

Catholic Marxism: Looking Forward and Looking Back

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Catholic Marxism was deeply involved with the December Group which met annually for some years at Spode House. In most ways the December Group was the institutional form of Catholic Marxism. I was not a founding member of the group—its immediate ancestor was a magazine called *Slant* run by some young graduates, but I attended regularly for the last ten years of its existence. It was not called after any great event in socialist history but because it was simply convenient to meet in December. As most of its members were academics of one sort or another this is easy to understand. Since I am going to be critical in retrospect it is only fair to point out how good many of the sessions were. There was a memorable paper by Denys Turner (*New Blackfriars*, 1973), and for those of us who were present, there was the staggering all-day session on the Pinochet *coup d'état* with Gonzalez Arroyo—recently evicted from his chair in his Chilean university—and Jacques Chamsun, Allende's minister of Agriculture. There were some of the best, and best informed, lectures on Ireland, of which Irene Brennan's contributions were outstanding. But what there was not was any attempt to compare and contrast as Finals papers used to say (and perhaps still do) the substance of Catholicism and the substance of Marxism.

The presiding genius over Catholic Marxism wasn't Marx, whose name was as infrequently mentioned as that of God. It was the French *philosophe*, Louis Althusser. He seems to me to have been a fraud from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. He had been an active member of various Catholic organisations in his youth, in particular the Jocists until he became converted to Marxism. Unfortunately his youthful involvement in Catholic organisations persisted to influence his Marxism. He and most of the Catholic Marxists retained the scholastic indoctrination of their younger days. What the movement was about was a peculiar scholastic marxism. As with most scholastic-influenced movements, history was ignored. For Althusser and his Marxist followers, Catholic or not, history began with the French Revolution: anything earlier was written off as irrelevant. The fact that Marx obviously believed and believed deeply that dialectical materialism (the term was coined by Engels) could explain the historical process from its earliest beginnings

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was ignored. The Althusser school was rubbished by E. P. Thompson in his *Poverty of Theory*. The book came out towards the end of the December Group's existence and was never discussed. Mr G. de St Croix wrote a brilliant book on the end of Ancient Greek history applying the doctrine of the class war to a thousand years of Greek history. (Like many scholars who had read Greats at Oxford he was sniffy about the 'Grandeur that was Rome' and wrote the Romans off *tout court*.) His arguments were rigorous and consistent. One might feel his treatment of the beginnings of Christianity was less than adequate. Or that his unfavourable comments on St Paul's attitude to women compared with those of a Greek author so obscure he has not yet achieved an edition in the Loeb classical Library but whom Mr de St Croix was prepared to treat as representative, will not really do. But he did show that the tensions of the class war permeated the whole of Greek history: if it took a thousand years of history to topple Greek society class war did it in the end. He showed that the Marxist time scale could be very slow indeed but that class war could none the less explain the fundamental factors in Greek society. The Marxist explanation of history worked after a fashion and in a very remote period of history. Althusser and his disciples were not interested in this sort of writing.

In England a group of Marxist and marxising scholars led by Rodney Hilton showed how a feudal society accumulated the capital that made possible the leap into sustained economic growth that Capitalism represented. The debate on the causes of the English Civil War, initiated by Marx but now forever associated with the name of Christopher Hill, left the Althusser school cold. When E. P. Thompson spoke of the poverty of this kind of theory he spoke no more than the truth.

Althusser wrote curious, almost unreadable, essays on the question of how much Marx owed to Hegel.¹ He also discussed the topic in an earlier work, *For Marx*, London, 1977.² He not only denigrated Hegel as a philosopher in his own right but in practice virtually eliminated any question of his influence on Marx. He ignored a key thesis of Marx certainly taken from Hegel concerning the transformation of quantity into quality. This was how Marx escaped the dilemmas of most philosophers since Plato. Traditionally human development was pulled from in front, history was teleological in other words. Marx's materialism was based on another form of explanation. The transformation of quantity into quality meant that history was driven from behind and 'entities' like Plato's forms could be dispensed with.³ M. Althusser does not fail to point out that Marx talks very little about this unquestionably Hegelian doctrine. He (Marx) left this to Engels, who devoted two chapters of his *Anti-Dühring* to the topic (written after Marx's death). M. Althusser never deals seriously with the relationship between Marx and Engels.⁴ When it

