wonder that some of them turn to crime. Second, such societies do not allow all of their members to develop into fully rational, fully autonomous moral agents—a condition presupposed by the retributive theory. Marx’s conclusion, of course, is that we ought to change society in such a way that crime and criminals are no longer bred by the system. Rather than concern ourselves with abstract theories of punishment, we ought to create a society (namely, communism) where punishment is not necessary. As Marx puts it:

14 Cited in Murphy, “Marxism and Retribution,” p. 217.
MARX'S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

It is not a delusion to substitute for the individual with his real motives, with multifarious social circumstances pressing upon him, the abstraction of "free will"—one among the many qualities of man—for man himself? . . . Is there not a necessity for deeply reflecting upon an alteration of the system that breeds these crimes, instead of glorifying the hangman who executes a lot of criminals to make room only for the supply of new ones?15

This is but another illustration of Marx's affinity with Kant's moral framework and his commitment to the evaluative concept of human dignity. Kant, of course, was primarily concerned with freedom as freedom of the will in connection with his concept of moral autonomy. Moral autonomy is characterized, on Kant's view, by two sorts or aspects of freedom: the negative freedom from alien or illegitimate considerations in practical reasoning and the positive freedom to act in accordance with the principles we give ourselves as free and rational beings. Two demands flow from these two principles, on Kant's view. The first is that we bar from practical reasoning considerations not only of self-interest but those based on desire, want, and inclination generally, i.e., that we reason in accord with the autonomy rather than the heteronomy of the will. The second is that our principles must be universal not only in the sense that they apply to everyone but also that in adopting them we act as legislators not merely for ourselves but for humanity, i.e., that we act as legislators in and of the universal kingdom of ends.

While I am not trying to make Marx out as a strict Kantian—even in his early works—the claim that Marx was very much influenced by Kant can hardly be doubted. Even though, as we saw in chapter 1, Marx emphasizes the distinction between heteronomy and autonomy in the moral realm in his early journalistic writings, he did not, even then, seriously take to heart Kant's demand that moral reasoning be purged from all considerations based on desires, wants, inclinations, needs, etc. This is one important respect in which Marx—and almost every other thinker who has proffered opinions on the subject—differs from Kant. This is also why Marx cannot be classified as a Kantian or a strict deontologist as opposed to a mixed deontologist. Marx does not accept the first of Kant's demands mentioned above. He thinks that the pursuit of the non-moral good is a relevant moral consideration. That he takes Kant's second demand somewhat more seriously is borne out by such quotes as man "treats himself as . . . a universal and consequently free being."16

But this does not constitute even the beginnings of an adequate account of Marx's concept of freedom (as self-determination) because freedom, as Kant conceives it in relation to moral autonomy, is a moral good, whereas most of what Marx has to say about freedom concerns freedom as a (distributable) non-moral good, i.e., as a good whose description need not contain moral terms. It is this aspect of Marx's concept of freedom to which we now turn.

Marx's Concept and Theory of Freedom: A Reconstruction

As stated at the beginning of the present chapter, I wish to argue that Marx's theory of freedom can be rationally reconstructed as follows: (1) freedom is essentially the opportunity for self-determination and is based in the final analysis, on the moral value of autonomy; (2) self-determination entails both negative freedom (i.e., freedom from the undue interference of others) and positive freedom (i.e., the opportunity to determine one's own life to as great an extent as is compatible with a like opportunity for all); and (3) the opportunity to determine one's own life entails both (a) the right to equal participation in all social decision-making processes that affect one's life and (b) the right of equal access to the means of self-realization.

Let us consider each of these claims in order. The claim that Marx identifies freedom with self-determination—or, more precisely, with the opportunity for self-determination—can be interpreted in two ways. By "self-determination" philosophers have meant either (1) determination of one's self in accordance with one's essential nature (as the sort of being one happens to be) or (2) the determination of one's self in accordance with the laws (or imperatives or plans) one legislates or chooses for one's self. (It is important to note that while the formulation of Rousseau, Kant, et al. that freedom can be defined as being determined in accordance with one's real, rational will seems to be a version of the second interpretation of self-determination, it is actually a version of the first since the dictates of real, rational will are not necessarily the same as the dictates of one's actual, empirical will.)

While views (1) and (2) can be combined, they are separate and distinct. Both views, I believe, are to be found in Marx's earliest

15 Ibid., p. 218.

16 Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, p. 126.
works, while only the second interpretation, on which the actual, empirical self is the determining agent, is to be found in his later works. Consequently, Marx is not open to the charge of collectivism or totalitarianism so often put forward. In fact, Marx can be interpreted (or at least reconstructed) as a methodological individualist (as opposed to a methodological holist) in social science, and it is clear that he is an ethical individualist (as opposed to a collectivist) in moral theory.17

As concerns the first view, Kamenka points out that “the Young Marx, following a line laid down in Spinoza and Hegel, treats freedom as self-determination. To be free is to be determined by one’s own nature. To be unfree is to be determined from without.”18 For Marx, or at least for the (very) early Marx, the essential nature of human beings is freedom. Thus, unless the notion of freedom as man’s essential nature is analyzed further, we seem to be able to derive from these remarks only the unenlightening and tautological claim that to be free is to be determined in accordance with freedom. As we have seen, however, we can analyze Marx’s claim that humanity’s essence is freedom into the claim that human beings have two essential capacities: the capacity for free, conscious, creative activity and the capacity for human community (or solidarity). Thus, for human beings—given the sort of beings they are—to be self-determining is to be determined in accordance with (or to realize) these two capacities. On this view, anyone who doesn’t realize these two capacities is, ipso facto, not free even if subject to no constraints and in complete control of his or her life. But this, of course, is an abuse of the term “freedom”—at least on its common meaning.

The (very) early Marx, with his praise of Aristotle, Spinoza, and Hegel and his acceptance of the Hegelian problematic of essence and existence, in which existences tend toward their essences, seems to have been attracted to this view of freedom. However, the later Marx rejected the philosophical problematic of essence and existence and is probably best interpreted as holding only (1) the empirical thesis that human beings, when not diverted from doing so, tend to realize the two capacities in question and (2) the evaluative thesis that it is good for human beings to realize these capacities and, even more importantly, it is good for human beings to be able to (i.e., to be free to) realize these capacities. On the

---

18 Kamenka, The Ethical Foundations of Marxism, p. 97.

---

view I am attributing to the Marx of the Manuscripts and later, the fact that a person doesn’t realize these two capacities does not constitute a conclusive but only a prima facie reason for assuming that that he or she is not free. If the person were free—the reasoning goes—he or she, in all probability, would realize these capacities. The person has not realized these capacities. Therefore, in all probability, there is some liberty-limiting condition at work that prevents the person from realizing these capacities, i.e., in all probability, the person is not free.

 Philosophers of the rational will tradition—particularly Rousseau and Kant—tended to identify the self in this context as one’s “real, rational self,” with the result that one is free (or “truly free”) if, and only if, one is acting in accord with the laws that the “real, rational self” would legislate or if one is acting in accord with the choices that the “real, rational will” would make. This leads, of course, to the view that one’s freedom is not violated if one is forced to do something one doesn’t want to do, so long as it is what one’s “real, rational will” would dictate: one can, as Rousseau claimed, be forced to be free. This, too, seems to abuse our common notion of freedom or liberty on which actions (or persons) are free if, and only if, they are both uncoerced and self-determined. But freedom or liberty is not the only value most of us accept, and it would be a mistake, I think, to pack all of our values into this concept. This is the point Isaiah Berlin makes when he writes:

Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience. If the liberty of myself or my class or nation depends on the misery of a number of other human beings, the system which promotes this is unjust and immoral. But if I curtail or lose my freedom, in order to lessen the shame of such inequality, and do not thereby materially increase the individual liberty of others, an absolute loss of liberty occurs. This may be compensated for by a gain in justice or in happiness or in peace, but the loss remains, and it is a confusion of values to say that although my “liberal” individual freedom may go by the board, some other kind of freedom . . . is increased.19

On the other hand, one can accept the second interpretation of freedom as self-determination and take freedom to be a matter of being determined in accord with the decisions or choices of one’s

actual, empirical self. Marx seems to have been attracted to the Rousseau-Kant interpretation of freedom as self-determination in his earliest works; he even goes so far as to claim that "only when his actual actions have shown that he has ceased to obey the natural law of freedom, does the State force him to be free" (emphasis added). But he moved away from these views after his very early, journalistic period and, in his later works, came to view self-determination as simply a matter of having control over one's life, i.e., having the effective power to determine the course of one's own existence (to the extent this is empirically possible).

