

AN OPEN LETTER TO LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI

E. P. Thompson

Dear Leszek Kolakowski,

First, I must introduce myself, since this is an unusual kind of letter. You don't know me, but I know you well.

This must be familiar enough to a man with an international reputation. He must often be beset with the importunities of strangers.

But my claim is more insistent and vulgar than that. I am the stranger who walks into the house, slaps you on the back, sits down at your table, and jests about your youthful escapades, on the pretext of a claim to distant relationship of which you know nothing. I am, in political terms, your mother's brother's stepson. I am an impossible and presumptuous guest, and an uninvited one—you may even suspect that I am an impostor—but the courtesies of kinship disallow you from throwing me from your house.

We were both voices of the Communist revisionism of 1956. Not much can be made of that. The intellectual particles produced in that moment of ideological fission have now fallen out over most parts of the political globe.

But there was a closer and more continuing identity in our pre-occupations. We both passed from a frontal critique of Stalinism to a stance of Marxist revisionism; we both sought to rehabilitate the utopian energies within the socialist tradition; we both stood in an ambiguous position, critical and affirmative, to the Marxist tradition. We both were centrally concerned with the radiating problems of historical determinism on the one hand, and of agency, moral choice, and individual responsibility on the other.

When I say that "we both" initiated similar enquiries, I don't, of course, suggest that we both did so with equal success. The inadequacy of my own writings is testified by the silence into which they have fallen. Your own writing, on the other hand, still seems to me to be among the few constructive and enduring consequences of that experience. Your sustained polemic, "Responsibility and History", first published in *Nowa Kultura* in 1957,¹ remains without equal.

In 1956 we lived through a common experience, but we experienced it in different ways. In Britain the small number of Communist intellectuals belonged to a defeated and discredited tradition—or so it

was the business of every orthodoxy in our culture to assure us. We were not heretics but barbarians, who desecrated with our presence the altars of the liberal Gods. There are many personal histories and each one is accented differently. But one may say that, in general, our allegiance to Communism was political: it arose from inexorable choices in a partisan world in which neutrality seemed impossible. You are familiar enough with this, and I won't go over all the elisions of truth and the self-deceptions that were involved.

But our intellectual allegiance was to Marxism. It was, at least in some part, pre-Stalinist, or Stalinist in a hang-dog, shame-faced sort of way. We might, from a sense of solidarity, act as apologists for Stalinism. We might even engage in some casuistry to explain away Zhdanovism (a consequence of the tragic sufferings of the war); but few of us, in the depth of our hearts, did not wish for the siege mentality of Communism to fall away. Thus there is a sense in which, even before 1956, our solidarity was given not to Communist states in their existence, but in their potential—not for what they were but for what—given a diminution in the Cold War—they might become.

Hence, whether consciously or unconsciously, we were expectant of exactly what occurred in 1956. These "revelations" represented less a rupture in our understanding than a fulfilment of our half-conscious hopes. From that preposterous military orthodoxy we had hoped for controversy, acknowledgement of human frailty, a moral vocabulary. And for this reason, in spite of its agony, in spite even of the Hungarian tragedy, 1956 was a year of hope. We had seen, not the potential (for this was soon crushed) but the living, indomitable agents of that potential at work within those societies. Behind the posters, novels and films of Stakhanovites we saw (to our relief) workers who were absentees, pilferers, time-servers, as well as workers who were learning to defend themselves, organize, and take common cause with intellectuals. And behind the nonsense of self-validating "correct formulations" we saw the old Adam of a critical, sceptical intelligence. The undefeated old man of the mind still survived, it seemed, among the copybook abstractions of the New Man of History.

You Poles were the worst old Adamists of all! Your poets—Tuwim and Wazyk—your film-makers and sociologists, and, worst of all, your Leszek Kolakowski. In our journals, *The Reasoner* and *The New Reasoner*, we dissident British communists did something to make public your work. A member of our editorial board, Alfred Dressler, followed closely the discussions in *Nowa Kultura* and *Po Prostu*, and visited Poland more than once for exchanges with our friends.

Your voice was the clearest voice out of Eastern Europe in those years, although you didn't offer the easiest answers. You offered not a parcel of solutions, each ready for unwrapping ("freedom", "democ-

racy", "workers control"—although each of these you indicated as objectives, complex in their nature, awaiting attainment), but the resumption of old modes of intellectual and moral aspiration and discourse. And in this, too, we showed what solidarity we could with you.

What we dissident Communists did in Britain—and for this small achievement I still feel a stubborn pride—was to refuse to enter the well-worn paths of apostasy. After the suppression of the Hungarian revolution up to 10,000 people, or one-third of its total membership, walked out of the British Communist Party; and of that 10,000 I can think of not one who took on the accepted role, in liberal capitalist society, of Public Confessor and Renegade. No-one ran to the press with his revelations about Communist "conspiracy" and no-one wrote elegant essays, in the organs published by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, complaining that God had failed. We had had, after all, our experiential political reasons for being opposed to capitalist society, independent of any evolution in Eastern Europe whatsoever. We had had, after all, our intellectual reasons for associating with the Marxist tradition, independent of any follies or self-delusions of Stalinism. So in the face of liberal applause, which was short-lived, and intellectual ridicule, which we were used to, we took up what work we could. Some, no doubt, fell back exhausted into private trajectories. Others continued their work in the working-class organizations to which they already belonged. Others took a part in initiating the New Left and in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Some of us, in trade unions or in intellectual life, are still not quite dead.

But none of us, I think, are classical renegades. And I claim this as a debt upon you, as a solidarity we paid to you, although you may not see it in the same way at all. Nor do I claim this out of hindsight. Expressly and repeatedly, between 1956 and the early 1960s, I and several of my comrades affirmed our general allegiance, not to the Communist Party as institution or as ideology, but to the Communist movement in its humanist potential. And we did this for two reasons.

First, you and your comrades, striving in the most complex and sometimes threatening circumstances to influence your own societies, were present at every moment in our political consciousness. If such men as you were content to remain Communists (and you will recall that your own membership of the Polish Party was not severed until 1966, and then by expulsion and not by resignation), if such men and women as the Czech insurgents of 1968 were to emerge directly from the Communist tradition, *who* were we to deny the claims of solidarity? We rejected—as I still reject—any description of Communism or of Communist-governed societies which defines these in terms of their ruling ideologies and the institutions of their ruling élites, and which

excludes by the very terms of its definition any appraisal of the conflicts characteristic to them, of the alternative meanings, values, traditions and potentials which they may contain. And I make this point the more strongly, since I have recently noted with astonishment that you yourself, in the last year or two, appear to have been falling back on such conditioned liberal definitions.

The second reason is closely related to this. It is, perhaps, a re-phrasing of the first. Nothing distinguished the zenith of Stalinism more than the absolute polarization of two worlds. As you wrote in 1957, "because of the absence of a major social focus that would retain their criticism within the orbit of socialist thought, dissidents from Stalinist communism were easily transformed into renegades". And you continued:

"There is no greater danger to the development of the socialist movement in its present phase than to permit a renewed intensification of the political polarization that tends towards a single alternative . . . The result would be to force legitimate criticism into the position of the **counter-revolution**"²

In 1958 I was writing about very much the same dilemma:

"We can assert with Pasternak that the Revolution's 'indirect results have begun to make themselves felt—the fruits of fruits, the consequences of consequences.' In doing this we must not in any way limit our critique of Stalinism, which must be dismantled in fact and in the human mind, if the fruit is to ripen; but we must not fall in behind the old trek which started in the 1930s, when a romantic espousal of Communism was followed by a purist retreat from life. This, in effect, is only to abandon the pass to Stalinism or to anti-Communism, and to strengthen the advocates of 'no-middle-way'. I think we must be tougher than that, and for this reason I still prefer to call myself a dissident Communist . . . Moreover, we still have a 'Communist' duty to fulfil: to express our solidarity with fellow dissidents in the Communist world, to assert our confidence in the humanist strand within the Communist tradition, to assist the Western labour movement to an understanding of the kind of society immanent within the late-Stalinist forms, and thereby to re-awaken an appreciation of the community of aspiration among the **working** people East and West.."³

The world has changed a good deal in fifteen years, and neither of us need be accused of inconsistency if we have changed with it. The estrangement of the Russian and Chinese states, the survival of the Yugoslav state, the cautious diversification of Communist orthodoxies (for example, in Italy), and the growth of movements throughout the world which style themselves of the Left, which sometimes actually are of the **Left**,⁴ and which certainly are not subordinated to Stalinist institutions (indeed, the increasing anachronism of the very term "Stalinism")—all these real events mean that neither you nor I would feel the need to define matters as we then did.

But I was explaining a point of history, why I feel that I have some

petty claim of relationship to you. (I owe also, of course, for your writings and for your courage, in 1956 and again in 1966, a much greater debt). My claim is a trivial and abstract one. At a certain moment, partly out of a sense of solidarity with you and your comrades, I and others like me took up certain intellectual and political positions. We refused to disavow "Communism" because Communism was a complex noun which included Leszek Kolakowski. I am sure that the solidarity expressed in little, academically-unreputable journals in England did you no good whatsoever. We brought you neither tanks nor tank-traps; not even an audience among a "reputable" British public.

So the claim turns out to be nonsense. We fought in the same battle once; it was by accident, and anyway the battle was lost. I am, it turns out, an impostor after all—a reader, an admirer, but no kin.

And even as a reader I am sadly behind the fashion. For those editors who present your writings to "Western" readers are inclined to pass over indulgently your writings of 1956–7 and to go posting on to later and better things. Thus Leopold Labedz:

"While in his earlier writings there was little from which a Westerner could learn anything of universal significance, now he has moved from a stage of rediscovery of intellectual landmarks well known in the West to a stage where his search is more original . . ."

At least—and perhaps this is our only claim—we "Easterners" in the heart of the enlightened "West" read your earlier work without that kind of self-congratulation and patronage. And even now, having re-read your "Responsibility and History", I am at a loss to know what "intellectual landmarks well-known in the West" you had there rediscovered. Continuities, extensions of prior enquiries—yes; but as to landmarks "well-known in the West", I had overlooked the familiarity of your enterprise. It seemed and it still seems to me that this study, for all its tentative character, remains the most substantial examination of its universally-significant themes since the mid-century. To keep it by me I would trade in ten volumes by Sir Karl Popper: and this, because your thought plays upon the actual stuff of choices in actual contexts and not upon some etiolated arrangement of academic concepts; and because you leave, at the end, victimhood and agency, realism and utopia, arguing with each other down the corridors of history, as they have always done and may always do.

After 1957 censorship and a renewed (but more opportunist and less lethal) conformism closed around you. You pursued your researches in the history of thought⁶ and also in more academic fields of philosophy. You maintained and extended your positions as a Marxist revisionist, although you were forced to speak less frequently (or to

speak in riddles) to a non-specialist audience. In 1966 you broke your enforced silence, at the request of the students at Warsaw University: your plain account of the deformities and unfreedom of intellectual and cultural life, of the betrayal of the Polish "October", ensured your expulsion from the Party. In 1968, at the onset of a new nationalist and anti-intellectual night, you were dismissed from your Professorship. Since then you have been in West Germany, Montreal, California and are now at All Souls' in Oxford.

That is a bare biography. From what is available of your work in English translation one can detect other themes. You have entered into philosophical dialogue in many areas of contemporary (no doubt Mr. Labeledz would call it "western") thought, handling critically but with respect ideas of positivist, phenomenological, existentialist, and Catholic thinkers. In these matters I am a layman, but I can see no fractures, no sharp discontinuities, in your preoccupations. In 1966 you returned with vigour to the themes of historical explanation, determinism and moral choice: I find in these studies a greater philosophical precision, but perhaps also a greater impatience with arguments which to a historian maintain validity (they existed and exist) even if, to a philosopher, they are flawed in logic.'

From the time of your enforced exile, in 1968, to the "West", I feel less certain of your identity. Your published statements are few. I must reconstruct what I can from fragments—an article in the Socialist Register, an article in Daedalus, an interview in Encounter, the proceedings of a conference—and these fragments intersect in negatives. For each isolated negative—this expression of contempt for Communist orthodoxy, that outright "no" to Althusser, this frank objection to unexamined socialist slogans—I may feel partial or complete assent. But for the intersection of particular negatives into a general sense of defeat and negation: for the absence of qualifications, for the absence (most of all) of an awareness—contained, as it must be, in the same moment of thought—as to the reasons of capitalist power and ideology: for the absence of expressions from you of intellectual fellowship with your political analogues and former comrades in this "West", the absence of an awareness that we had already (in our very different context) sought to examine some of those objections to revolutionary socialism which you are now propounding in Daedalus or at Reading University—and that we had proposed, if not answers, then at least ways of acting in relation to these problems: for all of these I feel concern.

My feelings have even a more personal tone. I feel, when I turn over your pages in Encounter, a sense of injury and betrayal. My feelings are no affair of yours: you must do what you think is right. But they explain why I write, not an article or polemic, but this open letter.

It would be impertinent in me to speculate too far upon the experiences which have led you to this point of negation. It may not be as nice as "Westerners" assume for a Pole or a Czech to leave his friends and colleagues, and his context of engagement, and come to "the West". Your arrival in West Berlin coincided with the ascendance of a peculiarly impulsive and intransigent German revolutionary youth movement. Your arrival in California coincided with a culture of "radicalism", which had serious and courageous components, but which was surrounded by a halo of hysteria which—caught up and magnified in the lenses of the sensationalist media—reproduced itself across half the world as a "youth culture" of self-indulgent emotionalism and of exhibitionist style. From Paris to Berkeley, from Munich to Oxford, the "West" offered a supermarket of avant garde products, some branded as "Marxism", each cutting the price against the other. But how many of these products, when unpackaged, contained only old and discredited arguments under a new label, or a horrific make-up kit for the revolting young bourgeoisie (a fast sports-car, a villa in the Appenines, and the Thoughts of Mao-Tse-Tung) to act out their transient, fashionable pantomime? Posters of Che Guevara, juxtaposed against mini-skirts, "Mao tunics", and military leather jackets, decorated the most modish, swinging boutiques, in the King's Road and in Royal Leamington Spa; for a year or two, intoxicated by "May 1968" in Paris—or, rather, by this event as assimilated in instant myth—cohorts of leftist students imagined that, by some act of occupation of a few administrators' offices, they could announce in the heart of repressive capitalist society a "red base" which would bring an instant voluntaristic proletarian revolution looming out of the streets. That was the year of the *gauchistes*, the year when the tragedy of Joanna Southcott's annunciation of the impending birth of the Shilohi was re-enacted. but this time as a rich kid's revolutionary farce: and in both cases the pregnancy of the millenium was diagnosed, at last, as dropsy.

I grant the irrationalisms of that year. It was a bad year for one with your exacting intellectual temper to come to the "West". From your later references to "the blind enthusiasm for the meaningless idea of global revolution" (see p. 33) one can detect how these experiences seemed to you. And yet there are other, and more hopeful, ways of seeing that experience: the challenge to Gaullism, the great strikes in the French motor industry, the first large cracks in the massive, ritualized traditionalism both of French academic institutions and of the routinized politics and routinized ideology of the P.C.F.

And then, again, I must ask against what *perspective* you observed these phenomena? Did you consider that what was remarkable in the German youth movement was not its impulsive form and its lack of

bearings, but that these children of Hitler's legionaries had taken to the streets, and in this affirmative way, at all? Did you remember, while shrugging off the hysteric harmonics within Californian culture, that these were resonances only from a profound and healthy human chord—a chord which signalled the **decomposition** of that state-endorsed ideological conformism (chauvinism, hysteric anti-communism—with its rituals of denunciation and of exorcism—and mindless technological consumerism) which had dominated American college culture during the high years of the Cold War? It is from that matrix of crew-cut, clean-limbed playboys, of mother-pampered, "christian scientific", systems-conditioned, ambitious, morally-adaptive and intellectually-null college boys of 1946–60 that, one after another, the astonishing caste of Watergate has come. You found the enthusiasms of West Coast revolutionaries in 1968 to be "blind". And perhaps, at this point and at that, I would share your judgement. But what of that? It has always been your work, in Berkeley as in Warsaw, to help the blind to see. Enthusiasm—and an enthusiasm generous enough to act against racialism, to declare against war, to submit to the ministrations of Mayor Daly's helmeted (christian scientific?) state priests—is a better starting-point, one would have thought, than that earlier campus culture which generated men and women who, like propositions from a page of Talcott Parsons, have no vocabulary in which lies, bribery, espionage upon citizens, corruption, can be encompassed at all.

Forewarned by an experience sufficient for any life-time, you need only glance at some of the "Mamisms" currently on offer to identify them as manias. And to this I assent. I would criticize you only for this: that you have assumed that the loudest, the most strident, the most modish or the most "reputable" voices are those that are most significant. You were perhaps unaware of the great "law of development" of intellectual life in "the West", in this stage of competitive consumer society, that cultural modes must change, like sartorial fashions, with dizzy speed from one year to the next; that in ideas as in suburban villas it is style and self-exhibition and not structure that determines acceptance, and that, moreover, very many intellectual workers—even men and women whose work is to teach youth, to write, to present television—literally do not remember positions which they adopted ardently and with vituperation against all opponents two or three years before.

Indeed, this law seems to me to apply most particularly to the intellectual Left. From voluntarism to determinism, from "red bases" on campuses to exclusive dependence upon proletarian revolt, from non-violence to aggression, from apogetics—in the name of supra-nationalist universals—for the Common Market to glorification of the Provisional I.R.A. : between all these positions people oscillate, adopt-

ing each with equal fervour, never dropping their voices for reflection in between. Indeed, these contradictions coexist in the same minds. Consistency is a vice of the square and out-of-date. It can't be reconciled with the "contradictions of reality", nor with the imperative to "do one's own thing". Consistency is an old bore.

The voice of the bore is doomed in the end to tail off into silence. And that, in a nutshell, is my own history as any kind of political voice. For a year or two some of us continued to explore old themes from 1956, in *The flew Reasoner* and *New Left Review*. The exigencies of our activist concerns, in the attempt to give the word flesh in an actual New Left independent of the old polarities (and the British New Left, unimportant as it may have been, was one of the first of this particular generation of movements) altered perceptibly our former preoccupations. Renewed Cold War. renewed conformism and censorship in the "East", diminished our expectations of any early resolution of the knots tied by history and ideology in Communist societies. We addressed ourselves to the task of encouraging into being in Britain a movement of socialist thought and practice, purged of the old religious anti-Communism, founded experientially upon British conditions, which was revolutionary, rational, democratic: which accentuated self-activity, which was sensitive to ~~cultural~~ forms of exploitation, which affirmed the values of *égalité*.

**"O what fine thought we had because we thought
That the worst rogues and rascals had died out."**

In this we left aside the arduous tasks of a more philosophical self-examination—a task for which most of us were, anyway, ill-equipped, and unlikely to find time to equip ourselves amidst the demands of Aldermaston marching, speaking at Left Clubs, fund-raising for our journal (which did not, *mirabile dictu*, receive funds from the Ford Foundation), and attempting to improvise movements out of attitudes. Indeed, one's responsibilities as an intellectual workman became forgotten in one's tasks as an impressario.

Well, I could talk about that. But not now. Our unresolved intellectual debates remained unresolved (although in certain fields—in economic and industrial theory, in historical and cultural analysis—much more than that was done). And for the irresolute, "history" has little patience. We reached a point of personal, financial and organizational exhaustion; and at this moment, the agent of history appeared, in the form of Perry Anderson. We were exhausted: he was intellectually fertile, immensely self-concentrated, decisive. We saw, in a partnership with him and his colleagues, an opportunity to regenerate the review and to recuperate our own squandered intellectual resources. We **did**

not, as it happens, anticipate that the first expression of his decisiveness would be to dismiss the review's founders from its board.

We were, it turned out, insufficiently "rigorous": which was true. We were confined within a narrow nationalist culture and unaware of the truly internationalist Marxist discourse: which meant, in fact, that we had attended most to the voices of Kolakowski, Hochfeld and Wazyk, of Tibor Dery and Illyes, of Basso and of Djilas, of C. Wright Mills and of Isaac Deutscher, and had attended insufficiently to a particular dialogue between Parisian Marxists and Parisian existentialists. And we were not intellectually "reputable": which meant that our work was not well-regarded in Oxford.

This is not the place to attempt a definition of the transition from one tradition to another. But this debate was never raised to any theoretical articulation; it was resolved by an administrative decision. The old New Left could either destroy both old and new in a quarrel over the control of the review; or it could elect for its own administrative dissolution, could withdraw from a signal-house of defined commitments and enter the wilderness of individual intellectual enterprise. This Register is the last survivor in the direct line of continuity from the old New Left, and its editors and publisher have done much to keep alive a tradition of undoctinaire, ecumenical, substantive Marxist analysis. But I think that they would agree that the Register has not included all the tendencies which co-existed fruitfully in the older movement.

I explain this because I find even now (outside of Britain) some confusion as to the intellectual relationship between the first and the second *New Left Review*. Since taking on editorial control in 1963 Perry Anderson and his colleagues have conducted the review with system, conviction and decision. There was, however, a fracture in the passage from one tradition to another, which was never exposed to principled discussion. It was a very English transition: that is (according to one's viewpoint) gentlemanly and tolerant, or otiose and manipulative. It was not until 1965 that I raised, in the pages of this Register, objections to certain interpretations in the (mutated) *New Left Review*: these pointed to ulterior questions of some significance, although I was inhibited both by my own sense of the shared fellowship of the Left and by editorial advice, from pressing every objection home. In due course, and perhaps with less sense of either inhibition, Anderson replied. His reply, in my view, neither answered my objections nor opened up new problems of significance.⁹

That is where matters remain. My colleagues and I turned back to work in our own specialist, professional, or practical fields. We no longer represented a coherent and identifiable position. Some of us regrouped, in 1967—8, under the initiative of Raymond Williams, to

offer such a position and perspective, with the *May Day Manifesto*. This arose, I believe, from theoretical assumptions substantially distinct from those of the present *New Left Review*; but what these ulterior differences are has (unless in some parts of Williams' own work) gone unargued.

To argue for possession of the term "new left" is not worth breath. And even to argue for possession of the term "Marxism" may not be worth the breath that is spent upon it. I am persuaded that it is not. There are arguments of greater substance to be conducted. But to argue them at all requires a certain morale, a certain sense of audience.

If, after a breathy euphoric overture, I have fallen into a moody political silence, it may have arisen from the absence of the last two requisites:

"My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late . . ."

One cause of this, to which I will soon return, is, paradoxically, the revival in Britain of Marxisms: but of Marxisms with which I cannot associate myself. Another is even deeper: it penetrates to the very language of political discourse, the idiom of thought.

To be a British Communist, on this empirical island anchored off Europe, was never a matter of great international relevance. British Communists did something to assist struggles for colonial independence, and something more than-is now remembered to assist in the defeat of Fascism between 1942-5. But to be a Communist dissident or revisionist, or a relic of that tradition, in 1973, is to be a null quantity like a foreign postage-stamp twice cancelled, unusable and not worth a collector's attention.

The language itself provokes smothered ridicule. But when the language comes over in a strong provincial accent, like Aristotle's *Politics* declaimed in scouse, then the joke is so good that it might draw an audience after all. For I belong to a nation which has lost self-confidence, and whose people certainly lay claim to something less in the scale of human rights (such as self-determination) than-do the Norwegians. Our intellectual culture has for so long been insular, amateurish, crassly empirical, self-enclosed and resistant to international discourse that the damage done is probably irreparable. But we still have a chance. We are going "into" Europe, and Tom Nairn and other contributors to the *New Left Review* are attempting to teach us the vocabulary which real intellectuals use over there.

This is what we are assured, from many sides, and by many voices other than Tom Nairn's. I am compelled to believe it is so. After all, if our rate-of-growth lags behind that of "Europe", if the pound falls

against the mark, if English apples can't stand up to French competition, then it follows, as the night the day, that English intellectuality has no chance of survival unless—exposed to the bracing competition of Paris and Milan—it learns a new vocabulary and efficiency. The process, of course, may be painful. Certain backward, uncompetitive sectors (English empiricism, romanticism, traditionalism) will have to be closed down. One cannot expect M. Sartre and M. Althusser to subsidize these antique survivals. There will necessarily be, in the transition phase, unemployment. Even some executives may (with adequate compensation) be made redundant.

It was in the name of this logic that the founders of the *New Left Review* were some of the first to be laid off. And it is because I sense a justice in my own redundancy that I have been, for some years, silent on the larger issues of political argument. It is not, of course, a matter of an argument only with Tom Nairn. Among younger intellectual workers in Britain there have been, for a decade, indications of a significant mutation in idiom. As Raymond Williams has written:

"British thinkers and writers are continually pulled back towards ordinary language not only in certain rhythms and in choices of words, but also in a manner of expression which can be called unsystematic but which also represents an unusual consciousness of an immediate audience."

This "manner of expression", which I have described as "idiom", and in which Williams can see both negative and positive qualities, appeared to many students in England since the early 1960s as an obstacle to being "intellectuals of a different kind":

"A sense of certain absolute restrictions in English thought, restrictions which seemed to link very closely with certain restrictions and deadlocks in the larger society, made the search for alternative traditions, alternative methods, imperative."

"Everybody except the English, it suddenly seemed, thought or at least wrote" in a more highly-specialized and systematic manner. And in the search for a more rigorous theory, many in the new generation sought to acquire "the highly specialized and internal vocabulary" of an intellectual caste, sometimes acquiring at the same time—

"A language and a manner of the monograph and the rostrum: a blackboard **numbering**, a dictated emphasis, a pedagogic insistence upon repeatable definitions: habits which interacted strangely with the genuine **rigour** of new and bold inquiries and **terms**."¹⁰

This is well stated. And it relates in specific ways to the mutation in the *New Left Review* tradition. I cannot here attempt a considered assessment of the achievements of this review in its conduct since 1964. and if I indicate only certain points at which I and other founders and

contributors of the earlier review have been excluded from its discourse it will suggest a partial, and ungenerous, assessment. But I must make these indications, very briefly, if I am to explain to you the position from which I am now writing. And, first, there has been an exclusion in fact: not only has the review turned away from its founders, but it has passed over their thought without examination and has strenuously denied that any serious Marxist traditions existed in this country before some moment in 1963. Second, while the review has undoubtedly enlarged certain international dimensions it has severely limited others, and, in particular, the interest in (and sometimes dialogue with) Communist "revisionism" and "dissent" which marked the tradition of *The New Reasoner*. (As an example, the review, in the past decade, has not noted your work but has paid respectful and continuing attention to that of Althusser.) Third, the review's intention of deepening and clarifying Marxist exegesis has been accompanied by a distinct narrowing of intellectual referents and a closing down of certain open areas of examination; that is, there has been an insistent pressure to reassert Marxism as doctrine—albeit highly-sophisticated doctrine—of a kind which I will soon discuss. Fourth, this has been further accompanied by an obligatory rejection of the empirical mode of investigation, in which empirical controls (which are very evident in Marx's own procedures) are dismissed along with the proper resistance to empiricism or positivism. Hence heuristic and structural organization of concepts are given priority (even Hegelian priority, albeit expressed in severely anti-Hegelian terms) over substantive analysis. We are always—and not only in the pages of *New Left Review*—arranging ourselves to make analysis, being told how analysis may be conducted and (more frequently) how it may not be conducted, but the substantive outcome of these arrangements is less clear. And fifth and, for the time being, finally, one may doubt (you and I would certainly doubt) how far the mutant tradition has ever absorbed or worked through the full historical experience of Stalinism. Indeed, I find in the very vocabulary of this new Marxism, with its obligatory face-making at "humanism", "moralism", etc.—its inability to discuss the arts except by translating them into cerebration—and its lack of terms with which to handle moral or value-making process, a suggestion that that experience has passed the new tradition by.