suits him he can dismiss Engels summarily — or more usually ignore him. In many ways Engels was what the Germans call a *Kaffegelehrter* but his relationship with Marx makes him important.⁵ Marx left many important theoretical questions to Engels whilst he got on with *Capital*. It is impossible to disassociate Marx from Engels as Althusser does. M. Althusser notices the transformation of quantity into quality briefly in his book and (p. 200 n.41) promises a discussion of the topic but if he ever produced one I have failed to locate it.

Althusser's general approach as illustrated in his preface to his English readers, *For Marx*, is instructive. "The critique of Stalinist 'dogmatism'", he writes, "was generally 'lived' by Communist intellectuals as a 'liberation'. This 'liberation' gave birth to a profound ideological reaction, 'liberal' and 'ethical' in tendency, which spontaneously rediscovered the old philosophical themes of 'freedom', 'man' the 'human person' and 'alienation'.⁶

This ideological tendency looked for theoretical justification to Marx's *Early Works*, which do indeed contain all the arguments of a philosophy of man, his alienation and liberation. These conditions have paradoxically turned the tables in Marxist philosophy [I am not sure what he means here EJ]. Since the 1930's Marx's *Early Works* have been a warhorse for petty bourgeois intellectuals in their struggle against Marxism.⁷ The themes of 'Marxist Humanism and the Humanist interpretation of Marx's works have progressively and irresistibly imposed themselves on recent Marxist philosophy, even inside the Soviet and Western Communist Parties.'

Martin Nicolaus in the Foreword to his translation of the *Grundrisse* in the Pelican Marx Library points out how little and late Marx's early works were known. In the case of the *Grundrisse* which is neither very early nor noticeably naive it is hard to escape the impression that it was virtually suppressed by Stalin.⁸ A reading of Martin Nicolaus' foreword to his translation of the *Grundrisse* is enormously illuminating about the relationship between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. In any case the Catholic Marxists could not complain that Althusser hadn't told them what he was about.

For myself I never accepted the Catholic Marxist theses. This was not simply through a dislike of Althusser, who in the end, in spite of the great authority he once wielded in France, is irrelevant. I thought, and still think, that Marx's economics were a pretty convincing tool of economic explanation. At the present time it is constantly said but never argued that Capitalist economics has triumphed over Marxist economics. It is true that the greater part of the world and all the developed world have accepted Capitalist economics but it has yet to be shown that they work. It is the case that Capitalist economics have shown (to use a very Hegelian

turn of phrase) a cunning to outflank Marxism. They have destroyed any belief in the necessity of a socialist order to underpin a civilised society for the time being at least — but the Capitalist alternative has yet to show where the economic growth is to come from that can satisfy all the economic expectations that must be satisfied if societies are to remain stable. There are no longer areas waiting for economic exploitation that can sustain further growth for capitalism but there are a great many peoples with a recent colonial past that has left them with economic demands they will not give up. How are these demands to be satisfied? It needs to be remembered that a central thesis of Marx was that with the colonial empires of his day Capitalism had reached the limits of its possibilities for expansion, its bursting point as it were. (He was a bit premature here but I suspect in the end right.) For him Socialism was the only way the contradictions that Capitalism was faced with could be overcome. The alternatives (which I do not think he ever discussed) were a kind of inner colonialism that exploited the poor and the weak and necessarily resulted in brutal, repressive, regimes. In many parts of Latin America every trace of patriotism and social cohesion has been expunged from many societies.⁹ It seems obvious that Marx was very much on the right track here.

