

## TOWARD AN EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL SCIENCE

### Lecture 2: The Road Possibly to be Taken

#### I

Analytical Marxism sets its face resolutely against all forms of Hegelian or dialectical Marxism such as the form of Marxism that I discussed and criticized in the first lecture. It is important to note, however, that Joseph McCarney (the principal subject of my first lecture) was both a paradigmatic and very thorough Hegelian and a dialectical Marxist. But what is most relevant in the present context is to note that he also often deployed careful analytical arguments in setting out his account and defense of Marxism and socialism and he is not alone among Hegelian-oriented Marxists.<sup>1</sup>

Be that as it may, analytical Marxists agree that there is no distinctively Marxist *method* (dialectical or otherwise) which sets Marxism off from (if you will) 'bourgeoisie' social science and philosophy. In terms of origin Marx was, as McCarney among others amply establish, deeply influenced by Hegel and in an important sense was thoroughly Hegelian, particularly in his methodology. That, I believe, was an unfortunate historical accident. His important substantive claims can be and, analytical Marxists believe, should be stated and argued for in complete independence of the so-called Hegelian or dialectical method—something usually so obscure and ill-articulated as to be scarcely if at all intelligible. This is something that analytical Marxists contend or assume and it is something I contended in my first lecture.

What Marxists should do instead, analytical Marxists have it, is to deploy resourcefully the most adequate methods of mainstream social science and philosophy of their time in pursuing the

substantive issues that Marx and Engels have set out. This does not at all mean that we should, let alone must, hold Marx in reverence. To do so is incompatible with having ‘a scientific attitude’ and, I would claim as well, with being through and through reasonable. But that is not at all incompatible with thinking someone’s ideas are deeply important and deserve careful consideration and reconsideration. That is exactly what analytical Marxists feel about Marx, but not, unless they are dogmatists, exclusively about Marx. I, for example, feel that way about Dewey, Davidson, Wittgenstein, Rawls, Rorty, and Gramsci as well. (I do not mean to suggest that they are all of equal importance.)

Mainstream methodologies in science and philosophy that analytical Marxists deploy and claim that all Marxists and scientific socialists should deploy are (1) in philosophy logical, conceptual and linguistic analysis such as logical positivist and post-positivist analytical philosophers deploy; (2) in economics, the technique of analysis Adam Smith and David Ricardo deployed and that have been given mathematical formulation by Leon Walras and Alfred Marshall; and (3) in political science and the social sciences more broadly, what is now called ‘decision theory’, ‘game theory’ or more broadly ‘rational choice theory’. The four founders of analytical Marxism—G. A. Cohen (a philosopher), John Roemer (an economist), Jon Elster (a political scientist), and Erik Olin Wright (a sociologist)—are comfortable with all three of these methodologies and upon occasion, where they are most relevant, employ methodologies across this range, though typically Cohen emphasizes the first, Roemer the second, and Elster and Wright the third. As G. A. Cohen writes, these techniques “are commonly styled ‘analytical’ in a broad sense because their use requires and facilitates precision of statement on the one hand and rigour of argument on the other” (Cohen 2000, xiii).

The above is being analytical in what Cohen calls a *broad* sense. But analytical Marxism is as well analytical in what Cohen calls a narrower sense. This is in its *disposition* to explain molar phenomena—be they entities or processes—by reference to their micro-constituents and micro-

mechanisms. Such a movement to a more atomic level is more integral to the economic techniques utilized by Roemer and the techniques of game theory utilized by Elster for political science, than to “the more purely and more generally philosophical techniques associated with Cohen” (Cohen 2000, xxiii). Similar things obtain for much, but not all, of the sociological analysis used by Wright. However, there is an affinity all along the line in analytical Marxism in there being a commitment to gaining a more fine-grained analysis than many other theorists seek.

Such a penchant was not true of pre-analytical Marxists (e.g., the classical Marxists) or of many non-Marxists as well (e.g., Durkheim, Michels, and Parsons). Some theorists even believe such fine-grained theory or analysis is not feasible or (even if feasible) desirable. Against such holistic thinking Cohen remarks, “insofar as analytical Marxists are analytical in the narrow sense they reject the point of view in which social formations and classes are depicted as entities obeying laws of behavior that are not a function of their constituent individuals” (Cohen 2000, xxiii). Cohen goes on to say:

Now the commitment of analytical Marxists to the constitutive techniques of analytical Marxism is absolute: our belief in the power of analysis, both in its broad and in its narrow sense, is unrevisable. And our commitment to Marxist theses (as opposed to our commitment to socialist values) is not absolute in the way that the commitment to analytical technique is. The commitment to the techniques, so we should claim, reflects nothing less than a commitment to reason itself. It is a refusal to relax the demand for clear statement and rigorous argument. We believe that it is irrational obscurantism to resist analytical reasoning, to resist analysis in the broad sense in the name of dialectic, and to resist analysis in the narrow sense in the name of anti-individualist holism. It is not, of course, irrational obscurantism to reject particular conclusions that are presented as results of analytical reasoning, for ordinary error and extraordinary ideological distortion commonly disfigure such (supposed) results. But to argue that there is something hopelessly undialectical or individualist about analytical techniques themselves represents, we believe, an unwillingness to accept the rule of reason (Cohen 2000, xxiv).

It is, for me at least, tempting to accept what Cohen says as just plainly and unequivocally true and to believe that to deny it or even question it is an irrational abrogation of “a commitment

to reason”—“an unwillingness to accept the rule of reason”. But initially beguiling for me as that thought is, it is mistaken to put things this way or to have such beliefs. We should be *fallibilists all the way down*. That is in the very experimental spirit of scientific inquiry. The classical pragmatists (particularly Peirce and Dewey), the neo-pragmatists (Putnam, Rorty, Brandon, and Stout), such paradigmatic analytic philosophers as Sellars, Quine, and Davidson, as well as such renegades as Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Toulmin and, above all, that *über* renegade Wittgenstein (who is also a founder of analytic philosophy) have enculturated us into this fallibilism and a suspicion of talk of ‘the rule of reason’. (Remember Peirce here on the fixation of belief.) Cohen writes, perhaps to be a bit unfair to him, as if analytic philosophy had culminated with philosophy done in the spirit of Austin and Ryle.

Cohen claims that the commitment to analytical techniques—the commitment to analysis both in its broad and narrow senses—is a commitment to reason. It is, that is, just to accept the rule of reason itself. Not to make such an acceptance or such a commitment is, Cohen claims, irrational and obscurantist. It is irrational to relax the demand for clear statement and rigorous argument. Cohen remarks, “We [analytical Marxists] believe that it is irrational obscurantism to resist analysis in the broad sense in the name of dialectics and to resist analysis in the narrow sense in the name of anti-individualist holism” (Cohen 2000, xxiv). But what exactly, or even inexactly, is this *commitment to reason* or to the *rule of reason* that tells us that this is what we must do? The ‘rule of reason’ has been understood very differently by hosts of intellectuals (including philosophers and scientists) at different times and places and, as it is paradigmatically by us now, even in the same places and times. Even such a careful thinker as Peirce thought it to be an empty appeal. I would ask Cohen, or a Cohenite, to flesh out clearly and to clearly specify what he means by the ‘rule of reason’ or ‘commitment to reason’. These phrases do not wear their meanings on their sleeves. I have little doubt that Cohen could do so. But I very much doubt whether he could spell them out in such a way that it would be seen to be unreasonable to question these spellings

out—i.e., such that we would get something substantive that all people must accept on pain of being unreasonable or irrational. If that is so and Cohen sticks to his guns, he is insisting on it without argument or grounds and in that way without reason. He is being what he calls a dogmatist. It is, for example, very unlikely that he would gain acceptance of his beliefs about unrevisability from all, or even most, people, excluding from considering those who are locked up in mental institutions and the like (Callinicos 2006).<sup>2</sup> He would not even get acceptance from all intellectuals or all philosophers and scientists. He would not even get it from all analytic philosophers. Imagine Reichenbach, Feyerabend, Davidson, and van Frassen agreeing about ‘the rule of reason’ or a ‘commitment to reason’. (Perhaps he would discount Feyerabend as an analytic philosopher? But then just take the others.) We can wave those phrases, e.g., ‘rule of reason’, as banners to rally the faithful or as slogans to excoriate heretics. But there would not be widespread agreement about what constitutes or can constitute precision of argument or exactitude of characterization beyond something rather formal and empty. Talk of ‘the rule of reason’ is not as bad as talk of ‘the Absolute’ or ‘God’ but it is pretty obscure. It is not the way, as Peirce stressed, to be fixing belief (Peirce 1991, 109-23). Cohen has forgotten the lessons of fallibilism and has set himself here on a quest for certainty that hardly fits with a scientific way of thinking that he and his fellow analytic Marxists (among whom I would like to include myself) exemplify. They (including Cohen himself), eschewing unrevisability and absoluteness, have repeatedly modified and altered their positions and sometimes have even abandoned them. Moreover, we should not in any case be claiming certainty and unrevisability. But we can and should be wary of talk of ‘the rule of reason’ without going post-modernist.

Don’t misunderstand me. I am not inveighing against clear statement, rigorous argument, and careful deliberation. That would be absurd and indeed irrational. But I am sceptical about its being context-free (including historical context-free). In struggling for such attainments, for some reasoning to be practice-independent, we are asking for the moon (Toulmin 2001; Geuss 2008),

Cohen himself showed this contextual awareness when he charged that “Elster’s rejection of functional explanation in historical materialism reflected a too insistent analytical stance, in the narrow sense of ‘analytical’” (Cohen 2000, xxiii). There he showed just such a sensitivity, but he abandons it with his talk of ‘the rule of reason’ and unrevisability.

I frequently say to myself, sometimes thinking of Wittgenstein, that what can be said can be said clearly and the rest must be passed over in silence. I (perhaps strangely) am not sure of the truth of that claim and I am puzzled concerning its logical status. On one reading it has a tautological ring and a paradoxical one at that. However, I would like to take it more prosaically as saying that for the purposes of science, philosophy or everyday deliberation our aim should be to state things as clearly as we can and to set aside and pass over in silence allegedly cognitive informational claims that resist such effort. But I certainly would not say that of poetry which has different aims. But philosophy, even Heideggerian philosophy or bad philosophy, is not *pace* Carnap poetry: not even bad poetry. My difficulty with Heidegger, Hegel, Adorno, Derrida, and Althusser as well, as I pointed out in my first lecture, is that they don’t even try to say things clearly. And yet they try to do philosophy.

If they would argue in response, clearly or even reasonably clearly (something that admits of degrees), that there are certain important things they are trying to say that cannot (no matter how hard one tries) be said clearly that can still somehow be understood, though not with clarity, then we should, though cautiously, take interest in those things. But unfortunately here I believe we perhaps are stuck. These philosophers disdain that but some of their commentators rise to that challenge. If some of them succeeded in saying with reasonable clarity that there are these things—important things—that cannot be said clearly, then we might be home and clear. But *what* is this that cannot be said with some reasonable clarity? If one of the commentators says it with reasonable clarity then they by that very act are unsaying what they are saying. If they do not, then they (as it seems even good commentators of Hegel or Adorno do) just leave us with obscure

remarks of their own concerning those they write on or they leave key obscure remarks of the philosopher they are commenting on unexplicated. The commentator who will make everything reasonably clear—who will leave none of their subjects allegedly crucial obscure remarks (what I would call their dark sayings) unexplicated—will be invariably accused by other authorities on Hegel, Adorno, et al., of distorting their texts and of making a fetish of clarity.

We should note, however, that there are thinkers we can learn from and understand reasonably well who are not paradigms of clarity. Kierkegaard and Herder and indeed Marx himself are examples of thinkers we can learn a lot from in spite of their lack of thorough going clarity of statement or rigorous argument (as if we know what that is or know what thorough going or complete clarity is). But they, Cohen responds, are pre-analytical, but after the age of analysis (to use Stuart Hampshire's phrase) Cohen would say for a philosopher, social scientist or historian to be a non-bullshitter they must be committed to and actually practice clarity of argument and rigor of argument. They must reason according to what Cohen calls the 'rule of reason'. But two philosophers both well acquainted with analytic philosophy and generally regarded as important by most analytic philosophers (including for at least one of them by Cohen) lack the kind of clarity (or at least don't practice it) that Cohen requires. Yet we can learn a lot from them. Even some of their remarks which are cloudy are still deeply insightful or suggestive, driving our own thinking along. I refer to Cohen's old teacher and friend Isaiah Berlin and to Jürgen Habermas. But I could have referred to Wilfrid Sellars or Robert Brandon. Clarity and rigor are important but the work of these philosophers often does not fit Cohen's conception of the rule of reason or his analytic ideal. They do not fit with his ideal of clarity. I wish none of them had written just as they did. I refer here not to the contents of their writing but to the way they write. I wish, for example, that Berlin would have calmed down his exuberant metaphors—though they make for enjoyment in reading—and that Habermas would be less turgidly obscure which certainly doesn't make for enjoyment in reading. But *maybe* the way they do it is the best way for them to say what they wanted to say or

*perhaps* the only way they could have said it, though that is more doubtful. But even with their ways of saying thing—not models of clarity—we without their thought would have been at a considerable loss. And the same thing should be said for Collingwood and Toulmin—not paradigms of clarity but not obscurantists either. If these thinkers, following Cohen’s rule, had been preoccupied with getting the clearest sentences they could possibly get and the most rigorous argument they could possibly make, they would not have written in the expansive way they did, giving us the insightful narratives they did. Rigorous argument indeed is important but it is not the whole or even (*pace* John Passmore) the first virtue of a philosopher or intellectual or something that should always be at the center of either philosophy or social science (Passmore 1967).

It is also important to remember there are degrees of unclarity and clarity as well as unreasonableness and reasonableness. Berlin and Habermas are one thing; Hegel and Adorno another. I have great difficulties with the latter two. *Perhaps* I am making unreasonable demands on them? Perhaps I am asking them to say clearly what they say (*perhaps* rightly) cannot be said clearly. Berlin and Habermas with a little effort can be made out. With Hegel and Adorno, it is different. Unless we can somehow, by grasping that there is at play some form of Kierkegaardian indirect discourse which makes things a little more understandable, what they are trying to say is simply lost on us. Or at least on me. (Certainly it would be the utmost in *hubris* to take myself, or for anyone to take themselves, to be the measure of the world.) Still, it isn’t just that what they say cannot be said clearly but that it cannot be said at all in terms of which we can make head or tail. Or am I just talking about myself and people like me, i. e., the bulk of analytic philosophers? Or am I just being dogmatic here? When I say I can’t understand Adorno-talk, suppose someone says, ‘Well, I can.’ Is it unreasonable for me to respond, ‘Well, show us how’? Is it unreasonable to ask for the rules of the game here? And would not that, when my interlocutors (Hegel or Adorno experts) are pushed, come to asking for truth-conditions or assertability-conditions: what would count for the warrantability or unwarrantability? Remember that they (*pace* Carnap) are not writing poetry.



