

MODERN AGE

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Poetry and Revolution

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IN 1848 WHEN the *Communist Manifesto* was first published, its authors were both under thirty. They were determined to transform the world, and the rhetoric of revolution which they developed for their purposes was one which partook less of contemplative philosophy than of revolutionary activism. In his *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx wrote: "All philosophies have sought to explain the world; the point, however, is to change it." That there was a poetry in the deed was not, of course, an original discovery on the part of Marx and Engels. Marxist writers have frequently asserted that German idealism was essentially quietist, a conservative philosophy of conforming

bureaucrats. Nothing could be less accurate than this assessment. Heine discerned the implicit activism in German idealism and pointed out its revolutionary character. He called Kant "a more terrible revolutionary than Robespierre." He predicted that German idealism would develop into a destructive and revolutionary pantheism. Romantic hero worship and the Romantic preoccupation with the man of deeds was already old by the time Heine delineated the implicit content of German idealism. Goethe recognized this activism as the singular mark of modern man. It will be recalled that in scene III of part I, *Faust*, Faust has decided to translate the Bible.

It is written: "In the Beginning was the *WORD*."

Here am I balked: who, now can help afford?

The *WORD*?—impossible so high to rate it;

And otherwise must I translate it,
If by the spirit I am truly taught.
Then thus: "In the Beginning was the *THOUGHT*."

This first line let me weigh completely,
Lest my impatient pen proceed too fleetly.

Is it the *THOUGHT* which works,
creates, indeed

"In the Beginning was the *POWER*." I read.

Yet, as I write, a warning is suggested,
That I the sense may not have fairly tested.

The Spirit aids me: now I see the light!
"In the Beginning was the *ACT*," I write.¹

If it is false to overestimate the originality of the activism of Marx, it is even more erroneous to underestimate the impact of this activism upon Marxian epistemology and more especially on Marxist behavior.² The activism implicit in the rhetoric of revolution and the poetry of violence had its roots in Promethean style rather than in contemplative categories. Like the parent Romanticism from which it derived, Marxism was vitalistic and irrational in its orientation rather than contemplative, rational, and analytical. Under these circumstances it is entirely correct to view the *Communist Manifesto* as a piece of high political poetry which derives its force both from its powerful rhetoric and the Romantic colorings of its unexplored assumptions.

Few opening lines possess the force and suggest the mystery of the opening line of the *Communist Manifesto*: "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Commu-

nism." It introduces one of the most powerful pieces of political rhetoric in the history of the world. But because of Karl Marx's historical stature and his broad claims to philosophical mastery, it is sometimes forgotten and more often goes unrecognized that he was above all a great political journalist. To assert this is to stake out for Marx a double claim to greatness, for the 19th century was an age in which journalism dominated the European and the American intellectual scene and in which the major talents of the era turned to the newspaper and the popular journal as favorite means of propagating their ideas. No doubt Marx was one of those writers Jacob Burckhardt was later to denigrate by naming them "terrible simplifiers." That accounted, in part, for his appeal to many of the superficially educated middle-class minds which formed the great reading publics and dominated the political life of the era. But the more important source of Marx's influence was the fact that he was a consummate rhetorician.

The force of the opening line of the *Manifesto* rested on truth as well as rhetoric, for in 1848 communism did haunt Europe. It was an exaggerated fear which had little to do with the realities of the situation. Europe, as Marx recognized, was predominantly middle-class. Nonetheless, the fear of socialist revolution was abroad not as a recognizable and definable reality but rather as a spectral fear.³ The existence of a widespread revolutionary proletarian movement was then, as so often later, the invention and the wish-fulfillment of alienated middle-class intellectuals. Its power derived from its very ghostliness.