These qualifications may have force. But, even so, it seems that I and some of my colleagues cannot break into that discourse. We do not command the appropriate terms. And I meet, when I confront your own writing of the 1960s, an analogous difficulty. In the view of one of your editors, in your "post-revisionist writings", you—

"Show the influence, in about equal measure, of the philosophical ideas of Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Dilthey, Mannheim, Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, and Camus."¹¹

To this pantheon (which I must emphasize is not of your own nomination) my first instinctive, but irrepressible, comment would be: "Humph!"—a term too inexact to introduce into philosophical discourse.

If I may borrow your own image of the Priest and the Jester, English intellectuals have played the role of jesters to the universalist priests (Catholic or Anti-Catholic) of Western Europe for several hundred years.¹² Our best idiom has been protestant, individualist, empirical, disintegrative of universals; our best moralism has been contextual. Our poets have, on occasion, advanced philosophy further than our philosophers. If I who have been formed in this idiom think about problems of determinism and free-will, of social process and individual agency, I move not from Spinoza through Marx to Heidegger and Sartre but I fall into a different kind of meditation, conditioned by a literary culture, among instances, objections, qualifications, ambiguous metaphors.

When you are reported to say, as you are in *Encounter* (although you have said it more elegantly elsewhere) that you, as an "inconsistent atheist" find, nevertheless, that "men have no fuller means of self-identification than through religious symbolism", and that "religious consciousness . . . is an irreplaceable part of human culture, man's only attempt to see himself as a whole", then not only the atheist but also some primal Lollard or Anabaptist within me rebels. You may say this in Poland: you may say this, if you wish, in Italy or France. But by what right, what study of its traditions and sensibility, may you assume this as a universal in the heart of an ancient Protestant island, doggedly resistant to the magics of religious symbolism even when they remained believers, cultivating like so many urban gardeners the individual conscience as against some priest-given "religious consciousness"?

I fear that you will not understand me. You will think that your casual reflection has touched off some atheist fury. It is not this at all. I share and accept, in my work as an historian, your imaginative sympathy and intellectual respect for Christian forms, movements and ideas, which as you insist (and as Christopher Hill in this country has long insisted) must be studied in their own reality and autonomy, and not as figments of "false consciousness" in which other more real and material interests were masked. If I devised my own pantheon I would without hesitation place within it the Christian antinomian, William Blake, and I would place him beside Marx.

What you touch off in me—and this is why I introduced the point—is simply the old *Adam* of the English idiom. You interrupt me in my work. I don't wish to be dragged back into all *that*, I don't wish to be *drawn* into an argument whose form and even whose philosophical

terms arise from a culture in which the old ding-a-dong between Catholic and atheist universalists goes on and on and on; in which, generation after generation, the Catholic theologians and philosophers, like cunning groundsmen, prepare new pitches and dictate to their opponents that they must, once again, play over every inch of this novel pitch or they will have lost the series; in which, to stand somewhere between Catholic and anti-Catholic philosophy, is to give one a unique status as a Referee.

If "going into Europe" entails going back into all that then we might just as well go into Eire. Meanwhile there may be a little time left to get on with our work. I am not clear what you mean by "self-identification" nor by what means we judge how one kind of self-identification is "fuller" than another, unless the conclusion is entailed in the premise — that only self-identification "through religious symbolism" can be full. In this case, if you are an atheist, your self-proclaimed "inconsistency" must reside in the fact that you find a mystified self-identification to be fuller than a naked and demystified one. This does not assort well with your vindication (and your personal example) of the values of rationality, wherever these may lead, nor with your reminders of the tragic side of human culture.

Self-identification through religious symbolism may certainly be more comforting: that is true. But neither your business nor mine has been to provide comforts. I cannot see you in the ward of mortality, like a tea-lady with a philosophical trolley. But your other proposition touches more closely on history: "religious consciousness . . . is an irreplaceable part of human culture, man's only attempt to see himself as a whole—that is to say, as both object and subject."

If religious consciousness is "irreplaceable", this is a statement not only about the past (how man has seen himself) but about the future. I find this surprising, since elsewhere you have written so acidly across the pages of those visionaries who knew what the future must hold. In this case, you must affirm this because from your observation of the past and of the present, you have deduced a constant, an intrinsic component of man's nature, which can only find expression in a "religious consciousness".

There are many statements, of fact and of value, and of value disguised as fact, in that short statement. One may readily grant that the religious consciousness has been a part of past human culture. How far it has been present in all past cultures is a highly technical question, in answering which we would not only have to consult anthropologists but would also have to define the term "religious" and decide how far any myth (whether supported or not by a doctrine, by priests or holy men, whether entailing or not notions of an after-life, rewards and punishments, etc.) may be defined as religion. The definition of "religious"

would clearly influence very largely our conclusions: if (for the sake of argument) we defined "religious" in such a way as to include all attempts by man to see himself as a whole, then your argument will, like a well-built canoe, ride triumphantly through all succeeding rapids.

Point Two: If we accept that religious consciousness has been part of past human culture, then it follows that it has been irreplaceable, since we cannot replace any part of what is already past. But, and Three. If "irreplaceable" is a statement not of fact but an imputation of value then it is a very different order of statement. If you imply that the religious consciousness was, is, and by implication may always be "irreplaceable", because it fulfils some intrinsic human need—and a profoundly significant and valued need (since who would deny that men should "self-identify" and be allowed to see themselves whole?)—then we are directed to an argument far too large to pursue, an argument, moreover, which entails so many insertions of normative judgements that it could not be pursued by logical means alone. One arm of the compass is fixed upon that single word, "irreplaceable": the other has swung through 180 degrees, from a banal statement of fact to the largest assertion of value: as to the approved function of religious consciousness in the past, as to man's essential nature, and as to future social evolution. As you know, many men could readily assent to Point Two, but find (at Point Three) only a matter for regret: would show that religious consciousness had constricted and confused cultural advance, or had inhibited man's self-knowledge—perhaps even his self-identification. I will not myself be drawn, at this moment, to either side of this argument.

Point Four. When you say this unexamined quantum is "man's only attempt to see himself as a whole" it is a statement which is either—as history—patently and outrageously inexact, or else, once again, the conclusion is entailed in the premise. I don't refer only to those thinkers who have consciously set themselves in the face of religious forms and ideas to see man as a whole, but to an artistic and literary culture (to which I happen myself to owe greater debts) which has been throughout history enlisted in the same attempt. If you tell me that *King Lear* and *Le Rouge et le Noir*, *War and Peace* and *The Prelude* are, at root, manifestations of the religious consciousness, then I can only throw my hand in, and ask that we may play through the game again, more slowly, and without marked cards.

And if (my Fifth Point) you insist upon marking each card of thought or art or secular social ritual as "religion", because of the derivation of its symbols or its forms, we are still in the youth of man's secular self-knowledge. How can you predict, or I contradict, what forms man's self-knowledge, in its fullest affective and symbolic forms, may take? At least (Point Six) one might hope that atheist culture can

transcend the aridities of negating religious consciousness, and move to a more positive and unselfconscious appropriation and expression of the (still imperfectly-defined) needs which it fulfilled. As a matter of fact, I had thought that this was what was happening—and had been happening for some two hundred years. It is not because I wish to close the doors to imaginative sympathy towards forms of religious consciousness, whether past or present, but because I resent being drawn back into a fruitless argument upon terms which I reject, that I offer these objections.

The point, however, was my allegiance to an outworn English idiom. I proceed by digressions, and that is an idiom also—an essayist's contrivance. Never mind, we proceed, if circuitously, and there is perhaps more logic in the progress than I mean, as yet, to show. I have been jesting with you, you indomitable and seasoned jester, because I am the product, perhaps the prisoner, of a jesting culture. If you come before us to ask us questions, I will ask questions of your questions.

But I cannot fly. When you spread your wings and soar into the firmament where Kierkegaard and Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers and Sartre and the other great eagles soar, I remain on the ground like one of the last of the great bustards, awaiting the extinction of my species on the diminishing soil of an eroding idiom, craning my neck into the air, flapping my paltry wings.¹³ All around me my younger feathered cousins are managing mutations; they are turning into-little eagles, and whirr! with a rush of wind they are off to Paris, to Rome, to California. I had thought of trying to join them (I have been practising the words "essence", "syntagm", "conjuncture", "problematic", "sign") but my wings grow no bigger. If I were to try I know very well that with my great bulk of romantic moralisms, my short-sighted empirical vision, and my stumpy idiomatic wings, I would fall—plop!—into the middle of the Channel.

I belong to an emaciated political tradition, encapsulated within a hostile national culture which is itself both smug and resistant to intellectuality and failing in self-confidence; and yet I share the same idiom as that of the culture which is my reluctant host; and I share it not only through the habits of a writer but out of preference. This, if I am honest, is my self, my sensibility. Take Marx and Vico and a few European novelists away, and my most intimate pantheon would be a provincial tea-party: a gathering of the English and the Anglo-Irish. Talk of free-will and determinism, and I think first of Milton. Talk of man's inhumanity, I think of Swift. Talk of morality and revolution, and my mind is off with Wordsworth's Solitary. Talk of the problems of self-activity and creative labour in socialist society, and I am in an instant back with William Morris—a great bustard like myself, who has never been allowed into the company of such antiquated (but

"reputable") eagles as Kautsky or Plekhanov, Bernstein or Labriola—although he could, if given the chance, have given them a peck or two about their gizzards.

Well, that is what I am, and it is a ludicrous predicament. It is an excuse for any amount of silence. Holding for too long, and with too few companions, to an unregarded position breeds—as this letter has already shown—symptoms identical to those of egotism. I have become too much aware, in my silence, of the motions of my own mind; too detached from the thought around me into which my own argument can never be inserted; too stubborn in resistance to assimilation.



And then, abruptly, out of that unassimilated past there comes a familiar voice: Leszek Kolakowski! There was something in the Clan of our small detachment which, many years ago, was caught between two withering ideological fires, which makes me catch my breath, and resume that past: to question where we are going, what I have become. It is no fault of yours that all these sheets of paper fall upon your head.

Of course, we have both changed. Let us examine a little how we have changed and why.

We both adopt (as I understand it) a common stance in relation to the Marxist tradition. We might classify the ideas which are offered as Marxisms in several ways. There is, (1) Marxism conceived of as a self-sufficient body of doctrine, complete, internally-consistent, and fully realized in a particular set of written texts: of Marx (early or late): of Marx and Engels: or with some hyphenated addition, as—Lenin, —Trotsky, —Mao-tse-tung. While here or there an individual may be found who claims to "know" the true set of texts better than anyone else, this Marxism is normally found in some institutionalized form: since no-one can prevent reality from changing in ways which the texts did not (without some pushing and pulling) anticipate, there must be not only approved texts, but approved interpretations of those texts (or opinions outside them); and this entails an Office, or a Priest, or (with an intellectual sect) at least a priestly editorial board, which can signify approval and changes in the body of textual truth.

This is very familiar to both of us, and poignantly so. Reality changes, but the texts do not change: they are interpreted in new ways. Interpretation may be the work of men of great cunning, but I would accept your definition, of many years ago, that "a Marxist" in sense (1) "refers to a man with a mental attitude characterized by his willingness to accept institutionally-approved opinions".¹⁴ One may detect very quickly the tricks of this mode of thought: when anyone commences a sentence with "Marxism teaches that . . ." or "Let us apply Marxism to . . .", one knows ~~that~~ the text is being brought to the object of

examination. It is difficult, if one steps out in this way with the right foot, not to ensure that the left foot of self-confirmation follows. But all true intellectual work requires a more dialectical image than that: thought wrestles with its object, and in the encounter both are changed.

We need not be reminded of the disgraces entailed by this mode of thought during the zenith of its most notorious institutional embodiment, under the priestly care of the "Greatest Philologist of the World". You described these in your article on "Permanent and Transitory Aspects of Marxism" (1957):

"The 1950 Marxist knows that Lysenko's theory of heredity is correct, that Hegel represented an aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution, that Dostoevsky was nothing but decadence and . . . also that the resonance theory in chemistry is reactionary nonsense. Every 1950 Marxist *knows* these things, even if he has never learned what chromosomes are, has no idea in which century Hegel lived, never read one of Dostoevsky's books, or studied a high school chemistry book. To a Marxist all this is absolutely unnecessary so long as the content of Marxism is determined by the Office."

In its worst institutional expressions, this Marxism has done man's culture injury enough. It is sufficiently discredited. We may pass it over without further comment.

Or we might suppose that we should be able to do so. In fact, "Marxisms" of precisely this order have shown an astonishing vitality. Wherever, in 1956, we could find one such Marxism, we can find now three in its place. At the end of 1960, when our New Left Clubs (which were intended both as open local forums of socialist theory, and as local points of socialist initiatives) were already disintegrating under the attentions of the emissaries of various "fraternal" (and often vituperative) Marxist sects, I made this comment:

"I am getting bored with some of the members of 'Marxist' sects who pop up at Left Club meetings. . . to demand in a your-money-or-your-life tone of voice whether the speaker is a Marxist, whether he 'believes in' the class struggle, and whether he is willing to give instant adhesion to this or that version of the Creed."

Such interlocutors would have achieved much the same effect "if they had simply cribbed the lines of Ancient Pistol: 'Under which king, Besonian? Speak, or die!'"

"Most Clubs have suffered from one or more of these prophets, heterodox or orthodox, of diabolical and hysterical mysterialism. The connections are seen, but they are seen to be everything; and everything can be reduced to a few basic texts . . . Marxism is conceived of, not as a living tradition, but as a self-enclosed doctrine, a means of flattening and simplifying whatever phenomena are under investigation so that certain plausible facts may be selected (and all others discounted) in order to ornament or 'prove' pre-existing assumptions. A **great** deal of what is today most stridently acclaimed as 'Marxism' is no more than thinking of this order,

whether it commences with the assumption that Soviet leaders are all-sinners or all-knowing. This accounts for the scholastic style in which so many 'Marxist' statements are couched—theses and counter-theses so neatly sewn at every seam that reality cannot break in at any point."¹⁵

I wrote this in 1960, and since that time such Marxisms have reproduced, have held and added to their adherents, while I and many of my old comrades have, outside of our more professional roles, fallen into silence. The priests have multiplied, the jesters have been laughed down. These Marxisms may be nonsense: but they certainly fulfil some human need.

They are not, of course, altogether nonsense. Their selection of texts may be better than the old ones; an argument among many sects is immensely more fruitful than the apologetics of one orthodoxy; and even where the mode of thought is wrong, subtle and perceptive minds can be found at work within it. And yet, if this is where "Marxism" necessarily leads, then neither of us are of that company.

Let us pass (2) to another mode of thought which is identified as Marxism. In this, Marxism is upheld less as doctrine than as "method". It is a definition which offers difficulties, but difficulties do not make it invalid. Clearly we mean something more than that Marx was a scholar; that (as you reminded us) his work was distinguished by "a relentlessly rationalist attitude, a sense of radical criticism, a distaste for sentimentality in social research, a deterministic method". Such qualities (as you observed) were "not characteristic only of him and his followers", they "do not suffice to distinguish a separate school of thought".

The method must be more exactly defined than that. But if we try to do so (and this argument could be—and has been—immensely prolonged) we encounter, in the end, an irresolvable difficulty in distinguishing between Marx's method and some of his premises and, indeed, some of his conclusions. If we say that his method was dialectical, we are saying something: I believe that we are saying a good deal. But we encounter impossible problems when we attempt to distinguish Marx's dialectics conceived of as pure method from the dialectics of other thinkers. And what is worse, these problems beckon us away from matters of substance to disputations which I can only describe as scholastic. We must therefore go on to say that Marx's method was dialectical and it was also that of historical materialism. I think that this also means something. But in defining that meaning, we must define further historical materialism: that it entails certain proposals as to the relations between social being and social consciousness: indeed, it would be an etiolated definition of Marx's method which did not point us towards his way of examining capital and class-conflict.

I am not jibing at those who associate themselves with Marxism as method. Many of those whose work commands my respect would define their position in this way. But I am not persuaded as to the adequacy of the definition. If by "method" we are using the word in a loose and metaphorical sense—that I associate myself, very generally, with Marx's way of working, with some of his premises, his terms of historical analysis, and with certain conclusions—then we are really saying that we are associated with a "tradition" or school of thought: this is a different position, and one which I will soon discuss. But if by "method" we mean something more exact we will find, in the end, that method inextricable from the work:

"O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

The proof of this is to be found in experience. For those who espouse the notion of Marxism as method with the most intellectual rigour are exactly those who are caught insensibly in the undertow which drags them back to Marxism (1) as doctrine. In attempts to define what is "essential" or "basic" to Marx's method they must define the essential texts. As revisionists, they may point to later corruptions or deformities in the Marxist tradition; they dig under the shale and slag which has accumulated over the pure and original load of ore; they discard Lenin, or Engels; they uncover the early Marx. From "method" they pass to "model"; there is an essential model to be uncovered, before or after 1844; fertilized by semiotics or structuralism, their researches break into regions of epistemology undreamed of by Marx; they spin a miracle-world of gossamer threads, "admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit". Through this filigree fairy-world Marx, whose concrete historical imagination "worketh according to the stuff, and is limited thereby", would have walked with astonishment.

You must forgive, again, the English idiom. I had supposed that Bacon had long voiced a serious objection to both Marxisms (1) and (2), when he had objected (in *The Advancement of Learning*) of the schoolmen—

"For as water will not ascend higher than the level of the first springhead from whence it descendeth, so knowledge derived from Aristotle, and exempted from liberty of examination, will not rise again higher than the knowledge of Aristotle."

But this was before the advance of modern phenomenological technology, and the discovery, by certain projectors on the Left Bank of the Seine, of the Cartesian Well.

Let us say again that the coexistence of many Marxisms (2) is a situation enormously more conflict-fraught, and hence more charged with intellectual vitality, than the dogmatic conformisms or anti-conformisms which passed so widely as Marxisms in 1950. And let us add that—as you argued in your essay "In Praise of Inconsistency"—there are virtues to be found in the fact that all men are not rigorous thinkers.¹⁶ For "Marxism as method", when pursued with less rigour, has served as a kind of permission for a critical eclecticism. Men could use the notion, perhaps with the aid of a little evasion or opportunism, in order to set aside some difficult enquiries for which they were poorly equipped, while pursuing and advancing knowledge in their own more specialist fields.

There is, however, an opportunism rather grander and more evasive than this: I will describe it as Marxism as Heritage (3). All human culture is a super-market in which we may shop around as we choose, although some products are more gorgeous and more heavy than others. Karl Marx was a great man, and so was Jesus Christ; so too were Hegel, Husserl, Tolstoy and Blake. The producer of ideas may be forgotten, it is the customer who must be pleased. If on any day we feel like doing a Marxist or an existentialist or a Hegelian intellectual thing, we can pop into the glittering culture-market and pick up an appropriate product of that brand. We pay our money in a footnote and all debts are met. Why should we concern ourselves further with the ardour and skill of the workman in his ill-lit workshop who first turned this product in his hands?

You are familiar with this argument. Indeed, in a more serious sense you once proposed it (but with a limiting clause to the natural and social sciences) yourself:

"The greatest triumph of an eminent scholar comes precisely when his achievements cease to be a separate school of thought; when they melt into the very tissue of scientific life and become an elemental part of it, losing in their process their separate existence."

"We can assume", you proposed,

"that with the gradual refinement of research techniques in the social sciences and humanities, the concept of Marxism as a separate school of thought will gradually become blurred and ultimately disappear entirely. (There is no 'Newtonism' in physics, no 'Linneism' in botany, no 'Harveyism' in physiology, and no 'Gaussism' in mathematics.) This implies that what is permanent in Marx's work will be assimilated in the natural course of scientific development. In the process some of his theses will be restricted in scope, others will be more precisely formulated, still others will be discarded."

In the social sciences and humanities (you allowed) this process of assimilation would be much slower than in the analogy from natural

science. In philosophy you foresaw a rather different evolution: Marxism, like Platonism, would remain as a distinct school of thought.

I was, and remain, uneasy at this presentation, with which you yourself may no longer be in agreement. You were not of course forecasting an instant assimilation: but your metaphor of "gradual blurring" suggested an assimilation already well-advanced, and with little accent upon the ideological conflicts which might be met with on the way.

Your statement arose from your particular experience in Poland and in 1956. You were far more aware (it could not but be so) of the deformities and constrictions of the Stalinist ideology masquerading as Marxism than you were of the deformities of capitalist ideology. It may even have seemed, at times, as if Marx's influence was being held prisoner within the forbidding institution which had been given his name; that he need only be set free to walk at will through intellectual culture; that Stalinism's ill will alone prevented his ideas-from meeting with their due acceptance among those men of good-will who made up the social sciences of the rest of the world.

You were proposing a fluency of exchange between Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers, a removal of false suspicions and fictitious polarities between scholars. And your proposition met with an instant assent from one scholar of outstanding courage and of true goodwill in the "West". I am thinking of C. Wright Mills, who at once accepted your extended hand; who proposed, in turn, that this "assimilation" was well-advanced, and that Marx stood with Weber, Mannheim and Veblen in the "classical tradition" of sociology.

And yet I am not persuaded that too much can be made of this assimilation. The influence of certain ideas which perhaps originated from the Marxist tradition is certainly enormous: This influence is sometimes creative, and it can sometimes be found in vulgarized, dwarfish forms within the work of men (one thinks of the paltry economic reductionism in the work of W. W. Rostow) who are ardent anti-Marxists and apologists for capitalism. But in the social sciences, at least, I think you greatly under-estimated the capacity for capitalist society to generate and regenerate its own defensive ideological formations. (That "historicist" metaphor, which elides a more complex process, is offensive to you, I know. I will try to clarify the point of ideological formation later.) Social science, as fostered by many of the institutions of capitalist society, is not always a beast of good-will nor one with which any kind of Marxist finds it easy to assimilate. (Wright Mills wrote more than one eloquent testimony to this point.) Stalinism may have accentuated but certainly did not invent nor determine its intellectual evolution. There have been, after all, other insurgents (such as a native working class) to keep in order.

These arguments belong not to epistemology but to the sociology of knowledge. But my objection could be sustained at other levels. At least you may agree that a loose assertion of Marxism as (3) could, if not further examined, encourage that opportunism of the super-market in which any product is as good as any other and all is consumer's choice—an opportunism of which you are personally so incapable that its seduction for others may not even be imaginable. If you think of assimilation, you think of a strenuous encounter: but others think of a row of miscellaneous paperbacks. If you think of heritage, you think of the active process of intellectual self-reproduction: cleansing thought of inexact concepts and fashioning ones more exact. But in Britain, when we think of heritage (and for all my jests, some of what Tom Nairn says is true) we surrender to inertia; we lie upon our heritage like a Dunlopillo mattress and hope that, in our slumbers, those good, dead men of history will move us forward. We are dosed with eclecticism (or with opportunism given the brave name of empiricism) as regularly as we are dosed with librium; the public health service pays for one and the University Grants Committee pays for the other; it scarcely matters which pays for which, since the Government pays for all. Someone will make huge profits one day from the public dispensation of Marxism as Heritage.

We are back within the sociology of knowledge once more. I cannot help it: I am trained as an historian, I must always shuttle to-and-fro, since history itself has always been a weaver. But if we propose a fourth position, Marxism as Tradition (4), then we might escape the objections that I find in (3) and which we both find in (1) and (2).

In choosing the term tradition I chose it with a sense of the meanings established for it within English literary criticism. You might prefer, as a philosopher, the term "school". But it is easier, to my mind, to think of a plurality of conflicting voices which, nevertheless, argue within a common tradition than to think of this plurality within a school.

The notion of tradition entails some of the advantages but avoids certain difficulties of Marxism (2). It allows a large measure of eclecticism—and Marxists (1) and (2) will assert that it allows too much—without the unprincipled invitation to self-dissolution of (3). One difficulty in (2) was that it tended to exclude (at a certain point) all modes of self-criticism which were not self-validating. That is, Marxism as method must insist that *some* method can be defined: and this, I tried to show, entailed endorsing certain premises, certain texts, and indeed certain conclusions as the inviolable essence of Marxism. This may allow for flexible and creative thought. But what remains disallowed is the criticism of that method itself by criteria external to the method: we may criticise one text in the light of another text, or a prior text in the light of a later one, but if we are consistent about a Marxism as some

essence of method or doctrine, we are confined, in the end, to criticism of it within its own terms, in terms of itself.

When the intelligent editor of the Pelican edition of *Grundrisse* can write, without irony, that "the manuscript contains enough material to fuel perhaps several generations of additional philosophical treatises", then he demonstrates rather accurately the kind of scholasticism tailed in such exegesis, as well as indicating the socio-intellectual *couche* into whose hands Marxism (2) is increasingly falling. What are lost are, precisely, the empirical controls and the empirical transfusions—leading on to the breaking and making anew of concepts—intrinsic to the method of historical materialism. The recent emphasis given in several Marxist quarters to the structural organization of Marx's concepts, and to their function in revealing "hidden" as opposed to manifest social relations, is valid, and, indeed, familiar; what is invalid is the supposition that such hidden relations are beyond reach of empirical criticism and verification, or the inference that a competence in some kind of "structural" philosophy provides entrance to some higher Marxist academy, aloof from the collisions of evidence and the awkward confrontations of experience.

If, on the other hand, we are willing to bring any and every part of Marxist thought under scrutiny—and to employ any instrument of criticism which seems legitimate (whether historical evidence, or the examination of its inner consistency, or the well-founded objections of intellectual opponents)—then we can only describe ourselves as Marxists in the fourth sense. Nor need this be as airy and indefinite a position as many who have been conditioned by the existence and claims of other Marxisms will suppose.

This is so, in part, because of the very stature, universality, originality and power of Marx's work; the disciplines he commanded and reshaped; his characteristic methods and preoccupations; the many voices added to the tradition since his death; and the extent of contemporary Marxist discourse. This tradition exists; it has defined itself in Marx's work and in the evolution (contradictory as that is) of his ideas. The point is (if one affirms this tradition as one's own) less to define the tradition than to define where one stands within it.

In doing this we are still, in a way, defining that part of the tradition which we most value, and which commands—in spite of inquisitors and impostors—our allegiance. When you did this, for yourself, in 1957, you selected exactly those parts which also command me:

"Typical for Marx is . . . the tendency to emphasize those primary social divisions which are most influential in determining historical development. . . Typical of Marx is a certain kind of historicism which not only does away with evaluating historical phenomena from the standpoint of a moralizer who stands guard over eternal values; which not only is based on a general principle as to the historical

relativity of the subjects under study, but also on the conviction that human nature is the product of man's social history and that our entire conception of the world is 'socially subjective'."