Their not infrequent (to me, at least) utterly obscure Hegelianish or Adornoish sentences are not meant to be poetic utterances. Or am I in making such claims asking too much in the spirit of pragmatism and logical positivism? But is there any alternative here that would be reasonable? Or is 'reasonable' a slippery term here? (See here Sober 1999 or, somewhat differently, Toulmin 2001, 204-14.)<sup>3</sup>

At this point, and my last endnote to the contrary notwithstanding, I say in sympathy with Cohen, 'What is the point of such obscure talk?' Perhaps it is to enable us to see or understand something that we could not otherwise see or understand? But isn't that just a matter of resonating with Adorno or Hegel or attuning to them. They and we are engaging in philosophy—doing some when they wrote and doing some when we try to understand or assess them—and doesn't this unavoidably and rightly involve an attempt to gain something of a 'cognitive grasp of something'? We are not just engaging in mood setting or vision articulating. We should try—I would say *for the context* (moral discourse is one thing; the discourse of chemistry another, logic still another)—for clear statement and sound argument and as perspicuous articulation of the relevant things as we can on occasion get. That is just what it is to be intellectually serious when one is trying to do science or philosophy or anything with a cognitively intellectual content. It is not just or at all a matter of resonating or 'sweet singing'. In science, philosophy and deliberation over practical matters we should ignore those who would make claims about what the world is like who would ignore this. Perhaps we cannot get things precise but we should seek to get things as reasonably clear as we can though we should remember that that will in part depend on what we are talking about. But I am not saying, and I conjecture Cohen would not say either, that the above matters are all there is to life. To come to grips with how the world is is not the only thing of value in the world. To gain a steady grasp of such matters is not the only thing that is worth achieving. Such a 'cognitive grasp' is not all there is to life.

However, to gain a ‘cognitive grasp’ of what the world is like is something of grave importance that both philosophy and science (including a normatively engaged philosophy or enmeshed emancipatory social science) should be centrally concerned with and an emancipatory social science (Marxian or otherwise)—though not as a part of that science—will have as well a vision of how our lives should be and of what a better world would be like.<sup>4</sup>

In line with this I appreciate and applaud Cohen’s remark that we will, or at last should, resist intoxication with Althusserian Marxism when we come “to see that its reiterated affirmation of the value of conceptual rigor was not matched by conceptual rigor in its intellectual practice” (Cohen 2000, xxi). I never felt the attraction that both (though in varying degrees) Cohen and Andrew Levine once had for Althusser. But I resonate with Levine’s point that Althusser importantly insisted on the claim that Marxism and socialism were and must have a determinate scientific aspect if they are to be at all what they aspired to be. They must have a scientificity. Althusser importantly set himself against Hegelian Marxism and Marxist humanism (e.g., Yugoslavian Marxism). But Althusser writes in such a turgid and obscure fashion that he is at least as bad as those he critiques. Perhaps worse. Indeed, worse than the Yugoslavian Marxists. When he started to make his claims about the scientificity of Marxism, he characterized science in such an obscure way, in spite of the fact that he had been a student of Gaston Bachelard (a kind of French Kuhn), that it was scarcely recognizable as a characterization of science of any kind.

I also take Cohen’s moral derived from his unsettling and very, for him, instructive encounter with Isaac Levi when Cohen as a young man read a paper “Bourgeois and Proletarians.” This was a paper written before he had firmly taken his analytical turn, as he puts it. In an extended comment on Marx’s claim that “like the proletariat the bourgeoisie are alienated but that, unlike the proletariat, they [the bourgeoisie] enjoy their alienation and find their strength in it” (Cohen 2000, xxii), Cohen suggested that on Marx’s view “the rich capitalist’s mistress does not love him because of his money; instead, she loves the money itself” (Cohen 2000, xxiv). Levi, in a good pragmatist

fashion (or, if you will, in an analytic fashion), wanted to know what that meant and/or how one was supposed to go about telling whether or not it was true: what, precisely, was the *difference* between loving someone *just* because of their money and loving that money itself? Reflecting on this, Cohen remarks of himself that he “stopped writing (at least partly) in the fashion of a poet who puts down what sounds good to him and who needn’t defend his lines (either they resonate with the reader or they don’t). Instead, “I tried [Cohen remarks] to ask myself when writing: precisely what does the sentence contribute to the developing exposition or argument and is it true?” (Cohen 2000, xxiv). The lessons that Cohen learned here are just what should be learned, though, as I remarked above, we can make a fetish of them. Moreover, analytical Marxism or any good philosophy or truth-seeking intellectual activity should adopt them. Any serious and responsible intellectual should seek to ascertain whether what at the time and for the matter that he is concerned with is warrantably assertable. He should also have learned a pragmatist/verificationist lesson from Levi. It should be that when in any non-formal context we are trying to ascertain what we responsibly should believe concerning what is the case, we should try to ascertain the truth-conditions or at least the assertability-conditions of what must obtain for a claim to be true or to be false or probably true or false. Strict across the board verificationism is a thing of the past. But not all is dross that was a part of that program (Sober 1999).

Cohen is a philosopher I genuinely admire and regard as not only a principal source of analytical Marxism but as its most important lucid and consistent advocate. But that notwithstanding, I think his remarks that I have been considering about unrevisability, the rule of reason, absoluteness, and what he says about bullshit are mistaken and unfortunately so. They have a rationalistic tone that runs counter to the very fallibilist and genuinely experimentalist scientific attitude that he and his fellow analytical Marxists so brilliantly instantiate. I put it down (to be a bit *ad hominum*) to a rather kneejerk reaction to the obscurities of Hegelian Marxism and its nemesis Althusserian Marxism and to the dogmatism and utterly unscientific claims to ‘scientific

socialism' of the official and doctrinaire 'Marxism' of the Soviet Union and its comprador states and of the Second and Third Internationales. But Cohen's remarks I have been objecting to are (in effect, if not in intention) meta-theoretical remarks that can, and should, be benignly neglected and forgotten. One can go on in the reasonable and rational way that most analytical Marxists in practice (including Cohen) do without a rationalistic song and dance about the rule of reason and without being spooked out by the specter of post-modernism. Cohen remarks, speaking for all analytical Marxists, "in all our work, it is always Marxism that is in question and analysis is used to question Marxism" (Cohen 2000, xxiv). But where reflection generates a reason (or at least a cause) for scepticism about some Marxian claims, either or both should be questioned and neither should be taken as foundational, as the 'bottom line', as the 'last word' that we just without question must rely on. (We should not be in the business of 'the bottom line'. We should be fallibilists and non-foundationalists all the way down. Moreover, we are not caught in a pragmatic contradiction. We should be fallibilist about our fallibilism itself.)<sup>5</sup>

## II

I now want to turn to some more positive remarks about analytical Marxism. Take Cohen's remark quoted below and the gloss on it that Cohen *endorses*:

I think that three questions should command the attention of those of us who work within the Marxist tradition today. They are the questions of design, justification, and strategy, in relation to the project of opposing and overcoming capitalism. The first question is, What do we want? What, in general, and even not so general terms, is the form of the socialist society that we seek? The second question is, Why do we want it? What exactly is wrong with capitalism, and what is right about socialism? And the third question is, How can we achieve it? What are the implications for practice of the fact that the working class in advanced capitalist society is not now what it was, or what it was once thought to be? (Cohen, *History, Labour and Freedom*, Oxford 1988, p. xii) [Now for his commentator's remark.] According to Jon Elster, the Analytical Marxists have subjected virtually every tenet of classical Marxism to 'insistent criticism', but the foregoing quote . . . should clarify why most of these critics still identify themselves as Marxist. Much of the scholarship produced by Analytical Marxists addresses

one or more of the three questions posed by Cohen and explores the possibilities of transcending capitalism. 'Perhaps the greatest task of Marxism today', suggests Roemer, 'is to construct a modern theory of socialism'. The emphasis on using the full methodological armory of modern social science stems from the desire to give better answers to questions about the longevity of capitalism and the viability of socialism (Cohen 2000, xxv. The commentator was Tom Mayer, 1994, 16).<sup>6</sup>

We first should note that all the scholars and analytical Lefties whom Cohen describes as being of a Marxist or quasi-Marxist persuasion who met first in 1979 (the so-called September Group) to discuss elements of analytical Marxism have continued to meet up to now. Only two—Jon Elster and Adam Przeworski—talked and thought themselves out of Marxism. But all the others have stayed and others have joined the group, among them Joshua Cohen. They are a diverse group. They all are analytical and most are Marxist but all subscribe to Elster's commitment to insistent criticism of the Marxist canon. Still, all of them are some form of socialist.

Cohen remarks that it was unfortunate that people who came to be designated as Marxists were so called, analytical or otherwise, rather than called what Engels preferred, namely, 'scientific socialists'. Marx and Engels, and indeed Lenin, Trotsky, Luxembourge, Gramsci, and as well analytical Marxists today, want or wanted to set out a scientific socialism in opposition to utopian socialists. Analytical Marxists wished to articulate a conception of Marxism that was on a *sure road to science*. They all sought to construct or reconstruct socialism as a social science (though not *only* as a social science), albeit an emancipatory social science—something that some intellectuals, mistakenly I shall argue later, came to regard as oxymoronic.

However, those who work in what has come to be called the Marxist tradition have almost without exception regarded their socialism as an emancipatory social science using in the interests of socialism the most advanced resources of the social sciences at the time of their writing. This is exemplified very robustly by analytical Marxists. It is unfortunate that they or any other Marxists have been called Marxists, let alone (*pace* Lukács) orthodox Marxists. It makes it all sound too much like church. The very use of 'Marxism' rather than 'scientific socialism' assimilates it too

much to religion. Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam all were founded by figures who their followers fervently believed revealed *the truth*—the *redemptive* truth—once and for all. To speak of Marxism, or of Marx founding Marxism, makes Marxism sound too much like a religion—something which it is not or at least certainly should not be, particularly if it is also, as it is, to be construed as a science. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Marx famously said of himself, “I am not a Marxist.”

If socialism has obtained or is to obtain the status of science, then it would be out of place to ask a socialist if she were a Marxist. It would be as conceptually anomalous as it would be to ask a physicist if she were a Galilean or a Newtonian. If all the same this misdirected question is asked, a sensible response from a contemporary physicist would be, ‘Look, Galileo or perhaps Newton or both founded physics and much of what they said remains true’. But, as Cohen well puts it, the physicist should go on to say, ‘We physicists don’t call ourselves “Galileans” or “Newtonians” because physics is a progressive discipline and no one expects that the views of its founders will remain intact. Contemporary physicists will reject many of the things Galileo and Newton said. Only so can it be loyal to the tradition which they founded’ (Cohen 2000, xxvii).

Note that could only rightly be said of a science like physics or chemistry whose scientificity is secure. Yet scientifically secure as biology is, it is not quite so secure as physics or chemistry and it is not quite so out of place to ask a biologist if she is a Darwinian.<sup>7</sup> It is not *quite* like asking a physicist if she is a Newtonian. But I emphasize ‘quite’. But if we turn to social science it is a somewhat different story. It is problematic—some would say very problematic—to say that social science (even economics) has gained a status like physics or even biology (Toulmin 1999, 47-66). Marx and Engels and most analytical Marxists think and proceed on the assumption that it has gained that status. But it is not at all odd (conceptually anomalous) to ask a social scientist if she is a Marxian. The answer reasonably could be yes or no or that they don’t know.

Cohen in this mode of thought remarks, "If it were not just a fact, *but also appropriate*, today that Marxism gets called 'Marxism' then Marx would have failed" (Cohen 2000, xxvii; italics mine). And many people think he failed. Even if he did found a social science, Cohen goes on immediately to say, "there are, of course, big differences between physics and the social sciences" (Cohen 2000, xxvii). And it is not just in the subject matter and the intellectual resources needed to cope with it but the security of its status as a science; its very claim to be a genuine science. (Remember there are not unreasonable people who will say that 'social science' and 'political science' are oxymoronic. Not a few political science departments have renamed themselves departments of politics or political studies.) But whatever we say here social science is not and never will be as scientifically developed as natural science or even the biological sciences. You do not need to read Galileo or Newton to be a good physicist (reading them is part of the vocation not of the physicist but of historians of physics). And the same thing is true about Darwin for a contemporary biologist. "We have not," Cohen goes on to say, "progressed so far that it is time to stop reading Marx. The study of Marx and Engels remains an indispensable element in a scientific socialist education" (Cohen 2000, xvii-xxviii). And I would say the same thing is true for a contemporary economist, though, alas, that is far from being true in practice.

However, we should ask, 'Why is this so?' Is it something that is just baldly contingent and may without mystification cease to be so one hundred years from now *if homo sapiens* is still around and in decent shape in decent conditions with a decent education? We just don't know. Even if conditions remain decent for human life (something that is not very likely) we still will not know. The jury is out here. If *naturewissenschaften* and *geistwissenschaften* are very different we will have good reason to think that there will never be a reduction or partial assimilation of one to the other. But they seem at least to be importantly different activities. People such as Peter Winch and Charles Taylor and such a different figure as Donald Davidson are neither stupid nor ill-informed about such matters and they are very philosophically sophisticated. They believe that

there is not much prospect that there will be such erosion of the current belief held by many people concerning the difference between *naturewissenschaften* and *geistwissenschaften*. But *some* social scientists believe that this situation will not continue for, they believe, social science is on its way to becoming a mature science. Again, the jury is out. And it may indeed result in a hung jury. That is, it is not unreasonable (though perhaps mistaken) to think the jury is permanently out.

That is why it is so untoward—or perhaps I am just mistaken here—of Cohen to say that “there exists Marxism which is neither analytical nor bullshit, but once such (as we may designate it) pre-analytical Marxism encounters analytical Marxism, then it must either become analytical or become bullshit” (Cohen 2000, xxvi). I can well understand feeling that way when one encounters what one can only hope, and probably rightly, is an unintentionally obscurantist Marxism. But then when one encounters analytically literate non-analyticals such as Joseph McCarney, Christopher Arthur, Simon Critchley, Bertell Ollman, and Michael Lebowitz one realizes Cohen’s judgment concerning the whole of non-analytical Marxism is not justified or even reasonable. This is all the more distressing since Cohen is normally a very open-minded person acutely aware of alternatives and sensitive to them. He is out of character here.

It is surely right, as Cohen stresses, that there is a distinction between a dogmatist and a bullshitter. A “dogmatist maintains his belief in the face of all criticism as best he can, and who might even admit he has no good response to a particular criticism while nevertheless sticking to his dogmatically held view” (Cohen 2000, xxvi). Cardinal Newman is a good example of such a dogmatist, indeed—though this sounds like a contradiction—a reflective one. A bullshitter by contrast just goes with the flow, shifting with the warp and woof of the argument like a good sophist.

However, the contemporary non-analytical Marxists I have just mentioned—and they are not alone—are not at all like that. They are aware, with varying degrees of thoroughness, of analytical Marxism, respond to it in thoughtful though perhaps in mistaken ways, and articulate



reflective and reasoned responses. There are other philosophers who are analytical and deeply schooled in the analytical tradition who do not go Cohen-like concerning analytical philosophy and its alternatives. I am thinking here of Sellars, Rorty, Brandon, and Allen Wood among others. It would certainly be irresponsible to say they have no use for reasonability or what Cohen calls 'the rule of reason'. (Cohen actually said of Allen Wood that he wrote the best general book on Marx in English (Cohen 1983).) The bullshitter by contrast has no concern for truth or to get something that is warrantably assertable or even close to it and like a sophist he will shift his position or his arguments in an attempt to keep from being bested. The thing for him is to keep at almost any cost from losing the favor of his audience. The show is the thing. What is crucial for him is to win; it is not to try to ascertain what it is more reasonable to believe. There are a lot of bullshitters around, some of them very sophisticated and some perhaps not quite conscious of what they are doing (e.g., that they are in fact though not intention bullshitters) and not all of them are antagonistic to analytical philosophy. Like Kant's 'man of good morals' as distinct from 'a morally good man', they are often hard to spot. Still, as difficult to detect as the bullshitter sometimes is, we should be on the lookout for bullshitters. But, even more importantly, we should beware of acquiescing in the cynical but still mistaken belief that one person's intellectual hero is another person's bullshitter.