Although we shall return to this matter presently, one might say that the main difference between the later Marx and the rational-will theorists on this issue can be expressed in the triadic definition of freedom offered by Gerald MacCallum as a difference concerning the first variable, i.e., the variable standing for the sort of agent one has in mind. MacCallum's formula is "x is (is not) free from y to do (not do, become, not become) z."22 In the rational-will tradition, the x is taken to stand not for actual, empirical individuals but for the real, rational will of such individuals, which may and often does stand in opposition to their actual but "merely" empirical wills. This is the reasoning behind Rousseau's claim that in being forced to conform to the laws of a (just) state, citizens are merely being "forced to be free." But in all but his earliest works Marx seems to be speaking of the freedom (i.e., the self-determination) of actual, empirical individuals rather than the "real, rational will" of such individuals. In his later works, for example, he never speaks of forcing the bourgeoisie to be free by means of the expropriation of productive property but, rather, speaks of "despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production."22 While Marx certainly sees as justified "despotic inroads"—i.e., the use of the legitimate coercive power of the (new) state to effect this end—he does not seem to conceive of the situation as one of forcing the bourgeoisie to be free.

On the other hand, it is clear that it is the notion of freedom (as self-determination) in the second sense that informs Marx from the manuscripts to his latest works. An individual is free, according to Marx, only if he is self-determining; and he is self-determining only if he is in control of his own life. To be free in the latter sense is to be autonomous, to be one's own master. "A being does not regard himself as independent," Marx claims, "unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself. A man who lives by the favor of another considers himself a dependent being."23 But to be in control of one's own life entails both that one is not prey to the warranted interferences of other individuals and that one can, in addition, have a significant impact or effect upon the direction of one's own life and the circumstances under which one must live.

Self-determination, for Marx, thus entails both negative and positive freedom. By "negative freedom" I mean freedom from interference on the part of other persons or groups of persons, e.g., the state. By "positive freedom" I mean freedom in the sense of being able to determine or control one's life. Speaking of negative freedom or liberty in his classic essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty," Isaiah Berlin writes, "By being free in this sense I mean not being interfered with by others"24 and "liberty in this sense means liberty from; absence of interference."

The value of negative liberty, he claims, is based on the conviction that "there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated"26 and that "we must preserve a minimum area of personal freedom if we are not to 'degrade or deny our nature.'"27 Socially speaking, "a frontier must be drawn between the area of private life and that of public authority."

It is often claimed that Marx had no respect for negative freedom, as thus defined, but this is not true. There are two kinds of evidence that tend to refute this claim. The first is the occasional statement Marx makes in support of negative liberty, one of the more striking examples being his comment in the "Critique of the Gotha Program" that (of course!) "everyone should be able to attend to his religious as well as his bodily needs without the police sticking their noses in."28 The second piece of evidence is the simple fact that self-determination in the sense of having control over one's own life obviously excludes such unwarranted interferences with one's person and privacy and one's actions and activities.

(Deciding on what constitutes a warranted intrusion, however, is

25 Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, p. 165.
27 Ibid., p. 339.
28 Ibid., p. 337.
one of the most important albeit most difficult issues in moral and social philosophy and an issue on which individuals greatly differ.)

This sort of (negative) liberty was so obviously required, on Marx's view, that he hardly thought it worth commenting upon. What he will not allow, however, is that this sort of liberty exhausts the category of freedom. It is the view that negative liberty does exhaust the category of freedom that Marx has in mind when he writes (disapprovingly), "This right to the undisturbed enjoyment, upon certain conditions, of fortuity and chance has up till now been called personal freedom."30 It is also this narrow conception of freedom Marx is describing (and implicitly condemning) when—at the transition point between descriptions of the spheres of circulation and of production in the first volume of Capital—he claims:

This sphere that we are deserting, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality because each enters into relation to the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself.31

It may be argued that Marx's normative ideal of individuals as communal or "species-beings" contradicts the thesis that he was concerned with the negative freedom of individuals, but this is not so. He was not a collectivist or totalitarian in this sense. His normative ideal of the individual as a truly social being is combined with the utmost respect for a person's individuality. In the Manuscripts, for example, he attacks "crude communism . . . [which] is only the culmination of . . . envy and levelly down on the basis of a preconceived minimum"32 on the grounds that "this communism . . . negates the personality of man in every sphere."33 He attacks capitalism on the grounds that "what I am and can do is . . . not at all determined by my individuality [since] . . . what I as a man am unable to do, and thus with all my individual faculties are unable to do, is made possible for me by money."34

Nor does Marx's view that rights to such liberties will be an outmoded concept in communist society refute the thesis that he was concerned with negative liberty. He believed that in a full-fledged communist society individuals will have become so humanized that there will be no occasions on which it is necessary for them to press claims to their rights to privacy, conscience, expression, etc. Therefore, the category or concept of rights (as well as justice) will quite simply be otiose. But this is not to say that the freedoms claimed by such rights would be violated or the persons populating communist society will be bland conformists or unthinking automatons. Marx believed quite the contrary.

Marx's concept of freedom is, however, broader than that of mere negative liberty. Although Hilliard Aronovitch uses the term "self-determination" more narrowly than I, since he identifies it only with positive freedom—whereas I take this term to apply to both negative and positive freedom—a perspicuous explication of Marx's notion of self-determination is given in his article "Marxian Morality":

Self-determination . . . is the free and conscious shaping of the conditions of one's life, which makes possible the further free and conscious shaping of oneself through the development of this or that specific capacity; it is what has sometimes been called positive freedom, being able to do things—those things, including effecting one's will upon circumstances, that accord with self-consciously arrived at choices. Put in these terms . . . the capacity for self-determination or positive freedom is fundamental in that without it one is not in a position to deliberately achieve or even aim at anything else.35

Self-determination, the free and consciously directed shaping of the conditions of one's life, obviously connotes freedom, and individual freedom, of a certain basic kind. The kind counts for very much. What is especially important is that freedom is specified not just in terms of the absence of coer-

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., pp. 191–192.
cution but in the more positive terms of actually being able to effect one’s will, and that circumstances are not treated as fixed things to which I must adapt my will and within which I must find some residual area of choice: rather, my freedom on this conception is to be measured in crucial part by the extent to which I can effect my will upon them. 36

But this positive freedom (i.e., the freedom to determine one’s own life) has, in turn, two components. The first is the right to equal participation in all social decision-making processes—political, educational, economic, etc.—that affect one’s life. Since, according to Marx, many and perhaps most of the decisions that affect our lives are social as opposed to individual decisions, it is of the essence of the matter that these decisions be made on the basis of the equal participation of all—or at least the right of equal participation of all (since some might prefer not to participate in certain social decision-making processes). As opposed to the bourgeois parliamentary system of representational democracy, which he regards as a sham, Marx demands that the new society extend democracy into all realms of social activity (particularly the economic) and that it be made real or effective democracy. By the process of reaching a consensus or, if that is not possible, by the most democratic method available, individuals collectively ought to control social and economic processes rather than be controlled by them. The fact that, in his view, social and economic processes control the lives of human beings under capitalism, rather than vice versa, is of course a key phenomenon described by Marx’s concept of alienation as well as part of what underlies his concept and theory of exploitation (more on this presently).

Opponents of Marxism may well be tempted to point out that currently existing post-capitalist societies do not seem to give their citizens even as much control over their lives as some capitalist societies. Proponents of Classical Marxism, of course, will reply that such post-capitalist societies do not yet qualify as socialist or communist societies and will normally cite historical circumstances as being responsible for their divergence from Marx’s vision. The most important point of contention between Marxists and their opponents, in fact, is whether or not a democratic form of socialism is historically possible (more on this in chapter 10).

Although right-libertarians (e.g., Robert Nozick) and many liberals deride the concept of positive freedom in the sense of self-

determination, an interesting question arises from this fact: on what grounds do right-libertarians or such liberals defend political democracy? Speaking of negative liberty, Berlin writes:

Liberty in this sense is not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy, or at any rate with the absence of self-government. Liberty in this sense is principally concerned with the area of control, not with its source. . . . There is no necessary connexion between individual liberty and democratic rule. The answer to the question “Who governs me?” is logically distinct from the question “How far does government interfere with me?” It is in this difference that the great contrast between the two concepts of negative and positive liberty, in the end, consists. For the “positive” sense of liberty comes to light if we try to answer the question, not “What am I free to do or be?”, but “By whom am I ruled?” or “Who is to say what I am, and what I am not, to be or do?” . . . The desire to be governed by myself, or at any rate to participate in the process by which my life is to be controlled, may be as deep a wish as that of a free area for action, and perhaps historically older. 37

Be that as it may, the second component of Marx’s concept of positive freedom, according to my reconstruction of his position, is the right of equal access to the means of self-realization. Marx demands that “man . . . [be] free not through the negative power to avoid this or that but through the positive power to assert his true individuality.” 38 Insofar as this means that people aren’t free unless they have (approximately equal) access to the means of self-realization, this thesis will be even more noxious to the right-libertarian (and to many liberals) than the last. But this principle is obviously in need of further analysis. First, to simplify matters and make my reconstructed version of Marx’s theory more plausible, I propose to take “means of self-realization” to include all social primary goods mentioned by Rawls except the good of negative liberty or freedom (which is covered by the above principle). The social primary goods, according to Rawls, are rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth, leisure and the social bases of self-respect. 39 I shall also take this right to an equal access to the means of self-realization to entail the right to an equal

38 Leisure is not listed as a primary social good in A Theory of Justice but is added by Rawls in his “Reply to Alexander and Musgrave.”
opportunity to attain social offices and positions. Although the very notion of social offices and positions may be otiose in a full-fledged communist society, Marx certainly thought they would exist in socialist societies. In *The Civil War in France,* he calls for such positions to be democratically elected, subject to recall, and done at workman's wages. (This last provision was designed to prevent a privileged bureaucracy from forming. The suggestion by many later socialists to rotate such offices or positions on a regular basis is designed to accomplish this task and perhaps to give people a chance to realize themselves in this way as well.)