And again; when you are defining Marxism's continuance, as a school, in very much the same sense as my "tradition":

"Marxism in this meaning of the term does not refer to a doctrine which can either be accepted as a whole or rejected as a whole. It does not mean a universal system but a vibrant philosophical inspiration, affecting our whole way of looking at the world; a stimulus forever active in the social intelligence and social memory of mankind. Its permanent validity is a consequence of the new and ever important perspectives which it opened to us: enabling us to look at human affairs through the prism of universal history; to see, on the one hand, how man in society is formed in the struggle against nature, and, on the other hand, the simultaneous process of humanizing nature by man's work; to consider thinking as a product of practical activity; to unmask myths of consciousness as being the result of ever-recurring alienations in social existence and to trace them back to their proper sources. . . ."

To this (in my own allegiance to the Marxist tradition) I would add little, and, I think, subtract nothing, unless a use of the term "historicism" which I would reject. I would add more explicitly than you do that as an historian I find the dialectical method of analysis—not as reduced to terms of formal logic but as evidenced repeatedly in the fluency of both Marx's and Engel's own analysis—to be the clue to a thousand hidden meanings: this intuition into the double-sidedness of things, the potential within the form, the contradictions of process, the consequences of consequences. And I would add, as you would do, my tribute to Marx's great-hearted commitment to the practical movement of the proletariat.

If one apprentices oneself to a master, one does not do so to become a copyist, but to become a craftsman in one's own right. Apprenticeship may even involve (as Gerard Manley Hopkins once advised) the precept: "Admire and do otherwise." And another problem is involved when thought passes from a master to his disciples: what was a whole way of thinking becomes instantly codified, reduced to system: a metaphor is made into a rule. Indeed, the master himself, solicited by disciples made anxious by the grey in his hair, or impelled by the need to give laws or write programmes, may be an accomplice in reducing his own thought to code. We know well how this turned out in the case of Marx and of Engels.

And so one may give allegiance to a tradition, in which one learned one's own craft, while holding that its codified expression is largely wrong, and not only that some of the master's ideas were wrong (which must go without saying unless we are servants of God) but—and this can be more significant—that certain ideas that were profoundly right were (when set out as system) given an expression that falsified them in

perceptible ways. In this, I have no doubt, you and I are in agreement. But our professional preoccupations are different, and we are likely to accent the problems in different ways. So, once again, I must ask you to accompany me on a detour, which may serve to clarify some points which will arise at the end of this letter.

You are concerned to examine Marx's language within an epistemological discipline: you explain the obscure, repair imperfect and hasty passages of logic, and where the logic is too fractured for repair (or involves a hidden and unsuspected assumption) you point this out. I am also concerned with Marx's language, but in the sense in which it sometimes masks or rigidifies his ulterior meaning. To a philosopher such an exercise may seem improper: how can we examine a meaning apart from the words in which it is expressed—or if we can intuit one, what tools are available to carry intuition further?

To this a historian may, I think, give a legitimate answer. If in the process of historical analysis a writer can demonstrate the interconnectedness of disparate phenomena and regularities (within similar causal contexts) of cultural formations—if he can show "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure"—this is an achievement which may properly be distinguished from any formal description which that same writer gives of his own procedures, or, indeed, from any systematic exposition which he may generalize from his findings as to the historical process. We often encounter evidence of this distinction. The further we move from the stricter branches of philosophy the more it becomes true that any account which a cultural producer may offer as to his own mode of working may (important as it will be) be a thing distinct from the way in which he actually works.

Marx's work (and some of the best of the work of Engels) was informed by a fluent and sensitive apprehension of the dialectical interrelations of social being and social consciousness. When they attempted to explain this mode of apprehension and its object (to reduce process to system) they could offer approximate definitions only. And such definitions, if examined with care, may be seen to be ambiguous, in that they may either be read as statements of fact (this structure in society or this historical law may be said to exist) or as a metaphor of the social process (the process may best be understood if we suppose that it happened in this kind of way). I am unskilled in this kind of language: you have expressed arguments of a similar kind more clearly.¹⁷ At least I know that the thinker who mistakes metaphor for fact is in for trouble.

I have already indicated (eight years ago) objections to one such theoretical reification of metaphor: the lamentable image of "basis and superstructure". The Marxist tradition has included too few poets who risked their hand at philosophy. For any poet could tell, in an instant,

that any human existential process ~~must~~ be constricted and deformed which is contained within a **metaphor** out of the text-book of a constructional engineer. The point was far from original, although the particular way in which I proposed it—that we must say that the signpost was pointing in the **wrong** direction, while, at the same time, we must accept the existence of the place towards which it was mis-pointing—was less familiar.¹⁸

But such comments as this, proposed too bluntly and in the English idiom, do not rise to the level of sophistication requisite to merit notice in the current Marxist discourse. When hundreds of thousands of brilliant words—and *on this very theme* of infra-structure and supra-structure—flow from the **Euromarxist** presses—when there is such a colicatenation of eagles in flight around the loftiest mountains—why should these interrupt their concourse because one of the last of the great bustards goes—hop, flap, **plonk!**—from one dwarfish tussock to another? Meanwhile in serious intellectual circles the argument about basis/superstructure goes *on and on and on . . .* The argument is vitiated at root by this error: and this error, in turn, radiates error into discussions of ideology, aesthetics, social class. A whole continent of discourse is being developed, with its metropolitan centres and its villas in the mountains, which rests, not upon the solid globe of historical evidence, but on the precarious point of a strained metaphor.

When I deride this metaphor I do so because it offends that very sense of process, of the inter-action of social being and social consciousness, which I gained from Marx. And also because I have found any such metaphor (or model derived from it) actively unhelpful in my own work as historian. I do not **propose** another model. The closest I have come to doing so was, many years ago, in a discussion arising from Raymond Williams's *The Long Revolution*:

"If Mr Williams will abandon his vocabulary of 'systems' and 'elements' and his diffuse pluralism, and if Marxists will abandon the mechanical metaphor of **base**/superstructure and the determinist notion of 'law', then both might look once more at a phrase of **Alasdair MacIntyre**: 'what. . . the mode of production does is to provide . . . a kernel of human relationship from which all else grows.' Both might then accept that the mode of production and productive relationships determine cultural processes in an *epochal* sense; that when we speak of the capitalist mode of production for profit we are indicating at the same time a 'kernel' of characteristic human relationships—of exploitation, domination, and acquisitiveness—which are inseparable from this mode, and which find simultaneous expression in all of Mr Williams's 'systems'. Within the limits of the epoch there are characteristic tensions and contradictions, which cannot be transcended unless we transcend the epoch itself: there is an economic logic *and* a moral logic and it is futile to argue as to which we give priority since they are different expressions of the same 'kernel of human relationship'. We may then rehabilitate the notion of capitalist or bourgeois culture . . . (**with**) its characteristic patterns of acquisitiveness, competitiveness, and individualism.¹⁹

That is expressed more loosely than I might express it now. We remain dependent upon a metaphor, although 'kernel' has the merit of being a vitalist and generative metaphor, and not one which must lead on inevitably to 'concrete' formulations and to 'ivory towers'. It has the more considerable merit of evicting from our very mode of historical apprehension a schizoid notion of man, whose body/soul duality leaves him, in the end, edged towards antinomies in which food is exchanged for morals or for thought. The difficulty with the metaphor of 'kernel' is that it still suggests that all the possibilities of growth and of evolution are implicit, nucleated within the original nut, so that it still fails to comprehend the full dialectical process which entails qualities (consciousness and intentions) not to be expressed in any vegetative, organic analogy.²⁹ It may well be that no metaphor can be devised which is not in specifically human terms.

I mentioned also the determinist notion of 'law', and we can employ exactly the same method of criticism to examine this. In the course of historical analysis one may identify recurrent patterns of behaviour and sequences of events which may *only* be described (in a retrospective rather than a predictive sense) as being causally related. Since such events ensue in a manner independent of conscious human volition, it is easy to make this process intelligible by saying it is subject to certain 'laws'. But 'law', once again, may be intended as metaphor or fact. There is a difference between saying that a process works itself out in a known and expected way—that it conforms to laws—and saying that it arises as a consequence of law, is *lawed*.

When we speak metaphorically of "a law of nature" or of "the laws of love" or even (as Marx did) of "the economic law of motion of capitalist society", we may mean something quite different from predictive, scientific law. Law, in the second sense, entails at once a determinism—we cannot be voluntary agents if we are subject to law. In the first sense we can mean (although I do not suggest that I can show that Marx always intended this meaning) something closer to the phrase: "this is the way it works". And in this case an alternative term lies ready to hand. For if we replace the notion of the *laws* of social change by that of *logic*—a metaphor which may include the idea of causal relationships while excluding its determinist, predictive connotations—then certain "historicist" features of Marx's thought fall away and Marxists appear as honest men. "Every honest man is a Prophet", wrote William Blake:

"He utters his opinion both of private and public matters. Thus: If you go on So, the result is So. He never says, such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer, not an Arbitrary Dictator."

It was through this semantic confusion (to which, certainly, both

Marx and Engels were accomplices) that the notion of the laws of historical change, having a metaphysical (and hence extra-historical) existence independent of man's agency, took root in the Marxist tradition. But if these laws held predictive force, then men's ultimate freedom declined to the recognition of necessity: submission to, or at the most acceleration of, the general historic process; a submission which echoed a submission far older than this in man's thought: "nel sua voluntade è la nostra pace". And in the most corrupt, as also the most influential, sub-tradition of Marxism—the Marxism (1) which, nonetheless, remains historically one part within the Marxism (4)—the notion of agency declined to that of planning: to the manipulation of the economy, or of people, from above by an élite with the scientific know-how of history, the Marxist vanguard. The kingdom of freedom became the kingdom where only one party, and then one man, was free, and where his whim was other men's necessity.

This detour arose from a consideration of Marxism (4). I suggested that the Marxist tradition defined itself historically and existentially, and hence it contains, whether we like it or not, all those sub-traditions (the Marxisms (1) and (2)) which can claim some relevant descent from Marx's ideas—his errors and ambiguities as well as his discoveries. It may also include sub-traditions or individual thinkers who affirm allegiance to the tradition, because they own that Marx, more than any other man, saw to the heart of the matter; but who nevertheless hold themselves free to examine and reject any part of his thought. So far from this being a position of opportunism or eclecticism (as in Marxism (3)), I argued that for any thinker pretending to system it may be—and is at the present time—a comfortless and strenuous one, since it must entail a definition (and definitions continually renewed) as to where he stands within it. And I then entered into this detour, on metaphor and social process, to indicate ways in which I myself attempt this self-definition.

The question arises: if a great part of Marxism (1) is politically damaging and a caricature of rational thought, and if some part of Marxism (2) is intellectually-limiting and resistant to development, why should one maintain allegiance to the tradition at all? One part of the answer, which is intellectual, I hope I have already shown: one cannot be true to one's own thought in any other way. Another part is political: for strong political commitments remain in most Marxisms, and it can happen—I find that it happens sometimes in the case of my own relations with Marxists (1) of Trotskyist derivation—that one can share strong political commitments with Marxists with whom one's greatest source of disagreement is nevertheless about Marxism. It is not a case of hoping to "rescue" Marxism from these Marxists. That, I think, is hopeless. But there are many men with minds inside those

Marxisms, with whom one is engaged in common political struggles, with whom one may continue a dialogue, and who, in the end, may rescue themselves.

Another part of the answer is circumstantial. It depends upon where one is placed, and, for intellectual producers, it may depend even upon what discipline one works within. In my own case the choice presents no difficulty. Marxist historiography was never, in Britain, deformed beyond recovery, even when failing to make a clear intellectual disengagement from Stalinism. We had, after all, the living line of Marx's analysis of British history—in *Capital*, in Marx and Engels' correspondence—continually present to us. To work as a Marxist historian in Britain means to work within a tradition founded by Marx, enriched by independent and complementary insights by William Morris, enlarged in recent times in specialist ways by such men and women as V. Gordon Childe, Maurice Dobb, Dona Torr and George Thomson, and to have as colleagues such scholars as Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Eric Hobsbawm, V. G. Kiernan and (with others whom one might mention) the editors of this Register. I could find no possible cause for dishonour in claiming a place in this tradition.

Indeed, it is the creative strength of this tradition behind and alongside me which gives me the audacity to flap from tussock to tussock of thought. I think it even possible that the English tradition of Marxist historiography may be able to stand comparison with that of any other country. And (to cease jesting) I am not finally convinced that the English intellectual idiom must necessarily become extinct, or become so archaic that it will debar men from the conversation of the world, under the pressure towards some eurocentric or universal intellectual style. I know of no clause in the Treaty of Rome by which I am obliged to cede my intellectual identity into the hands of some supra-national commission of universalists. Indeed, I have looked at this new euro-marxism, and I doubt its claims to be a more advanced, more rigorous language: one may detect within it, not universalism, but that old brother-and-antagonist of ours, the idiom of Paris—an idiom one of whose historically-constant features has always been its claim to be, not an idiom, but universal thought.

In saying so, one adds that it has, on occasion, almost sustained that claim. And more so than the English, some of whose best thought, embedded in the contexts of drama and verse, in wise saws and instances, in idiomatic moralisms, defies translation. The dialectic of those idioms has long gone on, and each idiom needs the other, as the knife needs the whetstone; and to each knife the whetstone of the other, system ground upon substance, moralism ground upon logic. I will even agree that in many (although not all) areas of culture the French idiom is prior: they propose and we object. If there is another difference

it may be that many of the French, and most of all those English intellectuals who adopt a French idiom, assume (as the possessors of an idiom disguised as a universal must) that they could do perfectly well without the English. Whereas any English intellectual who advances to a certain point in his thought knows that he must both learn from and quarrel with the idiom of the French. One must attend to and admire M. Sartre and M. Lévi-Strauss, but in the heart of one's admiration there remains a watchful and quizzical eye.

If this is so, there might, at an outside chance, be a stay of execution for the bustard after all. One attends to what is said and to what one can understand. But it is not yet certain that one must change altogether one's mental vocabulary. Decimalization may have led us on towards a common European culture: towards the "supra-nationalism" of joining a European bourgeoisie with the same washing-powders, the same motels, the same pop stars, the same kinds of anxious marriages, the same cultural antibodies of drop-outs and hash, and the same rebellious students with the same Marxist brands. But even this reminds the traveller that it is *another* country that he goes abroad to see. It is not by our identities but by our differences that we can learn from each other.

It may yet prove to be the same in the itineraries of thought. The English idiom has travelled far, sometimes, it is true, protected by the navies of imperialism. As any historian of ideas has observed, a tradition may be carried by the most unlikely vector, and then by some twist of things, emerge as a creative art or voice. And, in the end, one may only act and write as one is; hoping, like all sad jesters, that some day someone may turn—as Kent turns to King Lear—and say: "This is not altogether fool, my lord."

I have explained why I affirm my allegiance to the Marxist tradition: in my discipline and in my idiom I have fellow workers who sustain me, and I can even (although with difficulty) sustain the quixotic notion that at some time, by some unforeseen twist of events (by conveying some new accent of thought to some emergent Marxist school in Calcutta or in Nairobi or in many-idiomed America) some element of this ~~quaintly-empirical~~ tradition of English Marxism could re-enter an international discourse. Agreed: a time could come when for political reasons, one could no longer choose to affirm oneself a Marxist. If institutional Marxisms, endorsed with power, proliferated and justified new crimes against the intellect and worse crimes against men; if all Marxists except a last grey company were either priests of established power or self-deluded chiliastic sectaries; then we would be bound by a duty beyond intellectual consistency to say, "I dissent!" And we would be compelled to accept the evidence: that there is some cause in Marxist nature that breeds these hard hearts.

But that moment has not come. It has not yet come by any means.

And that we should contest, up to and beyond the last reason for hope, this nightmare becoming true is a reason why one should remain—as a combatant or even as an outlaw—within the Marxist tradition.

* * *

I do not know whether you accept these arguments, or where you would place yourself now within the Marxist tradition. You have not, so far as I know, come to the point of saying "I dissent". I imagine that you feel yourself to be a Marxist outlaw. You may even (from your experiences in Poland, West Germany, California—and, if you will forgive me, your lack of *other* experiences and your inattention to other voices) feel that you are more of an outlaw than you are, that (save for a few friends) every Marxist's hand is against you.

Here are three comments of yours in your interview in *Encounter* (October, 1971):²¹

"When, in the West, I hear socialism interpreted in such a variety of obscurantist and even barbaric terms—for instance, the romantic nostalgia for a pre-industrial society, or a Bakunian faith in the revolutionary potential of the *lumpen proletariat*—that I am reminded of the notion of Hegel and Marx that progress is only brought about through its worst manifestations.

■ ■ ■

The blind enthusiasm for the meaningless idea of global revolution, which I met with particularly in America, was especially repugnant to me. I can't deny the possibility that this irrational revolt may be symptomatic of a genuine sickness of civilisation. But to be the symptom of a disease is not to be its remedy."

And (in reply to the question: "Is there much common ground between the New Left in the West and the Polish Left?"):

"I think the differences are more marked than the similarities. The Polish students who demonstrated in March 1968 were simply claiming the traditional liberties—freedom of speech, of Press, of learning and assembly—which to some elements of the New Left are nothing but 'treacherous bourgeois snares'. A Polish friend. . . recently wrote to me from Sweden saying that whenever he had dealings with the New Left he seemed to be watching a film of which he already knew the end. That is exactly how I feel. The kind of language that was used in the past to justify the most brutal oppression is now being repeated as though nothing had ever happened."

Now, this is difficult. These passages provoke me to a temper in which no kind of letter could be continued. I might simply tear these pages up, and scribble "apostate!" on the wall. I don't think I could ever hope to make you understand the sense of pain with which some of us read that final paragraph, *from you*, and *in that particular place*.

It is true that you point only to "some elements" of the New Left. But if there are other "elements", you have nothing to say of them or to them. And in any case, an acquaintance with us or with our thought would have been superfluous, since we are, precisely, at the end of that film whose end you already "know".

When one is assured in advance that one's end is known, that one's thought can be anticipated and that it is a theorem already disproved (moreover a malevolent theorem which justifies "brutal oppression") it is difficult to go on. You intend no personal offence, I know. As you say in the same interview: "I simply try to answer the questions that seem to me important without giving any special thought to the effect my answers may produce." The effect in this case was to give interior injury to those who had thought themselves your allies and your friends.

But I wish to continue a discussion, although you give me no reason for any expectation that you wish to enter a dialogue. And at this point I must turn back to the offending passages, and acknowledge that *in some part* the objections that you make to "elements" within the miscellaneous Western "Left" are identical with ones which I have already made myself, earlier in this letter, and with equal vehemence. Why, then, should I object? What a curious predicament—a nexus of crossed lines, old brooding grievances and old attachments, the counter-communication of plain anger—we have got into now!

One part of my objection belongs not to your arguments but to the sociology of their presentation: that is, to their consequences in a particular context. I will return to this in my conclusion. Here, let me say only this. In the East the critic of orthodox institutional Marxism must be courageous and intransigent, as you have been. He confronts an orthodoxy buttressed by the organs of the State, by reasons of power, by the inertia of an approved ideology. In the West a critic whose intellectual premises are identical may yet have to learn a different kind of wisdom. The reasons of State, the inertia of approved ideology—all these tilt to the other side.

We have had to learn, in this country where the intellectual components of all the Marxisms put together are small, certain reticencies and courtesies. If you criticize, with stridency, any section of the Left in certain places—and *Encounter* is, by intention and by subsidy, the first of these places—your criticism is not attended to for the sake of any particular discrimination which it may contain. It is absorbed, instantly, into ideology; that is, it is simply assimilated as one more *noise* against the Left, one more evidence that *all* the Left has failed, is brutal, *all* Marxism is incoherent, etc.; and if this evidence comes from Leszek Kolakowski then (not through your cogency but for your high repute) it is a veritable trophy to be hung at the cloudy altar of the established gods.

If a public statement of dissociation from some section (authentic or self-styled) of the Left must be made—as sometimes happens—then it must be as specific as possible, or it will immediately be turned against itself. Such language as "some elements" will not do. Indeed, it reminds me of another vocabulary of commination: have you not often been

defined as "certain elements" yourself? I don't of course ask you to inhibit your criticisms, but first to ensure that they are seriously *informed* (and not founded upon a casual impression of an aberrant and utterly transient student exhibition), and second to consider where you *place* them.

The other part of my objection is less contingent. In the last two years you have been passing from the criticism of irony to criticism by means of caricature. This is present in the passages I have cited: "romantic nostalgia for a pre-industrial society", "treacherous bourgeois snares". It is present in another gem dropped before *Encounter* readers: you disclaim belief "in a so-called total or global revolution, or in the *final* elimination of *all* alienation and a *wholly* peaceful state of society without conflicts and contradictions". These are my italics, and I italicize also the words which carry the same dismissive, caricaturing function in a passage from another recent article. In an essay on "Intellectuals against Intellect" published in *Daedalus* (a journal which is also, incidentally, subsidized, like *Encounter*, by the Ford Foundation, although it does not pursue ideological goals with equal *zest*)²² you write of—

"The ideals of anarchism and all those other social utopias that have had envy rather than a striving for justice as their underlying motivation, and that put forward as their aim the pulling down of the whole of mankind to the level of its most ignorant strata, thereby glorifying illiteracy as a proper road to the liberation of humanity.

This is not in criticism of any Marxism and I have no special loyalty to any anarchist thinkers. But it involves the same indiscriminating commination against a section of the Left, and employs the same method of caricature. Can you show, for example, that "the ideals of anarchism", as represented in the actual social aspirations of the most significant European anarchist movement of this century—the anarchists of Spain—conforms to your description? Orwell, Brennan, and other observers have given us a different account. But (you will say) you intended the criticism at a different level: as a criticism of ideas of particular thinkers—or of one thinker: let us say Bakunin. Why, then, is your criticism (in the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences) made in so imprecise a form? And is it, indeed, a criticism in terms of ideas? It would seem to belong (in a distinction which you have often made) to "genetic" rather than epistemological criticism:²³ that is, you are criticizing less the ideas than the psychological or social condition ("envy") out of which the thought arose. By such methods of philosophical criticism one may gain very quick results; and, moreover, results which confirm to the very echo the assumptions with which one started. And what of that other small phrase, dropped in so quietly, as

to "all those other social utopias", similarly grounded upon "envy"? Surely we have here once again our old acquaintance: "certain elements who. . ."? Since no precisions are offered, the noise which remains in the head after the voice has stopped is simply this: *all social utopias . . . envy.*

There is a small point here. In the East you formed a habit of making precise criticisms but with imprecise identifications of the actual persons/dogmas/legislation criticized. This was a habit apt to your context, the arcane wisdom imposed by censors and bureaucrats. Every reader knew instantly the corruptions, the irrationalisms, the approved Party spokespeople at which the criticisms were aimed—every reader except, perhaps, a puzzled censor. A general criticism might survive and take wing: a particular and poised criticism would incur administrative erasure. But a good habit in the East may be a bad habit in the West. So many varieties of doctrine are on offer that no-one will identify at which a general commination is directed: the category as a whole—"Marxists", "anarchists", "the New Left", "utopians"—will receive the attack. And why should this not be so? If you were to proclaim that you knew that certain leather articles (such as hand-bags) were infected with anthrax, and also warned against "all those other leather goods" which were equally infected, then the whole leather industry—jackets and belts, saddles, upholstery and shoes—must be regarded with anxiety as a locus of infection.

There are too many passages of this order in this article. Thus you refer to—

"the conversions of intellectuals to Hitlerism or Stalinism, which were conscious conversions to barbarism, known and accepted . . . Stalinism also attracted some people as an embodiment of Marxist universalism, and tempted others as a march of the 'splendid Asiatics' called to destroy decaying European civilization."

The context suggests that you are referring to "Western" intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s. Your criticism is once again "genetic": you *impute* certain motivations (and you offer no others): but at the same time you do not *examine* either motive or context. Any competent academic historian would explain to his students why one may not approach either ideas or social history in this kind of way. Nor do I think that your judgement is well-informed; nor that it contains any sense of the *politics* of those years, and the way in which choices arose. Thus I think it might be shown that many Western intellectuals who could properly be described as deluded or self-deluded by Stalinism were less interested in the Soviet Union (how much do you or I know about China today, although events demand that we take up some attitude?) than in the manifest crisis of the capitalist economy (and the class conflicts in their own countries), or in events in Spain or in

Germany or, later, in the resistance movements of France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece—events in which they were themselves participant and as to which they were very much better informed. They were "converts" to an existent Communist movement, in an actual social context whose ferocity of commitments were not of their intellectual invention, and it was from this that they were led on into other "Stalinist" deformities of thought.

Your premise is that intellectuals (who are distinct from other citizens with a social conscience and responsibilities) always move head-first. And their heads always move towards a system of thought (they are "converted" to Stalinism or anarchism); although, genetically, it may be shown that they only think that their heads are moving, while in reality it is their evil will or some passion ("envy") that invades the head. In a world of pure rationality or pure malevolence this might be so. But the world is not so pure: you cannot "hang it, as the country fellow speaks, by geometry."²⁴ It is not a question of whether one prefers impurities, an admixture of mind with more fallible human stuff. Whether or no, we must understand this world as it is; the mind's capacity for inconsistency, which you once praised,²⁵ must be apparent to us at every moment when we seek to analyse, not the logical ordering, but the historical imbrication of ideas in social movements.

Western intellectuals were not converted to Stalinism (or, in the first case, "to Hitlerism or Stalinism"—and why "Hitlerism" rather than the more analytic terms "Nazism" or "Fascism"?) only because they were either (1) conscious converts to barbarism, or (2) attracted by Marxist universalism, or (3)—and finally—tempted by the vision of Splendid Asiatics destroying European decadence. There were many, and more potent, motivations, both intellectual and in actual experience. I am unclear as to the distinction between two of the motivations you have selected: is it that in (1) the love is a love of barbarism *tout court* whereas in (3) we have a finer precision: the barbarism must be "Asiatic"? The discrimination, nice as it is, need not detain us, since while you might find, here or there, individual men, or statements by other men taken out of wider contexts, which supported your argument that such motivations were present, I defy you to show that these motivations were sufficiently widely distributed to be generalized in this way, or could be given anything like the priority among other motivations which you assert. I hold the unfashionable view—a view which is today most unfashionable of all among the non- or anti-Communist Left—that, in terms of the choices presented to them, the Communists of the 1930s and 1940s were not altogether wrong, intellectually or politically; certainly, that they were not wrong all of the time. I know that the Western Communist intellectuals with whom I associated did not sustain themselves with visions of splendid Asiatics

marching upon the West: their visions were of Panzers or of Sherman tanks rolling into the East, breathing racial purity or the freedom of capital down the barrels of their guns.

This is not a page of apologetics. I am simply asking for analysis and not caricature. One of the first casualties of Stalinist "realist" thought, I know, was Poland. And you, a Pole, cannot lightly forgive such an error. In saying that your thought comes from that tragic context—and I say it with humility—I am also saying that you cannot but think about this in a Polish idiom.

The point which I was offering to illustrate is that you have been passing from irony to caricature: or to mere abuse. Irony may be directed both against a friend and an antagonist. If used with effect, it is a small, accurate, fine-tempered weapon. It may wound, but it can wound only the particular point—the idea, the characteristic—at which it is directed. It is no blunt, belligerent instrument, as is abuse. Irony must succeed in striking exactly where it is aimed. If the aim misses, then it is not the victim but the ironist who is caught off-balance. And if the aim is good, the victim's ideas are not thereby "exploded", utterly exposed: they are questioned or corrected at one particular point. The wound may smart for a moment, but it will heal. Life evidences daily that friendship and indeed marriage can survive the mutual exchange of ironies.