People here can be what Kierkegaard called double-minded. The thing to remember is that the conscious bullshitter is not concerned with principle and has no concern with honesty and integrity except to *appear* honest and as a person of integrity. He/she has an exclusively instrumental concern with being principled or, rather more accurately, with the *appearance* of being principled. But we should also, if we can, have an acute awareness of the possibility of our being *unwittingly* double-minded—of being unaware of our plentiful capacity for self-deception. But all that aside, surely honest commitment, integrity and concern with truth or warranted assertibility is as true of non-analytical but still analytically informed Marxists such as the non-analytical Marxists I have just mentioned.

There is, as my above remark gestures at, surely a lot of bullshitting in the world and Cohen has the right attitude toward it. But there is a lot of understandable confusion, indecisiveness, and intractable disagreement as well among contestants and where this obtains scepticism and tolerance is in order among the contestants. There is also, as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, a lot of self-deception. It is something like influenza that may creep up on us unnoticed. He who with integrity just proclaims the rightness or truth of his view is being a *parti-pris* dogmatic proclaimer and not someone with a philosophical or scientific attitude. Though he need not be a bullshitter, he is a dogmatist and both are to be resisted. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish one from the other. But that is no reason to collapse the distinctions (1. honest and reasonable searcher for what is warranted, 2. *parti-pris* dogmatist, and 3. a bullshitter). It is all the more reason to try to maintain the distinctions. I have been centrally concerned in these last few pages to refute Cohen's claim that an analytically informed non-analytical Marxist must be a bullshitter. I think to claim this is both mistaken and untoward. It is itself a bit of unwitting dogmatism. Moreover, particularly in a contemporary culture which has little contact with analytic ways, we could also have a non-analytical Marxist who was neither a dogmatist nor a bullshitter.<sup>8</sup> And, as I pointed out, we have some in our culture who while not innocent of analytical ways also are neither.

### III

This has been a long preamble to my own articulation and defense of an emancipatory social science and an analytical Marxism that has as its center such a social science (Nielsen 2003, 81-116). Besides being a theory and practice of revolution against capitalism, or at least a theory and practice for overcoming and transcending capitalism, analytical Marxism is an emancipatory social science. I shall argue that enough of the canonical core of classical Marxism remains, even after analytical pruning, to yield an emancipatory social science. My claim will be that even after the classical core of Marxism has been suitably reconstructed, though sometimes with some of its

claims cut back, enough of it remains on which to construct a sound emancipatory social science in the service of socialism. It, that is, is sufficient for a genuinely scientific socialism (Levine *et al.* 1992, 89-100, 179-98; Cohen 2000, 341-88). It retains as a *presupposition* Marx's vision of a socialist and then a communist world order (Levine 1993). This, when properly understood, is a powerful normative vision, Marx's anti-moralism notwithstanding.

Analytical Marxists, taking their work together, have articulated an account of an emancipatory social science for a scientific socialism that does not collapse into something that is *merely* an ethical or utopian socialism. I do not deny that, in addition to its scientific content and scientific manner of proceeding, analytical Marxism has, non-conflictingly, a utopian and moral content and thrust. It has a utopian vision of what a world would be where human beings would flourish—a world very different from the pigsty and insane asylum we live in now, most particularly evident when we view the world globally. Such a claim about the world we live in now may seem to some, perhaps even to most people who live in the geopolitical North, much too extreme and exaggerated. Tolerably well off and sheltered people living in the North, if they did not read or travel extensively, might not notice it, particularly if they lived in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, or contemporary Ireland. But I think, though deliberately metaphorical, it is not unjustifiably extreme and that these are appropriate metaphors which fit our global world. That is, if we take a non-evasive look, at what our world is like. But be that as it may, the positive Marxian vision, inescapably vague, is a conception of a world that is through and through good, a world which would capture a reflective and informed moral point of view (Nielsen 2001). It is of a world that would be classless, non-racist, non-ethnically divisive, and non-sexist. It would be a world where for all human beings there will be no socially caused impediments to their flourishing. There will be only impediments that for some and sometimes for all can't be escaped such as purely physical things caused by injuries, aging or other infirmities—either inescapable ones or diseases that come upon us that for us that are at the time inescapable there being no way at least at the time

of preventing or curing them. The vision of the Marxist tradition is of a world that maximally utilizes its best scientific knowledge and its resources to cure all the ills that can be so cured now or, where they cannot be cured, to ameliorate them as fully as possible within the limits of our worldwide resources, including our scientific resources and our best sympathetic understanding of people and their inescapable situations (situations that cannot be rectified). No one shall be left to die in eradicable pain and suffering or with inescapable and unreasonable cognitive losses that make their lives meaningless where there is no longer even the faintest possibility of their living a life or having a consciousness of or any pleasure in mere existing (though we must be very careful that this is really so.)<sup>9</sup> They should not be required to continue to exist in such conditions until they die in misery or in utter and irreversible unconsciousness.

In short, the Marxian utopian vision is that of a world where everyone's compossible needs are met to the fullest extent possible. What we should aim at is captured by Marx's famous slogan for a fully communist world, "To each according to his needs and from each according to his abilities." It will be a solidaristic world—a republic of equals—where people serve and are served. This vision would, if people acted in accordance with it, yield a fundamental equality of circumstance worldwide giving some flesh—some non-ideological reality—to the utopian and cosmopolitan ideal that the life of everyone matters and matters equally. I have stressed in giving some substance to this ideal the relief of suffering and the importance of compassion and the importance of community. But there is as well the ideal of achieving as maximal flourishing as possible for all people. Some people cannot flourish as well as others. And there must be no leveling down. But everyone within the limits of possibility must be helped to flourish as much as they can.

We are, of course, light years away from achieving or even approximating these things and perhaps (very likely perhaps) we always will be. But this, Marx's anti-moralism notwithstanding, is a socialist and communist utopian vision. It, fact-insensitive though it *may* be in some crucial

respects, is compatible with scientific socialism though scientific socialism does not require it except, perhaps, as a presupposed *heuristic* ideal. And even that would not be part of its science but the normative vision *its* science presupposes and serves. You don't have to be a utopian socialist to have that ideal. And we might, as I do, have Marx's low estimate of moralizing's causal efficiency (efficiency for achieving and sustaining socialism) and still have that ideal as I believe Marx in practice did, his nay-saying anti-moralism and pessimism about human nature notwithstanding. Generally, moralizing won't do much to change the world or even do much to help understand it. It may sometimes even be an impediment. It can, however, give us some idea of where ideally we would like to go, but we must not just blow bubbles in the air.

Marx and Engels and classical Marxists following them rejected a moralizing Marxism and any attempt to set their scientific socialism on moral foundations (Nielsen 1988; 1989; 2009). Yet their work—Marx's *Capital*, for example—resounds with strong moral condemnations of capitalism, with Marx's rage against that very system with its exploitation, oppression, domination, and the willingness to immiserate or at least indifference to the immiseration of people. Moreover, they did have a utopian vision of what the world would become with the end of capitalism and the development of socialism into communism and they took this ending to be deeply desirable (Levine 1993). But this was not their tactical and strategic focus. Their focus was to give an accurate account of *what* capitalism is, *why* it is that way, and, indeed for classical Marxists necessarily so, *what* it was becoming and an account of *when* and *how* it can and will be brought to an end and be replaced by a socialist and finally a communist order. Given these 'laws of motion' of capitalism, there was little point in saying it should be such and such or not be at all. Their anti-moralist strain was rooted in this and in a firm recognition of how most moralizing was ideological and how it is used in our societies to preserve and facilitate the capitalist order, whether in intention or just in effect. Moralizing, that is, mostly functions to serve in various ways ruling class interests.

Sometimes crudely and at other times sophisticatedly, the latter effectively disguising how moralizing so answers to class interests.

A Marxist emancipatory social science under analytical auspices enables us to understand what is going on in the world by (1) clearly describing and explaining how these things are and (2) by explaining why they are that way and how this order is sustained. It calls our attention to things which we are conditioned in capitalist societies not to see. It also, where the conditioning is not effective and we become aware that people are hoodwinked into believing that is just the way things are and indeed factually speaking must be. People have been and are being so indoctrinated. Feudal ideology and then capitalist ideology have conditioned people into believing that the way things are in their societies are just rooted in the human condition. The poor, we are conditioned to believe, will always be with us. There is no alternative to this. As Margaret Thatcher famously put it, “There is no alternative.” For Marxists *au contraire* many of these things are rooted instead in our historically given social systems and indeed for us in the capitalist system. They are not deep unalterable facts of human nature; they are not the way things must be. They are not the way social systems and human life must be (Fanon 1965, 237-50).

Of course, there are different ways of describing, explaining and interpreting—sometimes radically different ones—that are economically and politically important. With, say Frederick Hayek, Michael Oakshott, or Robert Kaplan, we have accounts of the world that are radically different accounts of the world from that of such contemporary Marxists as David Harvey, Colin Leys, Samir Amin, and Leo Panitch. There will, of course, be disputes about who, if anyone, comes closer to telling it like it is or, indeed, if there can be any telling it like it is. But, whatever we say here, Marxist social science has a very different take on things than we usually get from our mass media or even from more conventional academic sources such as the conservative ones mentioned above. Marxist social scientists and (seldom-read) Marxist activists—Marxists may be both—point to social facts most people, including most academics, are quite likely to be unaware of. Concerning

them, and for more well known facts as well, Marxians often give us different explanations or interpretations than we will see elsewhere. These explanations function within a program which has plainly normative ends or goals but has a distinctive empirical take on what the world is like as well. (The very idea of changing the world expresses and requires both. This is similar for the claim that a different world is possible.) But these so embedded descriptions, explanations and interpretations make confirmable or infirmable claims if they are genuinely scientific. These descriptions, explanations and interpretations, directly or indirectly, face the bar of empirical evidence. (This is true at least of the emancipatory social science of analytical Marxists. And it is often though not invariably true of the Marxian activists as well. Indeed, it should always be true of them.)

Let me illustrate this from a Marxist oriented report on the recent (Fall 2008) attacks in Mumbai. It first reports something that is well known to people somewhat informed by the mass media, namely, that the death toll from the attacks in Mumbai as of December 2, 2008 had risen to 173 with hundreds more wounded. But then it also goes on to report facts that are less well known at least in the North. They are facts that are important to become aware of in coming to properly understand the attacks and what they signify for life in India and Pakistan and for what should be done there. First, there is the fact of extensive recent attacks on Muslims in India. These attacks, even the single one in 2002 in the state of Gujarat in India just north of Mumbai, caused (to understate it) far more deaths and extreme suffering than the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. These attacks by extreme rightwing Hindu organizations resulted in the death of 2,000 Muslims and drove 200,000 from their homes. They were carried out by Hindu extremists who were part of a fanatical rightwing Hindu organization with an extreme anti-Muslim ideology. And in the summer of 2008 the Indian state, facing demonstrations by hundreds of thousands of people in Kashmir, used its police and armed forces to brutally attack the demonstrators. There the object of the violent repression was against the Muslim majority in Kashmir.

India is a country of one billion people. Most people in the North, if they think about India at all, are likely to think of India as a rapidly modernizing country greatly profiting from capitalist globalization. Indians do this perhaps most prominently through their high tech industries. It is true that a few Indians have profited from that and that there has more generally been rapid industrialization in India. However, its benefits have not been spread out among the population, and poverty and inequality have grown enormously. Many live in incredible and increasing poverty. High tech industries employ just 0.2 percent of India's 1 billion people, while almost half of all Indians live below the international poverty line of the equivalent of \$1.24 US a day. The World Bank reports that half of the children of India are so malnourished that their bodies fail to achieve normal size (*Workers' World* 2008). Moreover, they have the highest rate of such malnourishment in the world.

Now relate this to the Muslims of India. They number 150 million—13 percent of the population—and are the poorest segment of people in a very poor country with the lowest literacy, lowest income, highest infant mortality, highest unemployment, and (when they have them) the worst jobs. One third of the villages in India with a majority Muslim population have no schools at all (*Workers' World* 2008).

Given all these social facts—determinable empirical facts, though facts that few of us, at least in the North, know—how should we view the attacks in Mumbai? I am not saying or suggesting that the attacks in Mumbai were justified. They plainly were not. But, given the above understanding, it is hardly surprising that Indian Muslim youth, as well as Pakistani Moslem youth, will be radicalized and that some will turn to desperate measures. (I do not mean to suggest that only youths will be radicalized but to give to understand that their radicalization will be the most politically salient.) It *may* be that the Mumbai killing was only a Pakistani affair, though this is not what later reports *seem* to bear out. But it is understandable, given what we have noted above, that the attackers or some of them could be homegrown. Be that as it may, the report—a Marxist



report—goes on to say, correctly I believe, “Marxists know that violence against wealthy individuals and their politicians does not end the system of exploitation and oppression. They also understand that when there seem to be no alternatives, such actions are bound to arise from the violence of the system and the misery and desperation that millions experience” (*Workers’ World* 2008). Here we move from determinable facts to at least putative explanations and interpretations of them which also purport at least to be factual and factually well taken. And they very likely are. Moreover, if we accept this account of the situation in India, it is very likely that we will come to believe that, though the attacks are condemnable and indeed deserved condemnation, the situation that caused them was even more evil and condemnable with its oppression, domination and destruction and prevention of even remotely decent life chances for vast numbers of Indian Muslims. And such strong religious and ethnic fanatical hatred and violence directed against Indian Muslims is bound to provoke and sustain counter violence. (I am not saying that there is not hatred on both sides. There is. In this sense it is like the Israeli and Palestinian situation.)

A socialist emancipatory social science will show us that and how the reality of such states of affairs is not just rooted in the human condition. It will show us meaningful ways to interpret and explain such events. It will also, being emancipatory, point to ways in which such inhuman situations can be resisted and in some situations overcome. We will come to clearly see, if we have any moral awareness at all, that such situations are unjust and evil. Moreover, we hardly need a moral theory here to see that. A fine-grained account of equality, autonomy, solidarity, and justice is not needed to see that such situations are both evil and alterable. There is no need for micro foundations here. We only need an egalitarian ethos with the moral convictions that are commensurate with it; and the specification of that ethos need not be something fine-grained. The thing is to see how our somewhat more generalized moral beliefs—what Rawls calls considered judgments and others have called intuitions—should be translated into the concrete and for that we do not need a fine-grained philosophical account or indeed any philosophical account of justice,

autonomy, equality, solidarity, and a moral point of view. In fact, and reasonably so, such more fine-grained accounts piggy-back on certain un-fine-grained egalitarian and liberal convictions *and* on a good knowledge of how the world goes and a reasonable understanding of how it could go differently. It is that which undergirds what has been called 'Marxist amorality'. An understanding of a Marxian account of ideology and its home in Marxian class theory and historical materialism is what we need here.