Today communism is a "specter" in a much more literal sense than that which Marx intended in his brilliant opening line. It is the ghost of a God who failed, the etherialized dogmas and institutionalized rituals of a dead religion. Such vitality as

it possesses derives from classes, movements, and institutions which are antithetical to classical Marxism. Racism, market economics, peasant revolutionaries, existentialist humanism, nationalist proto-fascism, and a new class of party and technological bureaucrats are the dominant and contending forces within this decadent movement. It is true, of course, that communist weapons and communist revolutionary elites continue to threaten the peace of the world but the threat they constitute is not the challenge of a vital and commanding doctrine. It is the threat, rather, of institutionalized revolution seeking vainly to regain a revolutionary élan and the doctrinal purity of revolutionary innocence. However, the weakness of communist ideology, its steady erosion and disintegration, is positive gain to the student of Marxism. Ideological analysis succeeds best as a kind of intellectual autopsy. Then the hostilities and terrors of ideological engagement, real or imagined, can be put aside and the examination of the idea with the object of understanding it rather than refuting it can proceed.

Sidney Hook has in a remarkably fine primer of Marxism,⁴ described the intellectual tradition established by Marx as, "the ambiguous legacy." Marx's successors misunderstood and reinterpreted, adapted and transformed the legacy of ideas and attitudes which Marx bequeathed to succeeding generations. As with the heirs to every body of doctrine, the disciples of Marx were deeply divided and remain deeply divided today over the genuine meaning of what Marx said. But not all the burden of misunderstanding and miscomprehension can be placed on the succeeding generations. Much of the difficulty lies in the nature of the Marxist legacy.

Karl Marx was born in 1818; he died in 1883. These dates are especially significant for they indicate the close relationship between the life-span of Marx and the Ro-

mantic and revolutionary 19th century. Not a major intellectual, technological, economic, or political change in that protean era went unobserved by or escaped the comment of Marx. His was one of the great synthetic minds of the century and he welded into an unstable unity many of the diverse and contradictory currents of his time. For marxists, this ability to reconcile polar opposites and accommodate fixity to development, process, and transformation was a guarantee of the validity of Marxist epistemology and sociology. In retrospect it seems clear that the synthesis which Marx forged was bound to break down into its constituent elements.

More important than the inherent instability in the synthesis of Marx in explaining the contradictory interpretations of the Marxists is the fact that Marx did not leave a developed system. He was not a systematic philosopher. The bent of his mind was pragmatic and controversial. Not only was he a superb rhetorician but he was also an impassioned and aggressive controvertist. Many have judged him a thoroughly disagreeable and unlikeable person because of his overwhelming intellectual arrogance, his ruthlessness, and his penchant for cruel and demagogic denunciation. It is well to remember, under these circumstances, that Marx was also capable of inspiring intense and lasting friendship and personal loyalty. This passion for controversy, attacking men, institutions, and ideas, meant that Marx's formulation of his thoughts was conditioned by the particular needs of the moment. Marxist theory then, is a response to conflict, and, while it is not to be thought of as wholly tactical, it does not represent a closed system, a system which is whole and integral. It is precisely this lack of system which makes possible such wide divergences concerning what Marx actually said and meant.

If Marx said so many and such various things, how is anyone, short of the expert who has devoted his life to the study of Marxism, to deal with his ideas and to discern what is essential and characteristic in his thought?⁵ There are three sources of what one might describe as an ideal or classical Marxism. In the first place, despite variations and development, there is in the writings of Marx a central core of ideas, a set of themes and conceptions which, while not constituting a closed system, provide a fairly rigid ideological structure. Second, this central core of ideas and themes finds its most complete expression in the *Communist Manifesto*. It is because the *Manifesto* represents a kind of creedal statement of essential Marxism that it is the simplest and most certain way of understanding what Marx had to say. Third, the great mass of committed Marxists have derived their faith from the *Manifesto* rather than the more extensive and ambiguous literature of theory and controversy which Marx produced. Though indeed the Marxists hold conflicting interpretations of the legacy of Marx, still they all recognize the creedal statement of the *Manifesto*. It is not then simply what Marx said, but what, especially in the *Manifesto*, the great bulk of Marxists thought him to have said, which enables us to understand Marxism. Similarly, it is not simply what Christ said, but what the Christian Church through the centuries has understood Him to have said, that constitutes Christianity. Marx may not have been a Marxist, as he himself said, but it is necessary that we comprehend what the Marxists as well as Marx accepted as the definition of the Marxist position. That definition is to be found in the *Manifesto*. For these three reasons, the *Manifesto* constitutes the key to any understanding of Marxism.