They will not survive abuse nor repeated caricature. For caricature—when it is applied to thought or social movements—signals exactly that dialogue can no longer be sustained. What is caricatured is first set at a distance, then pointed at as "other", then falsified in such a way as to confirm our sense of antagonism, to make it all the easier for us to point out to strangers its deformities—its heavy jowl, its paunch, its shifty eyes. It means that all hope of rational argument has been given up.

Well, then, Leszek Kolakowski, old comrade of another time, where have we got to now? Others on the Left will say that you have "gone too far": all hope of dialogue is at an end. And this I *will* not say. I honour too highly your past, I owe too many debts to your work. Moreover, you write like a man still in a state of shock, whose subjective despair has engulfed, but only for a time, his workman's morale:

"One cannot completely exclude the possibility that contemporary admirers of barbarism represent a real tendency in the historical process and that all the technological and spiritual achievements of modern times will be destroyed in an unprecedented cataclysm, compared to which the fall of the Roman Empire will seem a trivial stumble . . ."

I agree: the possibility cannot be excluded.²⁶ It came very close to us indeed, through the agency of nuclear war, more than once in the two past decades, although the human agents were not exactly those to

whom you point. One excludes nothing: and Marx (we should not forget) did not exclude "the mutual ruin of the contending classes."

We do not exclude. Nor do we, without apparent and overwhelming reason, despair. For, if we do, we add in that instant one more particle to the reasons of despair. But with you one feels that despair has already made a deeper entry. It has broken into reason's gates.



To despair is to suffer, and we may not accuse a man for his suffering. Least of all may we do so when we have not shared his sequence of tragic experience. All we can do, and all that you would wish us to do, is to reason.

There are three areas of thought which appear among your present preoccupations: (1) the active danger of a messianic element, which you see as intrinsic to the Marxist tradition; (2) a distrust, not of intellect, but of intellectuals; (3) what I must propose as an imperfect assimilation of some parts of Western experience, which leaves you a prey to sociological nightmares of a familiar kind. I will attempt a comment on each of these.

In pursuing the first theme you have shown great consistency. In "Responsibility and History" (1957) you showed the consequences that have followed when "one messianic hope becomes the unique governor of life, the sole source of moral precepts and the only measure of virtue." I did not have the language then to dissect these problems. But (I show this to illustrate that we share more than a formal premise: even "Western" Marxists and former "Stalinists" have had moments of moral suffering) I will cite the crude lines of a poem which I find among my own notes of 1956. The poem is "In Praise of Hangmen":

"How can we other than
Honour that man
Who undertakes this social trust
Since someone must?

How much more honour then
To all those dedicated men
Who saved society
By rope and calumny!

So giving honour, we
Who moralise necessity,
With slats of sophistry erect
A gibbet of the intellect,

And from its foul and abstract rope
Suspend all social hope,
Until with swollen tongue
Morality herself is hung

In whose distended dedicated eyes
All honour dies."

You have worried at that problem (and I worry at it) ever since. In "The Priest and the Jester" (1959) you suggested:

"The most common hope of historiosophy is to identify or adjust the essence of man with his existence; that is, to assure that the unalterable aspirations of human nature will be fulfilled in reality.

This "secular eschatology", you implied, had become imbricated in the Marxist tradition: "current history can be characterized by its striving towards a lasting goal that can be defined and that will irrevocably end all existing conflicts." Every man is influenced, even in his "daily endeavours", by his eschatological assumptions: convinced that "history" is moving towards some final goal, we may consider our own acts and choices as "a kind of scraping together of pennies toward a pension fund for ourselves or mankind, and thus run the risk of scorning current facts and momentary values."

You did not, in this place, pursue the argument in its relation to Marx's thought: although you did imply (in a very general reference) that all systems of thought "which are supposed to give us certainty as the end result of their search, always give it at the very beginning", and in this sense commence with the revelation which they disclose. You returned in 1966 to a related problem in a brief study of "Historical Understanding and the Intelligibility of History".²⁹

This gem-like study, whose brevity rebukes my verbosity, glints with light from each of its facets. You commence with philosophical precisions as to the meanings of "understanding". You show the fallacy of expressive or behaviouristic notations of "understanding" which proceed by means of improper analogies from the behaviour of individuals to social process, or historical events. You insist that if history is to be intelligible—that is, can be "understood" as valued significance and not as natural process—these values must be inserted by the observer. As you have observed, "the human species enjoys no one's protection."³⁰ Any interpretation which offers a universal significance to man's history "must presuppose a non-empirical *potentia* which actualizes itself, thanks to history, but which places itself outside of history and therefore cannot be inferred or deduced from historical knowledge".

"It is in relation to this *potentia* or 'essence'—that history becomes endowed with significance, that it is henceforth not only the sequence of cause and effect, but above all the succession of approaches to the actualized essence. It is difficult to imagine a theoretical construction of the idea of progress without it."

And just above this you had written:

"I want to stress the fundamental coincidence of the three different **theoretica** constructions of **Hegel**, **Marx**, and **Husserl**. This coincidence is found again (and I say it conscious of the blasphemy) in their anti-historical viewpoint, in the conviction, therefore, that a non-actualized essence of man (or even a non-human essence of which humanity constitutes a stage or 'moment') is *given* in such a manner that it imposes on history, so to speak, the necessity of its actualization."

Your argument clarifies much, although I hold it to be open at one point to question. But, before offering this enquiry, let us pursue your own argument further. You deny that "history" itself has "immanent intelligibility". But if we know that men insert into it an attribution of significance—by an "act of faith"—then the problem appears differently. This act of faith is "creative and fertile": it is a projection which "gives the past its meaning":

"This project must contain . . . the hope that it is *really possible* and the faith that its possibilities rest on the pre-historical *eidos* of a *humanitas* whose painful course of incarnation is furnished to us by history. But the project is a decision about the choice of values. It is therefore not a scientific procedure."

You did not, in that study, examine in any particular way **Marx's** own act of faith, or assumption of a "non-actualized essence of man". You came closest when you asserted:

"Hegel, Marx, and Husserl were perfectly aware that, at the moment when they wrote about history, they were not truly writing about history. They were writing the autobiography of spirit. In writing, they continued that about which they were writing. Their project, so to speak, inscribed itself directly in history, giving it intelligibility."

What constitutes the clue to **Marx's** "autobiography of spirit?" In a recent paper, "The Myth of Human Self-Identity", you argue the case further.³⁰ You point to a "soteriological myth"³¹ hidden in the traditional Marxist anticipation of socialism as based on the identity of civil and political society." This myth concerns the historical division between "civil" and "political" society, which Marx supposed would come to an end and be transcended in the unity of communist society. You detect a source of this "primordial hope" as to the future "kingdom of freedom" in a passage of *On the Jewish Question* (1843), albeit the idea is expressed there "still in philosophical and embryonic form and not yet in class terms". In the passage which you cite³²—

"the concept of 'human emancipation' lacks any mention of class struggle and of the mission of the proletariat. And yet, the same vision of man returning to perfect unity, experiencing directly his personal life as a social force, makes up the philosophical background of the **Marxian** socialism. In all later writings. . . the same eschatological concept of the unified man remains."

"What is wrong with this hope?" you ask. "Is there any connection

between the Marxian vision of the unified man and the fact that real communism appears only in the totalitarian shape, i.e. as the tendency to *replace* all crystallizations of the civil society by coercive organs of the state?" One way of approaching this problem might have been through a consideration of the actual history by which what you refer to as "real communism" appeared in totalitarian shape. But this way of approach you turn from with an abrupt, dismissive gesture!¹³

"To those who think about the prospects of socialist development the real question is: does the very inquiry into the Marxian idea of the unity of civil and political society allow us to presume that any attempt to set up such a unit will be likely to produce an order with strongly pronounced totalitarian traits?"

To this question you offer an unqualified affirmative. You do so partly on experiential or empirical grounds. The distinction between the administering of things and the governing of people is too indefinite to be sustained. "Management of the economy involves command over people", and one cannot usefully distinguish between "political" and "economic" command. The withering-away of the state would presuppose that among the working people material incentives or physical coercion gave way to moral motivations: but "experience of socialist countries" declares firmly against any such "formidable moral revolution in men's minds". Moreover, once production is no longer motivated by private profit, the State must become "the only remaining source of economic initiative": hence socialism must instantly inaugurate "a tremendous growth in the tasks of the state and its bureaucracy." These arguments in your view,

"may justify the suspicion that, far from promising the fusion of civil with political society, the Marxian perspective of unified man is more likely to engender, if put to practical test, a cancerous growth of the quasi-omnipotent bureaucracy, trying to shatter and paralyse civil society and leading the (rightly blamed) anonymity of public life to its extreme consequences."

To these arguments you add considerations of a similar order. There is no reason to suppose that once social classes, in Marx's sense, have been abolished, the struggle of private interests will stop. (Your arguments on this matter I will leave for later discussion (pp. 66-8).) The "restoration of the perfect unity of the personal and communal life" is myth: it "presupposes an unprecedented moral revolution running against the whole course of the past history of culture."

"The dream of perfect unity may come true only in the form of a caricature which denies its original intention: as an artificial unity imposed by coercion from above, in that the political body prevents real conflicts and real segmentation of the civil society from expressing themselves."

This is not, of course, a conclusion that may be found in Marx's own

"primordial intention": his intentions were quite otherwise. But this "primordial intention is not innocent . . . It could scarcely be brought to life in a basically different form, and this not because of contingent historical circumstances but because of its very content . . . There are no reasons to expect that this dream can ever become real except in the cruel form of despotism. The despotism is a desperate simulation of paradise".

I have tried to trace a long sequence of intricate argument fairly. But now I must re-trace my steps and follow your thought in a more argumentative manner. Let us return, first, to "Historical Understanding and the Intelligibility of History".

I found this essay to be open to question at one critical point. This point may be approached by three steps. First, I am not convinced with your conclusion that "from the point of view of historicism which takes into consideration only what is actually given in the historical material, history is inexorably unintelligible and totally opaque"; and hence that "understanding" (when considered as valued significance rather than as reconstruction of a natural process) "must impose itself on knowledge as a hermeneutic rule": i.e. as a rule of interpretation already imposed by the interpreter.

This is a difficult and technical question which concerns what we mean by a social or historical *process*, in which sequences of cause and effect may be observed in the actual work of empirical investigation, and in which regularities of behaviour, of institutional formation, and of cultural expression can be shown to have occurred in social life. This question of course raises further questions as to process, causation, and as to the categories which the researcher brings to his materials. I will take it from several references of your own—for example, to "a real tendency in the historical process" (p. 38 above)—that we are in sufficient agreement as to the objective existence of "process" to set aside this particular matter of definition.

However, you refuse to dignify the description of process with the name of "understanding". Without the attribution of significance by the observer, you argue, "history is a *natural process* [my italics] similar to the evolution of stellar systems and equally incapable of being understood". But, as you well know, it is as hazardous to draw analogies between a historical process and a natural process as it is between an historical event and the motivations or actions of an individual. The stars are not conscious creatures; they do not attain towards the attributes of moral agents or of rational beings. If they did so, a coherent description of the evolution of the stellar system could not be undertaken without the evidence itself imposing upon the most neutral observer problems of explanation of an order distinct from that commonly assumed by the term "natural process". Thus the observer would

have to note that the intentions of certain stellar actors were negated by the intentions of others, that certain meanings gained ascendancy and other meanings were lost in inter-stellar space. Hence the observer's "explanation" could not avoid taking in some explanation of the significancies attributed to their own evolution by the actors. And the "explanation" will approach towards "understanding" (in a common usage of the word) in the sense that not only "natural process" but also valued significance will be described.

We are supposing, up to this point, a stellar system, composed of stars with moral and rational attributes, under investigation by a detached, non-stellar observer. It is true that this observer need share at no point the significancies attributed to themselves by the stars. His explanation of the evolution of meaning may be undertaken entirely in terms of the system's own self-attributions. If he becomes partisan, if he adopts the meanings of this sun and rejects the intentions of that planet, then he is projecting upon that history his own criteria of intelligibility. But of course the supposition indicates another fracture in the analogy between the explanation of historical and natural process. For we must now see that our stellar investigator (if he is to be akin to an historian) must have a mind and sensibility which is itself a product of that very process of evolution which he is investigating: he is himself a consequence of process, and his nature is exactly one of the possibilities which have evolved. Hence the very meanings which he may attribute to this evolution are themselves a selection from the products of that evolution, and if he succeeds in contorting his consciousness into an extra-stellar state—from which standpoint all stellar meanings can be seen as transient phenomena devalued of significance: i.e. as "natural process"—then he still deludes himself, for he only demonstrates that one of the possibilities within the process of which his consciousness is an outcome is precisely that his own historical evolution may be seen in this way.

I will add at this point—although I am clear that the addendum is by no means entailed by the previous argument—that to one who stands in an affirmative relation to the Marxist tradition, the fact that many thinkers around the mid-20th century have independently come to the view that man's history may be seen as de-valued of significance, might have not only a logical but also a genetic occasion: that is, while treating the argument with respect, I would also wish to examine its situation within the sociology of ideas. If in the 19th century it became rather easy, against a background of accelerating technological innovation and ascendant bourgeois democracy, for thinkers in Western Europe to assume the idea of progress, so it may today, against a background of war, terror, Fascism, and their aftermath (in statist realpolitik, a nuclear balance of terror, and the near-universal defeat of socialist utopianism) to assume the idea of devalued process.

In both cases, the observer is projecting backwards upon history an attribution of significance. It is not a case of the former doing so and the latter stoically refusing to himself that consolation, since the latter's stoicism (and indeed the very categories of significance) are themselves derived from an experiential matrix at a certain point in this evolution. Thus in both cases what the observer projects *upon* history is a notation of value which is among the possibilities given to him *by* that history.

If we observe natural process, the question of valued significance does not even arise; if we observe history, it arises compulsively, not only because of its subject-matter (valuing and conscious beings) but also because the observer is by his own moral and intellectual nature a creature of these compulsions. To deny significance to history is not to adopt a "neutral" or scientific, extra-historical posture: it is to make a particular kind of declaration of value.³⁴

I hope we may agree that the analogy between natural and historical process is unhappy; and, even more, that a metaphor, so seductive to the academic mind, of an extrahistorical observer examining history as if it were non-human phenomena, is misleading. We may attain towards objectivity; what we cannot attain towards is an inter-stellar, extra-human objectivity, which would thereby be extra-sensory, extra-moral and extra-rational. The historian may choose between values but he may not choose to be without values, because he cannot choose to sit somewhere outside the gates of his own historically-given human nature.

This, then, is the first step of my argument: a philosopher may imagine a value-free history, but he deludes himself and no historian can offer one. But now to the second step. Is it true, as you have argued, that any interpretation which offers a universal significance to man's history "must pre-suppose a non-empirical *potentia* which actualizes itself, but which places itself outside of history and therefore *cannot be inferred or deduced from historical knowledge*"? [my italics].

Let us turn this assertion around, and approach it from a point in your conclusion. You stressed the "fundamental coincidence" of the three different theoretical constructions of Marx, Hegel and Husserl. All adopt an "anti-historical viewpoint"; all themselves endow history with significance, as "the succession of approaches to the actualized essence"; all "were perfectly aware that, at the moment when they wrote about history, they were not truly writing about history. They were writing the autobiography of spirit." You propose this—perhaps savouring your metaphysical insolence a little too indulgently—"conscious of the blasphemy".

Well, we don't mind, in these latter days, about blasphemy. But a historian—and not only a historian in the Marxist tradition—must be a little worried about a philosophical conclusion, so cogent in presentation, which nevertheless conflates the work of three men whose known

and demonstrable procedures of historical research—that is, their very stance in relation to the object of research, historical evidence—are so starkly opposed.

Let us pause for a moment with the name of Husserl. I doubt whether the most ardent disciple of Husserl can ever have proposed that his master had more than a casual, eclectic and secondary acquaintance with historical materials. A recent interpreter explains that his arduous project "of laying the groundwork of a strictly scientific philosophy" imposed upon him "a choice which demanded of him great asceticism and which precluded his acquiring the large historical background whose absence is so conspicuous in his writings".⁴³

It is without doubt true that Husserl knew perfectly well that he was writing, not about history, but the autobiography of spirit:

"The spiritual *telos* of European Man, in which is included the particular *telos* of separate nations and of individual human beings, lies in infinity, it is an infinite idea, toward which in secret the collective spiritual becoming, so to speak, strives."

It may be admirable to have the innocence so to speak, although it is a difficult question to know how it was possible, in *Prague* and in 1935 for Husserl to speak so:

"No matter how inimical the European nations may be toward each other, still they have a special inner affinity of spirit that permeates all of them and transcends their national differences. It is a sort of fraternal relationship that gives us the consciousness of being at home in ~~this~~ circle."

And Husserl "proves" his assertion by contrasting Europeans with "Indians": "all other human groups" are motivated by a desire "constantly to Europeanize themselves, whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, will never, for example, Indianize ourselves." Perish indeed, the thought! "In our European humanity there is an innate entelechy that thoroughly controls the changes in the European image and gives to it the sense of a development in the direction of an ideal image of life and of being, as moving toward an eternal pole."⁴⁴

We may agree that Husserl was not writing history: he was concerned with a certain, culturally-embodied, concept of the spirit of rationality—and he was consciously attributing this significance to history. I agree that one may attend with sympathy to such concepts. I do not agree that such attention can be seen as "prior" to or independent of attention to fact, to evidence; nor that any concept which any philosopher cares to think up and attribute as significance to history is as good as any other. A philosopher who wishes to propound large views as to history and human destiny, but who is "ascetic" in his acquisition of historical knowledge, cannot expect to detain a historian's attention.

If concept be brought to history it must equip itself at every point to argue with the facts; it must immerse itself in the acidity of historical evidence and see if then it survives; and if it purports to generalize as to the nature of "Man" it might do well to try first to "Indianize" itself. If we throw our own significance back upon history—if we acclaim these men as progenitors of an outcome which we endorse, if we uphold those values as the ones which we, in our own present, wish to perpetuate and enlarge—we must still wrestle with these historical men and those historical values within the strictest terms (contextual definition, recovery of forgotten meanings and inflexions) of the historical discipline: otherwise we are simply using history as a mirror and glimpsing within it projections of ourselves.

It is preposterous—I will agree after all that we may call it blasphemy—to find a "fundamental coincidence" in a common "anti-historical viewpoint" in both Marx and Husserl. And it is scarcely less preposterous to bring the name of Hegel into the same conjunction. I am not competent to pursue the difficult question as to Hegel's historical method, a method which sometimes—as in the *Phenomenology*—commands the historian's respect, and at other times—as in the *Logic*—provokes his indignation. For Hegel is capable of saying in one and the same moment that history "has constituted the rational necessary course of the World-Spirit", whose unchanging identity unfolds itself "in the phenomena of the world's existence" and appears "as the ultimate result of history"; and that "we have to take the latter [i.e. this result] as it is. We must proceed historically—empirically".²⁷ It is the tension between these two methods which provides much of Hegel's excitement and historical insight, and the over-dominance of the first method over the second which provokes the historian—and which provoked Marx—to exasperation.

But we need not settle this difficult point. It is evident that the historical method proposed and employed by these three men cannot be subsumed into a single viewpoint. Husserl dispensed with empirical controls altogether, and hence his "history" is truly anti-historical. In Hegel there is a complex (but diminishing) tension between the attribution of the ideal and the investigation of the actual, in which, nevertheless, the ideal always maintains a primacy over the actual and can never be thoroughly reformed by empirical self-criticism. In Marx, who was no "ascetic" in his historical studies and whose engagement with the evidence was heroic and lifelong, a historical method is employed in which there is a continual dialectical interaction between concept and actuality—the conceptual selection of evidence, the structural organization of the data, and then the breaking and refashioning of concepts and structures in the light of that criticism which further empirical investigation must bring. So that your argument appears as

too neat in its philosophical proportions: for the sake of the delicious savour of "blasphemy" you have inserted within it its own *reductio ad absurdum*. These three men could not all "know" in the same way that they "were not truly writing about history"; there is scarcely a passage in the mature Marx which is not drenched with the sense that it was, exactly, history and its exfoliating meanings that he was writing about. What most remains, after the vibrations of Marx's local investigations die away, is the lasting impression of his historical method.

Your argument was that he, like Husserl and Hegel, interpreted history by attributing "a non-empirical *potentia*" which "cannot be inferred or deduced from historical knowledge". This remains possible, although it is manifest that Marx, in his mature work, thought that he could make such deductions. It is intrinsic to his historical method that the historian may not bring concepts to the materials of history, and select from them only those evidences which conform with the concepts: the concepts must in the same moment of investigation be exposed to the whole available and relevant evidence, to the inconvenient as much as—indeed, more than—to the convenient facts. Husserl's "spiritual *telos* of European Man" is merely silly, because it will not survive the scrutiny of the evidence at all. Hegel's "World-Spirit" is more interesting, because it effects a conjunction with evidence—and, indeed, organizes evidence and gives to it significance—but often in fortuitous and inverted ways. Marx's "fully human" man—a man who was held under firm controls in his mature writings, and as to whom he was perhaps over-reticent—was indeed exposed to some empirical investigation; although he was not exposed (as he has been subsequently) to the investigation of Fascism, of a seemingly-compliant working-class in a consumer capitalist society, nor, above all, of Stalinism. Hence the question as to whether this man can "be inferred or deduced from historical knowledge" is not, as you suppose, a question which permits of a swift philosophical solution—or a question which may be discussed at the level of Marx's intention—but one which demands historical investigation.

Any investigation of man's entire history and destiny must of course require superhuman knowledge. But because no man can ever undertake it—and because its results can never be more than approximate as well as relative to that point in history in which the observer is situated—this does not mean that it is factitious. The attempt to attain a collective accretion of such self-knowledge is one of the justifications for situating oneself within the Marxist tradition of historiography. Moreover, this investigation may be somewhat more strenuous, and more active in the making and breaking of concepts, than some philosophers—in their rather casual references to historiography—appear to suppose. The historical discipline is not a fairground in which different

interpreters set up their stalls and solicit the preference of their customers. Historical argument concerns always the exposure of concept to evidence, or the organizing of evidence by concept. Its common forms of dispute are thus: "this concept, or this ordering of the facts, explains phenomenon A but ignores B and is at variance with phenomenon C"; or thus: "this description of A, B and C is conceptually vacuous and empty of structural organization: it neither shows us how A, B and C are related, nor prepares us for the fact that ABC gave rise to D". Hence, if Marx's partially-concealed notion of the "fully human" attaining towards realization in his history proves to be an inadequate, insufficiently-defined concept (as I think we must now agree), then the historian cannot simply dismiss it from service and leave a de-structured conceptual vacancy: he must set about fashioning a concept which will stand a better chance of standing up to the scrutiny of our sad, 20th-century evidence.

I will resume the second step in my argument. If we agree (for the purpose of argument) that valued significance arises not from the historical evidence itself but from an attribution made by the observer, it is not true that any kind of significance that anyone chooses to attribute is as "good" as any other. There is a crucial distinction to be made between the attributions of the neophyte (and in matters of historical discipline the most worthy philosopher may be a neophyte: it is time that historians defended the integrity of their own discipline) and the sustained submission of that attribution to historical criticism. I offer Husserl as an example of the first, and Mam as exemplar of the second. Therefore the question of any "projection" which Marx made "upon" history is a question which must be discussed with reference to the historical evidence.

The third step is this: you are somewhat cavalier in your attention to the central subject matter with which Marx wrestled—that is, capitalist society and, to a less degree, feudal society and pre-capitalist formations. But if we locate (as we should) Marx's notion of human potential within the actual context of pre-existent social formations—and, in particular, bring it into relation to his concepts of class and of contradiction—we find that we are dealing with a problem that is more real than your essay proposed and which cannot be dismissed by such dexterous philosophical means.

At this stage, while still keeping your first essay in view, I wish to take in points also from your subsequent essay, "The Myth of Human Self-Identity". And here I must cover my own deficiencies in philosophical argument by a kind of short-hand. For we approach the difficult and much-fought-over territory of the relation between the "early" and the "mature" Marx. I don't wish to reproduce in intellectual terms a very material event of my youth, when I was detected crossing an open

hillside. with no cover. and subjected to the personal attention of a battery of mortars. Since I don't wish to lie pressing my face into the earth while Messrs Marcuse, Althusser, and their numerous progeny bracket my trembling body with Hegelian and anti-Hegelian shrapnel, I will say this. I reject a great part of Marcuse's work, and for the reasons which Alasdair MacIntyre has expressed with lucidity in his critical study: in particular, I accept those arguments by which he shows that Marcuse's characteristic thought is derived not from the mature Marx but from the Young Hegelians.³⁸ At the same time I reject in form all, and in content most, of the work of Althusser, for reasons which you have expressed with lucidity in a recent study.³⁹ I not only reject, but I object, in both writers, to their lack of sincerely-offered, open empirical controls—to their evacuation of the method of historical materialism.

This clears some ground, I hope. But Althusser is of course right that Marx's thought came together into a new kind of totality in the late 1840s; and that those seminal concepts present in earlier writings, of essence and existence, of alienation, of civil and political society, are afforded new meanings within the newly-discovered context of historical materialism. His emphasis is not of course new: the first "education class" which I attended after joining the Communist Party in 1942 consisted of a rather vulgar demonstration as to how Marx turned Hegel "upon his head".⁴⁰ Nor was he the only one to note that the renewal of interest in the concept of alienation after 1956 tended to isolate certain ideas from the organization, by Marx in his maturity, of these ideas into a whole.⁴¹ Nor is it useful to spend any further time upon Althusser's particular vocabulary of structure, conjuncture and over-determination. I will prefer, at this point, to borrow a rehearsal of the familiar argument in the crisper terms of MacIntyre:

"... the knowledge of man himself depends on grasping the individual as part of a totality. Yet we cannot grasp the totality except insofar as we understand the individuals who comprise it. Marx wrote:

'A loom is a machine for weaving. It is only under certain conditions that it becomes *capital*; isolated from these conditions it is as far from being capital as gold, in its natural state, is from being coin of the realm.'

What are these conditions? They include both the existence of a whole system of economic activity and the informing of human activities and intentions by concepts which express the relationships characteristic of the system. We identify a loom as capital or gold as coin only when we have grasped a whole system of activities as a capitalist or monetary system. The individual object or action is identifiable only in the context of the totality; the totality is only identifiable as a set of relationships between individuals. Hence we must move from parts to whole and back from whole to parts.⁴²

This admirable recital serves two purposes: it reminds us of what we

are talking about when we discuss the capitalist system; and, also, that the same notion of "totality" may be taken, by analogy, to a system of thought, and specifically to the mature thought of Marx. To trace a concept of alienation or (as in this case) a "myth of human self-identity" through from the immature writings to the mature, and systematic, thought of Marx, while failing at the same time to establish the meanings given to these concepts within the total context of historical materialism, is to embark upon too easy a philosophical refutation.

I find in all your writing a failure to give full weight to the concept of capitalism as system. This may perhaps be a consequence of suffering your formative intellectual years within a (supposedly) socialist system, whose manifest presence was neither socialist (in any way in which Marx or socialist utopians had given reason to expect) nor (unless as statist repression) systematic. In "The Myth of Human Self-Identity" you even offer at one point "a schema" of Marxist thought in which you are at pains to employ synonyms—"mediaeval European societies" for feudalism, and "industrial societies" for capitalism—which are, perhaps unintentionally, disintegrative of Marx's systematic constructions. Undoubtedly experience has made you sceptical as to the historical existence of any social system.