But the rudimentary moral convictions we rely on are equally compatible with liberal (social democratic) considered judgments (considered convictions), some of which *may* be fact-insensitive, and the very similar ones of Marxists. (For some Marxists, including Marxist amorality, they may not be articulated but they are held in practice.) But such radical egalitarian Marxists have a much more realistic political and economic sociology than Rawls deploys (Levine 1986). The most important thing is not to worry about these shared liberal and Marxian moral convictions. They will have the concurrence of moderns (or at least most of them) lucky enough to have what Freud called a sober education. What we should be worried about is having or getting a reasonable knowledge of the facts on the ground, including their explanations and best interpretations and at least a somewhat comprehensive viewing of them. And this, if it does not require it, is greatly aided by a well validated emancipatory social science.

#### IV

In this penultimate section and the next I shall consider the conception of emancipatory social science of one of four major figures of analytical Marxism, the sociologist Erik Olin Wright. He has a considerable body of writing but I shall concentrate on only four recent essays (Wright 2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2006). Within that space I shall concentrate most extensively on the 2006 article "A Compass for the Left," for it focuses on what is most central to what I have been concerned with in these lectures. But all four relatively recent articles meld together into a

formidable case by analytical Marxism for the scientificity of socialism, and for an emancipatory social science.

Wright, a sociologist, is, as I initially remarked, one of the four most prominent figures in analytical Marxism. The others are G. A. Cohen (a philosopher), John Roemer (an economist), and Jon Elster (a political scientist). Wright (as all the others) exhibits in his work the virtues of analytical thought but as well he has a thorough grip on his own discipline. And he utilizes these talents with clarity and an intelligent purpose. Fitting with his disciplinary orientation, his work is most extensively oriented towards class analysis and articulating clearly a conception of an emancipatory social science with a clear Marxian orientation. He is most noted for his striking and innovative work on class exploitation, particularly in capitalist societies (Wright 1978; 1985; 1996; 1997). He also has a good understanding of philosophy and it shows in his work. It comes out in his articulation of what he calls *radical* egalitarianism and its place in the social sciences and particularly in an emancipatory social science with a Marxian orientation. Unlike Joseph McCarney, he does not think an emancipatory social science can be without normative functions. But like McCarney, he understands the importance of what has been called Marx's amoralism. (Indeed Allen Wood, no enemy of Marx, has characterized it as Marx's *immoralism* (Wood, 1985).) While Wright is reasonably clear about what he is saying about egalitarianism, justice, autonomy, solidarity, exploitation, and the like, his characterizations of these normative notions are not nearly as fine-grained as G. A. Cohen's or John Roemer's or for that matter mine (Cohen 2008; Roemer 1994; Nielsen 1989 and 2003). Without in any way condoning—let alone in any way defending—obscurantism, I think Wright's proceeding as he does is a virtue at least for what he is trying, quite legitimately, to achieve. Again note the importance of contextualism. How fine-grained we should get and in what way depends on the context including our goals. For setting out, explaining and defending an emancipatory social science, Wright has found, I believe, at least approximately the right level. And he has found, or at least nearly so, the right level without betraying the ideals of

analytical Marxism or the Marxist tradition more generally. (However, I am *somewhat* ambivalent about some of this and I shall return to it later after I have described and examined what he says about radical egalitarianism and its place in an emancipatory social science.)

I shall now proceed to an examination of Wright's texts listed above. In the first part of his "Compass Points: Towards a Socialist Alternative", Wright shows how socialism is located "within a broad agenda of emancipatory social theory" (Wright 2006, 93). He remarks:

Emancipatory social science, in its broadest terms, seeks to generate knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging human oppression and creating the conditions in which people can live flourishing lives. To call it a social *science*, rather than social criticism or philosophy, is to recognize the importance for this task of systematic scientific knowledge about how the world works. To call it *emancipatory* is to identify its central moral purpose—the elimination of oppression, and the creation of conditions for human flourishing. And to call it *social* implies a belief that emancipation depends upon the transformation of the social world, not just the inner self. To fulfill its mission, any emancipatory social science faces three basic tasks: first, to elaborate a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists; second, to envision viable alternatives; and third, to understand the obstacles, possibilities and dilemmas of transformation. In different historical moments one or another of these may be more pressing than others, but all are necessary for a comprehensive emancipatory theory (Wright 2006, 94).

Wright's characterization will raise the eyebrows of those still captivated by the idea that science—including social science—is and must be 'value neutral' in order to be genuinely scientific. Moreover, they will think that to speak, as we have just seen Wright does, of science's moral purpose, let alone its central moral purpose, is unscientific. Science should and indeed must limit itself to gaining a systematic scientific knowledge of how the world works and why it works that way and to how it can plausibly come to so work. There are two importantly distinct issues here: (1) whether there can be a normatively neutral description of the world, particularly of the social world; and (2) whether there is a *scientifically acceptable sense* in speaking of the moral purpose of science. When, some will say, science has given its most accurate descriptions, given us its best causal explanations (something that will carry with it predictions) and most perceptive

interpretations, including, where that can be had (if it ever can be had) comprehensive ones, its task is finished.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps public intellectuals, moralists and moral philosophers can utilize, and indeed legitimately, these empirical findings for enlightening and indeed emancipatory purposes but that is not the business of science *per se*. Perhaps an emancipatory theory can be extended beyond an emancipatory social science to include an emancipatory theory which contains those non-scientific but not unscientific activities as well. But then it will not just be an emancipatory social science or any kind of science. It will have a part which is *non-scientific*. Perhaps Wright meant to suggest this in his last sentence in the above quotation but he is not explicit about it—though he is when writing with Andrew Levine and Elliot Sober in *Reconstructing Marxism* (Levine *et al.*, 1992, 187-91). To be genuine science, some will say, it must limit itself to a value-neutral description, explanation and to non-moral—not immoral—interpretations. If we are clear about the task and vocation of a scientist (to echo Weber), we will acknowledge the last part of the sentence—namely, the part about interpretations—of the immediately prior sentence, but not the part about the value-neutral descriptions. It is also important to recognize that we could reject the part about value-neutral rejections (as I think most social scientists now would) and still affirm the denial of (2), namely, that there is a *scientifically acceptable* sense in speaking of the moral purpose of that science. (It is now commonplace to say that social science discourse in many areas cannot be normatively neutral. It cannot avoid using thick concepts. But to say ‘Our study shows that there is a lot of male domination in our society’ need not be to say or give to understand that it is wrong. To add, in my view plainly appropriately, that it certainly should be taken to be plainly wrong is not to make a further scientific remark but to make a moral one and one that is justified. And all justification need not be scientific justification—though this is not to give to understand that that justification is or can be unscientific.)

I have given in my first lecture my reasons for believing (1) to be false. Briefly now: thick concepts and thick descriptions are pervasive and ineliminable in our discourses including our

social scientific discourse where they have both substantive informative content and substantive normative content often inextricably mixed (Berlin 1980, 103-42). I speak here of concepts and descriptive terms which have both a descriptive and evaluative content that is indivisible. Think of terms like 'rude', 'amenable', 'touchy', 'sleazy', 'beastly', 'alienated', 'kindly', 'thoughtfully', or 'compassionately'. We cannot specify their descriptive content independently of their evaluative or normative content or vice-versa. We cannot separately analyze the descriptive part or the normative part. When a social scientist speaks of 'oppression', 'domination', or 'exploitation' she is using such expressions and utilizing such concepts (the concepts these terms are expressive of); her discourse would be impoverished or (if you will) inadequate to its subject if she did not use them or other terms expressing similarly content-full thick concepts (Berlin 1980, 103-42). (Again with 'impoverished' and 'inadequate' we are using thick terms expressive of thick concepts. There is no escape from that.) We could hardly open our mouths without using such concepts. Evaluating and describing come together pervasively in many contexts, contexts that the social scientist cannot avoid if she wants to say anything not so thin as to be practically devoid of content. (By the way, similar things obtain in normative ethical theory.) But the social scientist *qua* social scientist cannot be using them to make moral remarks; but she may go on to make a moral remark—indeed a reasonable moral remarks—as well but not *qua* social scientist. A social scientist studying urban ghetto life might well say, 'Partially as a result of continued overcrowding, ghetto life is becoming more oppressive.' And she may then go on to say, 'And we must do everything we can to relieve that oppressiveness.' The first statement (correct or incorrect) is a scientific observation; the second is a moral remark. They are validated in different ways. Moreover, to make both of them plainly does not require the social scientist to go schizoid.

However, (2) is another matter. Here, I think, Wright has gone off the mark or at least has not expressed himself perspicuously. Can science, including social science, have, *qua* science, a moral purpose? The answer, I think, is no. Science *qua* science, as distinct from philosophy or

social criticism, seeks to give us “knowledge of how the world works” and, where it is successful, it actually does. It is to seek, as well, to show us why the world works his way. Formal science (mathematics and logic) aside, science gives (or seeks to give) us systematic empirically grounded substantive knowledge of the world. For social science this is of the social world. Science itself has no moral purpose but only the purpose of producing such knowledge. Wright is perfectly on target when he says in his first sentence of the above extended quotation, “Emancipatory social science, in its broadest terms, *seeks to generate knowledge relevant to the collective project* of challenging human oppression and creating conditions in which people can live flourishing lives.” The scientific part is concerned with the part I have italicized in the above quoted sentence. It, that is, is the part about *generating knowledge relevant to some project*. That knowledge, whatever it is, if it is genuine scientific knowledge, is knowledge, direct or indirect, of empirical facts or of mathematics or logic. (Knowledge of the empirical facts includes empirically grounded explanations, predictions, and interpretations of empirical facts.) But the non-italicized part of the sentence, while not connoting anything unscientific, let alone anti-scientific, is non-scientific. It speaks of a political and moral practice that uses such scientific knowledge but is not itself such knowledge.<sup>11</sup> (If this sounds too much like logical positivism, make the most of it. Not all was dross there.)

*Challenging* human oppression is just that, namely, a challenging, not an *additional* knowledge, of human oppression, though to successfully challenge human oppression may require some human knowledge. It well utilizes an understanding of the conditions of oppression and of how oppression can be resisted and perhaps ended. But *challenging* it is not itself such knowledge. It is a political act. It requires (while not being that) more primitively an understanding of the use of the term ‘oppression’ and some knowledge of the occurrence of oppression and of its evils. This is, of course, a linguistic and moral matter and without this primitive understanding we could not have a scientific knowledge of the conditions of oppression for we wouldn’t then understand that it was oppression or what oppression is. We couldn’t understand *what* they were conditions of.

Without this primitive understanding there could be no emancipatory social science or at least not a Marxian one. To understand the use of 'oppression' is to understand that it is *regarded* as bad but that by itself need not be to think or believe oneself that it is bad.

I should say *ditto* for the last part of the sentence we have been discussing, i.e., "*creating* the conditions in which people can live flourishing lives". 'Creating' here is no more than 'challenging' a scientific activity but a political and moral one utilizing scientific knowledge but not itself being a part of scientific knowledge. It is another political act.

To put the matter somewhat differently: science, including emancipatory social science, can be and often is instrumental in aiding political and moral agents in the attainment of certain extra-scientific aims, aims that need not be anti-scientific or unscientific. But they are non-scientific. For a Marxian emancipatory social science, the or an extra-scientific aim is "the elimination of oppression and the creation of conditions for human flourishing." But scientific knowledge itself is not moral knowledge but among others things a tool for gaining it, a tool for bringing about the conditions for securing that certain moral commitments are or at least can be realized in our lives.<sup>12</sup> Socialists take oppression and a lack of human flourishing to be two connected plain evils—a *background assumption* of a part of their scientific analysis. Acting politically, they seek to eliminate the former and further secure the latter. Their very political activity, if successful, shows this can be done. What is shown here rides on scientific knowledge but this showing is not itself such knowledge, though this showing is something relevant to science. And this activity is itself a political and moral matter, not a scientific matter. Socialists acting politically seek and need relevant scientific knowledge to achieve these aims—or at least it is reasonable to so believe. The sought-for scientific information is taken to be *relevant to* but not *constitutive of* the moral matter.

It might be thought that this way of reasoning commits me to a distinction between the is and the ought. And it does. Like Hilary Putnam, I believe that there is such a *distinction* but also like him I believe that there is no *dichotomy* between the is and the ought (Putnam 2002).



It is enough that there are in the stream of life these different practices—scientific, moral, religious, legal, and political— with different rationales and with different purposes. Most of them, perhaps all of them, are needed in our common life together. Moreover, they are often entangled. And one cannot be reduced to the other (Nielsen and Phillips 2005). They are socially sanctioned, deeply enculturated, and during a given epoch *at least* they are indispensable and irreducible. But *some* may, usually slowly, wither away as has the practice of witchcraft in the West, though not generally in the world. (*Perhaps* over time, and if we can avoid great catastrophes, religion, at least in the wealthier, better educated parts of the world, will wither away, though I wouldn't bet my ranch on it (Nielsen and Phillips 2005).

Most of these practices are indispensable in and to our lives and without them we would be scarcely human. (Here 'human' is a term expressive of a thick concept. It is not equivalent to *homo sapiens*.) In Wittgenstein's terminology, if you want to use it, they are language-games embedded in forms of life without which we would not be recognizably human. Science and morality are such practices distinct from each other, though sometimes entangled, and both are indispensable to our lives. But one cannot be reduced to the other. And they are not *foundations* for our lives or societies and one practice is not foundational for another practice. Moreover, there are no *foundations* for our lives. These practices are just there, like our lives (Rhees 2003). Moral practices pervade our lives; they are, that is, deeply embedded in our lives and there would be no emancipatory social science without them. They are indispensable. But moral practices are not part of the emancipatory science (or any science) themselves but *presuppositions* of it. Moral practices are indispensable for society—for its very existence as well as its coherence—as though in a different way scientific practices obviously are for modernizing contemporary cultures. Both moral and scientific practices are embedded in contemporary and indeed all modern social life as well. And increasingly so in our lives, our moral and social practices, while remaining distinct, work

together (Nielsen 2009).<sup>13</sup> Still, talk of either providing or yielding foundations is without any compelling sense. Indeed, the very notion of foundations fogs things up.

For a Marxian, a socialist, or an otherwise anti-capitalist anarchist or Rawlsian liberal (i.e., a social democrat), certain moral convictions embedded in certain moral practices may be the (or at least a) *motivational* force for them to become social scientists. And where they become social scientists, they are will, in making certain of their social science descriptions and explanations, have to use thick concepts that have a determinate moral or other normative force. To understand them they will, of course, have to understand that these concepts have that normativity. But it doesn't require, and the scientific use of these concepts doesn't imply, endorsement of them. Endorsement is a moral and political act, not a scientific one. Again, let us remind ourselves that it need not be unscientific or anti-scientific but it is non-scientific. We can speak of a socialist's scientific view of the world and of his moral view of the world, meaning by that how his own view of the world has been informed and guided by scientific considerations and by moral considerations, often working together though not being identical or reducible to each other. The moral convictions embedded in these practices are not a part of the science or a foundation for it or a funding of a Marxian view of the world. Practices, moral and scientific, may be *a* way for a Marxian to articulate a clearer and sounder Marxian view of the world but its social science is not nor can it be 'a moral science'. Yet its view of the world is a deeply moral one, Marx's amorality to the contrary notwithstanding (Nielsen 1988). But a Marxian view of the world is not a science and it is not a morality, though crucially it has moral aspects as well as scientific aspects. We can still, however, speak coherently of that view of the world—our view of the world—as being 'a scientific view of the world', meaning that our view of the world is informed and guided by scientific considerations. And we can as well coherently speak, though somewhat differently, of that very same view of the world as being a 'moral view of the world', meaning by that a view of the world that is informed and guided by moral considerations. But a view of the world that is both scientific and moral need not be a conflicted

view; it can and should rely on both moral and scientific considerations which are characterized by a fruitful reciprocity. We might call this combination—this emancipatory view of the world—a Marxian emancipatory theory (Levine *et al.*, 1993, 187-89). But given what I’ve just said, calling it a theory seems to make it something too philosophical. Calling it a Marxian emancipatory comprehensive practice is better. It is less philosophically pretentious and misleading.