What can exegesis add to the clear, persuasive, and impassioned statement of

Marx and Engels? The historical context and circumstances of the composition of the *Manifesto* have been dealt with at length elsewhere. A complete exposition of the philosophical, sociological, and economic elements in the Marxist synthesis has been the subject of frequent, exhaustive, and conflicting tomes. Moreover, the Marx of "scientific revelation" has gone out of style. Biographical data is the stuff of handbooks. Discussions of surplus value, of the logic of the dialectic, and of the relationship of the superstructure to the mode of production are no longer of primary concern to the readers of the *Manifesto*. An intellectual history of sorts covering the period of the past century might be written based on the introductions to the *Communist Manifesto*.⁶ They have reflected not only the changing styles in Marxist dogma but the shifting currents of Western intellectuality. And indeed these are legitimate responses to the changed needs and responses of every generation.

Today the chief concerns to the student of the *Manifesto* and of Marxism are humanistic, theological, and historical. We are no longer interested chiefly in Marx and Engels the scientists, but we are interested in the response of Marx and Engels to the human situation. We recognize the logic, the science, the economics and, indeed, even the sociology of Marx as hopelessly dated and stuck in the rigid formulations of the mid-nineteenth century. The recent students of Marx, and the Marxists who have sought to save the master, as trapped foxes try to save themselves by gnawing off a limb, have directed their attention elsewhere and are primarily interested in Marx, "the humanist" rather than Marx "the scientist."

An understanding of Marx "the humanist" involves the student in a whole range of intellectual problems which can be treated far less definitively and with far less

precision than the earlier discussions of "scientific socialism." These discussions of the "humanistic content" of Marxism as they are embodied in the *Manifesto* demand a consideration and an understanding of the unvoiced assumptions and attitudes which undergird the *Manifesto*. Intellectuals at any given historical juncture, and whatever their ideological position, share a set of concerns and address themselves to a complex of problems which they perceive in common with the totality of their society. The resultant world-views are always diverse but this diversity has its roots in a unitary experience which the shared environment forces upon the thinker.

Moreover, any given time span exhibits a host of all but unconscious assumptions which color to a significant degree the ideological structures created within that time span. These "endemic assumptions" and "intellectual habits," "dialectical motives," "metaphysical pathos," and "philosophical semantics" entangle themselves in and undergird the composite structures of thought which evidence themselves at a particular moment in history. Shifts in this substratum of assumptions, enthusiasms and sensitivities reflect themselves in the decay of dogma and in subsequent attempts at ideological reconstruction. The now generally rejected conception of "surplus value" is thus far less important to an understanding of the *Manifesto* than the general philosophical bias shared by the 19th century Romantics generally, for it is from this shared world-view that the humanism of Marx is distilled.

This Romantic age from which we are only now emerging was one deeply divided and contradictory in almost every aspect of its life and thought but one. This one had not yet unlearned the deep and abiding trust in an ultimate harmony, a final reconciliation, an abiding rationality which were

a heritage from the Greco-Roman and Christian Western past. The eternal and the evanescent, chaos and order, death and life, decay and renewal, the essential and the becoming, the transcendent and the immanent, subject and object, dreaming and waking are seen not as contradictory and mutually exclusive opposites but as moments of one reality embraced within a comprehensive whole. Polarity and its resolution in a higher harmony, the achievement of unity and harmony from conflict and diversity, a dialectical logic which defied the Aristotelian laws of self-identity and fixed species were the commonplaces not only of Marxist and Hegelian thought but of Romantic thought generally. It is this Romantic assumption which is the source of the dialectical ground of the "humanism" of the *Manifesto*. It is this dialectical world-view which Henri Lefebvre⁶ accounts the essential contribution of Marx and Engels. And it is precisely this mysticism of the dialectic, not as specifically Marxist logic but as philosophical bias, which is today rejected. The mystique of a dialectic which reconciles frustration and hope, decadence and progress, apocalypse and rebirth, alienation and fulfillment is unacceptable to a generation which, while no more "scientific," is at least a great deal more sceptical than were the Romantics. Moreover, the dialectic always tended to become rigid and mechanistic even though its model was that of organic development. The intellectual moment of the late 20th century is not the same moment as that of the mid 19th century. Milovan Djilas, once a leading Yugoslavian Marxist, recently wrote, "I am a materialist in the sense in which Marxists are materialists, but I am not a dialectical materialist. I believe that nowadays there is something reactionary about dialectics."⁹ And Djilas is quite correct. Dialectics are reactionary. They have not so much been refuted as they have sim-

ply gone out of style and there is nothing quite so reactionary as last year's, or worse still, the last century's enthusiasms.