On the other hand, I have framed this right as a one of equal access to the means of self-realization rather than as a right to equal means of self-realization to indicate that—at least in the first stage of communism where it still makes sense to worry about principles for the distribution of scarce goods—individuals have a right to an equal opportunity to realize their selves (i.e., their life plans) and thus an equal opportunity to attain the means to do so. This does not, however, necessarily include a right to an equal amount of self-realization (if it makes sense to speak this way) or to an equal amount of the means to self-realization (i.e., an equal share of primary social goods). As Marx makes clear in the "Critique of the Gotha Program," there is not to be strict equality of distribution of material goods in the first stage of communism (or what today is commonly called "socialism"). Except for those unable to work, individuals are entitled only to what they can attain by their own efforts within the (presumably fair) rules of the new social arrangements. The primary rules, according to Marx, are (1) that one person cannot realize a profit from another's labor, and (2) individuals are to receive back from society a share of the social wealth proportional to the productive (or socially useful?) labor they contribute to society. Commenting on that part of the Gotha Program which asserts an equal right on the part of individuals to the proceeds of labor, Marx writes: "No one can give anything except his labour and . . . nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals except individual means of consumption" and, further, that the individual producer receives back from society—after the deductions have been made—exactly what he gives to it. . . .

The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form he receives back in another . . . . In spite of this advance, this equal right is still constantly stigmatised by a bourgeois limitation. The right of the producers is proportional to the labour they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard, labour.\footnote{Ibid.}

Thus, in societies that still embody Hume's conditions of justice—moderate scarcity, and moderate egoism—Marx's view of freedom entails that the individual has a right to equal access to the means of self-realization (i.e., an equal opportunity to attain the means of self-realization). It does not, however, entail guaranteed access to any and all goods, services, and opportunities an individual may require for complete self-realization since this may not be possible. This proviso also allows us to ground our moral intuition that while a person's freedom is not violated just because he cannot obtain a yacht or a year-long trip around the world under present social conditions, it is violated if he cannot obtain a high-school education because, let us say, high-school tuition is $5,000 per year, his family cannot afford this amount, and there are no government programs to provide financial aid.

Even though Marx does not fall into the category of a proponent of the rational will version of positive freedom, he does accept a broader set of conditions as liberty-limiting than do Classical Liberals and most modern liberals, and he gives a wider interpretation of those things people ought to be free to do (or become). The differences between these several positions can be perspicuously outlined—and futile debates over vaguely defined notions of "positive" and "negative" liberty can be avoided—if we utilize MacCallum's triadic formula of freedom. As MacCallum points out, there are actually three variables to be considered: the sorts of persons to whom we are ascribing freedom, the conditions that are to count as liberty-limiting, and the sorts of things freedom can have as its end. Thus, in the formula $x$ is (is not) free from $y$ to do (not do, become, not become) $z$, "$x$ ranges over agents, $y$ ranges over such 'preventing conditions' as constraints, restrictions, interferences, and barriers, and $z$ ranges over actions or conditions of character or circumstance."\footnote{MacCallum, "Negative and Positive Freedom," p. 296.} The $x$ may stand for ourselves as we really are (the empirical self) or for the "real," "true," or "essential" self of the rational-will tradition. The $y$ may stand for the direct interference of other persons, or for this plus any and all social and economic (or even psychological) conditions that limit one's choices, or for anything in between these extremes. Finally,
the z may stand for actions people wish to perform or for what people do as well as what they can become.

As we have seen, Marx—or at least the later Marx—takes the x variable to refer to the actual, empirical wills of individuals. In this he agrees with the vast majority of modern moral and social thinkers. But whereas right-libertarians and some liberals insist that the z variable pertains only to actions (“doings”), Marx seems to hold that people should be free not only to do things but to become things and, thus, that the z variable pertains to both “doings” and “becomings.” Since in Marx’s view, however, one only becomes something (e.g., an artist) by doing things (e.g., studying art, drawing, painting, etc.), it is not clear that there is really much of a difference here. The more important difference concerns the y variable.

Whereas the right-libertarian and some liberals insist that the parameters of the y variable extend only to the deliberate interference of other individuals (or groups of individuals) and thus contend that this sort of interference constitutes the only liberty-limiting condition, Marx and many others reject this as overly narrow. Although Isaiah Berlin is generally taken to be an opponent of the broader view of liberty-limiting conditions, a careful reading of his “Two Concepts of Liberty” reveals that even such a thorough-going modern liberal as he leaves room for the broader view. As Berlin points out:

You lack political liberty or freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings. Mere incapacity to attain a goal is not lack of political freedom. This is brought out by the use of such modern expressions as “economic freedom” and its counterpart, “economic slavery,” . . . if a man is too poor to afford something on which there is no legal ban—a loaf of bread, a journey round the world, recourse to the law courts—he is as little free to have it as he would be if it were forbidden him by law. If my poverty were a kind of disease, which prevented me from buying bread, or paying for the journey round the world or getting my case heard, as lameness prevents me from running, this inability would not naturally be described as a lack of freedom, least of all political freedom. It is only because I believe that my inability to get a given thing is due to the fact that other human beings have made arrangements whereby I am, whereas others are not, prevented from having enough money with which to pay for it, that I think myself a victim of coercion or slavery . . . . this use of the term depends on a particular social and economic theory about the causes of my poverty or weakness. . . . I begin to speak of being deprived of freedom (and not simply about poverty) only if I accept the theory. If, in addition, I believe that I am being kept in want by a specific arrangement which I consider unjust or unfair, I speak of economic slavery or oppression. “The nature of things does not madden us, only ill will does,” said Rousseau. The criterion of oppression is the part that I believe to be played by other human beings, directly or indirectly, with or without the intention of doing so, in frustrating my wishes. By being free in this sense I mean not being interfered with by others. The wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom [emphasis added].

There is, of course, no reason a Marxist cannot accept this analysis. If this is done, the difference between Marxist and most other modern political thinkers will not be that they accept different concepts of freedom or that they have different criteria of what constitutes a liberty-limiting condition but that they have different empirical views about what (alterable) social conditions are, in fact, liberty-limiting or—more precisely—what (alterable) social conditions are unjustifiably liberty-limiting. Marx can be interpreted as proposing that, in addition to the direct interferences of other persons, the parameters of the y variable include any alterable social arrangement that unjustifiably restricts freedom. Marx, of course, offers an explanatory theory and analysis of how it is that (alterable) social institutions and arrangements—and thus indirectly people—act as liberty-limiting conditions for the vast majority in capitalist society. In the history of modern thought there has been no shortage of people with this view of freedom: the importance of Marx lies in his social-scientific theories that explain how the social arrangements of capitalism and all class-divided societies unjustifiably limit or constrain the freedom of the vast majority of people and how these unjustifiable constraints can be eliminated.

But is Marx’s moral theory, as I have reconstructed it—especially his concept of freedom as self determination—adequate? Although it is a more viable theory than most people are willing to give it credit for, it is not completely adequate as it stands. For one thing, we need to know what would constitute a warranted or justifiable intrusion on personal or political freedom. Not all actions

---

can or should be permitted in a society. One is not free to maim others, for example, but the fact that society (or the state) attaches sanctions to maimings of human beings constitutes an intrusion on people's freedom. But most or all of us would agree that this intrusion is warranted. Such warranted intrusions may be based on preserving equal freedom (e.g., laws against selling oneself into slavery); on creating a maximum system of equal freedoms (e.g., laws prohibiting people from expressing themselves so loudly that others are disturbed in their private abodes and laws against slander and libel); or (possibly) on promoting or maximizing some other important moral value such as human well-being.

Most recent and contemporary moral and social theorists are willing to admit that in some cases liberty can be limited on the basis of considerations other than liberty itself. Berlin is worth quoting again: "Liberty is not the only goal of men. . . . To avoid glaring inequality or widespread misery I am ready to sacrifice some, or all, of my freedom. . . . I should be guilt-stricken, and rightly so, if I were not in some circumstances ready to make this sacrifice." Although it is difficult to imagine concrete cases in which one would be morally obliged to give up all of one's liberty, it is commonly agreed that we are morally obliged to trade off some of our liberty if doing so is necessary to prevent pain and suffering or extreme deprivation on the part of others. Right-libertarians, such as Nozick, are among the few who refuse to admit that liberty can be justifiably limited on the basis of anything other than liberty.45

44 Ibid., p. 338.

45 I use the term "right-libertarian" rather than simply "libertarian" to describe this school of thought because—as Noam Chomsky points out in *Problems of Freedom and Knowledge* and elsewhere—the latter term is also used to designate the views of left-wing anarchists and socialists who stress the value of freedom. (Obviously, such anarchists and socialists have a broader conception of freedom and, as such, might be designated "left-libertarians.")