## V

At the beginning of “Foundations of a Neo-Marxist Class Analysis”, Wright contends that Marxism needs (and at least in effect has) a specific orientation to radically egalitarian principles (Wright 2005, 4-8). Linked to this, Wright gives a class analysis in the body of that article. In clarifying that contested concept, he shows how for Marxians (*pace* Roemer) class has a close link to exploitation and how class has “a distinctive centrality within the Marxist tradition...” (Wright 2005, 4). He goes on to contend that (1) a good argument can be made for Marxian class analysis, and (2) how a specific orientation to radically egalitarian normative principles is “a large part of what defines the continuing distinctiveness of the Marxist tradition as a body of thought, particularly within sociology” (Wright 2005, 6). A few pages later he adds, “At its core, class analysis within the Marxist tradition is rooted in a set of normative commitments to a form of radical egalitarianism” (Wright 2005, 6). This, as he recognizes, goes explicitly against Marx’s own expressed view. Marx thought that “ideas about morality just reflected material conditions and interests of actors. Rather than defend socialism on grounds of social justice or other normative principles, Marx preferred to simply argue that socialism was in the interests of the working class and that it was, in any case, the historical destiny of capitalism” (Wright 2005, 6). Wright then makes an observation that many have made (including Steven Lukes, G. A. Cohen, and myself) that “Marx’s own writing is filled with moral judgment, moral outrage, moral vision” (Wright 2005, 6). But this does not establish that Marx took any of this as foundational to his scientific socialist

theory or even as a working part of it or even as revealing a commitment to radical egalitarianism or any egalitarianism or even to any acceptance of equality. Indeed, both Marx and Engels were hostile to an appeal to equality (Nielsen 1989, 193-226).

It just never occurred to Marx that one could take on or even try to take on writing in a manner that conformed to what later came to be called ‘a normatively neutral vocabulary’ supposedly to be utilized in articulating a normatively neutral social theory—any more than it occurred to the hardnosed political realist, Thomas Hobbes. Marx felt perfectly entitled to express his own deep indignation at the evils inherent in capitalism, evils that he thought just go with the system and cannot be eradicated without eradicating that system. Yet, as I have already noted, he did not think that moralizing or moral theory aided the revolution or in any other way the project of ending capitalism and constructing socialism. He even worried that it might impede it. And he *may* well have been right.<sup>14</sup>

That notwithstanding, Wright’s judgment is that the “core class analysis within Marxist tradition is rooted in a set of normative commitments to a form of radical egalitarianism” (Wright 2005, 6). However, Wright stresses—and this fits well with Marx’s thought—that this should not be regarded as a claim about moral or other normative *foundations* or funding. There is no such foundational or funding theory in Marx and there should not be in the Marxist tradition. Moreover, “rooted in” suggests *causal* effects and not necessarily *justificatory* ones. More generally, this does not face Marx’s low estimate of the practical effect of any form of moralizing or moral theorizing and it does nothing to establish radical egalitarianism. Still I hope that the Marxist tradition has developed somewhat in the direction that Wright points to, but it must do so *sans* Marx. However, Marx’s scepticism concerning moralizing is not addressed by Wright and it should be. *Perhaps*, however, that does not damage Wright’s claim, particularly if we should (as we should) view Marxism as a changing and developing tradition. Still, I think Marx’s ideas here and McCarney’s utilization of them are not readily put aside and that we should beware of taking a moralistic turn.

We should not view Marxian emancipatory social science as a ‘moral science’ or a ‘science proclaiming any normative point of view’. It can have a normative vocabulary but it also can’t as a *science* advocate a moral or otherwise normative point of view. Moreover, deploying a normative vocabulary need not to be advocating anything.

However, bracketing that, let us see how Wright portrays and defends his version of radical egalitarianism and what claim it can legitimately make to being, Marx notwithstanding, central to the Marxist tradition. (It should also be remembered that G. A. Cohen defends a radical egalitarianism. See Cohen 2008.) Wright says that radical egalitarianism can be expressed in terms of three theses which reveal its underlying rationale. The three theses are what he calls (1) the *Radical Egalitarianism Thesis*, (2) the *Historical Possibility Thesis*, and (3) the *Anti-capitalism Thesis*. They read as follows:

1. *Radical Egalitarianism Thesis*: Human flourishing would be broadly enhanced by a radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life.
2. *Historical Possibility Thesis*: Under conditions of a highly productive economy, it becomes materially possible to organize society in such a way that there is a sustainable radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life.
3. *Anti-capitalism Thesis*: Capitalism blocks the possibility of achieving a radically egalitarian distribution of the material conditions of life (Wright 2005, 6-7).

There are a number of questions to be raised concerning these three theses. A first one is to ask what work, if any, is ‘radical’ or ‘radically’ doing in these theses? How does ‘radical’ or ‘radically’ qualify egalitarianism? Wright does not say. If we say that *radical* egalitarianism is distinctive in claiming that everyone should have the same income or the same resources or the same shares then radical egalitarianism is obviously mistaken. People have very different needs sometimes requiring for their satisfaction different incomes, perhaps very different incomes and different shares. (But shares of what?) A worker who must commute long distances to work *ceteris paribus*

needs more income than someone whose work is just around the corner. Aged persons who need expensive medications not paid for or only partially paid for by the state need more income than young people otherwise similarly situated. Here we see that to make people equal in one respect makes them unequal in other respects, or at least in another respect (Geuss 2008, 77-78).

What about the *same* meeting of needs or the *same* meeting of basic needs or the *same* having of what Rawls calls primary social goods (not to mention primary natural goods, e.g., health, intelligence, stamina, and the like) or the *same* capabilities? The same type of objection as to sameness of income, though a little less obviously, arises for these matters. People in different stages of life and in different situations will sometimes have different needs. Babies, young children, young adults, pregnant women, middle-aged persons, aged persons all have different needs and usually require different allocations of resources or income or shares. What about the *same* meeting of these *different* needs? But what could be ‘the same meeting’ here is very unclear. Presumably people would have to come to a *commensurate* meeting of their various needs. But it is still very unclear what this comes to or how we or they could figure it out. And in any event it would have to take into consideration different people often differently situated with not infrequently very different needs and sometimes with different needs for allocation of resources and income—though generally speaking things here could be, without leveling down, made more equal with considerate benefit for many and no great loss for others. There is no justification for the vast inequalities with which we are stuck.

Similar things would obtain for the same welfare. To achieve the same welfare across the board requires in some domain other inequalities along with drastic leveling down of the welfare of some, though, of course, with the enhancement of the welfare of others. I don’t have in mind just the greater welfare of the rich. Soaking the rich to bring them closer to the non-rich, including, of course, the poor, seems perfectly alright to me as it does to Brian Barry. However, quite commonly situated and roughly commonly incomed people sometimes have very different welfare needs. To

give them the 'same welfare' or an 'identical welfare' would lead to plain harm for some with no equalizing benefit for others.

People also sometimes have very unequal capabilities. Some they have been born with or acquired early on by drastically different life conditions. Some of these differences in capabilities do not affect equality but many of them do. To lower down capabilities would often mean a loss for some with little or no gain for others. Suppose someone comes to recognize that there is nothing he is very good at. He is, he recognizes in moments of clarity, just mediocre through and through. Such a recognition could very well make his life very bleak. Leveling down people with higher capabilities would not help, perhaps even hurt, given his recognition of it and why it was being done. There is no clear-minded non-evasive escape from the bleakness of his life or even a rectification of it. That aside, there would still remain between different people different capabilities yielding different inequalities. Some people are just more intelligent or better runners or more imaginative or have greater capacities for sympathetic or empathetic understanding or greater endurance than others. *Sometimes* these matters are rooted in our physiology, or at least they could be. Perhaps there are some that could only be equalized by drastic and utterly unacceptable genetic engineering and the like. That plainly is not a road to be taken. Moreover, in some cases at least, it is very unlikely that it could be done. Suppose—to go to science fiction—we could make it such that all babies except for their sex could be made the same and their conditions of life could be made such that they remained the same throughout their lives. Should we do it? There would be very good reasons not to do that. Moreover, we do not have to fall back on the reason—valid as it is—that what I have been talking about is wildly and absurdly counterfactual and desert-islandish. Even if it were possible, it would be nightmarishly wrong. Equality, if it is to have the slightest attraction, can't come to anything like that.

A more standard way of moving to what is frequently called radical egalitarianism is to find some acceptable principles of egalitarian justice, more radical and more to the left than Rawlsian

liberal (social democratic) egalitarianism. They would, if acceptable and acted on, arrange social life and political life so that people were more equal in power and the social life that was instantiated would go beyond in an equalizing direction the difference principle of justice. People under ideal conditions Rawlsian style could have equal political rights. But that would not make them equal in or even nearly equal in political power. But to have an acceptably stronger principle for equalizing than the difference principle nested as it is with Rawls with other fundamental principles of justice has not gained any consensus. One may retort, 'Hasn't been accepted does not prove such a principle could not be acceptable'. But this in turn provokes the counter, 'People have tried and no one has succeeded more extensively in going beyond the difference principle. Other egalitarian principles have not gained the broad acceptance that Rawls's difference principle (so nested) has' (Daniels 2007). I sought to do so on three extended occasions and on all of them failed, and I have not seen anyone else succeed in that endeavor (Nielsen 1985; 2003, 139-90; 2007, 294-305; for critics see Levine 1986, 416-17; Daniels 2007, 278-93). Perhaps we shouldn't require such a consensus in trying to gain a wide reflective equilibrium, but where else for politics and morals should we appeal for something that even looks like a grounding? Should we appeal to reason? What does this come to? Remember my discussion of Cohen in Section I.

However, Wright does not even face considerations of this sort—considerations relevant to *ideal* theory—and, as I have pointed out, he does not specify what he means by 'radical' in his radical egalitarianism. *I am inclined to think that Wright means by 'a radically egalitarian society' a classless society with people more equal in power than in any class society—a republic of such equals.* But given his own analysis of class, even the working class is not a unified thing. There just isn't '*the* working class' and '*the* capitalist class' and there are status distinctions *within* the working class as well as *within* the capitalist class. Moreover, there are mixtures and partial crossovers of both. Even assuming we could achieve a classless society, there would still remain considerable *strata* differences—the kind of differences Weber and Rawls think are ineliminable at least in modern



societies. Moreover, there would remain divisions of labor: something the mature Marx came to accept as rationally ineliminable and that would produce strata differences which would make for inequalities—perhaps even steep inequalities, though not as steep as under capitalism.

However, there is no longer any unified proletariat—a class that is *in* society but not *of* it—to bring about a classless society (Levine 2003). Wright remarks, “the full realization of the radical egalitarian ideal may, of course, be a utopian fantasy. But even if ‘classlessness’ is unachievable, ‘less classness’ can be a central objective, and this still requires challenging capitalism” (Wright 2005, 7). This seems to be both important and well taken. But Wright should explain what he means by ‘challenging capitalism’. Does he mean seeking to end it and replace it by socialism? Or does he mean to accept the reality and probable irreplaceability of capitalism at least for the foreseeable future but to seek to challenge it by weakening its domination and its exploitation of the working class and the underclass? But domination and exploitation would still continue to occur, but perhaps with less severity in the North. This latter kind of challenge is what genuinely serious social democrats would be committed to. (I don’t mean by ‘genuinely serious social democrats’ ‘new labor’ which has nothing, except for a false labeling, to do with either social democracy or socialism.) Both socialism and genuine social democracy challenge capitalism but which kind of challenge does Wright have in mind or does he have both kinds in mind, one for one situation and the other for a different situation? Many leftists of integrity do and did opt only for the latter, as did Olaf Palme (a murdered Swedish politician once in power) and Stuart Hampshire (a distinguished philosopher). But, unless social democracy is regarded as a transitional stage, this is to give up on socialism as it is usually and rightly understood and instead just to seek to tame and humanize capitalism as much as possible. But a socialism with strata on the way to a strata-less, classless communism appears to be, as Wright believes it is, a fantasy (Wright 2005, 2-7). What, given all this, has happened to our radical egalitarianism? Can we have a radical egalitarianism in a stratified world or even a stratified but still classless world? But a classless world, even if one could

be attained, could still be extensively stratified or so it at least seems. And can there be a radical egalitarianism in a world with considerable strata or indeed with any strata?

I think the questions I have put would be legitimate and telling if Wright were doing *ideal theory*—what he points out moral philosophers specialize in and that is brilliantly exemplified in the work of Rawls, Nagel, Parfit, Gauthier, Scanlon, G. A. Cohen, Joshua Cohen, Gibbard, and Railton. The above considerations would be worrying for philosophers trying to articulate an ideal theory. But are they questions that should be worrying to Wright? He could be clearer about what he means by ‘radical’ as a component of radical egalitarianism, but from his more specific remarks we get some idea of what he intends. We need a rough material equality of condition and a far more extensive democratic control over our lives than we have now even in the extant most progressive societies. But should Wright do some ideal theory or instead even give it much attention in carrying out his project, any more than Brian Barry should have done in his *Why Social Justice Matters*? I do not think that either should do so. Barry wisely makes this issue quite explicit. We do not have to know what equality is precisely or what radical egalitarianism is precisely to know (something that Thomas Pogge convincingly reminds us of) that the poors in the geopolitical South are in dire circumstances of great inequality leading to terrible miseries and death. Something that is plainly morally unacceptable if anything is. That twenty thousand people (mostly children) die each day mostly from quite unnecessary and easily curable diseases or malnutrition shows this inequality is plainly evil. (We don’t have to have any kind of moral theory to know that. In fact, any kind of normatively ethical theory that did not acknowledge that would thereby be plainly mistaken.) Yet this kind of material inequality could be eradicated with little cost to the people of the North (Pogge 2002; Sachs 2005). But it is not done. This is plainly vile and however we characterize equality and egalitarianism or relate it to Pareto it is an utterly unacceptable inequality. And we know that between nations and within nations across the world various steep inequalities cause a variety of harms—plain evils—that are morally intolerable, though tolerated, and readily eradicable. We

could perhaps morally and reasonably resist this only if draconian measures were to be taken to eradicate them. But Pogge gives us good evidence that this draconianism is false. We don't have to so act to eradicate global poverty (Pogge 2002). Yet we go on tolerating this inequality while our masters are in a position to radically cut it down and we do very little to push or even to try to push them into action. Next to nothing is done. Some crocodile tears are shed and a few band-aid 'solutions' are proposed and some actually implemented. That is all.

Moreover, inequalities have been steadily growing, no matter what *The Economist* tells us about the rise of a global middle class (*The Economist*, February 14, 2009, 3-8). (People within countries, even wealthy countries, at the top end of the income and wealth spectrum live sumptuously while children in families at the bottom of the spectrum in those countries (the United States or Canada, for example) often go to school without breakfast and are often too fatigued to properly attend to their lessons and typically live in conditions at home that make studies or help with studies virtually impossible. They, hardly surprisingly, do badly in school and often drop out as soon as they can. And if they find jobs at all they are poorly paying insecure jobs and usually in one way or another unpleasant jobs (Burgi 2004, 12-13). Typically, such people die earlier than the better off and while they live they usually live a less healthy and more stressful life (Barry 2005, 70-95). And this is not a sob story. It is the way it is. And we know that things do not have to be that way, or at least not so grossly that way (Barry 2005, 37-94).