In spite of the emphasis upon polarity and conflict as a constituent part of the dialectical process, the preoccupation with violence in Marxism stems at least in part from sources other than the dialectic. It is no accident that one of the most representative of the Romantics was the Marquis de Sade. The Romantic era is one which was permeated with violence and the major social and biological formulations of Romanticism; those of de Sade, Josef de Maistre, Malthus, Marx, and Darwin, and later the theories of the ethnic nationalists, all reflect a common mood. All, to a greater or lesser extent, assert that not only is violence an observable reality in human society but that it is desirable and a part of the processes of nature. Marxists have written much about the process through which changes in quantity become changes in quality, but as the *Manifesto* demonstrates, they looked to revolutionary violence as the real key to social transformation. In this they were at one with the dark, irrational, intellectual underworld of Romanticism. It is not that Darwin's "tangled bank" and Marx's proletarian barricades were alone the scene of violence and struggle. The art and literature of the 19th century, culminating in Freud's dark imaginings, are shot through with horror and bloodshed.¹⁰ The theme of revolt, of violence, of the reversal and rejection of God's order, and commitment to a theory of decadence, all of which are found in the romantic mood of the century, are present in a most emphatic way in Marx. It is sometimes assumed that the theories of historical decadence which so permeate the historical structures of Romanticism are essentially rightist and conservative in their genesis. The fact is that there is no more telling and trenchant expression of a theory of historical decadence than that found in

the *Manifesto*. To be sure the formulation there is different from the formulation given the theme of historical decadence by the Romanticists of the right. Contradiction and the exhaustion of positive elements within the dominant middle-class are substituted for biological or spiritual decadence but the implications of the Marxist theory are the same as those of the Romantic right. Instead of seeking cultural regeneration in a new race or the rebirth of an old race, Marx seeks this regeneration from a new class.

No doubt the increasing strictures placed on the immediate expression of the instinctual impulses by the demands of a rationally organized and an increasingly ordered life account in part for the Romantic appeal of violence. The growing wealth and power of the bourgeoisie was based not simply upon order and calculation but upon the instinctual renunciation which was a concomitant part of that order and calculation. The Romantic myth of the hero who stands outside the laws governing ordinary mortals and points the way to what all men can in the future be, the myth of Promethian defiance of the Gods, the quest for a social order based on battle and orgy, escape from the trammels of rationality and order through drugs, through exotic travels, through historical dreams, and finally through death, stem at least in part from the anxieties engendered by calculation and order and the increasing abstractness of the goals to which the bourgeoisie addressed itself. Indeed, it is difficult to discover any 19th century conception more abstract than that of capital. The great revolution in physics still lay ahead. The Marxist dream of a manhood freed from "alienation" and "contradiction," fulfilling all of its potentialities and living in a society where evil, except for the continued intransigence of nature, is unknown, is directly related to the inability of 19th century society to adjust its emotional life to the conditions cre-

ated by an increasingly rationalized and technologized social order. It represents a flight from social reality whose seriousness can be comprehended in our generation because we have witnessed romantic social revolt from the right and the left and always masking itself in the garments of humanism, a humanism which is anti-rationalist in its most essential assumptions. Freud recognized that instinctual renunciation was the *sine qua non* of social order. It is always present in any society although the urbanized, technologized, and rationalized society created by Western man contains a greater degree of instinctual renunciation than any hitherto existing social order. Violence, expropriation, orgy, and every human nastiness are natural human behavior and exist where ever weakened social structures and institutions enable men to turn their midnight dreams of violence into noontday reality.