I shall not attempt a detailed analysis and refutation of right-libertarianism because, first, it is beyond the purview of this work and, second, this task—in my opinion—has already been accomplished. See Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty*, pp. 191-277; G. A. Cohen: "Robert Nozick and Wilt Chamberlain," "Capitalism, Free-

**THEORIES OF FREEDOM AND EXPLOITATION**

But Marx gives us no theory or criteria for deciding what could constitute a warranted intrusion. At the economic level, as Berlin points out, I speak of economic oppression or slavery or—we can add—economic exploitation, only "if . . . I believe that I am being kept in want by a specific arrangement which I consider unjust or unfair."46 But if this is so—which I believe it is—Marx's theory, in order to be adequate, also needs a theory of social justice. But while the grains of a theory of social justice, at least as applied to the first stage of communism, are apparent in the "Critique of the Gotha Program" and elsewhere in Marx's writings, he regularly condemns such concepts and theories and thus leaves us with a paradox to be solved. In chapter 8 I shall attempt to show that Marx's reasons for rejecting all notions of justice and human rights are unfounded. The next issue I wish to take up is his concept and theory of exploitation. In particular, I shall attempt to determine whether Marx's concept of exploitation has moral (or normative) content or force and, if so, what principles or values undergird it.

**Morality and Marxist Concept(s) of Exploitation**

Marx never gives a clear-cut definition or explication of his concept (or concepts) of exploitation. Moreover, while he usually seems to be employing the term "exploitation" in a morally condemnatory fashion, there is considerable debate among interpreters of his work as to whether this negative moral import is a necessary characteristic of exploitation. One interpretation, in fact, asserts that exploitation is simply a matter of the transfer of surplus labor (or value or product) from one group or class of people to another and that, in and of itself, this cannot be assumed to be wrong. A similar interpretation in this respect is the distributional theory of exploitation as proposed by John Roemer. On his analysis, a group is exploited if, and only if, it would be economically better off if it could withdraw from society with its inalienable assets (i.e., work skills) and—in the case of capitalist exploitation—its per capita share of society's alienable assets (i.e., productive forces). Again, it is not clear that exploitation in and of itself is even *prima

theory is that of the contemporary Marxist economist John Roemer. He utilizes "withdrawal rules" such as those previously mentioned to determine who is exploited and who is exploiting. (Thus, this sort of theory is sometimes called a "counterfactual theory of exploitation.") We will first consider Marx's general concept of exploitation and then take up his concept or concepts of economic exploitation. In examining economic exploitation we shall examine several versions of the labor theory of exploitation and then compare what I take to be the most adequate labor theory to Roemer's distributional theory of exploitation. I shall argue in favor of a labor theory of exploitation and a force-inclusive definition as being both most faithful to Marx and most adequate. Along the way we shall briefly consider the issue of whether taxation can generally be classified as a form of exploitation.

There are two sorts of evidence for the claim that Marx had a general concept of exploitation. The first is provided by his view that the state as well as economic classes can be an exploiter. In the Asiatic mode of production, where the state owns all land and receives rent from the peasantry, the state is the primary exploiter, according to Marx. Moreover, in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, he describes the French state as a parasite on the rest of society, a simile most naturally cashed in terms of exploitation. In The Civil War in France, Marx describes the state as a semi-autonomous power standing above all classes. He implies that the Bonapartist state exploits them all—even the capitalist and landlord classes.

But the benefits Marx speaks of in these contexts are primarily—if not exclusively—economic. Hence, it might be argued that even though these considerations prove that he thought that the state as well as economic classes can be an exploiter, it does not show that Marx had a general concept of exploitation in addition to his concept of economic exploitation. (These considerations might even be taken as indications that the state can, in certain cases, take on the role of a ruling economic class.) There is, however, more direct textual evidence for Marx's general concept of exploi-

---

47 My use of "distributional theory of exploitation" differs somewhat from Jeffrey Reimann's in "Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism." Reimann contrasts distributional theories with force-inclusive theories of exploitation and thus includes the simple surplus-value theory of exploitation as a distributional theory. I count this surplus-value theory—what I shall later call "simple exploitation"—as a labor theory, not as a distributional theory. This difference in terminology is unimportant so long as one does not confuse the usages.
MARX’S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

In Holbach, all the activity of individuals in their mutual intercourse, e.g., speech, love, etc., is depicted as a relation of utility and utilization. In this case the utility relation has a quite different meaning, namely that I derive benefit for myself by doing harm to someone else (exploitation de l’homme par l’homme). All this actually is the case with the bourgeois. For him only one relation is valid on its own account—the relation of exploitation; all other relations have validity for him only insofar as he can include them under this one relation, and even where he encounters relations which cannot be directly subordinated to the relation of exploitation, he does at least subordinate them to it in his imagination. The material expression of this use is money, the representation of the value of all things, people and social relations.48

This passage clearly indicates that Marx had a broader concept of exploitation. As Allen Buchanan notes:

What is most striking is the extreme generality of this characterization: exploitation is not limited to the labor process itself. It is not simply that the bourgeois exploits the worker in the wage-labor relationship. Nor is it simply a matter of the bourgeois exploiting the worker. The point, rather, is that, for the bourgeois, human relations in general are exploitative, and this includes not only his relations with the worker, but with his fellow bourgeois as well.49

Buchanan goes on to offer the following characterization: “Marx’s general conception of exploitation includes three elements: first, to exploit someone is to utilize him or her as one would a tool or natural resource; second, this utilization is harmful to the person so utilized; and third, the end of such utilization is one’s own benefit.”50 Therefore, according to Buchanan, “Exploitation occurs wherever persons are harmful utilized as mere instruments for private gain.”51

The definition of exploitation obviously has moral import.

49 Buchanan, Marx and Justice, p. 38.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 44.

THEORIES OF FREEDOM AND EXPLOITATION

Given this analysis of the concept, to characterize a set of social relations as exploitative is to imply that it is morally bad or wrong. In this respect, Buchanan’s analysis of exploitation agrees with the dictionary definition, which would seem applicable to such situations, as well as with the definitions given by most Marx scholars. The relevant dictionary definition of “exploit” is usually something like “to make use of meanly or unjustly for one’s own advantage.” For “exploitation” it is usually something like “an unjust or improper use of another person for one’s own profit or advantage.” Among Marx scholars, Jon Elster writes that “being exploited is being ‘taken unfair advantage of,’ a much subtler form of suffering harm than being the object of physical coercion.”52 George Panichas distinguishes between what he calls simple exploitation and wrongful exploitation, where the former is simply “taking advantage of” and the latter involves a “taking advantage of” that is, in some measure, morally wrong.53

Given this sort of characterization of exploitation, almost any well-known moral theory will judge exploitation to be—at least prima facie—morally wrong. Consequentialists will tend to judge it wrong because it inflicts harm on the person who is exploited. However, whether or not the consequentialist will come to judge a particular form or example of exploitation to be—all things considered—morally wrong will depend upon both (1) the nonmoral good or goods he or she is committed to maximizing (and, conversely, the nonmoral harms he or she is committed to minimizing), and (2) the amount of benefit that accrues to the exploiter, since this benefit could conceivably overbalance the harm to the exploitee(s) on some consequentialist views. Deontological moral theorists, on the other hand, will tend to judge exploitation, as thus defined, morally wrong either on grounds that it is—at least prima facie—unfair to harm another in pursuit of one’s own advantage or that it is morally not permissible to treat someone as a mere instrument, that is, to treat another person merely as a means rather than as an end. Again, whether deontological moral theorists will judge exploitation—all things considered—morally wrong will depend on all relevant considerations. It is at least logically possible that eliminating exploitation of a certain sort will result in a situation that is even more unfair or more violative of

52 Elster, Making Sense of Marx, p. 167.
MARX'S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

people's rights, or which treats more people as mere means (more on this presently).

Let us now proceed to Marx's concept and theory of economic exploitation. Here we need to distinguish his concept of the degree of exploitation from his concept of economic exploitation per se and, concerning the latter, labor theories of exploitation from distributional theories of exploitation. The degree of exploitation \( (\text{exploitationsgrad}) \) is equivalent to the rate of surplus value (which is calculated by dividing surplus value by necessary labor). As such, it is a purely descriptive concept, except that Marx would presumably use only the rubric "rate of surplus value" to describe a nonexploitative society such as communism. But any importance it may have from a normative perspective derives from its incorporation into a technical, utilitarian interpretation of Marx. As Lawrence Crocker puts it,

Ultimately this notion finds use in the analysis of capitalist competition, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and the genesis of economic crises.

Occasionally commentators on these technical questions create the impression that the central thrust of Marx's critique of capitalism is that it is inefficient. . . . On such a portrayal Marx emerges as the calculating engineer of revolution, committed to increased output and egalitarian distribution, but lacking sensitivity to freedom, democracy, community and, in general, whatever is unquantifiable.\(^{54}\)

However, it is much more natural to interpret the values undergirding Marx's concept and theory of exploitation as being freedom (as self-determination) and/or his commitment to an egalitarian (or nearly egalitarian) distribution of social goods. If true, this, of course, will dovetail with my interpretation of his general moral perspective. It should be noted, however, that there is a choice to be made here in interpreting Marx's concept of economic exploitation. The first alternative is to take exploitation to be basically a technical, nonevaluative notion and then bring the appropriate values into play when judging whether or not and under what circumstances exploitation is morally wrong. The second alternative is to take exploitation to be an evaluative term and then elicit the values that are already embodied in the concept. Both labor and distributional theories of exploitation are open to either interpretation.