What I think was the objectionable feature of the Marxist interpretation of history and politics, and the one that in the end sank that interpretation in spite of the considerable sense it contained, was Marx's anthropology — in the German sense of the term. He inherited from the Enlightenment, an inheritance far from confined to Marxism, a belief in the perfectibility of man to be achieved by pure reason. Marx produced a theory that seemed to him to embody precisely the principles of pure reason when applied to history and economics. His explanations, he believed, were as universal and as valid as those obtaining in physics and chemistry. Freud also thought his theory was pure science.¹⁰ So did the founding fathers of sociology. When I was a young university lecturer and becoming interested in sociology in general, and social anthropology in particular, as tools likely to be useful in historical interpretation, one was not encouraged by the reigning sociological establishment (even less by the reigning historical establishment). The then sociological establishment had no time for history and historians and thought they themselves were the heirs of the pioneers of natural science. I remember hearing a sociological panjandrum of the time — from the University of Chicago naturally—Edward Shils, talking to an interested group of staff and students in Manchester. He claimed that sociology, just like the natural sciences, proceeded by observation culminating in generalisations of 'scientific' validity. He was, not surprisingly, asked to quote one such successful generalisation. After some thought he said domiciliary groups

and residential groups tend to overlap which on translation seems to mean people who live in the same house tend to be related. Another distinguished visitor was George Homans, then professor of sociology at Harvard. He also came to Manchester and talked to more or less the same group on the same topic. He was a genuinely distinguished man—as well as an amiable fraud—who was a pioneer of historical anthropology although you couldn't call it that then. He had written an excellent study of the medieval village. In his lecture he claimed that eventually sociology would produce a complete explanation of history in an equation of infinite variables. When I pointed out that equations of infinite variables, particularly single equations that could explain everything, were nonsense mathematics, he smiled and said it was a manner of speaking: an unanswerable point unless one was prepared to be bloody rude.

The man who wrecked this travesty of sociology by scientism was the late Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, again the *Urtext* was a lecture given at Manchester.¹¹ He maintained that social anthropology was not a form of natural science but a kind of history, although he did not conceal his opinion that historians needed to get their act together. (It is obvious from his introductory lectures on social anthropology that his thinking was saturated by ideas taken from R. G. Collingwood, especially *The Idea of History*). It was only in the late sixties and early seventies that 'scientific' sociology died the death of a thousand qualifications. Historians a little later began to overcome their fear of sociology although there are still pockets of resistance.¹²

But all this was far into the future. For Marx society and history were to be totally explained by reason, meaning explanations modelled on natural science and on the basis of these explanations society was to be perfected and history closed. This seems to me totally incompatible with any form of Christianity that claims to be traditional and orthodox, as well as being utter nonsense. The doctrine of original sin that flatly denies this thesis is rooted in myth but is none the less at the heart of Christian theology (it is also a concept of considerable explanatory power). The Devil is the Prince of this world or he was until he was cast out by Jesus who is Christ the King, but he is still around and is a diabolical nuisance. His cunning is at least the equal of the cunning of reason: he is after all an angel. (I suppose we must assume angels are very intelligent although the Bible never says they were.) The capacity for good or well-meaning policies to distort and warp the society they were meant to improve hardly needs demonstration. Nor do the obstacles that 'reasonable' men put in the way of the application of reason if it is against their self-interest or even requires them to abandon their intellectual laziness and think. This could be admitted by many non-Christians. But the distortions and the warps are

not merely oversights or misunderstandings: they can only be adequately characterised by the language of evil and the vocabulary of wickedness. (One thinks of Hannah Arendt's profound and illuminating remark about the banality of evil.)

A particularly pertinent example is the way Marx's Enlightenment anthropology was used to justify the worst excesses of the Gulags. Their inmates were corrupt ideologues who had taken positions as enemies of the people. They had rejected reason, they had accepted reaction and therefore it was the duty of the State to kill or imprison them. Men were not allowed to be mistaken. Nor does it allow for the fact that a lot of men and women are natural yuppies: greed is a fact of life as well as a theological sin. (Supplemented by the power of television, it was as much as anything responsible for the demise of the Soviet Union.) One may not care for yuppies or their short-sighted greed but the answer to them is neither a Gulag nor Wormwood Scrubs. (Stalin tried the Gulag solution and the present state of the former Soviet Union is an excellent argument for its disastrous failure.) Nor does it allow for the change of scale consequent on the success of the Russian revolution, a nice example of the transformation of quantity into quality. Marx's anthropology was deployed in conspiratorial groups. But with the success of the revolution it had to move from the sanctions of social ostracism and the schisms between cafés to the KGB (originally the OGPU) and the Gulags.