Of all the heritage of Romanticism which remains a leaven in contemporary society and a dynamic force in Marxism, the myth of salvific violence is the most important. If we neglect it we can understand neither our own society nor contemporary Marxism.

Society, religion, and ethics were the triad of great concerns of the 19th century. Marx reflected all of them and none more strongly than the 19th century preoccupation with religion. Religious doubt, scepticism, agnosticism, and atheism were endemic throughout the century. It would be incorrect to maintain that the romantics were atheists. Few eras in the history of ideas have been so religious, so preoccupied with essentially religious questions as the Romantic era. Still there are nagging doubts in nearly every mind concerning God's existence, and in the generation after 1832 these doubts became beliefs and men began to act out their atheist anguish and their Promethian pride. Anarchy, the void,

and sentimentality—these are the ground of Romanticism. The Romantics were the first generation to live in a world in which the idea of God had become generally intellectually suspect.

But Christianity had gone out of style among the European intellectual elite long before the revolutionary changes in metaphysics and ethics which marked the end of the 18th century. European man had to lose belief in the human and the personal dimension of God before mankind could claim divine stature for its Promethian self. By the mid 17th century, hedonism, rationalism, and the belief in human perfectibility had replaced among the European intellectual elite the Christian conception of man as a finite, sinful creature. This elite had, moreover, begun to think of God in reationalistic and scientific terms which denied him the role of the loving father who has mastery over history and the suffering brother who has come to redeem history and save mankind. God now became the creator and the preserver of the natural order—a remote force rather than a person. His power having been reduced to that of the originator and preserver of the natural casual order, the idea of diety was imperiled when Romantic epistemology rejected demonstrations of causality, and Romantic metaphysics criticised natural theology. However, the Marxist critique of religion did not stem directly from the collapse of natural theology. It was the result, rather, of the first major attempt to replace theology with a thoroughgoing humanism. The Englightenment had prepared the way for this humanism, but only Romanticism could bring it into existence.

It has sometimes been argued that Marxism is a secularized Christianity in which the kingdom of heaven is brought down to earth, and the loss of paradise, as a result of the critique of theology, is compensated for by the promise of utopian earthly

bliss.¹¹ Of course there is a large measure of truth in this view and the fact that Marx was a Jew held special importance for the development of Socialist theory. Marx stood in the Jewish prophetic tradition both because he denounced the immorality of what he believed an exploitative system and hopefully anticipated its destruction, and because he predicted and proclaimed the eventual establishment of a perfected society. Judiasm has never been otherworldly; God manifests Himself and justifies Himself in the here and now. Moreover, the messianism characteristic of Marxism has deep roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Despite the sense in which Marxism is a secularized Christianity, we only obscure the real nature of Marxism when we carry this argument too far. There is today a belief nearly as popular as the belief of several years ago that the Chinese Communists were simply "agrarian reformers." This belief holds that Marxists are really disguised Christians crying out for social reform and seeking to bring into existence the kingdom of God. Marxists are prevented from being good Christians largely because the Church has failed and more especially because the Church of the 19th century allied itself with the ruling classes and social reaction. Once the Church demonstrates its "progressive" character, so this line of argumentation runs, a rapprochement between Marxism and Christianity will be possible. Christianity will become Socialist and Socialism will become Christian. It is a fond but fatuous dream.

What Eric Voegelin describes as "Western civil theology"¹² and sees as the ideology of modern totalitarianisms is not simply a reform and secularization of the Christian content but a much more radical effort at dechristianization of the world—an effort which aims at the abolition of Christianity and is necessarily anti-Christian. Stated simply, Christianity must be displaced be-

cause Christianity denies to man the full attainment of his stature as man. Not metaphysics or epistemology stand in the way of Christian belief and Christian commitment on the part of the Marxist, but human pride. This pride, discerning as it does in the mystery of transcendence the problem of evil, the temporality of all human creations, and the tragedy of all human existence, sees in Christianity the ultimate limitation upon the achievements of man.