The simplest labor theory of exploitation defines it as the appropriation of surplus value or the workers not getting back the full value of what they produce. Speaking in terms of "necessary" and "surplus" labor, Marx explains this as follows:

The labourer, during one portion of the labour-process, produces only the value of his labour-power, that is, the value of his means of subsistence. . . . That portion of the working-day . . . during which this reproduction takes place, I call "necessary" labour-time, and the labour expended during that time I call "necessary" labour. . . . the second period of the labour-process, that in which his labour is no longer necessary labour, the workman, it is true labours, expends labour-power; but his labour, being no longer necessary labour, he creates no value for himself. He creates surplus-value which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of a creation out of nothing.\(^{55}\)

While Marx is speaking specifically of capitalism in the above passage, it is clear that his concept of surplus labor and thus economic exploitation is transcritical. He writes:

Capital has not invented surplus-labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra-working time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian [aristocrat], Etruscan theocrat, civic Romanus, Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian boyard, modern landlord or capitalist.\(^{56}\)

The cogency of this view does not depend upon the truth of the labor theory of value in the narrow sense i.e., the claim that socially necessary labor time determines the prices of commodities in equilibrium market conditions. All that need be accepted is what Jeffrey Reimann calls the "general labor theory of value," i.e., the view that labor time is "what ultimately matters about a product."\(^{57}\) This view is also suggested by Elster, who writes, "From a

\(^{54}\) Crocker, "Marx's Concept of Exploitation." pp. 202-203.


\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 235.

normative point of view, one could argue that the amount of labour time expended is the only relevant fact, irrespective of the skill with which the labour is performed.\(^{58}\)

The interesting and important questions at this point are, first, whether or not to include force in the definition of exploitation and, second, whether labor theories of exploitation should be taken to imply some sort of unfairness or injustice. For Marx's theory of economic exploitation, it would seem plausible to answer both of these questions in the affirmative. Consider the issue of adding "force" to the definition of exploitation as the extraction or appropriation of surplus value. The first thing to notice is that Marx's notions of ruling and ruled classes already contain the notion of force or coercion. The ruling class maintains a monopoly over the means of production and distribution, and in class-divided societies the direct producers—be they slaves, serfs, or proletarian workers—are in effect forced to sell their labor-power to this class. Although Marx often speaks of the labor of the proletarian being "free," this only means that the proletarian is generally free to sell it to any one of a number of different buyers—if he can sell it at all. It does not mean that the proletarian is free in any real or substantial sense to not sell his labor at all, or that the proletarian really has control over it. As Marx writes concerning the relation of capital and labor, "[Capital] obtains this surplus-labour without an equivalent [such that]... in essence it always remains forced labour—no matter how much it may seem to result from free contractual agreement"\(^{59}\) (emphasis added). Thus exploited labor is forced labor (more on this presently).

The other point this quotation highlights is that Marx conceives of exploited labor as unpaid labor, i.e., "labor without equivalent." Thus exploited labor seems to be forced; unpaid, surplus labor. Is there anything else that must be added to this characterization? I think so. This is the condition that the direct producers do not have control over the surplus labor they expend or, in other words, the surplus product they produce. But this condition may be redundant. If the direct producers did have control over the surplus social product such that they could use it for their individual and collective benefit, then presumably their labor would not be unpaid. Nevertheless, since a number of Marxists and students of Marx have emphasized this as a condition of exploitation, it is

---

80 See Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1, p. 333; and Crocker, "Marx's Concept of Exploitation."  
83 Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 611.
MARX'S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

additional labour-power even at its full price, so that equivalent is exchanged for equivalent, yet the transaction is for all that only the old dodge of every conqueror who buys commodities from the conquered with the money he has robbed them of.\(^{64}\)

Finally, in "Critique of the Gotha Program” Marx proclaims that “the system of wage-labour is a system of slavery."\(^{65}\)

The injustice or unfairness of exploitation would seem to follow immediately from the fact that exploited labor is both forced and unpaid. So long as we add the caveat that we are speaking here of its being prima facie wrong or unjust as opposed to its being all-things-considered wrong or unjust, I don’t see how such a situation could be judged otherwise. This leaves open as a logical possibility, however, that exploitation can be all-things-considered just, as it might be, for example, if it were absolutely necessary in order to insure other important moral values such as meeting the subsistence needs of everyone. (Needless to say, Marxists would regard this as highly unlikely.)

This distinction between exploitation that is prima facie wrong and exploitation that is all-things-considered wrong is of paramount importance. Most disagreements concerning the definition of "economic" exploitation are, I believe, the result of failing to distinguish the following three notions:

1. **Simple Exploitation**: the appropriation of surplus value or the direct producers not getting back the full value of what they produce.
2. **Exploitation Proper**: forced, unpaid, surplus labor, the product of which is not under the control of the direct producers.
3. **All-things-considered Unjustified Exploitation**: exploitation (proper) that is not justified by its promotion of some other weighty moral concern.

*Simple exploitation* cannot be considered even prima facie wrong since it may be the result of a fair agreement for mutual benefit—for example, a mutually beneficial agreement between an actor and his or her agent.\(^{66}\) *Exploitation proper* as forced, unpaid, surplus labor is always prima facie wrong but may or may not be all-

\(^{64}\) Ibid., p. 582.


\(^{66}\) This example is given by Paniches in his "Vampires, Werewolves, and Economic Exploitation," pp. 233–235.

THEORIES OF FREEDOM AND EXPLOITATION

things-considered wrong. Although capitalist exploitation is *prima facie* wrong (and, at this point in history, all-things-considered wrong on Marxist empirical assumptions), it would not be all-things-considered wrong if capitalist apologists were correct in asserting that capitalism is a necessary condition for meeting people’s basic needs, maintaining political democracy and civil liberty, etc. But, as just said, if Marxist empirical assumptions are correct, then capitalist exploitation is now all-things-considered unjustified exploitation. Marx did not, of course, think that it is always immediately feasible to abolish such exploitative social relations, but he certainly held that they ought to be abolished as soon as it is historically possible to do so.

These distinctions are essential for clearing up a number of counter-examples offered against the force-inclusive analysis of the Marxist concept of exploitation. Consider, first, G. A. Cohen’s counter-example to Allen Wood’s analysis of exploitation as essentially coercive nonreciprocity—an analysis I take to be in line with the one I have offered here. Cohen argues against the inclusion of force or coercion in the definition of "exploitation" as follows:

To see that it [i.e., coercion] is not a necessary condition [for exploitation] consider a rich capitalist, A, who, for whatever reason, voluntarily works for another capitalist, B, at a wage which is such that, were A a worker, he would count as exploited on my view, and also Marx’s. A, though not forced to work for B, or for anyone else, is exploited by B.\(^{67}\)

But since A is not forced to work for B, it seems clear that Cohen is confusing Simple Exploitation with Exploitation Proper, or at least begging the question against the force-inclusive definition. Although Marx does use the concept of Simple Exploitation, it is clear, I think, that he normally uses "exploitation" in the negative, evaluative sense, which can most easily be accounted for by interpreting it as the force-inclusive notion I have labeled Exploitation Proper.

Arneson’s analysis of Marx’s concept of exploitation also suffers from not recognizing these distinctions. For example, in his article “What’s Wrong with Exploitation?” Arneson first defines "a technical sense of the term ‘exploitation,’ according to which exploitation is the appropriation by a class of nonworkers of the surplus

\(^{67}\) G. A. Cohen, “Review of Karl Marx, by Wood” p. 444.
product of a class of workers," and he claims—quite correctly, I think—that this sense of exploitation (which I am calling "simple exploitation") does not necessarily have negative evaluative import. But a few pages later—after having described Holmstrom's analysis of exploitation as surplus, unpaid, forced labor, the product of which the producers do not control—he asserts that "Holmstrom might be correctly explicating the technical sense of exploitation, but . . . the technical sense fails adequately to capture Marx's moral concerns" (emphasis added). Here Arneson clearly conflates Simple Exploitation with Exploitation Proper and thus fails to appreciate that Exploitation Proper does have negative evaluative import, at least in the sense of always being prima facie wrong.

Arneson goes on to describe what he calls "wrongful exploitation" as follows:

Wrongful exploitation exists wherever technical exploitation exists together with the following two conditions: (1) the non-producers have vastly more social power than the producers, and they employ this power to bring about technical exploitation; and (2) this technical exploitation establishes an extremely unequal distribution of economic advantages, and it is not the case that one can distinguish the gainers from the losers in terms of the greater deservingness of the former.