We can and do recognize such inequalities, and sometimes vividly, even when we do not understand what a radical or robust or full or perfect equality could come to. But we know life on our globe isn't even within a country mile of any of those things. And certainly, if we are reasonably free from self-deception, we recognize without any difficulty at all that the kind of inequalities I mentioned above are wrong. A world which moved just a little bit more in the direction of rough material equality would, we should recognize, be better and closer to being just. But the world does not so move. And we have some understanding of what it would be like for it to so move even if we

do not understand just how rough rough material equality can be to be an acceptable rough material equality. Moreover, we do not need to know the answers to the above questions of ideal theory to know that such inequalities as we have been mentioning are wrong and grossly unjust. These are plain, unacceptable inequalities easily recognizable as such. We (speaking now of the rich societies of the North) could readily take redistributive measures to eradicate the miseries that such extreme inequalities cause without just spreading the misery around (Pogge 2002; Sachs 2005). If the United States, for example, would divert small but reasonable amount of money from its military budget or its space exploration budget, they could do a lot of poverty eradication in the South as well as at home. But they don't. Why not? Are all their military and space exploration expenditures necessary? That is, are such extensive military expenditures and money for military-oriented space exploration—or even for any space exploration at all—necessary or even particularly desirable? It will be asserted by some that they are necessary, but isn't this just a distorting ideology? Given what is at issue, isn't this thoroughly misplaced? Even granted that the US needs some considerable military expenditure to be the super imperial power and the world's policeman, something of very dubious desirability, is all that expenditure still necessary? Beyond helping certain primarily military industries, is it even desirable? Even granting that the US needs such overwhelming military might, including the control of space, does it have to go so whole-hog that it could not take out some of these expenditures to eradicate at least extreme poverty? The expenditures, particularly if we compare them with the military expenditures, would be minimal. Moreover, the United States is way ahead militarily of their possible rivals—indeed of all of them taken together. That they could, if they would, answers itself. The burden of proof rests on those who would deny that, that is, if they could without endangering their security or imperial control relieve at least such extreme poverty. It might even strengthen both because perhaps not so much not unjustified hatred would be directed toward the U.S. It certainly appears that to allow such poverty and such inequalities is rankly unjust and indeed evil and probably not even rational.

We must go for a greater equality than we have in our very inegalitarian societies and struggle to increase equality as much as we can as long as there is avoidable misery and as long as there is domination and oppression around. (We are not in the position of having to worry about the possibility of too much equality.) We should only accept a 'second best' when we are forced to and where at the time we cannot effectively resist one. What perfect equality would come to be we do not need to know and perhaps we cannot know but, practically speaking, we need not lose sleep over that. We know what has to be done to make our society and our world a decent place. (I did not say a perfect or even a near perfect place.)

However, we need to think hard about the equality that with resourceful thought and determined action and struggle, luck and intelligence, we could realistically achieve or would reasonably achieve in the near future. What kind of advance in equality, if any, is maximally achievable with a proper institutional design for its achievability for the peoples on our globe in the next 25 to 50 years? We can recognize a range of inequalities unacceptable for peoples now in communities of the North and, less securely, ultimately for all the peoples on the whole of our globe and in both cases for peoples as well as for individuals. (Nobody, morally speaking, can just set aside people or treat a people as simply expendable. But a lot of people in fact are so treated and sometime whole races, ethnic groups or whole societies. Our world certainly does not look like a moral order.) The idea that it is a 'well-ordered society' is a fantasy. Even the idea that it is a society or community is problematic. But that is not to give to understand that it could not become one and desirably so. It is mind numbing and deeply depressing to reflect on all the *impediments* that stand in the way of its being a well-ordered moral order. But it is—to moralize—plainly something that must be fought for. We have a good understanding of what must be done to get within the ballpark of decency. And we have this without being able to recognize what it would be like for there to be a radical, perfect, or full equality or even a robust equality. When people are dominated, exploited, oppressed, not respected, even brutalized and even though there is the

factual possibility without extensive loss to the rich of meeting their basic needs and still these needs are not met, then we have unacceptable inequalities. We have something that is morally intolerable. We know that such a society is unjust and that such a world is unjust. Just the most casual glance at our world reveals our world is rife with such inequalities both in the North and the South but more grossly in the South. We live in a savagely unjust world and our governments, with their capitalist orientation, are, though in varying degrees, very much complicit here. We do not need moral theory to recognize that. Indeed, to repeat, any normative ethics that did not recognize that would be thereby shown to be very mistaken (Nielsen 2009).

We can feel despairingly powerless to do anything about these extreme inequalities and sometimes actually are not able to do anything about them. We may sometimes be forced to tolerate the intolerable, as we actually tolerate the unnecessary deaths of twenty thousand people, mostly children, each day or men tied up and gagged in the Congo who were forced to witness their children being killed and their wives being gang raped. We feel helpless to stop the torture that goes on in the world, indeed by such 'liberal democratic' societies as the United States and Israel, not to mention such places as Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria under France's colonial power during the Colonial War (Fanon 1965). We also have to tolerate the fat cats in power swilling at the trough while many of their compatriots suffer (not to speak of others who starve). But we need not and should not give up doing everything we can to resist those things, to fight them with whatever means we have as things that are unspeakably evil. But, again, we don't need moral theory or any philosophy to know we should do this. And no moral theory will prove to someone not already inclined that he should do this.

Taking these things to heart and to mind means thinking in a resolute and non-evasive way about what is to be done. The realization that sometimes, even often, there is nothing that we powerless individuals can do makes the thing all the more horrible, all the more intolerable. Here we must not dream or just speculate about what it would be like to eradicate such evils. That is,

though understandable, to be evasive. We must, facing this, try to figure out and resolve to try to carry out what we can do to fight these things (Fanon 1965). We should do this rather than, Hegel-like, resign ourselves and reconcile ourselves to the intolerable with which we are faced. But we should not for a moment forget that we are often slaves to our situations. Sometimes there is nothing we can do, try as we will. Through our long and barbarous history slaves of various kinds and in various conditions have resisted and sometimes with success, partial success, or defeat have paved the way for success. We should not forget Franz Fanon here. What he says is vital (Fanon 1965).

Where the situation is not quite so grim, we should, as a strategy for achieving a greater equality (compatible, as Rawls shows, with a reasonable autonomy), aim at viable equalities that are at present not achievable but still would be desirable to have if and when they become achievable and are such that it is not unreasonable to believe that there are conditions under which they could become achievable. We again can recognize these things without being able to recognize what a perfect or radical equality would come to or what would be maximally acceptable equality. Again, ideal theory seems a pointless extravagance.

Wright reminds us that “the actual limits of what is achievable depend on beliefs about what sorts of alternatives are viable. This is a crucial sociological point: social limits of possibility are not independent of beliefs about limits...[and] beliefs about limits systematically affect what is possible” (Wright 2006, 98). We need to realistically think about alternatives “to existing social structures that would eliminate, or at least significantly reduce, the harms that they [these institutions and social structures] generate” (Wright 2006, 96). To do this is to prepare the conditions for a greater equality. (How much equality can be achieved or should be achieved under ideal conditions we do not know. Do we need to know to be effective agents for deep social change? I don’t think so. For an activist, ideal theory can and should be neglected. A quietist can wallow in it to his delight.

Wright goes on to point out that such “alternatives can be elaborated and evaluated by three different criteria: *desirability*, *viability*, and *achievability*” (Wright 2006, 96). They are nested, as he puts it, “in a kind of hierarchy: not all desirable alternatives are viable, and not all viable alternatives are achievable” (Wright 2006, 96).

He remarks, “the exploration of *desirable* alternatives, without constraints of viability and achievability, is the domain of utopian social theory and much normative political philosophy” (Wright 2006, 96). In fine, it is ideal theory. He goes on to remark on something that I have been concerned to emphasize, namely, that “typically such discussions are institutionally very thin, the emphasis being on the enunciation of abstract principles rather than actual institutional design” (Wright 2006, 96). The great exception to this among philosophers was John Dewey and it was sometimes said that in proceeding as he did he was not doing philosophy. (This is what my genteel tradition philosophy teachers told me as a brash young Deweyian.) Still, philosophers (including such ideal theory philosophers) argue that *ought implies can*. But in practice they typically ignore this. For example, liberal theories of justice such as Rawls’s or Scanlon’s, elaborate the principles that should be embodied in the institutions of a just society without exploring what (if any) sustainable, robust structures could actually even with some viability be designed to enable something approximating the instantiation of how our lives are to be lived with something that yielded some social realization of those principles, how they would lead to a world that was a just world or even a somewhat decent one only intermittently good, rather than the terrible one we have now.

Rawls, for example, at least arguably the greatest of our contemporary moral and normative political philosophers, argues (according to Wright) that his equal liberty principle should always be taken to be lexically prior to his difference principle in real social institutions (Wright 2006, 97). This idealization, a central element of his ideal theory, points, I have argued, to the poverty of moral philosophy. It has been responded that what I point to as the poverty of moral philosophy instead



only points to a division of labor between moral philosophers doing, as is appropriate for them, ideal theory and social scientists and social activists thinking morally about our actual social practices. But what is the point of and how does it contribute to the clarifying of anything to ask why something is desirable without ever asking in any realistic way whether it is possible? One of the great virtues of Dewey was that he never fell into this trap.

This scepticism about the value of ideal theory and the way moral theory and normative political theory are normally pursued squares well with my claims about the considerable value of the way Wright pursues his emancipatory social science. He stresses that it should have an egalitarian moral and normative political infusion integrally linked with its scientific explanatory and interpretive structure, but, or so I have suggested, it should not make (try to make) its actual scientific account into a moralizing one or into a normatively activist or even committed one, but it should be a *social science in the service of egalitarian ideals*—ideals that when properly embodied in institutions arguably yield socialism. But that does not make socialism into ‘a moral science’ which in my view is an incoherency. But if not at present achievable, the ideals still must be viable. Moreover, in being an emancipatory social science, it is supposedly (*pace* McCarney) a normatively oriented social science and, in the case of a Marxian account, an egalitarian oriented one of some sort. (Like Brian Barry, I am prepared until utopia arrives (if ever) to settle for a rough material equality.) But that normativity does not make the truths or warranted assertions of its scientific claims justified by or rest on morality or any other normativity; whether what they assert is true or not is purely an empirical matter while the desirability of its claims is another thing.<sup>15</sup> The claims of an emancipatory social science about which institutional designs are actual, and which ones are reasonably possible now and which ones might be possible in the future are also empirical matters, though, in respect of the *possible* designs, often rather speculative ones. They will include an account of what normativities *as a social fact* are actual, which ones will come to obtain in social structures and which ones are likely to obtain or be attainable (achievable) in the future. These

empirical matters involve beliefs *about* what norms are held and are likely to be held in the future. These normativities as social facts do not show which normativities, morally speaking, should obtain. *They are beliefs about which normative beliefs themselves are held by a certain population and they are not beliefs about 'the foundations' of a Marxist social science or any kind of legitimate social science.* Charles Stevenson is useful about this (Stevenson 1944; 1963). To scientifically theorize, as far as social science is concerned, is not to proclaim moral beliefs or crucially or fundamentally to try to evaluate moral beliefs or even at all to do so, but to determine and examine institutional designs and social structures which would give or reasonably might give ideals a substantive place in our lives making them live options for us. Social science, including an emancipatory one, does not say anything, at least not directly, about what should or should not be our non-scientific ideals. That is a moral matter or a matter of what is the good life and not a scientific one. But, given certain moral beliefs or attitudes on our part, sometimes—indeed often in modern societies—some scientific beliefs can be useful concerning certain moral matters. Given, for example, that we want our children to do well in school and to be healthy and happy, science can often advise us on things to do or avoid. My qualifier 'at least directly' is important. Often science gives us good reasons—I didn't say decisive reasons—for having one or another moral belief or orientation or perhaps even a whole moral outlook. It can, for example, be significantly important in determining whether a sense of belonging or recognition is as important as some philosophers believe. And it can perhaps even say something informative about what a sense of belonging or recognition should come to. Psychology and the social sciences are important reason-givers without their being directly moral or taking a moral point of view and without there being such a thing as moral science. Using old fashioned terminology, science can, and significantly so, give us *hypothetical* imperatives but not *categorical* ones. However, perhaps there are no legitimate categorical imperatives. If so, what then? And is this something that is up to science to ascertain or are we drawn again back into metaethics? Or what? Some might wax lyrical here about

philosophy. Social science is to talk *about* these moral beliefs in an empirical way, not *to give voice* to those moral beliefs or to be expressive of the attitudes and commitments that go with them.<sup>16</sup>

However, all that notwithstanding, an important “task of emancipatory social science is to develop a coherent, credible theory of alternatives to existing institutions and social structures that would eliminate, or at least significantly reduce, the harms they generate” (Wright 2006, 96). Here we at least seem to have something that is *perhaps* not compatible with what I said above; we have (or so it seems) a blending of the moral and the empirically factual. It indeed takes a certain moral or at least normative understanding of harm to understand the statement from Wright just quoted. And that is not given by the social science he articulates or by any social science. However, it takes a scientific understanding, not just a moral understanding, to be able to know or plausibly believe that a certain change in or of institutions or social structures will reduce or eliminate the harms in question. But even to be able to understand such statements would presuppose at least a primitive moral or other normative understanding. But with that prior understanding the claim that certain institutions would reduce or eliminate these harms or what the changed institutions or structures are like is a purely empirical matter. And it is not only brutally empirical but scientific and (pleonastically) empirical as well. With a moral understanding one wants, *ceteris paribus*, structures to reduce harms but whether they will or will not is not a function of our moral understanding, though identifying and establishing such structures *presupposes* a moral understanding. Given an understanding of the concept of harm (if you will of the use of ‘harm’), we can show—empirically show—that something is harmful from empirical beliefs about these harms. That is a scientific matter; the former, namely, that the harmful acts are *ceteris paribus* wrong is not. That smoking harms your lungs is a scientific statement. That harmful things are *ceteris paribus* bad is a moral truism, perhaps even a ‘moral tautology’, and not a statement of emancipatory social science or any other kind of science, though it is presupposed by some sciences. To understand the use of ‘harm’ or the concept of harm which is supposedly (as Gilbert Ryle claimed) particular

language-neutral is to understand that it is bad or at least that it is generally taken to be bad. But what practices, institutions, or structures cause harm is an empirical matter and a subject of emancipatory social science.

What about Wright's remark that "alternatives can be elaborated and evaluated by three different criteria: desirability, viability, and achievability" (Wright 2006, 96)? 'Desirability', 'viability', and 'achievability' are clearly normative words. But they are also terms expressive of thick concepts so they have—and indivisibly so—both descriptive and evaluative components. While this is plainly true for 'viable' and 'achievable', it is *perhaps* not for 'desirable'. To understand that something is viable is not only to think that something is possible or taken to be possible but also that it actually might (with some probability might) obtain when conditions occur that are not achievable now but that it is reasonable to believe they would be so if in the future things change in a certain way and that it is reasonable to believe now that this is factually possible with a certain degree of probability. By contrast, if something is achievable it is reasonable to believe that with effort now it could actually be achieved. To take an example, a guaranteed unconditional basic income is viable now in the North but not achievable now. But it is not unreasonable to believe that in certain wealthy reasonably progressive countries in the North, e. g., Sweden, Finland, Holland, or Luxemburg, that it might in the not too distant future be achievable. Such a thing is arguably achievable for wealthy societies and not *just* viable and desirable. This is not just a wish for it or something we think would be desirable but as well a not unreasonable belief—an empirical belief—about what could come to be. Whether it could or could not is an empirical matter and establishable or disestablishable empirically and subject to social science confirmation and disconfirmation.