The myth of Prometheus which, to an even greater extent than the Faust myth, was the dominant mythical embodiment of Romanticism, did not originate with Romanticism and received no distinctive reformulation by the Romantics. The theme of man's overreaching and his subsequent punishment by the Gods is a commonplace of nearly all mythologies. The sin of Adam and the pride of the tower of Babel both embody the idea of the hubristic act which invites the punishment of God. What was distinctive in the myth of Prometheus was the fact that the act of hubris involved theft of technique upon which the power of the Gods rested and the employment of this technical power to establish human society and human culture. In the formulation given the myth by Aeschylus in his tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, the myth already possesses the characteristics which made it so acceptable to the Romantics and to Marx. Prometheus is a savior who defies Zeus. He bases his civilization teaching of the arts which enable mankind to rise from barbarism on the theft of fire. In the name of man he challenges and defies the Gods. It is interesting to note that the Platonic version of the myth of Prometheus is political rather than theological and is placed in the mouth of Protagoras as a defence of democracy.

The formulation given the myth of Prometheus by the poet Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound* is the essential Romantic state-

ment of the myth. But the formulation given the myth by Shelley was distinctively Romantic rather than Greek. Shelley was aware that Aeschylus in a lost tragedy had reconciled Zeus and Prometheus. Shelley tells us in his introduction to *Prometheus Unbound* that he rejected the idea of simply reconstructing the tragedy by Aeschylus with its reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus. "But, in truth," he wrote, "I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious enemy. The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan. . . ." At Shelley's hands the Romantic reformulation of the myth becomes Gnostic, or more specifically as Rex Warner has described it, "Manichaean." Its theme now is the restoration of wisdom, justice, love, and peace through the revolutionary deposition of Jupiter, who, though God, rules by violence and evil. The deposition of Jupiter enables man at last to be fully man, and the Spirit of the Hour at the end of Act III proclaims the arrival of the humanistic utopia:

All men believed or hoped is torn aside
 The loathsome mask has fallen, the man
 remains
 Scepterless, free uncircumscribed, but
 man
 Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nation-
 less,
 Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the
 king
 Over himself; just, gentle, wise: but man
 Passionless? — no, yet free from guilt or
 pain,
 Which were, for his will made or suffered
 them,

Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like
 slaves

From chance, and death, and mutability,
 The clogs of that which else might
 oversoar

The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
 Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

The poetry of revolution which permeates the *Manifesto* is the poetry of the Romanticized Promethean myth. In it the distinctively revolutionary atheistic and humanistic content of Marxism is made explicit.

It is not politics, or economics, or the problem of culture which gave rise to Marxism. We are now acutely aware that at Hegel's death in 1831, the philosophical problem *par excellence* was the problem of God. The left-Hegelians from whom Marx took his rise were theological rather than social thinkers, and the chief of them, Ludwig Feuerbach,¹³ introduced into the thought and language of the later Marxists the decisively important concept of "alienation." Feuerbach reversed the notion that man was made in the image of God. Rather God is made in the image of man. God is a projection out of the essence of man of all that is highest and noblest in man. In his God-making, man alienates from his own nature the powers which man covets but no longer possesses. What man as a species might claim as his own, man as an individual projects into a non-existent divinity. "Our task is to prove," Feuerbach wrote in *The Essence of Christianity*, "that the distinction between the human and the divine is illusory, that it is nothing other than the distinction between the essence of human nature and the individual. . . ." The attack therefore upon Christianity is not economic or political, though to be sure there are political implications to the left-Hegelian attack; it is rather anthropological. Belief in God is really nothing more than a confession of weakness and limitation on the part of man the individual. God

was exorcized through demonstrations by these primitive anthropologists of the way in which they believed the idea of God had come into existence. There was hardly any scientific attempt either to validate their theory or to refute the idea of God through a natural scientific argument.¹⁴

If religion, consequently, represents an impoverishment, a way in which man defrauds himself of his humanity by ascribing to God qualities he ought himself to possess, how does this strange delusion come to pass? Here Marx expanded the philosophical anthropology of Feuerbach by giving it what Marx believed to be a sociological-scientific basis. Religion is generated by the "real" conditions of man's everyday life; it is not the psychological alienation of essence as Feuerbach thought.