If Arneson were claiming here only to provide Marx's criteria for deciding which cases of Exploitation Proper were All-Things-Considered Unjustified Exploitation, I would have no objection. Indeed, I agree with Arneson's claim that the ideas that "people should get what they deserve [and] . . . people should not force others to do their bidding" both underlie Marx's evaluative concept (or concepts) of economic exploitation. I also agree that it is a reasonable supposition that "Marx believes that . . . what [people] deserve varies with their intentions and (under normal circumstances) with their efforts or sacrifices expended, rather than with the actual outcome of their intentions." What I do not agree with is Arneson's claim that Marx's concept of economic exploitation is best thought of as encompassing these values as a matter of definition. If this were the case, it would seem almost inconceivable

for Marx simultaneously to maintain that a particular society is exploitative but that this exploitation is justified. But, in a sense, this is precisely Marx's position with respect to early capitalism or any economic system that is both exploitative and—at that stage of its development—historically progressive in terms of spurring the expansion of the forces of production. Thus, all things considered, it seems more perspicuous to accept Exploitation Proper as Marx's primary concept of economic exploitation and to classify Arneson's "wrongful exploitation" as an attempt to provide the moral standards Marx and Marxists generally employ when deciding which cases of Exploitation Proper—which are always prima facie wrong—are all-things-considered wrong. While these two moral standards may be Marx's primary desiderata in determining whether a given situation of exploitation is an All-Things-Considered Unjustified Exploitation situation, they are not necessary conditions for Exploitation Proper, i.e., for "exploitation" as Marx normally uses the term.

Given this analysis, Arneson's purported counterexamples to the thesis that Marx's primary concept of economic exploitation is what I am calling Exploitation Proper can be rather easily dealt with. It usually turns out that the scenarios he puts forward are indeed examples of Exploitation Proper—and are thus prima facie condemnable—but, for one reason or another, are not All-Things-Considered Unjustified Exploitation. Arneson's mistake is to insist that because they are not cases of All-Things-Considered Unjustified Exploitation, they would not count (for Marx) as exploitation in a negative evaluative sense.

Before moving on to distributional theories of exploitation, I want to return to the topic of the role force plays in what I have described as Marx's basic concept of exploitation, i.e., what I am calling Exploitation Proper. I also want to explore briefly whether taxation is a form of exploitation.

Although it seems clear that Marx conceived of exploitation as (at least) forced, unpaid, surplus labor, many people will simply deny that workers are forced to work under capitalism. But here we must make two distinctions. The first is between coercion and force. The second is between standard cases of force and structural force. Both coercion and force imply the limitation of choice—usually to one alternative. But, with Elster, I shall take "coercion to
MARX'S MORAL PERSPECTIVE

Theories of Freedom and Exploitation

imply [an] intentional agent or coercer, while force need not imply more than the presence of constraints that leave no room for choice. I am forced to live in my native town if I cannot get a job elsewhere, but I am coerced to live there if I would be arrested were I to try to leave." 74 While slaves in slave societies are generally coerced to labor, the direct producers in capitalist societies are not normally coerced to labor or, more properly, sell their labor-power. But it seems that a strong case can be made for the view that they are forced to sell their labor-power. Proletarians, by definition, have only their labor-power to sell. They do not receive investment or property income like capitalists or landlords. They do not have their own small means of production or distribution like the petty bourgeoisie. Although it might be argued that in contemporary welfare-state capitalist societies proletarians have the option of relying on welfare, this would not show that the capitalist economic system does not force workers to sell their labor-power, but only that the external force of the state can sometimes "save" some people from being forced to do so. Moreover, this is rarely such an attractive option that rational persons would see it as a genuine alternative to a reasonably paying job. As Elster writes: "The existence of alternative courses of action that might allow him to survive is irrelevant if they are so unattractive that no man in his senses would choose them." 75 (Although not directly germane to the present issue, it should also be noted that the existence of welfare transfer programs is primarily the result of past class struggles and the ruling class's conscious attempts to preempt future ones.)

Another objection to the view that workers are forced to sell their labor-power under capitalism is the claim that they do have reasonable options, i.e., other than starving to death, becoming criminals, or going on the dole. The claim here is that workers have the opportunity to escape from the working class into the petty bourgeoisie or even the capitalist class. In its crudest form, this is the Horatio Alger myth: any person of normal abilities can rise to the top if she or he is hard-working and persevering. A slightly less crude version is the claim that talented individuals can escape the working class if they are hard-working and persevering. However, if we are speaking of individuals with a high degree of natural talent or ability, this ignores the fact that even if such individuals did well in the "natural lottery," they may not have fared as well in the "social lottery." If born into poverty and an unstimulating social environment, even highly talented, working-class individuals will, in all probability, not be able to escape their fate of wage-labor or worse.

Nevertheless, even some Marxists are willing to concede this point. G. A. Cohen, for example, argues that workers are individually free to stop selling their labor-power because any of them can—if they are of normal abilities and are hardworking and persevering—eventually save enough money to buy small means of production or distribution and thus escape into the petty bourgeoisie. 76 However, Cohen also claims that the proletariat as a class is collectively unfree because the slots open in the petty bourgeoisie and capitalist or landlord classes are limited: only so many proletarians can be absorbed. Certainly it would be impossible for all proletarians to escape wage-labor since it is impossible to have only capitalists and petty bourgeois—to the exclusion of workers—and still have capitalism.

It is my belief that Cohen is being overly charitable to capitalism when he claims that any worker can become at least a petty bourgeois and then concludes that no individual worker is forced to sell his labor-power. First, his claim that any given worker can save enough of her or his income over a five- or ten-year period to provide the initial capital for a small business is simply not true. Many workers are simply not paid that much. Even in contemporary welfare-state, capitalist societies, many workers lacking the requisite skills or connections work in low-paying (usually nonunion) jobs and in some countries—the United States, for example—are normally expected to pay outrageously high rents, medical care for themselves and their families, etc. (This is, of course, disproportionately true of women and minorities in such societies.) Second, those workers who do save up the initial capital and have succeeded in maintaining a good credit rating are not guaranteed success even if they do buy—or buy into—a small business of some sort. Far from it. It is well known that (literally) most small businesses do not successfully make it through their first five years, let alone provide their proprietors a long-term source of economic security. And when a business fails, the individual is often in a worse financial situation than he or she was before becoming a petty bourgeois. I conclude that escaping into the petty bourgeo-

74 Elster, Making Sense of Marx, pp. 211–212.
75 Ibid., p. 215.
sie (or big bourgeoisie) is a reasonable alternative only for a tiny minority of workers. Thus the vast majority of working-class individuals are forced to sell their labor-power to earn a living.

But the notion of force involved here is best captured by utilizing a concept of structural force. As Jeffrey Reimann puts it:

Unlike the usual strongarm stuff that singles out particular individuals as its targets, this force works on people by virtue of their location in the social structure (that is, for example, qua members of some class), and it affects individuals more or less “statistically.” By this I mean that such force affects individuals by imposing an array of fates on some group while leaving it open how particular individuals in that group get sorted, or sort themselves, into those fates.

In the standard cases, the target of force has no real choice over his fate, either because all his alternatives save one are unacceptable, or because he has no alternatives at all (perhaps he has been bound or drugged). In structural force, by contrast, there is some play. Structural force works to constrain a group of individuals to some array of situations, leaving it to them or to other factors to determine how they are distributed among those situations.

As long as the group is constrained such that its members must end up distributed among all the situations in the array determined by the structure, all the individuals are “forced into” the particular situations in which they end up—even if they exercised some choice on the way. In short, structural force can operate through free choice.

If this analysis is correct, then one can cogently say that workers are forced to work in a capitalist system. Thus their labor—also being partially unpaid labor—is exploited. But if labor is exploited because it is forced and unpaid, is not taxation a form of exploitation? Although exploitation in the sense of forced, unpaid, surplus labor being transferred from one class to another is always prima facie wrong from a Marxist perspective such that it should be eliminated if historically possible, what is not clear is that this arrangement should be judged even prima facie wrong when the partici-

---

99 Ibid., p. 15. See also Zimmerman, “Coercive Wage Offers” and “More on Coercive Wage Offers.”
less the state is taxing its citizenry to the point of starving them), it may not be unpaid or forced in the same sense or to the same degree as exploited labor in Marx's standard model. Moreover, given a democratic state, the direct producers who are taxed may very well have control over the product of their labor (i.e., the tax revenues).

The labor transferred to the state through taxation may not be forced labor in the same sense that the labor transferred from the direct producers to the ruling class is forced labor. While the alternatives acceptable to most—if not all—direct producers are usually considered unacceptable, there is usually a minimum income level below which one is not taxed, which is usually above that of absolute poverty. Although where this cutoff point is set will obviously be a relevant consideration, it is at least arguable that making this much money but no more, and thus not paying taxes, is an acceptable alternative to paying taxes. (Given a progressive tax scheme, of course, one who barely goes over this limit will have to pay very little in taxes.) Some may object that this alternative is not acceptable because a person would usually be much better off (materially speaking) if he both made more money and paid more taxes. But an alternative is not unacceptable just because it fails to optimize. 80

It is also arguable that taxation does not involve unpaid labor. To the extent that citizens receive benefits—either directly, as in medical assistance, or indirectly, as in public goods (including the good of security)—they are recouping their losses. However, since the amount of taxes people pay and the amount of benefits they receive may not be proportional, all individuals will not recoup exactly what they pay in. Finally, to the extent that the state is democratic and its citizens have control over the use of state revenues, taxation fails to meet the fourth condition in our definition of exploitation.