Nor did what I have called the Marxist central doctrine of the transformation of quantity into quality escape serious criticism in the moral realm. The key criticisms here came from Kierkegaard. I do not think Kierkegaard knew any Marxist text but he did know Hegel and his criticisms of Hegel are very relevant. He pointed out that in the moral sphere—he would have called it the ethical—quantity does not transform itself into quality. A man will hesitate and tremble before working himself up to commit a serious sin the first time and then find it easier and easier. I suppose—Kierkegaard didn't—that Macbeth is the obvious example here. It seems to me that Kierkegaard shows that Marx, or any other thinker basing himself on Hegel, could not provide a serious basis for a personal morality. Persons, of course, do not exist in isolation but in society. This no more means that the study of persons can be subsumed into society¹³ than it means that the study of society can be reduced to the study of persons.¹⁴

In the end what sank Catholic Marxism was its eclecticism. It took bits and pieces of Marxism without examining the whole package but Marxism has a consistency and a wholeness that does not lend itself to this treatment. Catholicism is much less coherent and much less of a whole but it does have coherence and consistency of a sort. I do not think the Catholic Marxists made any serious study of Catholic theology nor of

Marxism except what Althusser said Marxism was. What they sought and, alas, found, was a lowest common denominator. This was derived from the scholastic teaching of their youth or what they remembered of it: in my experience this was quite a lot. This was the attraction of Althusser. His was a truly scholastic doctrine. He had done the work and made Marxism a comfortable doctrine for those with this kind of background.¹⁵

There would be little point—but there would be *some* point—in writing an obituary of an intellectual movement of twenty years ago. But does the study of Catholic Marxism lead anywhere? I think it does.

Marxism has broken into pieces. Some of these pieces only deserve to be jettisoned but quite a lot has value, sometimes great value, and can only be neglected at our peril. It seems obvious that no grand scale synthesis between Marxism and Catholic theology can be made to work. But on a more restricted, but still very basic level, Marxism can still be extremely illuminating. One of the most vexed questions raised by Marxism is the relationship between the economic base and the ‘superstructure’, that is the whole intellectual and cultural baggage any society carries. The discussion of these matters still seems to have relevance. The old ‘Marxist’ thesis that assumed one could generalise about this relationship on the assumption that all cultural history can be reduced to an economic base is as dead as the dodo but one can still have a serious discussion about some parts of the superstructure and its economic base. An obvious example is the contemporary cult of sport. The public wants to see the major sporting events on television and Rupert Murdoch’s organisation ensures that this can only happen if the public pays his lot the prices they choose to charge.¹⁶

The organisation that purveys the sport on television can also spread into the television presentation of news and politics, as it is in the process of doing. The resulting product, still in its infancy, is bland, boring, with all the nastiness swept under the carpet. But there are many things some of us find important for which the economic base is irrelevant. A poet like Seamus Heaney has to earn a living but it is ridiculous to suppose that the way he does it, which is quite ordinary, has any relevance to the poems he produces, which are not quite ordinary. The old Marxist idea that all cultural work can be explained in terms of its economic base is useless and vicious and leads nowhere.