This distinction is an important one. "Alienation" has become one of the cant words of our generation and supplies, through some very amusing intellectual prestidigitation, a bridge between the bright world of Marx and the dark world of Freud. In order for man to be alienated from his nature, from himself, he must possess an identifiable nature, a true self which can somehow be violated. One can only be alienated from what one essentially is. Unless man possesses a fixed and essential nature in the older Classical and Christian sense, and unless man is developing toward a *telos*, it is nonsense to speak of "alienation" as contemporary, existentialist Marxists employ that term. There is, of course, the sociological doctrine in capital of self-alienation "through the fetishism of commodities"—but this is something quite different from alienation of essence in the sense of Feuerbach, or alienation from essence in the Classical and Christian sense. In the formulations of Marx, man simply possesses no essential nature from which he can be alienated. Man is protean, and what he is or what he might become is de-

termined completely by the mode of production. Indeed, essence receives an almost hypothetical character in the hands of Marx. If man is alienated at all in terms of the more traditional conception, for Marx it is an alienation from what he might become, rather than from what he is.

No one today can take seriously the Marxist "scientific" critique of religion. The late 19th and 20th centuries produced a tradition of scholarship which specialized in the scientific study of religion. In the history of religion men such as Weber, Troeltsch, Dawson, and Eliade have provided us with a sophisticated analysis of the rise and development of religious systems. From pioneering studies in the psychology of religion such as those made by William James and Rudolf Otto we have gained an understanding of the religious impulse. At the very time when non-Marxist science was making such rapid progress in the study of religion, Marxist religious studies remained at the level of a crude and pragmatic propaganda. Religion as a field for careful and disciplined analysis is second only to ethics in the neglect it receives at the hands of contemporary Marxists.

Marxism is, consequently, not antireligious because it is materialistic but materialistic because it is antireligious. Its atheism has many sources and certainly Marx himself was an atheist for many reasons.¹⁵ Still, the basic ingredient is Romantic Promethean humanism. It comes as no surprise that this oldest and most basic layer of Marxist thought is today the most viable part of the Marxist intellectual tradition.

One of the most interesting and important shifts in social and political theory which accompanied the transition from the Enlightenment to Romanticism was the abandonment of atomistic individualism and the contract theory for an organic-corporatist and collectivist theory of soci-

ety. It is tempting to view collectivism as distinctively Marxist but even a cursory survey of Romantic thought reveals that collectivism in one form or another is a commonplace of Romantic social theory. The role of French socialism as one of the sources of the Marxian synthesis has been somewhat overestimated. Germany and not France was the land where collectivist and especially organic corporatist theory received its fullest development and expression. By 1848 German philosophers and social and political theorists had been arguing with quite sophisticated formulations that the liberal 18th century social atomism was socially destructive, morally detestable, and historically unfounded. True, most of these theorists were men of the Right but they were at one with Marx in attacking what they conceived to be the dangers of political and economic liberalism. The climate of German social and economic thought was, and remained throughout the 19th century, basically anticapitalistic and collectivistic.

Slowly, however, the collectivities of the 19th and 20th centuries have lost the magic of their Romantic appeal. The political and social structures which Romanticism created tended to give men a corporate and collective identity and organization without providing them with the acutely perceived need for community. The party did not prove superior to the Church or to the ethnic nationalist state in its ability to integrate and articulate the faceless masses into meaningful participation in the common concerns of humanity. Indeed, in the years since 1848, collectivities have increasingly revealed themselves as evermore powerful instruments of exploitation and oppression. The totalitarian states generally, in spite of the emphasis they place upon the corporate and collective nature of the state, have been precisely those states where the least community has existed and where the indi-

vidual has stood against the total pressures of his society most isolated and alone. The so-called "atomistic individualism" of the 18th century no longer seems the grave social evil it once appeared to be, and the Romantic mirage of organic community, whether it is based on class, or race, or immemorial traditional, has lost its attraction. Communities of free individuals linked in common endeavors promise in the better world of tomorrow to replace these collectivities whose coercive power derives from some Romantic fiction. "Proletarian solidarity" is a conception wholly worthy of an era which found natural societies artificial and mythical collectivities natural.