But even if—after considering all relevant similarities and differences between the standard case of exploitation and taxation—we were to conclude that taxation is a form of exploitation, this would not settle whether it was just (or justified). Remember the analysis given in this section in which it is logically possible for exploitation to be just exploitation or at least justified exploitation. Nor, conversely, should we assume that simply because something is not unjust it cannot be classified as exploitation. This is why I must disagree with G. A. Cohen's assertion that "one reason why welfare recipients are not exploiters is that the relevant transfer payments are not unjust." 81 There are conceivable situations in which exploitation is just. For example, if the only way a group of people could ensure that their basic needs were met was to exploit other people, then this may well be just. In any case, it is probably best not to classify standard cases of taxation as exploitation.

Let us now consider another approach to exploitation. The major competitor to labor theories of exploitation is John Roemer's purely distributional theory of exploitation, which takes property relations rather than the transfer of surplus value (or product) as basic. Roemer's announced project is to utilize the tools of contemporary mathematical economic theory—especially general equilibrium theory and cooperative game theory—to provide a general (Marxian) theory of exploitation and class and to hook up these notions with Marx's theory of historical materialism. He usually begins his analyses with what he calls the concept of Marxian Exploitation. His interpretation of Marx's concept of exploitation is as follows:

An exploited producer is one who cannot possibly command as much labor value, through the purchase of goods with his revenues, as the labor he contributed in production, and an exploiter is one who unambiguously commands more labor time through goods purchased no matter how he dispenses his revenues. This is a generalization of the classical Marxian definition that the worker is exploited because the labor he expends is greater than the labor embodied in the only bundle he can feasibly purchase (and stay alive), his subsistence bundle. 82

This is, of course, what I am calling Simple Exploitation. But Roemer finds this concept wanting on a number of grounds. First of all,

the surplus-labor theory of exploitation fails with heterogeneous labor, despite various attempts to save it... The surplus-labor characterization is useful only when capitalism is seen as a system with one primary factor, labor, which is homogeneous and equally endowed to all. With the property-

relations characterization, Marxists are no longer forced to claim that capitalism actually looks like this special case, for the theory applies in a completely general environment. Thus, not only is the labor theory of value irrelevant as a theory of price, but its role in the theory of exploitation is superceded [sic].83

Another reason for rejecting the labor theory of exploitation is that it does not (according to Roemer) make clear the ethical implications of exploitation. He writes that “the true reason to be interested in exploitation is not that we are concerned with labor flows, but that we are concerned with the underlying inequality of the means of production.”84 He also writes that “exploitation is a misleading attribute if one’s true interest is inequality in the distribution of wealth. There appears to be no reason for an interest in the technical measure of exploitation, calculated in the classical Marxist way.”85

Roemer’s third reason is that in this interpretation of Marx’s concept of exploitation, there are some conceivable cases in which the poor exploit the rich. As Roemer writes, “It can happen that the asset-rich are exploited by the asset-poor: the flow of surplus value goes the wrong way.”86 This would be the case, for example, if a worker or petty bourgeois had enough money to hire a big bourgeoisie and make a profit from the big bourgeoisie’s labor. (That this is a highly fanciful possibility is obvious!) In any case, Roemer’s analysis of exploitation begins with the idea that a group (or individual) is exploited if, and only if, there is a conditionally feasible alternative under which it would be materially better off. More formally,

a coalition S, in a larger society N, is exploited if, and only if:

(1) There is an alternative, which we may conceive of as hypothetically feasible, in which S would be better off than in its present situation.

(2) Under this alternative, the complement to S, the coalition N − S = S', would be worse off at present.87

(It is interesting to note that in A General Theory of Exploitation and Class, Roemer adds a third condition: “S’ is in a relationship of
dominance to S.”88 But in an article that came out shortly after this book, he repudiates this condition as “undefined” and “ad hoc.”89 As we shall see, Roemer’s analysis would have been less objectionable if he had kept this condition.)

Roemer goes on to utilize withdrawal rules to give a game-theoretic characterization of this definition of exploitation. A different specification of the withdrawal rules is given for each type of exploitation. The different rules are supposed to reflect the different property relations found in the various modes of production. Thus exploitation in slave and feudal societies is defined in terms of property in other people or the rights some people have in the labor of others. Capitalist exploitation has to do with the unequal distribution of alienable productive assets, i.e., the unequal ownership of resources and means of production and distribution. Socialist exploitation, according to Roemer, has to do with the unequal distribution of inalienable productive assets (primarily skills). He thinks that the progression of societies in Marx’s theory of historical materialism can be perspicuously characterized in terms of the types of property in which unequal ownership is allowed. Each successive society, in the progression from slave to feudal to capitalist to socialist to communist society, constrains the type of property that can be distributed (i.e., owned) equally. (Roemer also defines concepts of “status exploitation” and “socially necessary exploitation,” of which I will have more to say presently.)

A group of persons (or coalition) is feudally exploited if it could improve its lot by withdrawing from an economy and taking its own productive endowments, i.e., its own work skills and family plots. That serfs in actual feudal societies were exploited, according to this analysis of feudal exploitation, depends on such further assumptions as that serfs owned their family plots and that their lords did not provide any essential services that they couldn’t provide for themselves or buy. But, as Roemer writes, “it can be maintained that large groups of serfs themselves possessed the requisite skill to organize military protection and to take advantage of other externalities and economies of scale accompanying manor life.”90 That feudal lords and their retinues would be worse off in this situation is obvious.

A coalition of agents is capitalistically exploited if it could im-

83 Ibid., p. 286.
84 Roemer, Value, Exploitation, and Class, p. 67.
85 Roemer, Free to Lose, p. 131.
86 Roemer, “Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?” p. 54.
89 Roemer, “New Directions,” p. 279.
90 Ibid., p. 195.
prove its lot by withdrawing with its per capita share of society's alienable productive assets—and its complement class would be worse off. Roemer claims that under simple models this type of exploitation is equivalent to the Marxian surplus-value characterization of exploitation. He claims that "to characterize capitalist exploitation in terms of an alternative egalitarian distribution of private property in the means of production captures precisely what Marxists mean by exploitation."91 (This, I believe, is debatable since Roemer's definition doesn't include the notion of force.)

Roemer goes on to offer a characterization of socialist exploitation:

If capitalist exploitation were annihilated inequalities would continue to exist, due to differential inalienable assets possessed by individuals. This inequality I call socialist exploitation. A coalition is socialistically exploited if it could improve its lot by withdrawing with its per capita share of society's inalienable assets, once alienable assets are distributed equally. While carrying out such a redistribution of skills might be impossible, or at the least would involve formidable incentive problems, as a thought experiment the calculations can be made.

Socialist exploitation is supposed to exist in socialism, where people are to be paid "according to their work" and thus not in an egalitarian manner. . . .

If all individual endowments are of either the alienable or inalienable type, then a distribution of income is free of socialist exploitation when it is egalitarian.92

The idea here is that even if the means of production are socially—and thus equally—owned in a socialist society, the skilled could still exploit the unskilled in the sense that the former could make more money than the latter. Even if everyone were to be paid the same hourly wage, some could earn more than others because they are physically and/or mentally able to work more hours. As Marx puts it in "Critique of the Gotha Program," "One man is superior to another physically or mentally and so supplies more labour in the same time, or can labour for a longer time."93 Thus the first stage of communism "f actually recognizes unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity as natural priv-

leges."94 Although Marx regards this as an unsatisfactory situation that will be overcome in the "higher stage of communism," he thinks it is the best that can be done in the first stage. Roemer concurs. He claims that "socialist exploitation" exists in socialism but, by hypothesis, will not exist in communism.

But, as Roemer recognizes, the skilled exploiting the unskilled is not likely to be the only or even the most important source of inequality in a post-capitalist society.

There is another inequality in existing socialist societies that appears to be more pernicious than skill inequality, namely, inequality in the distribution of income due to differential status, or access to position. To the extent that occupying certain positions is a return to skill, then these status differentials are a reflection of skill differentials. But much status inequality of socialist societies seems to be due not to skill differentials but to the privileges that come with occupying certain positions. Political office often brings with it myriad material benefits, with respect to housing, automobiles, and consumer goods. Those of high status can shop in special stores and are not rationed with respect to the purchase of goods that are otherwise scarce. Status exploitation is the consequence of real income inequality due to differential status.95

Whereas socialist exploitation, due to private ownership of skills, is supposed to exist under socialism, status exploitation is an unintended and undesirable form of inequality.96

Feudal exploitation is eliminated by abolishing property in others; capitalist exploitation is eliminated by abolishing private ownership of the means of production; socialist exploitation is eliminated by abolishing differential remuneration for skilled labor; and status exploitation is eliminated by abolishing the privileges of bureaucracies. Since, according to Roemer, "status exploitation exists because of the large degree of central planning and the consequent growth of a bureaucracy capable of creating privileges for itself,"97 the elimination of status exploitation in contemporary post-capitalist societies will probably require a "judicious use of markets."