I cannot hope in a few pages to vindicate Marx's discovery of capitalism-as-system, with its concomitant discoveries of class struggle, of characteristic ideological and moral formations, and of innate contradiction. I can only say that in my own work, as an historian I have found nothing to challenge and very much to confirm this definition of capitalism-as-system. This does not mean that I have found capitalism to be always the same system, nor always exactly as Marx described it, nor (as I have sufficiently explained (p. 27)) that I can always accept Marx's own theoretical models which set out the "laws" or logic of capitalist process. But my own research and that of my colleagues within the Marxist tradition of historiography appears to confirm Marx's discovery of capitalism seen (in MacIntyre's terms) both as "a whole system of economic activity" and as human activities and intentions informed "by concepts which express the relationships characteristic of the system."

Nor do I find this only as a historian of capitalism in its 18th- and 19th-century evolution when (it may be argued) historical existence approximated most closely to Marx's own descriptions. Whatever may be said as to the failure of certain of Marx's forecasts to eventuate (when considered as predictive "laws") one has had abundant occasion, in the past twenty-five years, to observe the working-out of a *logic* of the system, which Marx first identified, in social experience.

I will take only one example. In the immediate post-war years the

British Labour Movement, in an unusually assertive mood, attempted to construct and to enlarge within the framework of the capitalist system alternative institutions with an alternative, socialist content. The mines and the railways were nationalized; a free Health Service was introduced; educational provision was expanded in ways which were intended to provide greater equality of opportunity to the children of the majority of citizens; some attempts were made to make taxation redistributive in function; and to develop social services and benefits according to criteria of need. In classical social-democratic theory these measures, taken together, could be seen as an "instalment" of socialism, a step upwards in a steady gradient leading from a capitalist to a socialist society, an ascent which might (after a due pause for breath and meditation) be resumed. I reject this view, but I also reject the view presented by certain Marxist doctrinaires which would see these reforms as excreted as part of the Machiavellian defence-mechanism of the capitalist organism itself. It can be shown (and Raymond Williams in his presentation of the alternative values generated within working-class experience itself has done much to show this) that the years 1944-6 were a high-water-mark in the morale and consciousness of British working people: miners and railwaymen wished to bring the mines and rails within "common ownership"; sixty years of socialist propaganda and organization, strengthened by the particular circumstances of wartime shortages and solidarities, had diffused very widely the criteria of need in social welfare and of "fairness" in the distribution of both products and opportunities. A very great number of working people aspired to place each particular reform within the totality of an egalitarian, socialist society.

In not many years it was clear enough that these aspirations would not, in the terms of "1945", be fulfilled. One may attempt to describe the reasons as a succession of events and contingencies: the bad faith of Labour leaders: balance-of-payments crises: the onset of the Cold War: the imposition of a statist and bureaucratic form of nationalism, etc. But each of these facts takes on new meaning when they are seen within the larger, controlling logic of capitalist *process*. I do not—and this is important in view of the dismissive, doctrinaire and ultimately "anti-working-class" attitude of some Marxist sectarians towards "reformism"—suppose that all reforms, without instant cataclysmic revolution, must be doomed to failure. Those reforms, if sustained and enlarged by an aggressive socialist strategy, might well have effected such a cancellation of the logic of capitalism that the system would have been brought to the point of crisis—a crisis not of despair and disintegration but a crisis in which the necessity for a peaceful revolutionary transition to an alternative socialist logic became daily more evident and more possible.

This is exactly what did not happen. The reforms of 1945 were assimilated and re-ordered within the system of economic activities, and also within the characteristic concepts, of the capitalist process. This entailed a translation of socialist meanings into capitalist ones. Socialized pits and railways became "utilities" providing subsidized coal and transport to private industry. Private practice, private beds in hospitals, private nursing-homes and private insurance impoverished the public health service. Equality of opportunity in education was, in part, transformed into an adaptive mechanism through which skilled labour was trained for private industry: the opportunity was not *for* the working class but for the scholarship boy to escape *from* this class. Accountants and company lawyers, first, and, later, Chancellors of the Exchequer, punched holes in the redistributive intent of taxation, and money quickly found new water-courses down which to run and amalgamate. Municipal housing forgot its first social function in a function that capitalism dictated as primal: that of servicing the moneylenders.

In short, what was defeated was not each "reform" (for around each of these—the schools, the future of the mines and their self-management, the sale of council houses—stubborn actions continue to be fought and should be fought) but the very meaning of reform as an alternative logic to that of private enterprise, profit, and the uncontrolled self-reproduction of money. The socialist meanings of each reform were surrendered (as they always must be if not sustained by a strong, conscious and aggressive socialist movement) because each took its place within an alien totality: capitalism. As each surrender took place, the socialist movement weakened in morale and direction, and the protagonists of capitalism gained in brashness and aggression. Today the organs of capitalism—such as the business supplements of the newspapers—celebrate acquisitive warfare and sheer monetary motivations with a blatancy and hedonism which would have been impossible, not only diplomatically but morally, in 1945.

I have taken this example, since I wish to emphasize capitalism as system and as logic of process, not in the safe territory surveyed by *Das Kapital*, but in a period in which in certain of its features it appears to have falsified certain of Marx's predictions. Whether these predictions were or were not falsified bothers me not one jot: Marx did not suppose that capitalism would endure so long, but, if he had, I doubt whether he would have supposed that it would endure as *exactly* the same kind of system, and if he did suppose so, then he was wrong. In any case one can show without difficulty that there were contemporaries of Marx, who shared his definition of capitalism-as-system, but who very clearly foresaw the possibility that capitalism, while not changing its innate "nature", would show very considerable capacities to prolong its existence and to adapt to working-class pressure: and among these,

William Morris, whom—despite the continuing neglect of his thought—I regard as a socialist thinker of stature.

This digression may help us to reconsider the question of *potentia* and that of self-identity. It can be seen that the reforms of "1945" embodied a socialist potentia, which was not only nourished by ideal influences (the thought of Marx, of Morris, and of socialist utopians: the strategies of British socialist and communist parties) but whose partial realization was fleshed by actually existent socialist values and practices within the working-class community, at variance with those individualist values and practices of the capitalist system within which, in the final analysis, these reforms were contained. Hence this socialist potentia may be seen simultaneously as immanent actuality and as aspiration; that is, it is not to be seen only as a theoretical aspiration, expressed in a passage of Marx's writings; it is an aspiration which requires both logical and historical examination. Moreover, the defeat of this aspiration, its failure to come to its full realization, may be dealt with not only in terms of its theoretical inadequacy (as, indeed, its characteristic "reformist" or social-democratic theoretical expression was sadly inadequate) but also in terms of the actual contradictions of social life—the cancellation of socialist meanings within a totality whose meaning and logic of process was capitalist.

This brief and simplified example will satisfy no-one. But, short of writing a long book, I can do no better.¹³ And I am forced to offer this example, however inadequate, as a paradigm of the process of contradiction by which aspiration quarrels with actuality within class society. For, if feudalism and capitalism by no means take the same forms in all periods and places—and if we must give to both forms even greater flexibility than were given in the rather flexible typology of Marx—nevertheless we can describe them as systems because of (a) conformities in the ways in which the parts are related to the whole, giving a totality informed by characteristic concepts, and (b) because of an identity in the logic of social process. As systems each is also a matrix of possibilities for the actualization of human relations: hence, each system defines a possible in "human nature", and it is, simultaneously, a denial of alternative possibilities.

As we survey the fecundity and improvisations within the vast family of bourgeois societies, it seems that the possibilities opened by capitalism to "human nature" have been infinite. Nevertheless, these possibilities, while generically limitless, have been limited by the genus, capitalism. That is, while doubtless individuals within such societies may have been (at least in theory) capable of attempting to live any set of relations or imagine any social forms, the logic of capitalist process has set defined limits upon the possibility of their successful actualization. Communitarian experiments have been

manifold within capitalist societies: but in each case the historian observes that their reality has been quickly eroded or disintegrated by capitalist process, or their meanings have been assimilated or strictly de-limited by capitalist meanings, whereas in feudal society certain kinds of communitarian association, in due institutional form, found their meanings endorsed and were actually given status and sustenance by the logic of feudal process.

Thus, I insist, the notion of "contradiction" must be seen not only as a theoretical category brought to history: it also has a large and identifiable empirical content. Aspiration can be shown as actual; and its defeat, by an alternative logic of process, can be shown to be actual also. When we say that the possibilities open to human nature are limited by the logic of capitalist process, and that they may be realized only by the transcendence of that logic (revolution) we are talking simultaneously in theoretical and in empirical terms. Moreover, the empirical investigation of the characteristic contradiction of capitalist process may quite properly give rise to the "predictive" conclusion that this contradiction can be transcended, not in any way that we choose, but only in certain ways: as that the atomized and predatory logic of capitalism (which persists even within statist forms) can only be displaced by the alternative intentions and aspirations of a social consciousness which can (as empirically-given historical fact) be shown to find partial and fragmented embodiment in the actual working-class movement. British history, over 150 years, has shown this alternative possibility to be waxing and waning and waxing again—not as *exactly the same* possibility, but as the same in terms of an alternative, socialist logic.

If we are considering the thought of the mature Marx, then the concepts of "alienation", civil versus political society, and *potentia* must be seen within this totality: and the contradiction of possibility is never presented as abstracted category, but as contradiction within the context of social system, with a consequent possibility of transcendence, not in *any* conceivable way, but in ways imposed by the prior contradiction and the alternative logic of process. There is, precisely, an empirical *potentia* which does actualize itself "in history" and which can be inferred from historical knowledge.

But to say this still does not—I agree—answer the problem which you pose as to the observer's attribution of valued significance. History has disclosed innumerable possibilities, but there are no grounds within empirical evidence (you may argue) for attributing valued priority to one over any other. And even if history has disclosed very many fewer systematized logics of social process than it has possibilities within each logic, why should we assume as empirically-given fact that later is in any sense more worthy of value than earlier? The

logic of a primitive society may well (as Lévi-Strauss has reminded us) disclose a human potentia as worthy as that of 20th century Paris; and some observers of contemporary "socialist" states may and do say that they opt for the logic of capitalist process over any demonstrable alternative.

A short answer is that we are later rather than earlier. We cannot choose to be Nuer or Trobriand islanders. And if the Marxist notion of capitalist contradiction is well-founded, we cannot choose between capitalist logic (indefinitely prolonged) and socialist, but only between the ultimate breakdown of capitalism-as-system, in ways which may entail the destruction of civilization, and its transcendence. But I will not be content with a short answer, which appears as less comforting in 1973 than it might have appeared in 1873. A longer answer must encounter two major difficulties: (1) the philosophical difficulties entailed in attributing value to process, and (2) the theoretical and empirical difficulties presented by the notion of transcendence (or revolution) in the light of fifty years of "socialist" statism.



(1) What I have described in previous paragraphs may be seen as process but not as progress. Is there any reason why we should select from the possibilities disclosed by history one particular set and acclaim these as "truly human" potentia? For history has disclosed as bountifully possibilities of evil as of good (in the common usage of these terms), and we are, at this point in time, quite as aware of the former as of the latter.

Very well, I accept this. I accept also that if we select one set of possibilities among other sets as potentia this "project is a decision about the choice of values". But even here one might allow for a rational (and not eschatological) hope that the attribution of potentia is not, a post-facto insertion by the observer only, but is simultaneously an empirically-given and demonstrable possibility within actual historical process. That is, one proposition does not invalidate the other: I may say as a matter of "faith" that I choose to identify with this potentia and not those others, and I may say as a historical investigator that the chosen potentia is one of the empirically-observable possibilities of choice, and I may then add that I am, in my choosing and valuing nature, an outcome of this potentia.

As a philosophical neophyte I fumble in my terms: and I fumble within the portico of one of the most exacting of philosophical problems—the segregated domains of the "is" and the "ought". All that I can hope to do is to signal to certain philosophers that certain historians are also aware of the problem. What the historian may offer to the discourse is the consideration that the idea of the human

possible may equally have a naturalistic as an eschatological grounding. We may take this argument also in three steps:

(a) In the philosophical argument as to value and process I cannot offer original definitions. I can only borrow (perhaps in impermissible ways) arguments from philosophers, and I will choose these from yourself and from MacIntyre. It would appear that the mutually-exclusive epistemological integrities of "fact" and "value", once axiomatic within Anglo-Saxon analytic thought, may not, after all, be unbridgeable. You also have noted among the "common stock" of the Marxist tradition "the conviction that human cognitive activity should be always interpreted as an aspect of total historical praxis and that, for this reason, epistemological inquiry cannot be entirely divorced from genetic inquiry".¹⁴ The same "common stock" assumes an analogous relation between human evaluative activity and genetic inquiry: as you argued in "History and Hope" (1957),

" 'Duty' is but the voice of a social need. In this sense the world of values is not an imaginary sky over the real world of existence, but also a part of it, a part that exists not only in the social consciousness, but that is rooted in the material conditions of life."¹⁵

This "genetic" relationship you appear to reaffirm, albeit in an overly passive way, in 1971 when you argue that "tradition is the only instrument that enables us to appropriate values"; that is, those values which men have affirmed in their past experience remain, in the present, as an arsenal from which we choose—although I would wish to add that the arts and the experiential present are also value-formative.¹⁶ In any case, these values are genetically derivative from socially-experienced "fact".

This derivation from fact does not tell us how to choose between them. The historian or the sociologist may tell us something as to how we do choose between them; and in MacIntyre one detects the outlines of an epistemological bridge. Examining Hume he observes that "the transition from 'is' to 'ought' is made . . . by the notion of 'wanting'."

"And this is no accident . . . We could give a long list of the concepts which can form such bridge notions, between 'is' and 'ought': wanting, needing, desiring, pleasure, happiness, health—and these are only a few. I think there is a strong case for saying that moral notions are unintelligible apart from concepts such as these."¹⁷

But "wanting" is derivative from men in particular historical contexts, and from the possibilities given to their nature by these contexts. And MacIntyre has sketched a history of ethics which indicates not only ways in which men's moral wanting have changed, but the ways in which their own notions of valuing have themselves

changed accordingly. Thus he has proposed that we may see "liberalism as a political and moral doctrine [which] depends on a picture of the individual as sovereign in his choice of values":

"The facts do not and cannot constrain such choice, but the free individual is determined by nothing but himself. For this to be so there must be discernible in the language that we speak a class of factual statements and a class of evaluative statements whose relationship is such that no set of factual statements can separately or jointly entail an evaluative statement. At the same time liberalism clearly is only at home in, its contentions are only intelligible against a background of certain types of historical and social setting. Thus a logical doctrine about fact and value might indeed be rooted in some more general moral and political doctrine which in turn presupposed the background of a certain type of society."¹⁸

The "certain types of historical and social setting" indicated in this passage MacIntyre (in earlier writings) identified more specifically with capitalist society, and with a historical disjunction between lived experience and the moral law, seen no longer as part of the natural order of things, nor as the dictates of "human nature", but as a set of (alternative) moral rules presented as "arbitrary fiats".¹⁹ And in another passage of "the early MacIntyre" he sketches the possible view that the emergent socialist consciousness within capitalist society, by opposing itself to the "anarchistic individualist desires which a competitive society breeds" and by "a rediscovery of the deeper desire to share what is common in humanity", may carry us, across the bridge of "wanting" from fact to value: "moral rules and what we fundamentally want no longer stand in sharp contrast".²⁰

I wish that MacIntyre could complete his own thought.⁵¹ For it does indeed appear to connect historical and ethical inquiry in significant ways. This step, if I understand it rightly, might bridge the gap but at the same time deprive us of some of the liberal dignities of choosing. A socialist might properly be able to say that in his aspirations he fulfilled a *potentia* immanent (and empirically-discoverable) in history; but he would say this, not as an independent value-free extra-historical agent choosing one value among many alternatives, but as himself the value-conditioned product of exactly this *potentia*.

(b) As to the second step I will be brief, since it seems to me (in the present state of knowledge) hazardous and uncertain. It may be possible, with the advance of an infinitely-subtle, empirically-founded social psychology to translate certain notions of value, of good and evil behaviour, into diagnostic notions of psychic health or neurosis. This of course has been attempted (as in the work of Reich, Fromm, Foucault, Marcuse and many others). I find this approach hazardous because, while fragments of such historical analysis are convincing or promising (I have even attempted such an analysis myself in a rather

notorious discussion of Methodism) I have not yet met with any work which appears to surmount difficulties intrinsic to this approach.

The deficiencies arise most obviously in two forms: first, the unsatisfactory and questionable psychological categories (chiefly Freudian) which are brought to the investigation;⁴³ and, second, the inadequate proficiency of most of the practitioners within the historical disciplines. If this proves to be only a matter of an intellectual discipline in its infancy, then we would of course have the promise of an important step in our argument here. "History" has disclosed the possibilities of Athenian rational ardour and of the artistic ebullience of the *Quattrocento*; and it has equally disclosed the possibilities of Buchenwald and of the Soviet purges of the 1930s. If an empirically-grounded social psychology could show us that the morality or norms entailed in the first were an actual index of human health; and in the second may be diagnosed as sickness, then the notion of human *potentia* would acquire a rational justification independent of, or alongside, normative insertions.

The supposition has plausibility and has already occupied many scholars. One may often note when examining, for example, 19th century working-class history, ways in which men and women seem to be more "realized" as rational or moral agents, when acting collectively in conscious rebellion (or resistance) against capitalist process. And, equally, that the privatization of life which often ensues upon political or social defeats appears to bring with it a revenge into the most intimate personal relations, and the absence of an affirmative social context (even that of rebellion against the given context) appears to foster individual behaviour which psychiatrists would diagnose as neurotic. Hence it becomes plausible to offer the analogy between the neurotic or fulfilled individual personality, and the "personality" of a whole society. Just as psychotic illness may prevent a person from "being himself", from realizing his or her possibilities, so the analogy of "fully human" social *potentia* presses itself forward.

But there are still serious fissures in logic to be bridged. We know very well that notions of psychic health or sickness entail normative insertions; so that this method of analysis—important and fruitful as it may prove—may not offer a solution of the problem but simply a way of presenting it in a new form. And we must still jump the gap between the diagnosis of individual malaise and the diagnosis of process or of historical logic. It is my doubt as to whether this gap may legitimately be bridged which leaves me, as to this step, a sceptic.

(c) The third step may be offered, however, without the necessary intervention of the second. What is implied by Marx at some points as *potentia* is delineated more clearly at other points in the notion of the

passage from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. And this notion, which is certainly located in mature Marx within systematized social contexts, is offered simultaneously as concept and as the consequence of empirical investigation.

Man's history is a story of human victim-hood, not because some men (or all men) have been irrational or immoral, but because the historical process has been the outcome, not of the sum of individual intentions, but of a collision of mutually-contradictory intentions:

"The subject of history is the human species and therefore is a whole, of which all the elements behave in a manner directed toward an end, but which as a whole does not behave in such a manner—"

thus Kolakowski.⁵³ But—and this is crucial—in the thought of Marx the historical event is not merely the result of a collision of wills, or a collision of interest-groups. Hypothetically at least, such a collision might be mediated by institutions designed to reconcile opposing interests, so that the outcome—the historical process—could be seen as collective rationality, reconciled and adjusted intentions, or the "general will". The collision is always within a systematized context, within a social system conceived of as totality; for interest-groups we must replace the concept of class, and we must also see the collision as taking, not any haphazard form, but a form characterized by the logic of capitalist (or feudal) process which I have already discussed. In each age—

"the character of the rules is determined by the relationships between men which are involved in that particular mode of production, and these relationships are not between individuals but between groupings of men, who are united by their common economic and social role, and divided from other groupings by the antagonisms of economic and social interest. So—'all history is the history of class struggle'. This is not a generalization built up from instances, so much as a framework without which we should not be able to identify our instances; yet also a framework which could not be elaborated without detailed empirical study—"

thus MacIntyre.⁵⁴

The recognition of man's dual role, as victim and as agent, in the making of his own history is crucial to Marx's thought. Even in the *petit point* of piecemeal expedients we are also giving shape to the larger process of social change. But there is a critical difference in the degree of agency entailed in the two actions. In the detail of political life it appears that at least some men are free agents: they seem to choose between alternative policies, and the results of their actions may even bear some relation to their intentions. But the larger patterns of social process appear to design themselves. Although they arise as a consequence of individual actions, the way in which they arise and the

forms which they take are inconsequential and unforeseen. Circumstances or events appear to will men, not men events, and men appear as victims of social forces which, in the final analysis, are the product of human will.

The increasing control which advances in knowledge and technique should give us is negated by the partisan purposes and partisan consciousness of class society. Only in classless society will opposing and systematized interests and their derivative distortions of consciousness give way to a common human interest: this is where we appear to reach the threshold, in Marx's sense, of the kingdom of freedom. And this is also the threshold of the realization of immanent *potentia*. This "faith" of Marxism has been rehearsed in two related passages of MacIntyre:

"For Marx the emergence of human nature is something to be comprehended only in the terms of the history of class-struggle. Each age reveals a development of human potentiality which is specific to that form of social life and which is specifically limited by the class-structure of that society. The development of possibility reaches a crisis under capitalism. For men have up to that age lived at their best in a way that allowed them glimpses of their own nature as something far richer than what they themselves lived out. Under capitalism the growth of production makes it possible for man to re-appropriate his own nature, for actual human beings to realise the richness of human possibility. But not only the growth of production is necessary. The experience of human equality and unity that is bred in industrial working-class life is equally a precondition of overcoming men's alienation from this and from themselves. And only from the standpoint of that life and its possibilities can we see each previous stage of history as a particular form of approximation to a climax which it is now possible to approach directly."

And in the other passage, MacIntyre allows that Marx inherited from Hegel a conception of the "human essence".

"Human life at any given moment is not a realisation of this essence because human life is always limited in ways characteristic of the basis of a given form of society. In particular human freedom is always so limited. But in our age we have reached the point where this can change, where human possibility can be realised in a quite new way. But we cannot see the possibility of this realisation as the predictable outcome of laws governing human development independently of human wills and aspirations. For the next stage is to be characterised precisely as the age in which human wills and aspirations take charge and are no longer subservient to economic necessity and to the law-bound inevitability of the past. But Marxists surely say, not that this might happen, but that it will? If they say this, they are no longer predicting. They are re-affirming Marx's belief that human potentiality is such that men will take this new step, and this affirmation is of a different order from predicting. For the Marxist view of history can be written up in the end as the story of how the human ideal was after many vicissitudes translated into the human reality."¹⁹

To argue about *potentia* in this rather abstract way is to provoke, in 1973, instant scepticism. We have had enough glimpses, in this century, of human "possibility", and not all of them show man's

nature as "rich". We are more preoccupied with the need to control certain propensities of human nature than to release a questionable *potentia*.

But the fact that the problem of *potentia* is of continuing significance will be told to us instantly by any thoughtful woman. For women are, at this moment, very concerned to examine their own culturally-transmitted nature. And they bring to this examination examples from history of what women have been in order to define what women might become. For if it is true that for large and enduring historical contexts women's nature has been conditioned within the categories and practices of male-dominated cultures, in which the role of women has been defined primarily in terms of sexual, maternal and familial functions and only secondarily in more general productive, social and cultural functions—then it seems important to investigate what might be the *potentia* of women's nature if liberated from these cultural definitions. One way of criticizing the fixity of traditional definitions is exactly by opposing to them the criticism of alternative possibilities revealed within alternative cultures, or even by opposing individual examples of women who, in exceptional circumstances, transcended the definitions of their own habitual culture. So evident is this critical need, at this moment, that one is tempted to exclude the case of feminine *potentia* from an important qualification within this general argument. If we cannot locate a "fully human" man in *potentia* within history, perhaps we may discover a "fully human" woman, potentially present but denied realization within dominative male cultures?

But one should resist this temptation. And first, because any history of "man" must also be, even if imperfectly, a history of woman. A male-dominative culture may turn out to be a culture which, in attributing to women certain roles and functions and in depriving them of certain expressions, is a culture which is simultaneously itself deprived of certain components which it has defined or degraded as "feminine". But women do not have a history independent of that culture, or of that system and process which I have already discussed, even if historians have given inadequate attention to the parts of women within that history. The values of possessive individualism characteristic of a certain phase of capitalist process will manifest themselves in the attitudes of men to women, of women to men, and of both towards children: and so on.

But, second, what has been potential in history has not been one single "fully human" essence of womanliness, but precisely *the potential of feminine self-determination within changing historical contexts*; of freedom from being conditioned and limited by a masculine definition of her role and nature; or, perhaps, of freedom for men and women mutually to determine roles within a sexually egalitarian culture. The

potential denied realization would, in each context, have been different; one cannot assume a hidden woman as the sum of glimpsed possibilities; the hidden woman is the woman who could "be herself", or of men and women who could, in sexual respects, be mutually "themselves"—and, moreover, be so not as abstracted essence but within the larger context of a given society.

This illustration may lead us back to *potentia* again, and may also show how your arguments in "Historical understanding and the intelligibility of history" may be reconciled with the notion of historically-emergent *potentia*. You argue that the attribution of intelligibility to history must always arise from an act of "faith" in the attributor; this intelligibility, as valued significance, cannot be derived from empirical evidence; "it is in relation to our *intention* that our historical heritage, which represents just so many preparatory acts for this intention, is organized". The fact that it is an act of faith does not invalidate this act; men *must* attribute significance, but they should be clear in doing so that they argue from the ground of ought rather than is.

But the example of feminine "nature" may help us to overcome the difficulty, which is that what one observer may glimpse as "rich" another may glimpse as "decadent", and that, in any selection from history of examples of the "possible", the observer is introducing normative principles of selection. For the example reminds us that the *potentia* is not of any one single "fully human" man; nor of some sum made up by adding Athenian philosophers to Renaissance sculptors, subtracting secret policemen and successful entrepreneurs, and multiplying the product by romantic lovers. The *potentia* is a concept coincident with that of the passage from the kingdom of necessity to that of freedom. And the *potentia* is exactly the human potential to act as rational and moral agents, to enter an age "in which human wills and aspirations take charge and are no longer subservient to economic necessity and to the law-bound inevitability of the past".

In Marxist utopianism, communism is the society in which things are thrown from the saddle and cease to ride mankind. Men struggle free from their own machinery and subdue it to human needs and definitions. Man ceases to live in a defensive posture, warding off the assault of "circumstances", his furthest triumph in social engineering a system of checks and balances and counter-vailing powers against his own evil will. He commences to live from his own resources of creative possibility, liberated from the determinism of "process" within class-divided societies. In empirical terms, the historian or sociologist may show that given societies at given technological levels and with given social systems simultaneously disclose and impose limits upon human possibilities. This is *potentia* as fact, or as denial.

And one may go on from this to restate (as E. J. Hobsbawm has recently done in a cogent study)⁵⁶ the traditional idea of "progress" as a "hierarchy of levels", of enlarged techniques and consonant socio-economic formations, each signifying "the growing emancipation of man from nature and his growing capacity to control it". This is to give at least some empirical substance to the notion of enlarging *potentia*, the growth and differentiation of human possibilities.