In his play, *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov has one of his characters say, "a hungry dog believes in nothing but meat." The spiritually hungry dogs of the 19th century believed in nothing but history. There is precious little economics in the *Manifesto* but a very elaborate argument from history. One must somehow account for the historicisation of thought in the 19th century, must explain why in the 19th century history had so completely displaced even the natural sciences as a satisfactory explanation of both reality and purpose.

The rise of secular history parallels the decline of theology. It is no accident that the Middle Ages are essentially ahistorical. Secular history, from the Renaissance forward, is the single great talisman against what Czeslaw has described as the "suction of the absurd." If God is dead or does not exist and there is no truth, no transcendent value, then man is faced with an insoluble dilemma. What shall he be? What shall he become? What choices shall he make? These questions do not arise within the context of theism and the value structure of theism. God's world, for the theist, possesses an order, and it is within the power of the individual to accommodate himself to that order or to sin by violating that or-

der. But suppose there is no order; suppose all is anarchy; suppose all is absurdity. Suppose the structure of the world is such that every good and beautiful thing must be pulled down and perish, and that at the end the individual must submit to the ultimate absurdity of death. Suppose too, that every day, every minute, the individual is forced to exercise his freedom, that in the face of absurdity the individual must choose.

In the mid-nineteenth century the radical atheist humanists evaded both the question of human freedom with its insistence upon the necessity to choose and the question of ultimate meaning in the face of the anarchic void by insisting that causality operated through human history in such a way that man had no freedom. Marxism asserted that not only was man determined but that the processes of historical materialism would perfect, fulfill, and recreate man in such a way that earthly bliss would replace the lost paradise. History guided and governed by the workings of dialectical materialism would fill the aching void left by the disappearance of God. History is man's

justification and explanation of an existence which at the existential level seems to have lost all meaning and all purpose. The Marxists evaded the question of freedom and meaning by making man a prisoner of the processes of historical materialism. If "alienation" has any meaning at all, it must reside in the process whereby man is dispossessed of his freedom to act and laid under the compulsion of dialectics.

Today we stand at some distance from much of the Romantic world-view and revolutionary enthusiasm of the 19th century. The mechanics of Marxism which constituted its "positivistic" element were the first to be discarded by Western intellectuals. This was because the claim to being objective interpretations of reality could be checked and measured against that reality. The Romantic content of Marxism has been less amenable to analysis. Its abandonment depended less on disproof than on stylistic permutation. To the degree that we understand the style of the *Manifesto* and comprehend the poetry of revolution which it invokes we have overcome it.

¹Goethe, *Faust*, (Bayard Taylor translation).

²Frank S. Meyer, *The Moulding of Communists: The Training of the Communist Cadre*, (Harper 1961).

³Lewis Namier, 1848: *The Revolution of the Intellectuals*, (Oxford 1946).

⁴Sidney Hook, *Marx and the Marxists: The Ambiguous Legacy*, (Princeton 1955).

⁵The clearest and most readable discussion of Marxists theory available in English is: R. N. Carew Hunt, *The Theory and Practice of Communism*, (Harmondsworth 1963).

⁶The most thorough, tendentious, and dated (1948) introduction to the Manifesto in English is: Harold J. Loski, *On the Communist Manifesto*, Foreword by T. B. Bottomore, (New York 1967).

⁷Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being, A Study of the History of an Idea*, (Harvard 1936) pp. 1-23.

⁸Henri Lefebvre, *Le Marxisme* (Paris 1950).

⁹A. J. Stehle, "A Talk with Milovan Djilas," 27 *Encounter*, No. 6, June 1967, p. 62.

¹⁰Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (New York 1956).

¹¹The relationship of Marxist utopianism to the Christian concept of the kingdom of God is explored at much greater length and with much greater sophistication in Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History*, (Chicago 1949), and Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, (Ann Arbor 1960).

¹²Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago 1952), identifies Marxism as one manifestation of a larger Gnostic tradition which manifests itself in various attempts at immanentization.

¹³Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx* (Ann Arbor 1962).

¹⁴Henri de Lubac, *The Dream of Atheist Humanism* (New York 1963).

¹⁵Ignace Lepp, *Atheism in Our Time* (New York 1963).