I said the old Marxist idea but there is reason to suppose that the idea I am criticising belongs to the vulgarisation of Marx’s thought that set in with his death and lasted until the publication of his early works in the 1930’s. (One’s instinct to doubt that Marx would have thought that the cultural aspects of society could be reduced to the model of a cultural superstructure resting on an economic base should have been given a freer rein) The elucidation and criticism of this vulgarisation has been the

work of the brilliant Italian Marxist scholar, Lucio Colletti.¹⁷ He argues¹⁸ that Marx's view of the relationship of economic base and superstructure is a little more subtle than the one I have just criticised: 'Both subject and object are part of an *objective* object-subject process. The superstructure is itself an aspect and articulation of the structures; consciousness is itself a mode of being; the knowledge of life is itself a mode and manifestation of life. Criticism of them, reflexion on them, is already an investigation of society, i.e. a sociology.' What seems to follow from this is that, in my first example, although what Mr Murdoch's media empire is purveying is clearly superstructure, it has also become an integral part of the capitalist base. In the second example, Seamus Heaney's poetry is not in any way a part of the basis of society and it would make no sense to discuss it as if it were. This would be true of an example like Rudyard Kipling, whose very large income was derived indirectly from the profits of imperialism and whose writing in part set out to glorify that imperialism. But unlike Rupert Murdoch it would again make no sense to treat him as a part of the capitalist base.

What seems a sign of hope to anyone raised in a left-wing ambience is the nearly spontaneous Justice and Peace movement¹⁹ This seems to offer the opportunity, not of a synthesis between Catholicism and Marxism, but the creation of a weapon that can be used by Catholics in the struggle for justice and peace. In its origins it owes nothing very obvious to Marxism. Its roots lie in the traditional Catholic social teaching about justice and fairness that lies on the surface of the Gospels but develops quickly into the deeper levels represented by the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Catholic social thought, particularly in the capitalist era, has been characterised by ignoring or evading the story of Dives and Lazarus. But the evangelical Protestants have been much worse. If anyone wants to test the phoneyess of Protestant fundamentalist evangelicals who profess to follow the Gospels *au pied de la lettre*, let him (or her) ask for their views on Dives and Lazarus. I have actually seen a report on an American born again Christian's commentary on the parable that claimed that Jesus in the first century AD couldn't be expected to understand modern capitalism. It seems to me that one of the tests of the authenticity of modern Christian exegetes is that they accept that while Jesus could not have foreseen the development of Capitalism (foreknowledge being very much not a part of the human nature Chalcedon tells us Jesus had), his profound insight into the nature of man and his understanding of the power of greed, meant that his teaching could and did comprehend capitalist economics.

The initiatives of the Justice and Peace movement express themselves in various guises. The most spectacular is CAFOD. It nourishes itself and the Church by work on the ground amongst the poor, the oppressed and

the persecuted. It discovered that the poverty of the Third World and the cheapness of labour in those parts meant that a middle-class English parish could collect sufficient money to make a significant difference. (In my own parish we collect only for one English charity, for the local homeless. What this produces will buy cups of tea and bowls of soup, for a village in Africa the same money would equip a school kitchen. A stove adequate for a family of half a dozen would leave change from a five pound note.) Marxism has never done anything comparable to this. No doubt the teaching was that what was to be done was the creation from above, guided by men of superior intellectual training, of a revolutionary consciousness that would lead to revolutionary activity. In Marx's day it was possible to believe that intelligence and knowledge were on the side of the proletariat and that the Right were stupid, naive and inefficient. They were not.²⁰ The Cafod people began at the bottom. They were not conspicuous: they began with good and essential works. They got their feet under the table before anyone realised — including often, I suspect, themselves—that they could be a threat to an establishment that cared nothing for the poor. Once their feet were under the table they could not be disposed of by the usual means because they had a wealthy Western society the local barons could not afford to offend behind them. The rulers of this society cared little or nothing for them in reality but having a vaguely pious public opinion that could not be ignored, they could not leave them to the tender mercies of the local bosses.

It was the weakness of Marxist attempts to cope with this kind of situation — and some of these attempts were truly heroic — that it could not begin with apparently insignificant efforts by quite humble people, insignificant until the local establishment realised what the consequences of their actions were likely to be. I am not accusing the Marxists of *hubris* but pointing to the results of their elitist position (which in my younger days I shared). The Marxists thought they were showing the people the way, bringing them into the light, the leaders of the cadres that would lead the people to revolution. It was the tragic achievement of Che Guevara²¹ to show how disastrously misconceived this standpoint could be.