But we hesitate, at this moment of unfinished history, to accept too easily this "hierarchy of levels" as a progress. For we have seen the capacity to control nature as, simultaneously, the capacity to lay nature waste, bringing with it simultaneous opportunities for human emancipation and self-destruction. So that the critical point of *potentia* remains as a faith: that men can pass from process-determined "necessity" to the "freedom" of rational intentionality. As MacIntyre shows, there is no predictive historical "law" which entails the certainty that this will be so. But the faith required is not limitless or arbitrary. It is not a faith in any particular definition of *potentia*, as to which definition there might be many faiths. It is, very simply, a faith in the ultimate capacity of men to manifest themselves as rational and moral agents: "there is only the requirement that we shall recognize that it is in virtue of what they can be and not of what they always are that men are called rational animals".⁵⁷ And men would not have had a history at all, and certainly not one of scientific advance and of complex social organization, if they had not been capable, however imperfectly, of rational action and of submission to socially-cohesive values.

If we hold to the faith that men can effect the transition to the kingdom of freedom, it is true that we project this faith back upon history, and attempt by our own agency in the present to give to history that outcome. But in this projection we recognize ourselves in a million historical progenitors; and such an act of faith is not too large for a rational being to make. He is himself his own norm-giving reason.

(2) But should this kingdom of freedom be attained, the argument entails no guarantee whatsoever that men will choose wisely nor be good. And we encounter the second major difficulty (see p. 56), which will have been present in your mind and in the minds of all readers throughout the last passages, prompting in them impatience, scepticism or cynicism. "Show me this kingdom of freedom", you will say. "Does one enter it through the Berlin wall or at some point on the Czech frontier?"

You have already reassured the readers of *Encounter* that you disclaim belief "in the *final* elimination of all alienation and a wholly peaceful state of society without conflicts and contradictions." (See

p. 35). But if we disinfect this sentence of the terms of caricature it could read differently: as, for example, "the attainment towards the elimination of socially-determined forms of alienation and towards a state of society wherein conflicts and contradictions of interest are reconciled by rational democratic process". I do violence to your words in order to emphasize that what is at issue is a logic of process *towards* rather than the instantaneous fulfilment of some goal. And it is still relevant to enquire whether we can conceive of socialism-as-system in any way which makes it more likely for such a logic to operate within it than within capitalism-as-system.

You blockade the road to such an inquiry by assuming that, in the light of fifty years experience, the question has been already settled: "real communism appears only in the totalitarian shape, i.e. as the tendency to *replace* all crystallizations of the civil society by coercive organs of the state". (See p. 42.) This allows you to pursue two rather different lines of inquiry: (a) you suppose that Marxist concepts may themselves "engender" this consequence, this "cancerous growth of the quasi-omnipotent bureaucracy" (see p. 42); the "primordial intention" of Marx's "dream" was "not innocent": it could never "become real except in the cruel form of despotism" (p. 43); (b) you suppose simultaneously that there may be ulterior or intrinsic human tendencies or forces which were overlooked by Marx and which tend to the same outcome.

I will go as far as this along those roads with you. Anyone is a fool today who does not know that the critical questions in practical socialist theory are, first, the questions of the socialist state, its institutions, and the relation of state to people; and, second, the question of socialism-as-system, of socialist process. Insofar as Marx's cryptic expressions of faith as to the dramatic consequences of revolution disarmed socialist theory, led to a gross oversimplification of process, a very serious underestimation of the difficulties of socialist institution-making, a scepticism as to democratic values (which arose from a necessary critique of the democratic rhetoric of bourgeois politicians), an undue optimism as to the revolutionary transformation of human nature, and an inhibition of utopianism—insofar as this is true, and insofar as the contingent evolution of a dominant element in the Marxist tradition accentuated each of these omissions or inhibitions—then I will allow that the "dream" was "not innocent". But this is a small allowance. It does not allow that Marx's faith "engendered" these consequences: only that it failed to anticipate them and to warn against them.

The trouble (or one trouble) with your methods of inquiry is that they evade the critical problems of the socialist state and system. They do not even advance inquiry into the character of existent

societies in Russia and East Europe (although they assume that this is understood, and that generalizations may be drawn from this basis). They simply capitulate before unexamined experience, and provide loosely-connected assertions at a level easily assimilated by those used to Encounter's customary fodder.

Let us follow through more closely one of these passages of argument, in "The Myth of Human Self-Identity". You assert that you can find no reasons-for the belief that "once social classes . . . have been abolished, the struggle of private interests will stop":

"The class struggle in capitalist society is a historical form of the struggle for the distribution of surplus product. Why should we presume that the same struggle for surplus product will not go on within an economy based on public ownership . . .?"

Such an assumption would suppose "a sudden restoration of the angelic nature of the human race". But now that we have got to "human nature" we are on very familiar and ancient pre-liberal territory: indeed, we are on the ground of human *anti-potentia*, man's innate evil will constrained by law, culture, and institutional devices. (You have even, I suspect, from some recent references to "the stock of instincts of the human species" and "the totality of the biologically inherited reflexes", been reading Lorenz, Desmond Morris, etc. with rapt attention.)⁵⁴ Marx had admitted to his thought "two very general false premises":

"... that all human evil is rooted in social (as distinct from biological) circumstances and that all important human conflicts are ultimately . . . reducible to class antagonisms. Thus he entirely overlooked the possibility that some sources of conflict and aggression may be inherent in the permanent characteristics of the species and are unlikely to be eradicated by institutional changes. In this sense he really remained a Rousseauist."⁵⁵

In such passages as these I seem to see a fine and controlled method of philosophical analysis in a state of disintegration. In fact you are by no means examining the logic of Marx's own concepts but are opposing to these a set of unexamined counter-assertions which you are unprepared to expose to conceptual analysis in terms of the concepts you are criticizing. Like all bad arguments one may best advance backwards to faulty premises from the faulty conclusions. We may note that in your penultimate sentence you pass between two assertions of a very different order, the first of which by no means entails the second. One can scarcely disagree with the supposition that "some sources of conflict and aggression may be inherent in the permanent characteristics of the species". Indeed, one can see a score of academic Justice Shallows nodding their assent in a score of common rooms. "Good phrases are surely, and ever were, very commendable":

"Certain, 'tis certain; very sure, very sure: death, as the Psalmist says, is certain to all; all shall die.—How a good yoke of **bullocks** at Stamford fair?"

It would seem to a mere historian that any characteristics men have expressed at any point in their history must perforce belong to the possibilities of human nature and hence be "inherent" in the species. Reproduce the same conditions and the same culture and they are likely to reappear. It is rather unlikely that Marx would have admitted a premise that human evil was "rooted" in social as distinct from biological circumstances since he did not think of evil as a radish, nor of biological circumstances as a soil. Thus the entire weight of your assertion must fall on the second of the two "false premises": that "all important human conflicts are ultimately . . . reducible to class antagonisms." Once again, it appears that you are still thinking of evil and of conflicts as radishes, "unlikely to be eradicated by institutional changes". But what we are thinking about is not propensities (good or evil) arranged and controlled by institutions, but a total expressive human context, of culture (including socialization and education) and of institutions. And the equation "human conflicts" = "class antagonisms" is not one with which a Marxist should be happy. As you have noted elsewhere, Marxism has an "old antimechanistic orientation".⁹⁰ What Marx proposed (and I am thinking of the theses on Feuerbach) was that all human conflicts are observable only within specific social contexts. And the bare forked creature, naked biological man, is not a context which we can ever observe, because the very notion of man (as opposed to his anthropoid ancestor) is coincident with culture; man only is insofar as he is able to organize some parts of his experience and transmit it in specifically human ways. Thus to propose the investigation of "man" apart from his culture (or his lived history) is to propose an unreal abstraction, the investigation of non-man. And at least in recent history human conflicts have found expression within systematized social and cultural contexts, so that the conflict itself finds expression within the terms of that context: as, for example, we cannot understand certain kinds of aggression independently of the contextual concepts of the ownership of property or of nationhood.

That the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle—an assertion which Marx made in a propagandist rather than a philosophical work—is true only in this sense. And it is a statement as to a way of interpreting the history of societies, not of "man" or of individual men. Hence, if we wish to propose (for analytical purposes) a category of instinctual drive (as aggression, sociability, etc.) and a category of realized phenomena (as war, mutual aid, etc.), we will still find that the second cannot be reduced

to the first. For this is exactly as true and as untrue as to say that both rape and romantic love can be reduced to sex. We can only say that the drive (a) is realized in (b) certain expressive cultural forms and institutions. Human conflicts do not equal class antagonisms. Human conflicts, in class society, find expression and definition within the terms of, and work their way out according to, the logic of process of class.

Hence a classless society would certainly not "eradicate" these drives. The uncomfortable discovery that this is so is, of course, one of the ways in which the practical history of socialism of the past fifty years has been read. Disarmed by an overly utopian notion of "revolution", socialists have been astounded as every ancient Adam of history has walked onto the stages of the socialist state. If this is indeed the kingdom of freedom it appears to be the kingdom in which men are free to do evil.

But this very partial reading of fifty years of history is—even if salutary—a distraction from the critical point of analysis. And you have already, in the earlier stages of your argument, distracted us in this way. I don't know much about the nature of angels, although I imagine them to be much as Blake described them in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. But Marx enjoyed the company of angels less frequently than did Blake; and he appears to propose, not an angelic nature, but men who within the context of certain institutions and culture can conceptualize in terms of "our" rather than "my" or "their". I was a participating witness, in 1947, in the euphoric aftermath of a revolutionary transition, of exactly such a transformation in attitudes. Young Yugoslav peasants, students, and workers, constructing with high morale their own railway, undoubtedly had this new affirmative concept of *nasha* ("our"), although this *nasha*—as may have proved fortunate for Yugoslavia—was in part the *nasha* of socialist consciousness, and in part the *nasha* of the nation.⁴ The fact that this moment of euphoria proved to be evanescent—and that both the Soviet Union and "the West" did what they could to reverse the impulse—does not disallow the validity of the experience.

The class struggle in capitalist society, you say, is "a historical form of the struggle for the distribution of surplus product". And you ask why "the same struggle for surplus product" should not go on within an economy based on public ownership. A short answer is that if the struggle changed its historical form then it would not be the same struggle. And we cannot know of the struggle in a formless, de-contextual way. But you are doing the same thing now with manifest and ulterior social impulses as you have done with innate evil and its actual social expression. You are proposing some underlying "conflict" which takes different "forms". Let us play with this sentence a little.

(1) We will leave aside "surplus product", although most economic historians would prefer to ~~commence~~ with the concept of scarcity rather than that of surplus; (2) We could try out various sentences, analogous in form, as thus: "the contest in the law-courts as to property-rights is . . ." or "negotiations between the Government and the T.U.C. are . . ." a historical form of the struggle for the distribution of surplus product. Or we could try such forms as: "football is a historical form of the expression of human aggression", or "brothels and monogamous marriage are historical forms for the satisfaction of male sexual drives". The first analogies reveal the utter lack of specificity of your definition, the second reveal its abject reductionism.

Capitalism is a historical form of class power, and it is also a particular structuring of productive relations with attendant concepts of property, etc. Your sentence is too generous in one sense, for capitalism distributes inequitably many other things than "surplus product", including cultural opportunities and power itself. It is not generous enough in another sense, since capitalism also involves a mode of producing that product rather more dynamic than any previously known. Class struggle in capitalist society is, in paramount terms, between those who own and those who do not own the means of production. It is utterly empty to propose a quantum "class struggle" without also proposing which classes are struggling. So that behind your seemingly-concrete proposal one can detect the hidden premise, which is simply that greed for the greatest possible share of the product underlies all "historical forms". So that the "two" premises which Marx "entirely overlooked" turn out to be, in character, only one; it is man's nature to be both greedy and aggressive (although perhaps moderated by a "religious consciousness"—the only other "irreplaceable" part of human culture as to which you are willing to pronounce) and he will continue to be so in any possible society.

It is surprising that Marx should have overlooked this rather ancient argument. Indeed, while I have deliberately set myself in this letter against any such exercises in quotation and counter-quotation, I think that one could show without difficulty that Marx did not overlook it at all. But we may now see why you preferred to make your point by employing the concept of "surplus product" rather than "scarcity". For since Marx argued that communism was possible only in a society that had attained a certain level of affluence, you would—if you had commenced with the second concept—have been forced to ask: "Why should we presume that the same struggle to distribute products in scarce supply will not go on within an affluent economy based on public ownership?" And this would instantly have brought the fallacy in your argument to your notice. For while such a struggle might go on, it would be likely to diminish in intensity, change its

form, and lose priority before other motivations—unless, of course, one proposed an *insatiable* greed as one of the highest of human motivations: not an angelic but a truly diabolic human nature.

Capitalism is a system which not only sanctions the greed of the entrepreneur and the *rentier*: it cannot function without this. Its ideology and its orthodox modes of socialization actively foster competition and individualist values. In its latest, more affluent, stage it must actually stimulate new consumer "wants" or greed. What is at issue is whether you can show us that socialism as system will do the same, or whether you can show that socialist institutions must prove to be powerless to inhibit or divert man's innate greed and aggression from similar kinds of expression.

But you do not help us to see socialism either as system or as process, nor to explain the rationale of the particular kinds of statism under which you have suffered. You simply state: "I have lived there, I have suffered it, I know!" And you imply that from the experience of the past fifty years in Russia and East Europe it is legitimate to deduce conclusions about "real communism".

It is difficult to argue with this, and I do so with humility. I will touch only briefly on two substantial considerations. The first, which is in a sense insulting to living and suffering people, is simply that, to a historian, fifty years is too short a time in which to judge a new social system, if such a system is arising. The comparison of course is with the protracted and contradictory events which signalled the arrival of capitalism-as-system onto the historical scene. The second consideration is so familiar that I need not rehearse it: nor am I competent to do so with any authority. It lies in the host of limiting and constricting contingencies within which the first socialist revolutions came to realization. Any full account of this history leaves us with an extreme difficulty in extricating a logic of socialist *process*, or an innate logic of Marxism as ideology, from supremely powerful and immediate circumstances, contingencies, accidents, events, and from the logic of polarities within a divided world.

I would *prefer* to offer, very tentatively and with no more authority than the order in which one idea will follow another. a third line of inquiry. And first, what definitions and what evidence do we have of socialism as system and process? You offer us little here, although at one point, in "The Myth of Human Self-Identity", you refer to the *proposition* that "since public ownership must inevitably beget social layers endowed with privileges in controlling the means of production, the labour force and the instruments of coercion", one must suppose that "all devices will be employed to secure to these layers the stability of their position and the growth of their privileges".

This appears to offer the theory of the appropriation of the socialist

state by a new bureaucratic caste, which by self-recruitment, educational and other privilege, will establish itself to futurity as a new ruling class. There will be an antagonism of interest between this class and the labour force more generally, but insofar as the former can provide a rising standard of material consumption, (and of certain cultural goods) such an antagonism need not—or need not for the foreseeable future—give rise to any social explosion. Moreover, the ruling class will control vast centralized means of influence, information, and repression, and hence of self-perpetuation.

We are by now familiar with this theory which is distinct at certain points from alternative theories, such as that of "state capitalism". Yugoslavia, having produced a generation of partisans of political freedom, is now producing partisans of intellectual freedom; and some of these have gone furthest in examining the implications of this theory. Among these Stoyanovic has offered the most lucid exposition of "oligarchic statism". His arguments against those theories which attempt to "excuse" Stalinism in terms of contingencies appear to me to be cogent:

"The understated formula about the 'crisis of socialism' lost its persuasiveness long ago, for we are talking about a system which normally and regularly generates such 'crises'. Nor can we speak any longer of 'socialism with severe deformations', since these deformations are so numerous and of such a nature that they have introduced a new quality—statism. A third commonly employed theoretical crutch has to do with 'abuses' in socialism. But there is a limit beyond which the character of the entity which is being abused changes. Thus it is high time that we resolve to speak no more of abuses, but rather of the *systematic* use of social means for the achievement of unsocialist *goals*."⁶²

Historical experience, Stoyanovic argues, has shown "two possibilities and tendencies inherent in capitalism, i.e. statist and socialist". And he proposes various subsidiary categories of statism: primitive-politocratic, technocratic, oligarchic, etc.

But he fails to convince me that he has shown us statism as system or as process. And this may be too much to ask of any thinker. It took, after all, the best years of Marx's life to show capitalism in this way, and he could draw upon several hundred years of its manifestations as evidence. But we must still try to ask what logic or dynamic there may be in statism. In which direction does it appear to be evolving? What functions do the statist ruling-class perform, and is their power conditional upon the performance of these functions? Is this class itself intrinsically involved in the ownership or appropriation of the means of production; does it stand, through its representatives among the economic managers, in a unique relation to other social groups; or is it a powerful, highly-structured *parasitism* derivative from alternative productive relations?

Only the events will show which is true: and it is possible that both resolutions may still hang within the present balance. There is one empirical observation which might lead one to suppose that the alternative of a statist parasitism upon half-realized socialist relations of production might be a useful means of analysis, which is this. Whenever government appears in clearly predatory forms, and when the institutions of state are employed to secure private or sectional advantage, the political process can only be explained in terms of the rivalry of different interest-groups within the ruling caste itself. These may appear as rival nobles, as rival aristocratic "connections", or even (but this takes us at once to a deeper level of socio-economic analysis) as the rival interests of "land" and of great trading companies. We are familiar with the fact that observers of the political process in the Soviet Union describe it in exactly this way, as being moved by the rivalries of the Party (and Party regions), the Army, the managers of industry, the secret police, and so on.

But the sum of these rivalries does not add up to a single coherent process or rationale. If we try to trace back each interest to its ulterior function then both the theory of statism and that of parasitism appear as possibilities. Certain functions are disclosed which are simply those of holding and extending the power of the ruling groups. Other functions are disclosed which are not, in their character, "anti-socialist": as organizing and expanding the means of production, administering education and cultural facilities, or affording defence to the socialist state against external enemies: even if the forms and ideology within which these functions are performed are those of "oligarchic statism".

This is notably true of the forms and ideology of the ruling Communist Party. In Stoyanovic's words,

"Permanently based upon the principles of strict centralism, hierarchy and the absolute monopolization of social life, the party naturally aspired to fashion the entire social system in its own image."¹²³

I am reminded of the words of our comrade, Alfred Dressler, who shortly before his death visited the Soviet Union. He remarked: "We always said that the new society would bear the birth-marks of the old; but we never supposed that these birth-marks would be, exactly, the C.P.S.U.(B)." And he went on to stress his confidence in the socialist potential within contemporary Russia: only the restrictive, dominative forms and the repressive ideology of the Communist Party prevented the Russian people from realizing an alternative, democratic socialist potential.

His faith does not prove that it will be so. Or if it should prove so, the present forms of statism could endure and reinforce themselves for

several generations before they give way. But if the forms are those of a parasitism, there are two grounds for guarded optimism in the ensuing logic of process. First, a political or statist parasitism can survive only so long as it does not actively oppose or seriously inhibit the larger social process upon which it is parasitic. If it does so, either the society is plunged into crisis, or the parasitism comes under such heavy challenge that it must either give way altogether or must "tame" itself, by performing its positive social functions more effectively.

Since this is an unduly organic metaphor, I will take an example from the history of England in the 18th century. Many features of 18th century political life, from at least the time of Walpole, can only be analysed at the level of parasitism. The family connections of the great Whigs were shamelessly predatory in their appropriation of the state; ministers milked the public revenues and appointed members of their "family" to sinecures; by a remorseless system of influence and interest, subordination was ensured and opposition was curbed; democratic institutions were restricted, or corrupted by purchase. But this parasitism performed vestigial functions (notably in opening ways to commercial imperialism), and it did not interfere with the self-reproduction of those social groups—the capitalist landed gentry and the commercial and financial adventurers—in whose interests it ruled (or for whom it "substituted") and whose political settlement of 1688 had established the basis for its power. When it did so threaten these interests (the South Sea Bubble, the loss of the American colonies) it came under heavy challenge, and the last decades of the century show some adaptation and resumption of function. Its ascendancy, throughout the middle decades of the century, did indeed bring a revival of the economic strength and general influence of an aristocracy which it had, in part, created. But this did not quite make up a new ruling-class or a new direction to the wider social process. And this parasitic formation was ultimately (just) peacefully (and partially) displaced in 1832.⁴⁴

The example has little bearing on the contemporary Soviet Union. The Whig predators were vastly more predatory than (in my information) Soviet bureaucrats commonly are. But they did not have at their command an all-intrusive Party, and they were subject to some democratic criticism and legal control. Thus this is not proposed as a close analogy. The analogy may serve if it explains how a parasitism—and even a structured parasitism with substantial "real" social components—can be distinguished from a "new class". The parasitism which both exploits and substitutes for the social groups in whose name it rules must find its rationale, not in its own self-perpetuation, but in performing certain functions for those groups. The functions

which the Soviet parasitism must perform, and must be seen to perform, include those of organizing production; of defending the state against external enemies, a function which is not and has not been in the past fifty years imaginary (even if Stalinism has had an unusual knack of imagining the wrong enemies), and which provides the parasitism with a major practical and ideological rationale; and of defending the integrity of socialism against internal enemies, a function which is wholly mystifying and wholly appropriated to protecting parasitism itself.

This last "function" might make it seem that even if the bureaucracy is a parasitism *upon* a socialist potential, there is very little chance of shaking it loose. But there is a second ground for guarded optimism within the process. This resides within the notion of a self-defensive ideology which masks the actuality of power and exploitation, which Wright Mills defined as "rhetoric" and which you define as "hypocrisy".⁶⁵ The rulers must not only perform certain functions but must *be seen to do so*; and if they do not, they must *seem* to do so. For long periods the rhetoric of a society—libertarian, moralistic, socialist—may seem to be so much at odds with reality that it is mere inert myth, mere hypocrisy. Indeed, to the observer who can penetrate to the reality this "smoke-screen" is merely nauseous. But then at some point of crisis this rhetoric suddenly becomes activated, and some members of the society act upon it as part of their internalized and deeply-held convictions. And this is not surprising, for the children have been socialized, and the adults have been indoctrinated and mystified, in precisely this set of assumed values. Hence from within the C.I.A. itself a James McCord turns up who will not follow the "games plan" and who, as a *real* "liberal" opposing the state, decides to follow "a course of his own". And hence those repeated experiences of courageous critics of the ruling Communist Parties emerging from within the Communist Parties themselves.

I don't know how matters now stand with the rhetoric of the Soviet Union, nor how far submersion to an empty and repressive rhetoric has generated mere cynicism or opportunism. But it might be so (some observers say it is so) that beneath the parasitism millions of Soviet citizens still think of their land and factories as *ours* rather than as *mine* or *theirs*; still hold a pride in the intentions of the October revolution; are socialized in some socialist values; find something more than myth in Marxist texts; and hence already do and increasingly will criticize the practices of their own society in terms of its own rhetoric. Let us at least allow the possibility.

But there is a further and larger consideration. It might be possible, hideously inapposite as the metaphor appears, that the "socialist" countries have already shuffled across Marx's frontier into the "king-

dom of freedom". That is, whereas in previous history social being appeared, in the last analysis, to determine social consciousness, because the logic of process supervened over human intentions; in socialist societies there may be no such determining logic of process, and social consciousness may determine social being. And, again, in the very last analysis, which analysis may work out through several centuries.

This thought is rather too metaphysical for a historian within a Marxist tradition to cope with. Its consequences, if it could be shown to have empirical validity, would be unsettling. Methods of historical analysis to which one had become habituated would cease to have the same validity in investigating socialist evolution. On the one hand, it opens up the perspective of a long protraction of tyranny. So long as any ruling group, perhaps fortuitously established in power at the moment of revolution, can reproduce itself and control or manufacture social consciousness there will be no inherent logic of process within the system which, as social being, will work powerfully enough to bring its overthrow. There will of course be plenty of conflicts of interest within "social being" to which the rulers (in order to control consciousness) must adjust; and the actual social experience of the majority of citizens will give rise incessantly to a critical social consciousness which it will always prove difficult for the rulers, even with the aid of terror and censorship, to control. The manipulation of social consciousness will be difficult; but I see no theoretical reason why it could not, over a considerable historical period, be done.

Of course if the ruling group failed altogether in its function of organizing and expanding production, then the old logic of process, of social being, would assert itself. But there is no necessary reason why the ruling group should fail. Nor is there any necessary reason why rising material standards and controlled cultural provision should set rationality free. As another Yugoslav theorist has argued:

"A considerable improvement in the living conditions of individuals does not automatically entail the creation of a genuine human community, in which there is solidarity, and without which a radical emancipation of man is not possible. For it is possible to overcome poverty and still retain exploitation, to replace compulsory work with senseless and equally degrading amusements, to allow participation in insignificant issues within an essentially bureaucratic system, to let the citizens be virtually flooded by carefully selected and interpreted half-truths, to use prolonged education for a prolonged programming of human brains, to open all doors to the old culture and at the same time to put severe limits to the creation of the new one, to reduce morality to law, to protect certain rights without being able to create a universally human sense of duty and mutual solidarity."⁶⁸

That is the dark side of the dialectic. But it has another side. For it suggests that over and above any challenge emerging from "social

being" the ruling group has *most* to fear from the challenge of rational "social consciousness". It is exactly rationality and an open, evaluative moral process which "ought" to be the logic of socialist process, expressed in democratic forms of self-management and in democratic institutions. The dispersal of rational criticism is not one danger among many but the greatest danger of all to bureaucratic parasitism. This parasitism cannot survive without its mystificatory defensive ideology; nor could it survive the effective activation of the inert socialist rhetoric. And the activation of this rhetoric could be a swifter process than we imagine. This is why each contest over intellectual and cultural liberties in the Soviet Union is so stubbornly fought.

We may illustrate this by comparing the impact of Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th Congress and the Watergate affair. I don't wish in any way to underestimate the importance of Watergate, both in the dangers of centralized authoritarian rule which it narrowly averted—or postponed—and in the large political realignments to which it may lead on. Both Watergate and Khrushchev's secret speech were dramatically de-mystificatory; and both reactivated a rhetoric which one might have thought was an empty hypocrisy. In the case of the United States, the rhetoric of constitutionalism and of personal liberty turhed out to be somewhat tougher, more internalized, than one had come to suppose. But however far-reaching the political consequences, there is no sense at this time that this reactivation will in any way challenge capitalism-as-system.

Nor did Khrushchev's speech challenge socialism-as-system. But by de-mystifying orthodox ideology, by challenging the Party's legitimacy, by reactivating socialist rhetoric, it did challenge the ruling parasitism very seriously indeed. The dispersal of rationality took place with very great speed. Within six months or so both Poland and Hungary were brought to the point of insurrection; and I am not persuaded in these cases, any more than in the subsequent case of Czechoslovakia, that this process was leading necessarily to capitalist counter-revolution. Moreover, this process, if not interrupted, might have led very much further in the Soviet Union itself. And the interruption ~~was~~ not occasioned *only* by the self-protective measures of the bureaucracy.

We must remember that the failure of "1956" was in part a failure imposed by "the West". The West as anti-communist aggression; and the West as inadequate socialist response. Suez consolidated Soviet reaction; Kennedy's dance of death during the Cuban missile crisis precipitated the pragmatic Khrushchev's fall; the bombs falling in Vietnam were a background to the occupation of Prague. For the most manifest function of the statist oligarchies in the socialist countries is the organizing of defence against capitalist aggression. This function above all has provided a parasitism with a rationale.