Finally, Roemer introduces the notion of socially necessary exploitation. A type of exploitation is socially necessary if, and only if,
eliminating it would make society as a whole—including the producing class—worse off. This would usually be caused by a change in incentive schedules but could also be caused, Roemer claims, by a slowing of technological change. The notion of socially necessary exploitation is closely related to the Marxist notion of a progressive economic system: so long as a system, such as capitalism, is progressive in the sense of spurring rather than stifling economic development, the exploitation involved would seem to be socially necessary. Obviously this notion is related to my concept of “all-things-considered justified exploitation,” in that this consideration is the primary reason why exploitation in a particular society would be justified.

This brings us to another point: Roemer’s concepts of exploitation have a built-in theory of distributive justice. In fact, one might say that his theory of exploitation is little more than a surrogate for a theory of distributive justice and is thus, in principle, dispensable. Roemer writes, for example, that “the labor theory of exploitation just does not work as an analytically convincing theory of distributive injustice, and must be replaced by the property relations approach, which says a group or person is exploited if he does not have access to his fair share . . . of the . . . productive assets of society.” Furthermore, to determine whether exploitation exists in a certain society, we “compare the existing distribution of income with the distribution of income which would ensue were property in the alienable (nonhuman) means of production to be redistributed in an egalitarian way.” Finally, the principle of distributive justice proposed by Roemer seems to be that of strict equality. He says, for example, that “the recipe for ending Marxian exploitation . . . is to eliminate differential ownership . . . of the means of production.” When comparing his implicit principle of distributive justice to Rawls’ difference principle, he writes: “Certain inequalities may be to the benefit of the exploited or the least well off. The Rawlsian theory views such inequalities as just. I think, however, that justice entails that incomes to individuals are deserved.” Since Roemer does not view any income derived from differential ownership of either productive forces or work skills as being deserved, it seems that he must reject as just any distribution that is not strictly equal, even one that benefits the least well-off segment of the population.

There are a number of points to be made here. The first is that there is at least a tension—if not an inconsistency—between his principle of strict equality of productive assets (which seems to underlie his concept of exploitation) and his claim that exploitation is socially necessary (i.e., justified) if abolishing it would make society as a whole worse off. If Roemer wholly commits himself to strict equality in productive assets, then he cannot justify an unequal distribution because it prevents society as a whole from being worse off. Conversely, if he stands firm on his notion of socially necessary exploitation (i.e., on justified inequalities in productive assets and hence incomes), he cannot wholly commit himself to strict equality. (Here it could be argued that he should accept Rawls’ difference principle since it is a reasoned attempt to integrate these two distributive principles.)

Second, Roemer does not provide the full-blown theory of social—or at least distributive—justice his theory of exploitation requires if it is to be a useful tool of social criticism. It is not even clear exactly to what principles of justice he is committed. Moreover, he emphasizes desert but does not seem to distinguish it from entitlement or provide a justification for the primacy of the former over the latter. Similarly, he does not defend his assumption that income derived from differential ownership of property or skills is not deserved. (As Elster and others have pointed out, this assumption may run into problems when faced with hypothetical cases of “clean accumulation.”)

Third, it is not clear why the inequalities Roemer cites are cases of exploitation. As Allen Buchanan expresses this point,

Roemer does little to explain why inequalitarian distributions of property are wrong and nothing at all to explain why, even if they are morally wrong, they are exploitative. No attempt is made to connect the inequalitarian distribution of property with practice or actions that are, according to ordinary usage, exploitative . . . [He] provides no clue as to why the alleged injustice in question should be called exploitation (not all injust...
tices are cases of exploitation) rather than simply a violation of a right of distributive justice, for example. 103

In connection with this point, it is not clear why a theory of exploitation is needed if its content boils down to a theory of distributive justice. Why not simply apply the theory of justice straightforward to property relations in various societies. To quote Buchanan again:

Roemer's definition of "exploitation," like Wolff's, achieves clarity and precision at the price of emptying the concept of normative force. Without the required theory of justice, the concept of exploitation cannot serve as a tool for social criticism. If the theory is supplied, however, it is not at all clear that the theory of "exploitation" (as opposed to the concept of justice embodied in the theory) would have any role to play. 104

Before leaving Roemer's theory of exploitation, let us consider (in reverse order) his three reasons for rejecting a labor theory of exploitation mentioned at the beginning of this analysis. It is my contention that the objections that work at all work only against Simple Exploitation and not against Exploitation Proper (which includes force in its definition).

The last of the three reasons cited was that labor theories of exploitation may result in the poor exploiting the rich. A simple example would be a big bourgeoisie working for a rather poor petty bourgeoisie. Here the big bourgeoisie does not get back all of the value, product, or labor he or she expends since—let us stipulate—the petty bourgeoisie makes a profit from the big bourgeoisie's labor. Thus, in terms of Simple Exploitation—which Roemer takes to be Marx's concept of exploitation—the petty bourgeoisie exploits the big bourgeoisie. There are two points to be made here. First, if one utilizes a force-inclusive definition of "exploitation" (or Exploitation Proper), then clearly the petty bourgeoisie is not exploiting the big bourgeoisie since the latter, being wealthy, is not forced to sell his or her labor. Secondly, Roemer's theory is open to precisely the same sort of counter-example, and this is much more devastating for his theory since he cannot fall back on the requirement that exploited labor is forced labor. Consider a society divided between the Able-Bodied and the Disabled, where part of what the Able-Bodied produce is distributed to the Disabled. If the Able-

Bodied withdraw from society with their per capita share of the means of production, they will be better off since they will not have to share with the Disabled. The Disabled—the complement class of the Able-Bodied—will be worse off. Thus the Disabled (capitalistically) exploit the Able-Bodied! Although, as we saw earlier, the question of whether taxation for such purposes is a form of exploitation is somewhat puzzling, I take it that any theory that decides immediately and decisively that this is a case of the Disabled exploiting the Able-Bodied has somehow gotten off the track.

The second reason cited earlier for Roemer's rejection of labor theories of exploitation is that they do not make clear the ethical implications of exploitation, namely, inequality in the distribution of wealth. But this seems to beg the question since it is arguable that Marx and most Marxists have taken the violation of workers' freedom under capitalism to be at least as much a moral implication of exploitation—and at least as morally important—as inequalities in the distribution of wealth. Roemer constantly emphasizes the inequality in the ownership of the means of production, but no Marxist disagrees with this. The question is: is inequality in ownership of the means of production to be condemned primarily because it results in inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth or because it results in inequalities of power, with the further result that people's freedom (as self-determination) is violated. Although Karl Popper misinterprets Marx on a number of issues, he is squarely on the mark, I believe, when he claims:

Marx's condemnation of capitalism is fundamentally a moral condemnation. The system is condemned . . . because by forcing the exploiter to enslave the exploited, it robs both of their freedom. Marx did not combat wealth, nor did he praise poverty. He hated capitalism, not for its accumulation of wealth, but for its oligarchical character; he hated it because in this system wealth means political power in the sense of power over men. Labour power is made a commodity; that means that men must sell themselves on the market. Marx hated the system because it resembled slavery. 105

Exploitation is wrong, I contend, not only because it violates principles of distributive justice but also—and more fundamentally—because it violates the value of freedom. More precisely, it

103 Buchanan, "Marx, Morality, and History," pp. 129-130.
104 Ibid., p. 130.
violates the principle of maximum equal freedom as explicated in my reconstruction of Marx's concept and theory of freedom. Although a system of exploitation of direct producers by nonproducers does not directly violate the negative freedom of the producers, it may do so indirectly through the use of the police power of the state to break strikes, maintain order, and prevent the producers from expropriating the means of production and distribution from the nonproducers. But certainly such a system directly violates people's positive freedom in the sense of both their right to equal participation in all social decision-making processes and their right to equal access to the means of self-realization. (The latter is also a principle of distributive justice, of course.) Although my reconstructed Marxian theory of freedom does not take as basic a right to own an equal share of the productive forces of society, the claim that productive property should be socially owned—at a certain stage in history—is entailed by this theory when it is conjoined with the Marxist's empirical claim that capitalism violates people's freedom in the above-mentioned ways.

Finally, let us consider Roemer's first objection: that labor theories of exploitation presuppose the labor theory of value. As pointed out earlier, this is simply false. For a labor theory of exploitation to make sense, one does not have to be able to calculate the labor content of goods. Thus all the problems of heterogeneous labor, etc., simply do not come up. As Reiman puts it, only the "general labor theory of value" need be accepted. Or, as Elster puts it, we need only assume that, from a normative point of view, there is something important about how much one labors—or what percentage of society's total labor time one contributes—and what percentage of society's total wealth one gets back. Buchanan concurs:

To recognize that the labor process in capitalism is exploitative according to the general conception of exploitation one certainly need not subscribe to the labor theory of value. For the general conception of the harmful utilization of a person as a mere means to one's advantage is not tied to anything so specific as that theory. Further, even the special conception of exploitation in the labor process in capitalism can be captured without reliance on the labor theory of value. All that is needed for the special conception is a distinction between nec-

---

106 Buchanan, Marx and Justice, p. 46.