Desirability, it might be thought, is different from viability or achievability. But I believe that it is not. That something is desired does not mean or establish that it is desirable. Something can be desired and not be desirable. Similarly something can be desirable and not be desired. But,

or so it seems at least, there must be some relevant connection between the desired and the desirable. If no one anywhere and anywhen ever desired some particular thing, it would not be plausible or perhaps even coherent to say that it was desirable. *Perhaps* we could rather implausibly but still coherently say that though something is not desired by anyone now living nor, as far as we can ascertain, has it in the past ever been desired by anyone, yet if people in the future become more reasonable and rational then they would desire it. This is a rather chancy and implausible use of a modality but it is not incoherent to say it. It is not like 'Bush sleeps faster than Cheney'.

What then makes the desired also desirable? When is a desired something desirable? One not implausible response is to say that when we are aware of the causes of desiring something and the probable consequences of that desire being realized and reflect carefully on that, then what we will continue to desire, if we are reasonable, is something that under such conditions is the best reason we as individuals can have at that time and in those circumstances for believing it is desirable. When there is a considerable reflective consensus of reasonable people about that, when others also under such conditions so desire that something, we have the best reasons we can have at a given time and place for believing it desirable. It still would be *intelligible* even then to say that what is so desired is not desirable. The use of 'desirable' cannot be identified with what is desired under certain conditions. This is analogous to the so-called naturalistic fallacy or mistake. But it would be irrational to deny that something desired under those conditions is desirable. The relation between what we have grounds for desiring and what is desirable is like the relationship between confirmation and truth. Something can be well confirmed and still not be true and something can be true though not confirmed or *perhaps* not even confirmable. But the best reasons we can have for believing it to be true is that it is as well confirmed or otherwise grounded as it could be at that time and in that place. Similar things obtain for something being desirable. If it is desired under the conditions described above, particularly when we have a full cross-cultural

consensus about that, we have the best reasons we could possibly have at that time and in that place for believing it to be desirable.<sup>17</sup> (The use of ‘reasonable’ in this paragraph might seem troublesome. But it is not. Like ‘desirable’ or ‘viable’, it is expressive of a thick concept with both a descriptive and a normative meaning (Nielsen 2008).)

Desirability, like viability and achievability, is a thick concept with both a descriptive and an evaluative meaning (use). Emancipatory social science can have something to say about what it is to achieve something desirable, viable and achievable while *presupposing* that something is desirable, viable and achievable are normative notions not just bits of scientific information, though still being thick concepts having as well descriptive import. But to say ‘Boiling babies is vile’ is an expression of moral horror. Being a thick concept, ‘vile’ also has a descriptive component. But it doesn’t make it a bit of scientific information. But they also have a descriptive use and this enables a social science to explain, examine and confirm or infirm *what* is said or thought to be desirable, viable or achievable. That is in the competence of social science, including most particularly an emancipatory one.

A scientific socialism is a social science whose research programs and investigations are designed to achieve socialist emancipatory goals, centrally, egalitarian and perfectionist goals (for the latter, they are those concerned with human flourishing expressed in the normative vision of socialism and existing in its egalitarian *ethos*). This is a central (but not exclusive) *goal* of scientific socialism’s inquiry. It is, however, not the inquiry itself; it is that at which the inquiry is directed. It is a, perhaps the, central reason for its very being. But that is not what makes the inquiry scientific. This would have been regarded as a truism in the time of Gunnar Myrdal and I think it is what Wright is driving at and *perhaps* even McCarney.<sup>18</sup> But that is not clearly so. They do not put their points as perspicuously as they might. I hope I do not seem arrogant in saying if that is not what they are getting at that is what they should have been getting at. It is—or so I believe—a more coherent and perspicuous way, even with its abstractness, of characterizing a Marxian

emancipatory social science. And I would add that any *emancipatory* social science should be broadly so characterized, though some (perhaps most) will have somewhat different goals. But it is not impossible or in some contexts undesirable to argue about which of these goals are the most adequate but that also will not be a *purely* scientific matter.

## VI

For Wright emancipatory social science analytical Marxianism style consists in both historical materialism (a Marxian theory of history) and sociological Marxism (Buraway and Wright, 2001). But, and Cohen follows him here, it is important to distinguish them. Historical materialism is a theory of *history*. It is about how social forms succeed one another. It is, that is, about epochal social change and its effects—economic, political, and cultural—on peoples. Sociological Marxism, by contrast, raises questions about how elements *within a society* are related. The two are complimentary to each other but they are distinct, though historical materialism sets, or tries to, the general parameters about how central elements in a society can be structured.

Sociological Marxism's central claim is that social being determines consciousness. Put otherwise, material and economic existence explains for a given society or cluster of societies during a given epoch *the main lines* of its 'spiritual existence', e.g., religious, moral, legal, artistic, and political beliefs, practices, attitudes, and actions: superstructural matters as Cohen, following classical Marxism, labels them. This has a normative side. Marxists, *sometimes* Marx and Engels to the contrary notwithstanding, have a vision of how the world should be and they have a conception, animated in part by that vision, of in what ways to change the world. We have something here that is a normative conception, though rooted in (note the causal term) a factual understanding of how the world is and how it could change. That normative conception, though so rooted, is not a part of Marxian social science as we saw in the last section. But, by being so factually rooted, it is a vision which is informed by and is in part generated by that social science, though it in turn generates the

further development of that social science. The influence goes both ways. That normative vision affects which research programs are pursued; the research programs pursued and their results, in turn, affect that normative vision. Reflection on the evils of class domination makes us search for ways in which class society could be transcended. Study of the way domination works in a capitalist class society in turn makes us reflect on what it would be to have a society without class domination. This enhances our vision of a truly human society.

This science also includes some of the deep underlying assumptions that Marxists, including analytical Marxists, make. Analytical Marxism is not just a social science that, as a science, has no moral norms, but a social science that seeks to push on the Marxist tradition's social vision, normative stance, and political agenda without compromising its scientificity (Levine 2003). Marxists do not just moralize or speculate about the world or construct normative ethical theories or normative political theories but seek instead scientifically to comprehend and explain what is going on in the world in order to change it in certain determinate ways and give backing to their socialist vision of what the world should be without confusing that with their scientific conception of how it is, how it is likely to be and can be. This is a normative vision, though it is certainly not independent of what Marxists believe the world can be—of its factually historical trajectories. Marxists seek to understand and explain empirically the trajectory that our social world is likely to take and to alter their normative vision as well as their factual conceptions when they do not square with what careful scientific research reveals. (I am not saying that these normative and scientific matters can always be sharply and clearly distinguished. But they are, as I hope I have shown, distinguishable and importantly so.)

Analytical Marxian social science seeks to use cutting-edge techniques—or to put it with greater circumspection, what is conventionally taken to be cutting-edge techniques—in the disciplines of history, geography, sociology, social anthropology, economics, and philosophy to examine key substantive topics that have always been central to Marxism. Analytical Marxists



concern themselves with—seek to accurately describe, interpret, and explain—the social reproduction of capitalism with its practices, ideas, ideals, ideologies, institutions, ways of maintaining or manufacturing consent, with its assumptions and conceptions of legitimacy, with its conceptions about the conditions for the transition from capitalism to socialism to articulate conceptions that a socialist society and a socialist world would come to have.<sup>19</sup>

Marxist social science is also centrally concerned with class, exploitation, domination (indeed, all forms of oppression), democracy, markets, consumerism, alternatives to capitalist markets, and, more broadly, capitalist market economy, the feasibility of a market socialism, capitalist organization of social life, and to what could come to be called a post-capitalist alternative. Sociological Marxism, as Buraway and Wright put it, is concerned to understand so it can effectively challenge “capitalism’s capacity to absorb or ridicule alternatives to itself and to provide the grounds for a prefigurative politics” (Buraway and Wright 2001, 484). They go on to remark, “Thus, a sociological Marxism has to be not only a science but also ideology—ideology in Gramsci’s sense that embodies real utopia in a concrete fantasy that will move people to collective action” (Buraway and Wright 2001, 484). I take, as far as I understand it, their important substantive point but reject its specific formulation. Sociological Marxism, like all genuine sociology, all genuine science, has, to remain faithful to its vocation, to be *just* scientific. To be a science is to be a system of description, explanation, interpretation, and prediction. It is not to be in the business of advocacy or moralizing. It can and sometimes should be used to further an ideological and normative perspective. But that furthering is not a further scientific use. As we saw in Lecture One in discussing McCarney, an ideology is a set of beliefs, ideals, and practices that answers to class interests. Ideologies are different from scientific beliefs but they need not be in conflict with them and they may be supported by them and in turn motivate research for scientific beliefs that may either support or challenge particular ideological beliefs. Socialism’s ideology (some of its normative beliefs answering to its class interests) will be set against capitalist ideology.

Scientific beliefs may be utilized in this struggle, but that is a *utilization* and not a further bit of scientific activity nor a part of socialist ideology. It is something—a scientific something—that may be used by ideologists. To explain, for example, how work goes in capitalist society can be used to support socialist ideology.

Often—indeed usually—ideological beliefs are distorted beliefs but they need not be. Marxist sociologists have an ideology that in the ideal case will not be distorted but that can be true of the ideological beliefs of others as well. Ricardo, as Marx points out, had bourgeois ideological beliefs and as well was a firm supporter of capitalism but he also had scientific beliefs, some of which were well warranted as were *some* of his ideological beliefs. Marx regarded Ricardo as an astute defender of the bourgeois order but also as a soundly scientific political economist. But that does not mean that Marx agreed with either his central scientific or ideological views. He had his own alternatives that he took to have a greater claim on a more comprehensive truth. (I do not speak of *the* truth here. There is no such thing.) But we should not conflate his scientific beliefs with his ideological ones. They are different. But they both in their own way can be well warranted.

McCarney's conception of ideology here meshes nicely with Gramsci's. Moreover, we should, as Cohen has come to do, separate questions about how the elements within a society are related (sociology) from questions about how social forms succeed one another (history) (Cohen 2000, 385-86).

Political economy, of course, is also a social science, indeed as deployed by Marx, a key emancipatory social science, but it is a distinct discipline from history and sociology though it borrows elements from both as they crucially do from it. All three volumes of *Capital* as well as the *Grundrisse* have economics as their central concern. Yet with the exception of Robert Brenner and sometimes Erik Olin Wright, analytical Marxists have paid scant attention to it as an economic

theory, though Cohen masterfully uses this part of Marx in setting out his account of Marx's historical materialism (Callinicos 2006).

Cohen, Elster, and Roemer, as most analytical Marxists, reject the centerpiece of Marx's economics, namely, the labor theory of value (Cohen 1988, 207-38). Cohen has a deep understanding of Marx's economics and its place in Marx's thought, yet he is as firm as Elster and Roemer in rejecting the labor theory of value. Indeed, it is not much of an exaggeration to say, as Alex Callinicos does, that with their rational choice framework Cohen's, Elster's, and Roemer's work displays "a nihilist attitude towards the entire tradition of Marxist political economy" (Callinicos 2006, 252). Probably, principally through the powerful influence of Piero Sraffa, a brilliant but eccentric Marxist but still in economic theory a neo-Richardian, many contemporary and near contemporary Marxists were led away from Marx's economics. (This is particularly true of those who are also economists.)<sup>20</sup> Sraffa's trenchant but incredibly condensed and heavily mathematical criticisms of the labor theory of value and its related theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall and his alternative positive theory plainly had a strong effect, particularly on contemporary Marxist economists.

Justified or not, analytical Marxists followed the economic crowd here. I am not competent enough in economics to have even a reasonably informed opinion here but it seems to me that Wright's prudent agnosticism is the approach we should take; namely, we should not take the labor theory of value off the agenda. But, if it is something that is to be an object in renewed intensive investigation or to be accepted, it must meet the rigorous standards for assessment that analytical Marxists require, particularly by those of them who are economists. Whether it can be so articulated remains, as far as I can ascertain, open. But we should note that most economists think Marx's specific economic theory is a lost cause. But most economists could be wrong (Toulmin 2001, 47-66).

However, and be that as it may, I am interested instead in whether, in the form of classical Marxism, Gramscian Marxism, Althusserian Marxism, analytical Marxism, or some eclectic blending of Marxisms (scientific socialisms), we have a cogent critique of capitalism and its evident ills—now becoming glaringly apparent (2008-09)—brought about, or at least seemingly brought about, by neo-liberal practices. Does the collapse of the American boom-bubble mark the inception of a systemic crisis? Is the American empire bankrupt? Can states, either singly or together, develop, sticking with some form of capitalism, new and more adequate forms of economic regulation and behavior? Does constructing fairer and more democratic alternatives to neo-liberalism require a break with capitalism and/or the market altogether? Or can capitalism be stabilized in some neo-Keynesian form of economic governance? Or, alternatively, can there be developed a form of market socialism that avoids the mistakes of the command/administrative allocation systems of the now defunct 'state socialisms' (perhaps better called statist post-capitalisms)? Can we develop, and hopefully instantiate, a more adequate form of socialism for the twenty-first century? In an attempt to do that, what reasonably specific economic and other social measures shall we adopt? With a depression looming as a feared reality, can a Keynesian capitalism stem the recession/depression caused by, or at least seemingly caused by, the privatization and deregulation policies of neo-conservatism with its economically driven neo-liberalism? Do we need more big government than neo-liberalism will allow? Will Keynesianism again lead in turn to stagflation? Are we now unwittingly starting down the road to World War III as the failure to decisively end the Great Depression led to World War II? If Keynesianism down the road a bit, perhaps taking on some Marxian elements, begins to threaten or to be extensively perceived to threaten the ruling classes, frightening them with the specter of a socialist world, what will the ruling classes do? The prospect is frightening. Can socialist moves be necessary, or at least desirable, to replace capitalism altogether, to bid it a non-fond farewell (Callinicos 2006, 260-62; Nielsen 2003, 41-75 and 317-48)?

However, given the power (including the military power) of the rich capitalist North (particularly the United States) along with the widespread popular belief there that socialism in any form is a non-starter and, given the looming phenomenon of global warming, what are the prospects for us in the next 25 to 50 years? Will historical materialism, even in its weak and restricted forms as proposed by Cohen (2000, 341-95) and Levine, *et al.* (1992), provide a realistic guide and indeed one supporting the ascendancy of socialism? Classical historical materialism has been shown by analytical Marxists to be unsustainable. Can its weaker and restricted replacement do the job? What will our future most likely look like? South America shows some hopeful signs of going in a leftward direction but will it not be resisted by every means at the disposal of the rich and much more powerful North (Raby 2006)? (Think of the utter military superiority of the United States. But do not forget that with all that power—all that ability to shock and awe—it has not yet been able to subdue and pacify Iraq and Afghanistan as it could not Vietnam. More generally, see here Amin 2009). However, socialism in one country or on one continent (particularly not one of great wealth) has never been a great success. And what will be the role of China here? It calls itself a socialism but is it not in reality a very powerful authoritarian exploitative capitalism with a statist (not socialist) political structure? Still, it may well outstrip in a few years the other capitalisms. It may in time become the next dominant world power replacing the United States. (We see again, as if Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa were not evidence enough, how mythical the claim is about the link between capitalism and democracy.) Is there any reasonable hope that China, as it thoroughly catches up with the rest of the capitalist world and comes to an awareness of its ills, will revert to a genuine socialism? Perhaps, but I wouldn't bet on it.