This function has not been imaginary. And the hostility of Western social-democrats and liberals towards communism has not been always and in every case informed by principled opposition to its "deformities"; it has as often, and as forcibly, been directed against its achievements or promise. There is a complex polarity and mutual relationship between the "East" and the "West". At times when communism has shown a most human face, between 1917 and the early 1920s, and again from the battle of Stalingrad to 1946, the Western labour movement has been in good and assertive heart. But the reverse is also true. I have been an active socialist for thirty years, and through all that time (1944–1946 excluded) the greatest ideal obstacle has been the caricature of socialism presented by the fact of socialist states. But the failure of western socialist movements to effect a transition to a socialist system, with alternative and more democratic models of process, has of course helped to perpetuate that caricature.

I offer this hypothesis as to the inversion of social consciousness and social being without particular confidence. It is in any case a rather abstract notion, and the decisive part may be played by contingencies. It offers to restate Marx's notion of the passage from the kingdom of necessity to that of freedom in a diminuendo, shame-faced way. If he supposed that this passage could be instant and dramatic then he was wrong. The kingdom of necessity was never altogether so: the intentions of men can be seen imposing themselves within process, especially when we consider discrete histories (as for example of institutions); albeit these intentions are generally negated or transformed by "circumstances", or the larger logic of process, which logic is itself in part composed of intentions. The kingdom of freedom is not for instant proclamation. We may now observe, in the East, an in-between world, of attainment and approximation; social consciousness might begin to determine social being, but unless it does so through open democratic rational and moral process, it will not be the consciousness of all men but of a few, to whom the rest remain in bondage.

Beyond this—if such open process could be inserted—one might reassume the grounds for a guarded optimism. What we mean by the kingdom of freedom is that men will at last steal a march upon "circumstances". Since intentions will no longer be diverted from their outcome by an alternative logic of system it will become more possible to predict the outcome of some kinds of social choice. If the tide of affluence should ever come to lap the entire world so such choices might cease to be dictated by necessity and might arise from ideal considerations, disclosed in the democratic process. We shall cease to be obliged to produce as much as we can—or as much as the advertisers can induce us to consume—by the most expedient means. We can decide to produce in the way that we desire, with a new regard for

individual self-fulfilment—for our working and living environment, our needs for variety and creative expression in work. The energies and anxieties of producing and consuming man may give way before more relaxed modes of existing and experiencing man, for whose goals we must look to Athenian or even "Indian" precedents.⁴⁷

Moreover, men's choices will affect not only what things they produce but also the kinds of human nature which they produce. By this I do not mean the intolerable attempt to manipulate all men into a prescribed common mould, but that, in those areas in which the shaping of nature cannot but take place, the processes of socialization and of value-formation will become less involuntary and more fully disclosed. If man's culturally-endowed "nature" changes, these changes will increasingly appear as the product of open evaluative process.

What this does not entail is some faith that men will become naturally "good", or that opposing interests will disappear. There is no enchanter's wand which will banish propensities to greed or aggression. I accept your insistence that human conflicts will endure. Everything will depend upon men being able to create the institutional devices through which antagonisms of interest can be disclosed and rationally reconciled. The institutions, the culture, and the socially-endowed "nature" will not be identical in all parts of the socialist world. I would suppose that intellectual and moral controversy might become more, rather than less, strenuous in this new kingdom; since they will be free from the dictation of "circumstances", the ensuing choices will have more immediate social consequences. If the vast interest-groups of Army, Party, and secret police could be brought within control, lesser interest-groups (or alternative centres of commitment and identity) might assert themselves, as the commitment of men to particular institutions: the interest of this factory, this university, that city.

My own utopia, two hundred years ahead, would not be like Morris's "epoch of rest". It would be a world (as D. H. Lawrence would have it) where the "money values" give way before the "life values", or (as Blake would have it) "corporeal" will give way to "mental" war. With sources of power easily available, some men and women might choose to live in unified communities, sited, like Cistercian monasteries, in centres of great natural beauty, where agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits might be combined. Others might prefer the variety and pace of an urban life which rediscovers some of the qualities of the city-state. Others will prefer a life of seclusion, and many will pass between all three. Scholars would follow the disputes of different schools, in Paris, Jakarta or Bogota.

But one stirs uneasily within such dreams. The utopian imagination today has been diverted into the realm of space-fiction, whose authors examine, exactly, what societies might be created if social consciousness could impose itself upon social being. Their imaginings are not always comforting. Nothing will "happen" of its own accord, without conflict and without the assertion of choice.

Within such a perspective, we cannot immediately assume that statist socialist societies are more "advanced" than capitalist societies. It is impossible at any given moment of history to compare contemporary societies because what must be taken into account is not only the formal *status quo* but the potential; not only what they appear to be but what they are capable of becoming. We must select not only a comparative yardstick but also a datum-line. And in the case of contemporary pseudo-communist and late-capitalist societies, it is unlikely that future historians will find in 1973 their datum-line. And even if we judge from today's standpoint, and if we select as our yardstick the degree of approximation to a free and classless society, then it is possible to argue that Soviet society, which is in important respects more classless although it is certainly less free, is more advanced. This means, of course, that the attainment in Russia of effective political and intellectual liberties is more, not less, important, since it is only through the full democratic process that state ownership can become ownership in common and that planning will cease to be authoritarian manipulation and will become self-activity.

But by the same yardstick, one could also argue (and only the outcome will show) that a capitalist society with mature democratic traditions could be nearer to becoming a democratic classless society than a backward socialist country, with a corrupt and authoritarian ruling parasitism. Although constrained within capitalist forms, the socialist *potentia* could be greater. What we would be comparing would not be static *things* but processes of *becoming* whose outcome is uncertain since it depends upon what men choose to do.

To be a utopian, in 1973, is to be written off, in most "reputable" quarters, as a romantic and a fool. But perhaps to fall into a "realism" which is derivative from an obsession with men's evil propensities is only the symptom of an inverted or depressive romanticism. For to lose faith in man's reason and in his capacity to act as a moral agent is to disarm him in the face of "circumstances". And circumstances, mounted on man's evil will, have more than once in the past decades seemed likely to kill us all. It is the utopian nerve of failure, to which you were once a most eloquent witness, that we must still nourish.

In all this long foregoing argument I have offered you no effective reasons to refute despair. I do not announce, in new terms, the old millenium. I have offered only a refutation of your particular reasons

for despair. At this moment of historical time, neither despair nor optimism appear to me to be founded upon rationally compelling arguments. It remains for men to act and to choose.



There might also be another logic at work on the "optimistic" side. Early in 1944 one young man whom you would perhaps describe as a Western Stalinist, but who was not, as it happens, particularly enthused by fantasies of splendid Asiatic hordes, wrote this:

"When a democrat dies—that is, a man who has shown, as they [the partisans of Yugoslavia] have, by word and action that he cares more than anything for democratic freedom—then one, or ten, or a hundred new ones are created by his example: one or ten or a hundred existing ones are strengthened in their resolve. When a fascist dies the effect on his confederates is the reverse. Only in the most confused and darkest periods of history does this not appear to be the case."⁶⁴

The last two or three decades have been, exactly, such a confused and dark period of history. Even so, it is difficult to show that there are any men whose faith is sustained by the examples of Beria or of Rakosi. Whereas there are many hundreds of thousands who cherish the examples of the insurgents of Budapest in 1956 and of Prague in 1968. And the examples which a longer view of history provides are more numerous than that. It is possible that past culture can still provide reserves for "our" side.

You also have afforded to us an example, of intellectual integrity and moral courage. The price which you pay is that men watch you and judge you critically. I do not chide you for your despair. But I must and will chide you for hasty despair and for bad political judgment.

My criticisms are founded upon your *Encounter* interview (already discussed, pp. 33–5), your article in *Daedalus* on "Intellectuals against Intellect", and a recently-convened conference under the title "Is there anything wrong with the socialist idea?" held at the University of Reading. Since you came to "the West" you have made little attempt, it would seem, to enter a dialogue with those who thought themselves to be your friends. But you have been rather free with your intellectual favours elsewhere.

From your article in *Daedalus* I will select for criticism the following propositions or assertions. You argue that there have been historical examples of movements of "the oppressed and uneducated classes" which have been suspicious of rationality as an instrument of their oppressors: hence "they oppose their own spiritual poverty as a mark of superiority to the existing social order". "The great misfortune",

however, of these classes has been "their inability to participate in the development of spiritual culture":

"It is incontestable that the position of intellectuals is a form of privilege, and that those who see their ideal in the absolute equality of mankind in every respect must demand the destruction of culture. If equality in every respect is the highest value, then the most important task of society is to press all people down to the level of its least enlightened parts."

You disclaim the view that Marx himself had any such intention: "his purpose was to provide access to culture for everybody. That is why the cult of, and the striving for, knowledge were characteristic traits of the labour movement at the time that it was under the strong influence of Marxian theory":

"Certain formulations of Marx suggest that he believed in the particular class character of the culture as a whole. It is certain, however, that Marxism, in its fundamental presuppositions, conceives of socialism as a continuation of the spiritual work of mankind, as the inheritor and not the destroyer of the existing bourgeois culture . . ."

To the intellectuals of the Second International, with a few exceptions, being a socialist "did not mean being an advocate of an essentially different culture . . . which had different rules of thinking and different moral values". "There was no question of an essentially different 'proletarian culture' opposed as a whole to the 'bourgeois culture' and to bourgeois values."

Such a mistaken view you equate with the folly of Soviet "proletcult" which proposed to "create from nothing" an essentially different culture. This phenomenon is now only a "historical curiosity". But you also suggest that "social developments in this century" (a very large and unargued assumption) disallow the hope that "the idea of Marx that the industrial proletariat of highly developed countries should be the vehicles for socialist transformations" can be fulfilled. But certain Western intellectuals, who claim to be Marxists, continue ostentatiously to discard the values of Western bourgeois civilization (which, we must remember, you have more or less equated with "man's" spiritual culture) and "to humble themselves before the splendour of a second barbarism". They now find their vehicle in "masses of illiterate peasants from the most backward parts of the world":

"The contemporary enthusiasm of intellectuals for peasant and *lumpenproletarian* movements or for movements inspired by the ideology of national minorities is an enthusiasm for that which in these movements is reactionary and hostile to culture—for their contempt of knowledge, for the cult of violence, for the spirit of vengeance, for racism."

And from this you return to a defence of the universalist values of reason: "the idea that mankind should 'liberate' itself from its intellectual heritage and create a new 'qualitatively different' science or logic is a support for obscurantist despotism".

One could criticize this argument at several levels. For example, certain assertions are supported by mis-statements of historical fact. I would be interested to know how you could support your view that the intellectuals of the Second International did not advocate a socialist culture with different moral values, since several of the most interesting among them—including Bebel, Jaurès, and William Morris—were deeply and continuously concerned with the question of moral and cultural values in socialist society. And again—and this is relevant to my argument—one can demonstrate without difficulty that in British working-class history the "cult of, and striving for, knowledge" was by no means a consequence of "the strong influence of Marxian theory" but emerged out of the conditions of working-class life—its culture and its total conflict against its exploitation—many decades before the name of Marx had been heard of. Your formulation characteristically proposes culture and rationality as the perquisites of intellectuals, workers or "illiterate peasants" as inert and culture-less, as "vehicles" waiting in line for intellectuals to drive.

One could also assent to some parts of your argument. I know very well what you are pointing towards; I like no more than you do certain surrenders to irrationalism, certain dispositions to capitulate intellectually before the self-indulgences of a western white guilt, certain tendencies to look for a new set of "vehicles" among the defeated, the merely violent, and the criminal, which flourished for a time in Marcusean and Sartreian circles. But at the same time I would chide you for taking as serious and permanent thought what are passing Western intellectual fashions, and also for taking the often ill-informed accounts offered by Western intellectuals of their own working classes, at their own pretentious self-valuation.

So I know what you are getting at, and why you are enraged. But your argument could more helpfully be criticized at other levels. And I would select two themes. First, there is the same sense of disintegrative unsystematic thought which I have noted before. Your thought is littered with unexamined, nightmarish assumptions about reality which are easily recognizable as the devalued currency of current bourgeois—not thought, but ideology. The world is made up of intellectual barbarians, romantic nostalgics, illiterate peasants, manic students, racist blacks, and mute consumerized workers like vehicles just off an assembly-line awaiting delivery to ideological drivers. And no doubt one may easily find in existence examples of all of these. But no examples are examined, no sense of system or process

is involved. And the vitiating error is to suppose that intellectual culture and culture in its anthropological meanings are co-existent; that, for example, a theory of proletcult (which I agree was mainly folly) could offer to produce culture *ex nihilo*. So that even the challenge of *égalité* you must see as an abasement of culture to "the least enlightened parts" of the people: i.e. the destruction of "culture". The oppressed classes of history, in your view, have not even been allowed to participate "in the development of spiritual culture".

These assumptions—so familiar in the intellectual West—make me so angry, and this letter is already so long, that I cannot argue the matter through. I must content myself with counter-assertions. A good part of the lifetimes of intellectual work which I and many others in the Western Marxist tradition have given has been given precisely to disclosing, within history and within contemporary society, culture in its alternative anthropological meanings. I do not find in British working-class experience any *nihilo* but an active, value-formative cultural process. I do not find that the "spiritual culture" of the poor is always inferior to that of intellectuals; on the contrary, valid intellectuality can coexist with extreme spiritual poverty. I abhor intellectual games played with the values of violence, irrationalism and criminality; but I do not suppose for a moment that these games-players always offer a true account or a responsive understanding of the phenomena with which they play: thus intellectuals may exalt certain phenomena of "black power" movements for their own purposes and according to their own principles of selection, while entirely failing to respond to other, and very positive, qualities which these movements express.

In short, I affirm these propositions and negations. And I affirm them not only as arguments but as the fruit of experience. I have learned a great deal from working people in the past, and I hope to continue to do so. I have learned, from particular working people, about values, of solidarity, of mutuality, of scepticism before received ideological "truths", which I would have found it difficult to discover in any other ways, from the given intellectual culture. For the values of *égalité* are not ones which can be thought up, they must be learned through living them. And they teach that one may not bring to people some abstract intellectual meritocratic scale, which immediately supposes that equality entails the destruction of "culture" or its reduction to its "least enlightened parts".

For the worth of a human being—his capacity for loyalty, his qualities as a lover or parent, his creativity, his behaviour in the presence of death—is coincident in no way with his placing within a particular set of intellectual criteria. And it is the scandalous assumption that it is so—the product in this country of "public-school"

élitism, seconded by decades of educational selectivity, within a system which rewards, not only in money and status but also in "worth", those who pass the intellectual tests—that is a vitiating error not only of intellectual life very generally but also of some socialist and "Marxist" groups, which, just like you, are inspecting the workers and the pkasants as "vehicles", and (but you certainly don't share this unpleasant form of arrogance) propose themselves as the rationality which must direct an inert, pragmatic working-class movement and select for it its goals.

So that I am very much less alarmed than you are to observe the growing "romantic nostalgia for a pre-industrial society" and certain affirmations of "life values" against rationalized career values. Beneath some irrational forms, there is an affirmative and long-overdue impulse here: these are cultural antibodies generated by overlong exposure to mindless technological expansionism. Romanticism in this country offered a more radical criticism of the values of industrial capitalism than you seem to suppose; and Wordsworth attained in *The Prelude* to an insight into the *égalité* of human worth which one would gladly see appropriated to a socialist culture. You have no warrant to be so dismissive. We must be as patient as gardeners, pruning and training the impulses of revolt which arise within capitalist society, not turning away from each one—because it arises unbidden and in unexpected form—with abhorrence. If some young intellectuals in Western society turn their backs upon a cerebral, competitive and uncreative intellectual culture, and turn to what they think is Zen Buddhism, I will not run instantly to *Daedalus* in a state of shock. I will be happy to let them "Indianize" themselves, while arguing with them (and perhaps learning from them) along the way.

One tragedy of intellectuals in revolt within both Western and Eastern societies in the past two decades is that they have been, except for brief moments, isolated from larger popular movements, and they have sometimes perforce found these movements as their antagonists. Hence socialist aspiration, in its intellectual expression, walks gauntly along, picking at its own flesh. It learns no humility before experience, no mode of discourse with men of practice, because it sees always experience and practice as its enemy. And this very isolation breeds among intellectuals self-isolating attitudes, which make it more difficult to communicate with men who learn their ideas and live their values in more experiential ways. For a generation of American radical students, the entire white working-class of America was "written off". There were real reasons for this: but the writing-off did damage to intellectual growth itself. And in such a situation both despair and rebellion can lead to the same terminus.

It is the pathetic fallacy of intellectuals that by their own thinking

alone they can change the world. While at his own trade of thinking, the intellectual feels himself to be a free agent. But when he turns to act, in such a context as our own, this freedom appears to dissolve into illusion. His ideas break fruitlessly in mere foam against the cliffs of an insensate social reality. And this dilemma provokes two alternative reactive patterns. On the one hand, he attributes his ineffectiveness to the innate greed and aggressiveness of human nature, which may only be checked by an innate "religious consciousness". Or he accepts his despair, looks cautiously for the "levers" of power, and contents himself with the retreat into piecemeal, softly-softly social engineering. He finds in Sir Karl Popper "the greatest philosopher of the age", and he declares for the most modest empiricism. On the other hand, he swings to the opposite extreme of pure voluntarism. Only the impossible, utopian leap, the unplanned rebellion of the barricades, can break man's self-victimhood. The wheel swings around: a pusillanimous caution gives way to an irrationalist voluntarism. The young knit up their own exemplar from the twelve men of the Granma, or from Paris in May 1968. But Che Guevara's bones remind us that history is implacable. What is made by pure will is not a revolution but a myth.

Utter despair (or despair redefined as cautious empiricism) and absolute voluntarism, are two sides of the coin of social impotence. Both fail to connect with the actual potential of living men, both breed an intellectual self-isolationism. But there is a second theme in your argument which deserves attention. And this concerns the difference between intellectual culture as rationality and intellectual culture as ideology. This concerns a matter of definition, as to which you are more expert,⁷⁰ but as to which I must still offer disagreements. When you and I speak of ideology we appear to be speaking of different things. In "The Myth of Human Self-Identity" there is a curious passage of argument:

"It is plain, if not notorious, that an ideology is always weaker than the social forces which happen to be its vehicle and to try to carry its values. Consequently, since no real interests involved in social struggles are reducible to the simplicity of an ideological value system, we may be certain in advance that no political organism will be the perfect embodiment of its ideology. To state this of Marxism, as of any other ideology, we can dispense with historical knowledge."

Thus political organisms embody ideology imperfectly, and, once again, social forces are "vehicles" for values. Now I would argue in a manner quite contrary. Political organisms select from the available stock of ideas those which best serve their interests and justify (or mystify) their functions, and hence reduce ideas to ideology; and they often do this very perfectly. Social forces do not "happen" to be the "vehicle" for ideology and values; they shape ideas into ideology, they

are idea-selective and value-selective. The ideology and the social forces are sometimes coincident in strength; sometimes forces select for themselves an inadequate ideology; and sometimes (I would hazard more often) an ideology proves stronger than the social forces which were its matrix, and outlives it. What has happened in the Soviet Union is that Marxism as rationality or idea has been transformed into ideology, a selective, closed justificatory and mystifying set of notions which clothes the actions of the ruling groups. To state this of Soviet Marxism is precisely to require the most careful historical analysis.

That this passage was not a casual slip of the pen can be shown if we look again at "Intellectuals against Intellect". "Certain formulations of Marx", you allow, "suggest that he believed in the particular class character of the culture as a whole". But these were, evidently, mistaken formulations and not the true Marx. For Marxism's "fundamental presuppositions" conceive of socialism "as a continuation of the spiritual work of mankind", and "as the inheritor and not the destroyer of the existing bourgeois culture". And the existing bourgeois culture becomes, very soon, a synonym for man's universal culture, indeed perhaps for rationality itself. "The idea that mankind should 'liberate' itself from its intellectual heritage and create a new 'qualitatively different' science or logic is a support for obscurantist despotism."

And so indeed it is. But we pass in that sentence between two different propositions. Science and logic are carefully-chosen words: and, I agree, liberation from these leads to obscurantism. But man's "intellectual heritage" is not so simple a unified concept; "man" has many heritages, and the living do not inherit so much received property; they select, they use, they transform. And I see no necessary contradiction between Marx's formulations as to ideology, or as to bourgeois culture; and his presuppositions as to the universalist values of rationality.

One may see socialism as continuing the spiritual work of mankind, without also seeing socialism as inheriting this work as a received *quantum*; it continues it by reactivating it, by selecting from it, and by transforming it. Your method of caricature impedes rational argument. Such intellectuals as Marx and Morris did not advocate "an *essentially* different culture" which was "*opposed as a whole*" to bourgeois culture and bourgeois values. But they did, most emphatically, advocate the transformation of certain socially-critical concepts and values. It was not the "rules of thinking" which were at issue but, for example, the concepts of property as enshrined in capitalist economics, sociology and law. It was not the values of loyalty or mercy but the values of *nasha*: "ours" as against "yours" and "mine".

My notion of ideology is perhaps idiosyncratic. I have been told

that it is not Marx's, although I remain unconvinced. I am not happy with the notion of "false consciousness", since while such ideological consciousness certainly falsifies universals and mystifies rationality, it can be a very forcible and "true" consciousness of the particular interests who espouse it, a necessary mask, a necessary set of concepts for their own systematized exploitation of other groups, and a powerful source of self-delusion and rhetoric which is, in its own right, a potent social force. "False consciousness" suggests a mask held up against reality, and a mask which can easily slip. But my notion proposes no theoretical difficulty in distinguishing between rationality and ideology, although in practice the difficulties are immense, since the most principled philosopher, however forewarned against the dangers, must work with concepts which arise genetically within a culture which has a distinct ideological colouring.

This disagreement as to ideology may make it evident why I do not find the idea of "a formidable revolution in men's minds" (p. 42) as absurd as you do. It remains, for me, a socialist possibility. But this disagreement recalls also to my mind another, and more practical disagreement. This is, in fact, the pain which originally occasioned this letter. I refer to your seeming innocence as to the existence, the resources, and the process of contemporary capitalist ideology.



In May, 1973, you convened a conference of selected scholars at the University of Reading. Your original proposal was to call it upon the theme: "What is wrong with the socialist idea?", although subsequent considerations of tact altered "what is?" to "is there anything?" The conference was convened under the auspices of Reading's "Graduate School of Contemporary European Studies", an institution with a known reputation. Let me content myself with saying that its very eminent advisory committee, which includes Sir John Wolfenden, the Hon. Michael Astor, the Hon. C. M. Woodhouse, and the Right Hon. K. G. Younger, does not include any men especially noted for divided allegiances or neutrality within the context of ideological cold war. The conference, I understand, was funded by Sir George Weidenfeld's publishing house.

The purposes of this conference were to be academic and not political. You therefore insisted that invitations be limited to persons who, while sharing "some basic socialist values", were not "committed to any well-established system of ideas". By these criteria you were able to exclude persons who combined a scholarly concern with socialism with practical, participatory experience of contemporary industrial conflict. This exclusion may have simplified discussion, since certain of the propositions which you placed before the conference

could scarcely have survived the criticism of even British practice. Thus in your own contribution you proposed that:

"If the motives of private profit in production are eradicated, the organisational body of production—i.e. the state—becomes the only possible subject of economic activity and the only remaining source of economic initiative. "

This is the kind of fallacy into which intellectuals commonly fall, when they know rather little about "industry", feel it to be alien, and are unwilling to bring into their strictly "academic" consultations co-operators and trade unionists, industrial workers and technicians. And you carry the thought further by gesturing towards "an undeniable tendency" in "different political systems" towards the growth of centralized power and the growth of bureaucracy. And among those tasks "which, as is widely acknowledged, should rest on the shoulders of central powers" you list "the welfare, health and educational systems; the control of wages, prices, investment and banking", etc.

"It is difficult to be self-consistent when one fulminates at the same time against the growth of the bureaucracy and against the uncontrolled wastefulness of the operation of private industry; more often than not the increasing control over private business means increasing the bureaucracy."

I can **make** my point neatly about the intrusion of ideological assumption into rationality by noting those give-away phrases: "as is widely acknowledged" (i.e. by people I have talked about it with at Oxford and at Berkeley), "the control of wages" (it is "widely acknowledged" that these must be controlled from above), "private industry" is to be brought under "increasing control" (from above), and so on. But any alert participant in the health and educational systems, and in some parts of the welfare system, would instantly repudiate the notion that his tasks "should rest on the shoulders of central powers". Practical experience, even in non-socialist Britain, shows a hundred ways in which devolution of powers are attempted, in which conflicts between central and local authorities are mediated, in which consumers assert (*insufficiently*) their own intentions, and in which local initiatives, including the powers to raise or to allocate moneys, are jealously safeguarded; and these ways range from elected bodies to bureaucratic committees to feudal self-governing communities of scholars (like All Souls') to incipient experiments in self-management and control.

Moreover, it is of course untrue that the social process in advanced capitalist countries shows a unified technologically-determined drive towards centralized power. Simultaneously with this drive towards centralization we have seen, in the last decades, a great increase in the impact upon the whole economy of the power of even quite small groups of organized workers and technicians when they withhold their

labour. Power workers, transport workers, workers and technicians in the communications industries, and many others have a power undreamed-of by the founders of the socialist movement. And with this has grown the number and forms of localized resistance to centralization: sit-ins, work-ins, consumer and community organizations. Once again, this could have been introduced to the discussions by anyone with participatory experience of the contemporary socialist movement; but, alas, such persons might also have been disqualified by their commitment to a "well established system of ideas", i.e. socialism.

I also am concerned with the problem of how, within a capitalist society, the most searching and self-critical discussion of socialist theory can be promoted. I agree: it cannot be promoted by a comfortable meeting of the cosily committed, nor by an uncomfortable meeting of antagonistic sectarians. But I doubt whether it can be promoted in your way either, since your principles of selection exclude certain arguments and also relevant experience. In fact, some of those who attended your conference had excellent socialist credentials, some serious papers were exchanged, and Sir George Weidenfeld will make a passable book out of it all. And I don't wish to criticize any of those who, influenced by your reputation and integrity, did so attend.

Nor do I write this out of pique. As it happens I was not invited to attend, but if I had been so, I would have had to make the personal decision to refuse. For the organizing secretary for your conference (and deputy chairman of the Reading School of Contemporary European Studies) was Mr Robert Cecil, C.M.G. And consulting *Who's Who* I find that Mr Cecil was in His Majesty's Foreign Service from 1936 until 1968, when he joined the School at Reading. Among positions he has held have been those of First Secretary at the British Embassy in Washington (1945-8), a position at Bonn (1957-9), Director-General British Information Services, New York, at times between 1956 and 1961, and Head of the Cultural Relations Department of the Foreign Office (1962-7).

Mr Cecil is no doubt a cultivated and admirable man: he published a volume of poems in his youth, a book on Edwardian England in his maturity, and his club now is the Athenaeum. And no doubt he was discreet, in offering his services simply as an organizing aid. So that I am at a loss to explain to you why his presence as organizing secretary (together with certain other circumstances in the funding and auspices of the conference) would have imposed upon me a personal decision to be absent.

I would abstain for the same reasons that (if I were invited to write for it, which I am not) I would abstain from writing for *Encounter*.⁷¹

I would feel awkward in such company. I seek to impose my personal preferences upon no-one else. It is simply that I cannot overcome the habits of a lifetime. I have never attended a conference of socialists when I have not had to pay some part of the costs out of my own pocket. Sir George Weidenfeld did not fund the *New Reasoner* or the *May Day Manifesto*; we funded the initial launching of both publications from collective socialist donations. I would perhaps become bashful in Mr Cecil's presence and call him "sir". There is no virtue in any of these things, I know. They are confessions of a minority-minded self-isolation. If you are tolerant, you may consider me as a representative of a residual tradition, like Old Dissent, adhering meticulously to old forms whose significance daily diminishes. Like an 18th-century Quaker, who will not bare his head before authority nor take oaths, I will not take my holidays in Spain nor attend conferences in Rome funded by the Ford Foundation. I will be imprisoned in my own isolation rather than pay any tithes whatsoever to the Natopolitan Church.

I do not urge you to make the same abstentions. I simply say to you, as George Fox said to Penn when the latter was reluctant to discard his sword: "Wear it as long as thou canst!" You will have noticed, if you have followed my footnotes, that my criticisms of socialist reality have always been made in socialist journals. And at the time when I can no longer criticize socialism from such an unmistakable anti-capitalist standpoint, I will fall silent. For no matter how hideous the alternative may seem, no word of mine will wittingly be added to the comforts of that old bitch gone in the teeth, consumer capitalism. I know that bitch well in her very original nature; she has engendered world-wide wars, aggressive and racial imperialisms, and she is co-partner in the unhappy history of socialist degeneration. But this is "my" problem in a different way than it is "yours". "My" progenitors, and some of my contemporaries, have sown their lives into furrows, not to produce their own creative crops, but like a botanical prophylactic, to restrain the virulence of capitalist logic. And to the degree that they have succeeded, the apologists of capitalism appear with newly-soaped faces, and offer their beast as a beast of changed nature. But I know that that beast is not changed: it is held in the fragile but well-tempered chains of our own watchfulness and actions.

Your problem, as you see it, is a different one: it is to report your experience faithfully and without favour. Operating within a culture of universal rationality you cannot be bothered with the sectarian susceptibilities of another nation's Old Dissent. But I will offer to you two considerations. First, in the matter of capitalism as ideology. Your experience has been primarily of Stalinism as ideology: a new, brittle, uneasy, manifestly irrational institutional orthodoxy. This you can

instantly identify. But perhaps you—and others like you who find refuge in the West—are thereby unprepared to identify the ideological expressions and forms of capitalism. You appear to have at hand the resources which you have lacked in socialist society most of all; freedom of expression, toleration of dissent, democratic institutions. The society appears, as contrasted with the East, as a society of unconstrained rational and moral process.

But capitalist ideology is neither new nor brittle. It expresses, and at the same time it is, a very ancient hegemony, and a hegemony so assured that it can dispense *with* many of the more vulgar institutional means of imposing orthodoxy. Its very form is to suggest that it is not a hegemony at all, that its way of life is very nature. It discloses itself today in certain fixities of concept: of property and the rights of money: of "innate" human nature: of political "realism": of academic "objectivity" (itself concealing such concepts): of dominative modes of communication, education and government: of utilitarian criteria in economic and social decisions: of negative "freedoms":—indeed, some of those very concepts which you have recently been assuming *with* too little examination. It is not of course without its active institutional mediations, within the communications industry, within the educational system, and through delicate institutional selectivities, reticencies, and resistencies which one must *live* through for some years before they can be understood. Mr Robert Cecil "finds" himself to be organizing your conference and Sir George Weidenfeld "finds" that he is publishing its results; but there has been no imposition of any kind—not the least discourtesy.

Oh, but one must be a dialectician to understand how this world goes! One substantial advantage of having been an organized communist is that one gains certain understandings of its institutional and ideological defences. But once that position is evacuated—why, the world is open as far as eye can see, every sin is forgiven. And a certain exhibition of intellectual revolt (but not practical revolt, such as vulgar strike-making) also has its subsidiary niche, as ornamentation to the ideological hegemony. So that the problem for a socialist intellectual is two-fold: (a) the near-impossibility of not selling himself, of not being "taken up" in certain secondary ways, and (b) the near-impossibility of communicating at all in primary and deeply-serious ways. And from this derives the seeming egotism of some passages in this letter. For one must, to survive as an unassimilated socialist in this infinitely assimilative culture, put oneself into a school of awkwardness. One must make one's sensibility all knobbly—all knees and elbows of susceptibility and refusal—if one is not to be pressed through the grid into the universal mish-mash of the received assumptions of the intellectual culture. One must strain at every turn in one's thought

to resist the assumption that what one observes and what one is in the very course of nature.

And even the role of the Jester, which is a role you chose for yourself in the East, is a role which must be played with discretion. For the jester, if he jests in all company and jests unwisely, may provide arguments which acquire a different meaning when employed by the subalterns of the Emperor. "What is truth?" said jesting Pilate: but did not stay for an answer."

And this brings me to my second consideration. I will remind you that you remarked in Encounter:

"A Polish friend . . . recently wrote to me from Sweden saying that whenever he had dealings with the New Left he seemed to be watching a film of which he already knew the end. That is exactly how I feel."

But of course there are other films, whose endings are also known. And one of the oldest, on this side of the world, is that of revolutionary disenchantment. It is a film which was first made in about 1792, and it has been remade in different versions at repeated intervals. A powerful version was made in the 1930s and it has been running to packed houses ever since.⁷²

The reactive pattern, by which disenchantment in revolutionary aspirations leads on, after creative difficulties and conflicts, to ultimate reconciliation with the pre-existent status quo—or even zealous ideological partisanship on behalf of the status quo—is deeply inscribed within western culture. And it has, within capitalist ideology today, a very important confirmatory and legitimating function. Confirmatory, because it can then be shown not only that capitalism works but that the alternative is unworkable. Legitimating, because it can be shown not only that capitalism conforms to human nature but that the alternative is dangerous, immoral and unnatural.

Hence the intellectual in refuge from the East has a role already pre-arranged for him in the West, with which he finds it difficult not to conform. And your predicament in this respect was anticipated by MacIntyre as early as 1958:

"The reassertion of moral standards by the individual voice has been one of the ferments of Eastern European revisionism. But, because of the way in which it is done, this reassertion too often leaves the gulf between morality and history, between value and fact as wide as ever. Kolakowski and others like him stress the amorality of the historical process on the one hand, and the moral responsibility of the individual in history on the other. And this leaves us with the moral critic as a spectator, the categorical imperatives which he proclaims having no genuine relationship to his view of history. One cannot revive the moral content within Marxism by simply taking a Stalinist view of historical development and adding liberal morality to it. But however one may disagree with Kolakowski's theoretical position, the kind of

integrity involved in reasserting moral principles in the Polish situation is entirely admirable . . . But to assert this position in the West is to flow with the stream. It is merely to conform.¹¹⁷

I think that MacIntyre does less than justice to your thought at that time. But in coming to the West and in conferring at Reading as you have done, you appear to fulfil a fifteen-year-old prediction.

But I can't believe that you have come to a point of rest. Established institutions will, of course, prepare various points of rest for you; they will beckon you on; the intellectual resolutions which they propose for you will be reputable and will entail no disgrace. But I believe that you will reject them all. I recognize your film, but I do not pretend to know how it will end. For you differ in one respect from those numerous actors who have performed the same transitory role of witness, within capitalist society, to the "failure" of socialism. In the pursuit of truth you have been implacable. You have wrestled with ideas without regard for your comfort or reputation. I believe you will continue so.

I ask you whether you cannot, even now, help us to break that logic of reactive process within a divided world, which, like a pair of moral scissors, repeatedly cuts through the universalist integument of socialist utopianism? To remake that universality of aspiration we need your skills. I ask you if you can show the same tenacity and resistance to assimilation within capitalist ideology that you have shown within the Stalinist.

This is to ask of you much. It is to require of you a higher morale than one has the right to expect. Not many of us in the West, whose experiences have been trivial beside your own, have been able to maintain this morale. I have, for ten years, suffered my own dejection consequent upon the sudden re-emergence throughout the West of the "closed" Marxisms (1) and (2), some of them in the most doctrinaire, didactic and thought-resistant forms. For a decade it has seemed that the possibilities for the redeployment and reintegration of thought within the tradition of Marxism (4) have been sealed off. One has been left talking, or merely thinking, to oneself.

I recalled, earlier in this letter, some lines of Yeats. I must now complete his thought:

**"My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf."**

"An intellectual hatred is the worst", and we cannot renew our morale unless we resist that kind of intellectual rancour. But this question is, as you would say, not one of "scientific procedure". It is a matter, in the end, of "faith", and advice in such matters is gratuitous.

We can not impose our will upon history in any way we choose. We ought not to surrender to its circumstantial logic. We can hope and act only as "gardeners of our circumstance".³⁴ In writing to you I have been, in one way, casting some thirty years of my own private accounts. I have been meditating not only on the meanings of "history" but on the meanings of people whom I have known and trusted. I have been encountering the paradox that many of those whom "reality" has proved to be wrong, still seem to me to have been better people than those who were, with a facile and conformist realism, right. I would still wish to justify the aspirations of those whom "history", at this point of time, appears to have refuted.

It is now eight years since I attempted any "historiosophical" flight. I don't know whether I shall wait for a further eight years before trying the air again—and after two or three such interludes I must certainly leave the resolution of the argument to "history". If I am silent it will not be because I have changed my opinions, although it might be because of a lessening of political or personal morale, or a lack of any sense of audience.

But of one thing, from the fixity of my present intellectual address, I can be certain. I will not be silenced by mere opposition. For the great bustard, by a law well-known to aeronautics, can only rise into the air against a strong head-wind. It is only by facing into opposition that I am able to define my thought at all.

In this way I have sometimes exaggerated differences and put friendships into jeopardy. I fear that you may think that I have been using your thought, as a medium of antagonism, in order to define my own.

And yet—I return to the first lines of this letter—I have some right to speak frankly, for I am (or was) some kind of kinsman of yours. There was a time when you, and the causes for which you stood, were present in our innermost thought. And in those days (only fifteen years distant!) whose meanings are now forgotten or falsified, when a "new left" was first projected, we shared another kinsman in our friend, C. Wright Mills.

It was Mills who defined this relationship, in words better than any of mine:

"I can no longer write seriously without feeling contempt for the indifferent professors and smug editors who so fearlessly fight the cold war, and for the cultural bureaucrats and hacks, the intellectual thugs of the official line who so readily have abdicated the intellect in the Soviet bloc. I can no longer write with mortal surety

unless I know that Leszek Kolakowski will understand where I stand—and I think this means unless he knows I have feelings of equal contempt for both leading types of underdeveloped cultural workmen of the overdeveloped countries of the world.¹⁷⁸

We knew, or thought we knew, what you were fighting—and against what precipitous odds—then and there. Did you give equal thought to the odds confronting Mills—or confronting any of us, in our small, disorderly contingents, over here? Did you understand Mills's "contempt" for capitalist ideology and its institutions, and the "cultural default" of which their intellectual servitors were accused?

If you also enter this "default", you threaten the "moral surety" of that common moment of utopian revolt. We understood you, and we came to your side, because you voiced, not particular or sectional, but universal socialist aspirations. Your claims upon the future could not be realized (or so we thought) without moving decisively outside both stalinist and capitalist strategies and remedies.

And now, as you fall back, so also half a world falls back with you. And today the most-publicized voices of Soviet or Eastern European dissidence are those of falling men—courageous but self-regarding, passionate only in their negatives, self-isolating, deeply-deluded about "the West"^w—voices which command only one's weary, defensive solidarity.

The solidarity which you once commanded was of a very different kind. You did not call upon our political charity: resolutions, petitions, letters to the *Times*, on behalf of liberalism's underprivileged, who sought only the benefits of the West's benign democracy. You called, or seemed to call, us into a common struggle, as arduous in practice as in intellect.

I do not think the time has gone by for such a struggle. I think it is with us, every day. In any case, can we meet one day and have a drink? I owe you more than one. And can we still drink to the fulfilment of that moment of common aspiration: "1956"?

Yours fraternally,

E. P. THOMPSON.

NOTES

Too little of Leszek Kolakowski's political and philosophical writing has been translated into English. There are however important collections: *Leszek Kolakowski, Marxism and Beyond* (London, 1969; Paladin paperback, 1971), with an introduction by Leopold Labedz; and "A Leszek Kolakowski Reader", *TriQuarterly*, Number 22, Fall 1971. The latter includes a useful selective bibliography.

In these notes I use the abbreviations L.K. for Leszek Kolakowski and E.P.T. for myself. At various points I indicate in my own writings a place where a point finds fuller development. In many cases better sources could have been indicated in the work of other writers, but the method which I have chosen defines more precisely the particular tradition from which I am arguing.

I am grateful to Ralph Miliband, John Saville, Dorothy Thompson and Martin Eve for reading this letter in manuscript and suggesting certain revisions. They are not, of course, in any way responsible for the outcome.

1. *Marxism and Beyond* (1969 edn.), pp. 105–177.
2. *Ibid.* p. 126.
3. E.P.T., "Agency and Choice", *New Reasoner* 5, Summer 1958.
4. In the sense which you defined in "The Concept of the Left", *Marxism and Beyond*, pp. 87–104.
5. *Marxism and Beyond*, p. 14.
6. Notably the major study, "Religious Consciousness and the Ties of the Church: Studies in the Non-Denominational Christianity of the Seventeenth Century" (Warsaw, 1965), translated (Paris, 1969) as *Chrétiens sans Église*, but not yet translated into English; and *The Alienation of Reason: a History of Positivist Thought* (Warsaw, 1966; New York, 1968; London, Penguin Books, 1972). See especially "Historical understanding and the intelligibility of history" (discussed below) and "The epistemological significance of the aetiology of knowledge: a gloss on Mannheim", both in *TriQuarterly* 22. One amusing index of the self-conscious rewriting of history entailed in this break was the appearance in *New Left Review* 60, March–April 1970 of "A Retrospect" of articles published in the first ten years of the review's existence. Of 131 articles listed, only one was selected from the first 18 numbers of the review: and this one was by Ronald Laing. Not one article was listed by a founding member of the review's editorial board. E.P.T., "The Peculiarities of the English", *Socialist Register*, 1965; Perry Anderson, "The Myths of Edward Thompson", *New Left Review*, 35, January–February 1966.
10. Raymond Williams, "In Memory of Goldman", *New Left Review*, 67, May–June 1971, and intro. to L. Goldmann, *Racine* (Cambridge, 1972). George L. Kline, "Beyond revisionism: Leszek Kolakowski's recent philosophical development", *TriQuarterly* 22, p. 14.
12. L.K., "The Priest and the Jester", *Marxism and Beyond*, pp. 29–57.
13. I must apologize to ornithologists for my incorrect definitions of the great bustard, which obviously shares some attributes more proper to a dodo. But the dodo has been overworked, and the great bustard was, once, an English bird. The great bustard is indeed far from extinct, and inhabits the plains of Poland. It can fly a little better than I suggest, but is slow to get off the ground. It was therefore in England easy prey to foxes, and to the natives, who valued it for food. Indeed, in the village of Empirica Parva in Windsor Forest they once ate no other meat; and dead bustard was at that time a delicacy in great demand on collegiate high tables. This and succeeding quotations are from L.K. "Permanent and Transitory Aspects of Marxism", *Marxism and Beyond*, pp. 193–207; and also in *The Broken Mirror*, ed. P. Mayewski (New York and London, 1958), pp. 157–174.
15. E.P.T., "Revolution Again", *New Left Review* 6, November–December, 1960.
16. L.K., "In Praise of Inconsistency", *Marxism and Beyond*, pp. 231–240.
17. See e.g. L.K., "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth", *Marxism and Beyond*, pp. 58–104.
18. See E.P.T., "The Peculiarities of the English", *op. cit.* pp. 351–2.

19. E.P.T., "The Long Revolution, 11", *New Left Review*, 10, July–August 1961, pp. 28–29. Raymond Williams had of course indicated forcefully his criticism of the metaphor of basis-superstructure very much earlier: see e.g. *Culture and Society* (Pelican edn.), pp. 272–3. In his own account, it was his radical dissatisfaction with this "received formula", and his conviction that it was invalid as a methodology for cultural history and criticism (indeed, he describes it as "a bourgeois formula . . . a central position of utilitarian thought") which led him "to believe that I had to give up, or at least to leave aside, what I knew as the Marxist tradition". Thus both Williams and I share a central objection to this "received formula" of Marxism. His attempted solution, presented in *The Long Revolution*, was to offer an alternative, and original, theory "of relations between elements in a whole way of life"; while at the same time entering into an increasingly close dialogue with the Marxist tradition. (See R. Williams, in *New Left Review*, 67, May–June 1971 and intro. to Lucien Goldmann, *Racine* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. xiii–xiv). I was, and remain, dissatisfied with the solution which he then offered, for reasons argued in my review (cited above). My own attempts to explore the dialectical inter-relations of social being and social consciousness, or of culture and "not-culture", in relation to the Marxist tradition but without recourse to the formula, have been largely in historical practice: in *The Making of the English Working Class* and in subsequent (and forthcoming) historical work. Such historical analysis need not be—as some of my readers suppose—innocent of conceptualization, and of interest only as an account of "phenomenology".
20. My earlier borrowing from MacIntyre did not give his definition in full context: he writes—"As Marx depicts it the relation between basis and superstructure is fundamentally not only not mechanical, it is not even causal. What may be misleading here is Marx's Hegelian vocabulary. Marx certainly talks of the basis "determining" the superstructure and of a "correspondence" between them. But the reader of Hegel's *Logic* will realize that what Marx envisages is something to be understood in terms of the way in which the nature of the concept of a given class, for example, may determine the concept of membership of that class. What the economic basis, the mode of production, does is to provide a framework within which the superstructure arises, a set of relations around which the human relations can entwine themselves, a kernel of human relationship from which all else grows. The economic basis of a society is not its tools, but the people co-operating using these particular tools in the manner necessary to their use, and the superstructure consists of the social consciousness moulded by and the shape of this co-operation. To understand this is to repudiate the end-means morality; for there is no question of creating the economic base as a means to the socialist superstructure. Creating the basis, you create the superstructure. There are not two activities but one", Alasdair MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness, 1", *New Reasoner*, 7, Winter 1958–9. This very lucid gloss does not seem to me to get over the difficulties of a non-Hegelian use of "determination", nor those of the awkward metaphor. See also E.P.T., "The Communism of William Morris" (William Morris Society, 1965), pp. 17–18.
21. "Intellectuals, Hope and Heresy", *Encounter*, October 1971. The interview was not given in the first place to *Encounter* but comes from a West German source.
22. L.K., "Intellectuals against Intellect", *Daedalus*, Summer 1972.
23. L.K., "The epistemological significance of the aetiology of knowledge", *TriQuarterly*, 22.
24. As Harrington said of Hobbes.
25. L.K., "In Praise of Inconsistency", *Marxism and Beyond*, p. 231.
26. L.K., "Intellectuals against Intellect", op. cit. p. 13. One should recall that

William Morris also glimpsed this possibility, which he saw as arising from the failure of movements of revolutionary socialism: "If the present state of society merely breaks up without a conscious effort at transformation, the end, the fall of Europe, may be long in coming, but when it does, it will be far more terrible, far more confused and full of suffering than the period of the fall of Rome": E.P.T., *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary* (London, 1955), p. 838.

27. *Marxism and Beyond*, pp. 158-9.

28. *TriQuarterly* 22, pp. 103-117.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

30. Cyclostyled, for presentation at the University of Reading Conference (see above p. 87); and to be published shortly by Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

31. "Soteriological"—i.e. pertaining to salvation.

32. "Only when the real individual man will absorb back the abstract citizen of the state and—as individual man, in his empirical life, in his individual work, in his individual relationships—will become the species being, only when man will recognize and will organize his 'forces propres' as social forces and, consequently, will not separate from himself the social force in form of political force any more, only then the emancipation of man will be accomplished."

33. For this explanation as to why "we can dispense with historical knowledge" see p. 85.

34. Cf. Your insistence in "Determinism and Responsibility" that "the negation of a norm is a norm", *Marxism and Beyond*, p. 211; and your comments on "technocratic ideology" in L.K., *Positivist Philosophy* (Pelican, 1972), p. 235.

35. Quentin Lauer, introduction to E. Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York, 1965), p. 4.

36. Husserl, *op. cit.* pp. 156-8.

37. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (London, 1878), pp. 10-11. See also MacIntyre's comments on the differences in historical method of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* in his *Marcuse* (London 1970), pp. 32-33.

38. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marcuse*, *passim*.

39. L.K., "Althusser's Marx", *Socialist Register*, 1971, pp. 157-184.

40. The educator has been, for some twenty years, standing on his own head in the House of Commons, as a rather predictable Labour M.P.

41. See e.g. my comments in "Commitment in Politics", *Universities Left Review*, 6, Spring 1959.

42. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Pascal and Marx: on Lucien Goldmann's *Hidden God*", *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London, 1971), pp. 83-84; and compare M. Godelier on "Structure and Contradiction in *Capital*", *Socialist Register* 1967.

43. There is of course a very large amount of expert analysis by economists, social scientists and political theorists which tends towards the conclusions in the previous paragraphs: especially lucid analysis of certain phenomena have been made by Raymond Williams, Ralph Miliband, Bob Rowthorne, Dorothy Wedderburn, Michael Barratt Brown (notably *From Labourism to Socialism* (The Spokesman Press, 1972), Part I; and in certain sections of the *May Day Manifesto* (1967 & 1968).

44. L.K., "The Fate of Marxism in Eastern Europe", *Slavic Review*, 29, no. 2, June 1970, p. 181.

45. L.K. *Marxism and Beyond*, p. 164.

46. L.K., "On the Meaning of Tradition", *Evergreen Review*, 88, April 1971, p. 44. I find in this article an unduly passive presentation of value-formation. You argue, "tradition is the way in which values are preserved and transmitted". You do not discuss the ways in which in the course of changing life experience new values are formed, nor the operative function of the arts in changing men's values.

47. *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, p. 120.
48. MacIntyre, *Marcuse*, p. 20.
49. *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, pp. 123–4.
50. MacIntyre, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness, 11", *New Reasoner*, 8, Spring 1959.
51. It would seem, from the fact that MacIntyre has not republished his "Notes from the Moral Wilderness" nor his "Breaking the Chains of Reason" in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* that he may have lost confidence in these arguments, or in the form in which they were expressed. One appreciates his difficulty: the problems confronted in these pieces were very large, and a thinker as exacting as MacIntyre may well have been dissatisfied with the solutions then proposed. To a historian, however, these essays, together with "Hume on 'is' and 'ought'" (*Against the Self-Images*, pp. 109–124) remain of the first importance, and one hopes that MacIntyre will return to these themes.
52. I find convincing on this L.K., "The Psychoanalytic Theory of Culture", *TriQuarterly*, 22, pp. 68–102; cf. MacIntyre, *Marcuse*, pp. 41–54.
53. L.K., *TriQuarterly*, 22, p. 109.
54. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Breaking the Chains of Reason", *Out of Apathy*, ed. E.P.T. (London, 1960), p. 218.
55. "Notes from the Moral Wilderness, 11", *New Reasoner*, 8, Spring 1959, pp. 94–95; "Notes from the Moral Wilderness, I", *New Reasoner*, 7, Winter 1958–9, p. 100.
56. E. J. Hobsbawm, "Karl Marx's contribution to historiography", *Diogenes* 64, Winter 1968, reprinted in *Ideology in Social Science*, ed. Robin Blackburn (London, 1972).
57. MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, p. 210.
58. L.K., "On the Meaning of Tradition", *Evergreen Review*, April 1971, p. 43.
59. L.K., "The Myth of Human Self-Identity", *passim*.
60. L.K., "The Fate of Marxism in Eastern Europe", *Slavic Review*, June 1970, p. 181.
61. See *The Railway*, ed. E.P.T. (London, 1948), *passim*.
62. Svetozar Stojanovic, *Between Ideals and Reality* (Oxford, 1973), p. 60.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
64. I have argued this more fully in "Peculiarities of the English", *Socialist Register*, 1965; and hope to show the character of Walpole's parasitism in 9 *George I c.22* (forthcoming).
65. See e.g. C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics and People*, ed. I. L. Horowitz, (Oxford, 1963), p. 190: "The leaders as well as the led, and even the mythmakers, are influenced by prevailing rhetorics of justification"; L.K. *Marxism and Beyond*, p. 172: "Generally speaking, the growth of hypocrisy is proof of moral progress, for it indicates that what used to be done openly and without fear of censure can no longer be done without incurring that risk."
66. Mihailo Markovic, "Human Nature and Present-day Possibilities of Social Development", *Tolerance and Revolution*, ed. Kurtz and Stojanovic (Beograd, 1970), p. 94.
67. See E.P.T., "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism", *Past and Present*, 38, December 1967.
68. *There is a Spirit in Europe: a Memoir of Frank Thompson* (London, 1947), pp. 20–21.
69. You appear to share this instant dismissal, writing in some preparatory notes for the Reading Conference: "Let us imagine what 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' would mean if the (real, not imaginary) working class took over exclusive political power now in the U.S." The absurdity of the question appears (in your view) to provide its own answer. But I doubt whether you have given to the question a moment of serious historical imagination: you have simply assumed a white working class, socialized by capitalist institutions as it is now, mystified by the mass media as it is now, structured into competitive organizations as it is now, without self-activity or its **own** forms of political expression:

i.e. a working class with all the attributes of subjection within capitalist structures which one then "imagines" to achieve power without changing either those structures or itself: which is, I fear, a typical example of the fixity of concept which characterizes much capitalist ideology.

70. See especially L.K., "The epistemological significance of the aetiology of knowledge", *TriQuarterly* 22.
71. I assume **that** you know the reasons for this. If you do not, you and every other prospective contributor to *Encounter* ought to. There is now no excuse for ignorance. Apart from the disclosures in the *New York Times* (27 April 1966) and in several issues of *Ramparts*, there is an outstanding study by Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War: a Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom", in *Towards a New Past*, ed. B. J. Bernstein (New York, 1968) which addresses itself especially to as much of the history of *Encounter* as can be discovered without the use of lie-detectors. See also **Conor Cruise O'Brien**, *Writers and Politics*, pp. 169–173. Of course, all this has now changed. The subsidy which used to come to *Encounter* from the C.I.A. via the Congress for Cultural Freedom (or via "laundry" Foundations) is now provided by the Ford Foundation: **McGeorge Bundy**, the President of the latter Foundation, wrote to the *New York Times*, in a letter dated 10 October 1972, confessing that the Ford grant was made in the context of "an interest which has led us also to give help for other notable magazines that also once had C.I.A. support" (e.g. *Survey*, *China Quarterly*). The grant of \$50,000 to *Encounter* was "a good choice within our program purposes".
72. I have studied this pattern (for the 1790s) in E.P.T., "Disenchantment or Default?", *Power and Consciousness*, ed. C. C. O'Brien and W. D. Vaneech (London, 1969); and (for the 1930s) in "Outside the Whale" in *Out of Apathy* (London, 1960).
73. **Alasdair MacIntyre**, "Notes from the Moral Wilderness, I", op. cit. p. 93.
74. From the poem of **Thomas McGrath**, "In a Season of War".
75. **C. Wright Mills**, *The Cause of World War Three*, (New York, 1958), pp. 128–9.