It is questions like these—and they are just a sampling—with which we socialists must come to grips. Does rational-choice theory (game theory and decision theory) along with a methodological individualist anti-holism oriented analytical Marxism as well as a very elaborate and finely tuned moral theory—say, the one brilliantly executed by Cohen—help us come to grips

with the above central problems for socialists? I doubt it. They seemingly do little to help us in coming to grips with problems of the sort I have just characterized. Yet it is these problems and problems like them that are up front for socialist activists as indeed they should be for all of us who are socialists, even the most academic of us. Can we be serious socialists without coming to grips with them, putting them foremost on our agenda? Are they not the crucial problems rather than the problems that analytical Marxists, or for that matter Hegelian Marxists or Althusserian Marxists, concern themselves with? Are these not the crucial problems to be put on the agenda? Are not the problems of analytical Marxism, at least for the most part, free spinning wheels that turn no machinery? Are they not better set aside or put on the back burner? Should not an emancipatory social science in the service of socialism instead fasten on such activists' (but not only activists') problems? Or is this to be Luddite and fail to come at things at a sufficiently abstract scientific level, the austere level analytical Marxism requires? *Perhaps* I am being too Luddite. It is certainly important to determine, if we can, whether the capitalist mode of production is obsolete and likely to break down under the present recession/depression and at least somewhere along the way lead to socialism. And it is important to determine, if we can, whether or not social being determines or massively effects social consciousness. These are crucial issues for analytical Marxism. But can answers be given to these questions, standing where we are, without careful attention to the more specific questions and issues I have alluded to above? Probably not. Or should I just say candidly that I do not know the answer to this? I think we need a lot more clarity here. But we should also be wary about philosophers' penchant for endlessly asking questions about questions about questions. The thing to do is to determine, as directly and non-evasively as we can, what to do about our pigsty and global insane asylum—as a first step and immediately.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Think, for example, of the work of Christopher Arthur, Simon Critchley, Alex Callinicos, Jacques Bidet, Bertell Ollman, and Michael Lebowitz.

<sup>2</sup> Since first drafting this lecture I have come across an important article by Alex Callinicos. In it, among other things, he makes some similar as well as some additional criticisms of Cohen that I think have considerable force. See Callinicos 2006, 254-60.

<sup>3</sup> In a personal communication with him, John Kerkhoven noted that when someone repeatedly asked Louis Armstrong “What is jazz?” he responded, “Man, if you gotta ask, you don’t know!” Armstrong, if he wanted to be very patient, could play for his questioner a few short things by a variety of jazz musicians and then say, “That’s jazz” and then play some passages from Mozart and Mahler followed by a bit of music typically heard in cheap restaurants and then say that the last three were not jazz. That is an equivalent of what some philosophers call ostensive teaching. That would count in that context as an explanation. Kerkhoven goes on to say: “What if someone says, ‘Kai, you need to live with Adorno’s thought for a while before you can properly begin to understand it. And why should it [Adorno’s way of thinking and writing] conform to the ways of thinking you are accustomed to?’ That’s fair enough. But Kerkhoven also takes my point that in some sense Adorno ought to be translatable in ways that poetry need not be. (I would add, and I think Kerkhoven would agree, that poetry should not be translatable.) But Kerkhoven asks as well why I do not also have trouble with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein, though he is often elliptical, rhetorical, enigmatic, and cryptic, is not that obscure. He is a paradigm of clarity compared with Adorno or Hegel. To which it could be responded, “Try harder.” But is it worth the candle? Maybe, but there are a lot of other things to come to grips with and there is not world and time enough.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory Elliot notes that Max Weber once remarked that “anyone who wants ‘vision’ can go to the cinema” (Elliot 2008, 124). This could be taken in at least three ways: (i) as a tough minded remark affirming the desirability of being a realist about political and economic matters; (ii) as a cynical pun on how ‘vision’ is to be taken; or (iii) as an oblique remark concerning the cognitive triviality of most (perhaps all) expressions of a world vision or a vision about what the world should be like or about a better world being possible. Taken as (iii), it has an element of truth. Many such articulations are rather obvious and also risk having an overly utopian content. Yet sometimes they are something that should not be lost. I will return to that in my last lecture.

<sup>5</sup> But in doing this we should go up a meta-level. Remember Bertrand Russell.

<sup>6</sup> The commentator was Tom Mayer (Mayer 1994, 16).

<sup>7</sup> I think it should be out of place to ask that of a biologist ‘Are you a Darwinian?’ But due to some Neanderthal-like religious claims of ‘alternative biological accounts’, it, as a matter of ideological occurrence, is not quite out of place yet. If Neanderthal-like ways prevail, it might unfortunately not be out of place for a long time. Here again John Kerkhoven has made a sound relevant point. After acknowledging my point just made and made at greater length in the body of my text, Kerkhoven goes on to say that matters here are “complex, or at least quirky. Some say there just is no discipline of biology [now] without Darwinian thought. Wallace got it and someone else would have if Wallace and Darwin hadn’t.” Kerkhoven then says, “What I am saying is that one wouldn’t ask a biologist that question. How could a biologist not be a Darwinian?” I agree that he couldn’t now *not* be a Darwinian and remain a legitimate biologist. Indeed, and for some considerable time, to be anything else and still be a biologist, in practice at least, would be absurd. But some people—out of ignorance or from being ideologically bamboozled—do ask biologists that question. Biologists should respond to it as a matter of opposing a primitive ideology and not as a scientific challenge.

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<sup>8</sup> However, this is something that Cohen does not deny. His target is the non-analytical Marxist who, having become well aware of analytical Marxism, remains a non-analytical Marxist. He contends that such a Marxist becomes a bullshitter. This seems to be a bit of dogmatism on Cohen's part. Is Michael Lebowitz, who meets his conditions for a bullshitter, a bullshitter? That is not credible. The same obtains for the others mentioned in note 1.

<sup>9</sup> We need to be extremely careful about claims that life has lost its meaning or that it never had any and that none can be found or gained. Historically, the *sometimes* unintentional evils of the eugenics movement—something that Henry Ford and Adolf Hitler shared—should make us aware of that and make us extremely cautious. John Kerkhoven has well reminded me that before we judge that a life is or has become meaningless we should take note of Jean Vanier's L'Arche communities where "they put into practice that the handicapped have something to offer; they have something to teach us who are not disabled" (personal communication). A recognition of this and a taking it to heart and putting it into action, into practice, must not be evaded. However, that is not the kind of case that I had in mind. Rather, cases where (i) people are in incurable and unremedial pain and misery and want to die; and (ii) people are utterly and irreversibly unconscious and where it is crystal clear to medical experts (a consensus among them) that they will never regain consciousness. People in (i) and (ii) should be allowed to die or should be assisted in dying—the only thing for those characterized by (ii) that could be done if they are to die. Still, we should be extremely cautious here. Remember the Nazi practices of clearing out the insane asylums of the captured towns in the Soviet Union and liquidating their patients in accordance with the Nazi doctrine that there is some life not worthy of life. There were Nazis who were not brutes who still did this because they thought, everything considered, it was the right thing to do.

<sup>10</sup> Two objections emerge here. (i) A good deal of science does not concern itself with how the world might be but only with how it is and why it is that way. That's certainly true, but some science does concern itself with determining possible historical trajectories, e.g., parts of physics, climate science, and some social science (Levine, *et al.*, 1992, 129-75). (ii) In facing social life, some things (important things) are inescapably normative. Indeed, psychology and social anthropology importantly *study* normative matters. *But that does not make those sciences themselves normative.* You do not have to be fat to drive fat oxen to market. Some sciences non-normatively study normativity.

<sup>11</sup> Science does not need to hitch its wagon to some project, though it often usefully does. But in some important instances it *seems* at least to have no project in mind, e.g., Galileo's observations of the moons of Jupiter, his experiments with falling bodies, Darwin's explanation for the origin of species. I am again indebted here to John Kerkhoven.

<sup>12</sup> Could not one instead, after carefully studying Wright's characterization of emancipatory social science, say, *contra* me and McCarney, that that very notion is empirically normative and thus *as science* incoherent? I am inclined to agree that, as Wright states it, such a conception of an emancipatory social science is, if not incoherent, at least deeply flawed. In the body of the text I have tried to reconstruct Wright's otherwise impressive theory so that we would not call the *science* of it, either explicitly or implicitly, normative. Whether it is an effective tool for normativity is an empirical matter. He also has a partly normative emancipatory social theory but that is not a scientific theory, though it has important reciprocal relations with his emancipatory social science. Emancipatory theory and emancipatory social science are distinct but in close relation. Marxism as an emancipatory theory is a normative theory (Wright, *et al.*, 1992, 187-91).

<sup>13</sup> An example may help. Suppose an MP is accused by two former servants of sexual abuse, oppression, exploitation, and underpayment of wages for which they had contracted. These, if true, are serious moral charges. But they are also empirical fact-sensitive claims. The key terms used in these charges are expressive of thick concepts. They have both an evaluative (normative) component and an empirical factual component. They are distinguishable but not separate components. They are indivisible. (Hume showed us how this could obtain.) There is no way of asserting 'they were oppressed' without at least implicitly making an evaluation of their situation. And there is no way of asserting that sentence without describing their situation. Science will not tell us that sexual abuse, oppression, exploitation, and underpayment of contracted



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wages is wrong. That is a moral matter; something that is finally determinable by our moral intuitions (considered convictions). But whether sexual abuse, oppression, exploitation, and underpayment of wages actually occurred is a factual matter empirically determinable. (An MP so accused, guilty or not, will not deny that these things are wrong. He will deny that he actually did them or that they actually occurred but whether they did or not is an empirical matter: factually, empirically determinable.) The inference to the conclusion that they are wrong is a conceptual and moral matter embedded in certain linguistic practices in our language; our moral intuitions here are also embedded in our practices. Still, what *presently* counts as oppression and exploitation in Saudi Arabia and in Denmark may, at least in part, differ. But, given what may be a culturally determinant conception of oppression and exploitation in different cultures, there can be disagreement about what counts as oppression and exploitation. At least in a particular culture at a particular time and given a consensus about the uses of these terms (or their other language equivalents) that oppression or exploitation occurred or did not occur is an empirical matter as well as a moral matter, though science only considers, *qua* science, the first. Even for a determinate use of ‘oppression’ and ‘exploitation’, including the inferences to their being wrong, social science can often tell us in an authoritative manner whether oppression and exploitation has actually occurred. That is a factual matter determinable empirically, given a determine use of ‘oppression’ and ‘exploitation’. Someone may acknowledge that and still not believe or acknowledge it is wrong.

<sup>14</sup> Marx’s stance here is also compatible with Joseph McCarney’s conception of an emancipatory social science that is non-normative. Indeed, a vindication of McCarney’s account here would—or so I think—have to take a view of Marx and of emancipatory social science like the one I have just been expounding. But this would also require McCarney to narrow his concept of ‘science’.

<sup>15</sup> John Kerkhoven remarks that it seems deviant to speak at all of the *desirability* of claims of science. That is right, or so I have argued, of the scientific claims just taken as scientific claims. They are not, and cannot be as long as they remain purely scientific claims, also moral claims or claims of the appropriateness or acceptability of any norms *except norms of scientific inquiry*, e.g., that certain scientific claims should aim at predictive reliability, coherence, and interconnectedness with other scientific claims. But norms of scientific inquiry aside, bits of science *as such* can assert no norms including moral norms or any norms of good living or norms of a good or authoritatively acceptable political or social order. But science, in terms of what it reveals about how the world is and can be (including the social world), can help us in achieving or sustaining moral norms and similar such normative notions. It can, for example, help ascertain if some principle and the practices that go with it are achievable now or whether there is any reasonable possibility that it will be achievable in the foreseeable future. It can help us to keep from blowing moral and good life bubbles in the air.

<sup>16</sup> Suppose we, as Rawls did, acknowledge the pervasiveness of self-interest and, while continuing to defend a moral point of view, remark that we should not expect people to be saints. Where does ideal theory, or indeed any kind of moral theory (something I claim emancipatory social science is *not*) leave off and emancipatory social *science* begin? Where, if at all, is the cut or the distinction—it need not be a dichotomy—between them? Or is there such a distinction? I assume there is one, but I do not believe, the remarks attributed to Rawls notwithstanding, put in question that there is such a distinction. I claim there is a distinction, but I acknowledge that it is not always sharp such that we can properly speak of a dichotomy or even a division (Putnam 2002). There are many relevant sentences which are of an anomalous logical status. ‘That we should not expect people to be saints’ is one of them. In certain contexts it could be taken to be a psychological or sociological remark albeit expressed in a common parlance. Used otherwise in other contexts, as presumably Rawls used it, it could be a moral remark warning us to avoid a too vigorously deontological morality. In still other contexts its import could be indeterminate. But the user, if he has a clear intention, could make its status clear by attending to the context in which he is uttering it and by being clear about why he is uttering it and then clearly expressing that. It could be a bit of moral or normative political theory, perhaps relying in part on a bit of psychology or social science, or it could be just a psychological or social science generalization and as such it would be non-normative or, in a normative political context, it could be used to make a moral (normative political) claim either with or without a moral theory. But the distinction between morality and science remains intact. However, the context would determine how the

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remark is to be understood. Sometimes it is ambiguous and there we sometimes need some disambiguation with clarity about the user's intentions.

<sup>17</sup> Am I not engaging in ideal theory here and isn't it here at least pointless? Do we ever get a recognizable cross-cultural and reflective consensus here? Probably not, at least not about anything significant. But we do get some useful approximations. I think of myself here as doing a bit of conceptual analysis and not as setting forth a theory, ideal or otherwise. I work with some *idealizations* but that does not require a theory, ideal or otherwise. And it is the idealization, not any reliance on ideal theory, that has the bite. But what is the use of such an idealization? The use is to clear up a conceptual point—something that sometimes but not always is an important thing to do—and with that in this case to critique a perhaps small point concerning Wright's account. But what is the point of that? The point is to strengthen Wright's important argument for socialism by making a small emendation to it. And the point of that is to make a small move to help ensure the credibility of socialism.

<sup>18</sup> But if we look again at the extended quotation I made from Wright at the beginning of this section, in all but one place he seems to be in sync with what I have just been saying (Wright 2006, 94).

<sup>19</sup> I have been asked whether in time the conception of analytical Marxism should become obsolete. The answer is, I hope, yes. First because I would like to see the day when 'analytical Marxism' has become pleonastic and, secondly, because still later in our historical trajectory I would like to see 'Marxism' disappear and be replaced by 'scientific socialism'. Marx would have achieved his aims if people, utilizing a good understanding of our social world and having a fidelity to a moral vision concerning that world that is expressed by socialism (both utopian and scientific) where we socialists would have, as it were, built a better mousetrap and would continue to tinker with it to make it still better. Or to switch to Wittgenstein's metaphor, analytical Marxism gives us a ladder which, after we used it, we can throw away.

<sup>20</sup> Sraffa is principally known by philosophers for his close friendship with and influence on such diverse figures as Wittgenstein and Gramsci.

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