Having a little experience of the working of Justice and Peace initiatives it seems to me that those involved, religious or laity, are seldom drawn into the work by an initial left-wing stance. They are driven to the left by their experience of the right. The priest who is co-opted to look after refugees for quite adventitious reasons and then discovers how fascist the Home Office is²² for instance. From a base nearly thirty miles from Heathrow he is only ever summoned to collect his 'clients' at rush hour. A young Vietnamese man he had to collect on Christmas Eve asked when they got back to base if he could walk round the streets alone for a while. His explanation was that this was the first Christmas Eve since he

was fourteen that he had been free. Later he was hauled back into custody by the authorities. The warden of the hostel went to see him and asked if there was anything the boy wanted. He said he would like shaving cream and hair shampoo. It turned out that he learnt in Hong Kong how to produce a convincing counterfeit epileptic fit by using these materials. He underestimated the resource of our democratic country: they handcuffed him to his bed. They released him again in a typical cat and mouse game but he managed to get clean away.

One might also cite the campaign over the banning of landmines. This was largely the result of the alertness of agencies such as Justice and Peace. The media expressed no interest and published little if anything.²³

It seems that Marxist theory could be helpful here provided it is stripped of the conventional jargon.²⁴ It is a mark of the vitality of any intellectual movement that it is not imprisoned in any single mode of expression. Not even when that mode is as clear and, up to a point, as illuminating, as Marx's was. The course of events requires a revision of the original thought-world. According to Marx the proletariat were those who live by their work as the rentiers live by their dividends. The proletariat are the workers by hand and brain, to use the old Labour Party phrase. But this must be updated. Some workers by hand and brain earn such enormous sums buttressed by share-options that they are not readily distinguishable from capitalists (except that some of them are richer and they mostly seem immune to the desire to be Names at Lloyds). But this sub-class of the workers by hand and brain is not very numerous and unlikely to grow very large. Where it is important is that the so-called professional classes who used to repudiate any suggestion they were members of the proletariat, faced with the phenomenon of the fat cats and the Thatcherite contempt for their order, are having to re-think their position in society. In the early days of Thatcherism I took part in the first ever strike by the university teachers' trades union. It was a very academic strike. We wore our gowns and we managed to evade losing a day's wages.²⁵

Again Marxism was not (*recte* is not) equipped to cope with a situation where vast funds represented by stocks and shares are held by pension funds whose income is used to fund the pensions of the retired members of the proletariat. You cannot mount a wholesale attack on shareholders and rentiers as Marx thought you could in this sort of situation, especially as the best legal opinion is increasingly sure that although the funds are held by the companies, they do in fact represent deferred wages and belong to the members. It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that the employees' hold on the pension funds is more precarious than we used to think.²⁶ The Maxwell case and the fact that in the Guinness takeover of the Distillers the pension managers of the

Guinness fund were forced by the Guinness board to use £5,000,000 of pension funds to assist the Guinness takeover, together with the fact that many funds do not have employees' or pensioners' representatives on their boards demonstrate this very adequately. In virtually no cases do employees' or pensioners' representatives who are on these boards have any real power.²⁷

Another disturbing consequence is the force the pension funds give to what is called 'short-termism'. Naturally the managers of properly conducted pension funds are concerned with short-term investments that will produce high returns—and safe returns—for their pensioners. But society needs long-term investments and yuppies don't like them any more than pension funds do. There is a nasty situation brewing here and I would, in spite of my opening remarks to the paragraph, trust Marxist economists to effect a just solution much more than I would the reigning capitalist gurus.

Look, too, at the 'debate', promoted in the Press, started by the realisation that the community will be an increasingly ageing one until 2030. This debate is not at all what it seems. What costs money is residential care and that is needed by only 7% of the elderly and this percentage is unlikely to increase. True, the overall figure will increase and the actual numbers needing care will increase. The increase will not be astronomical and there is no reason to suppose that taxes to meet the increase would be insupportable. The debate is a cover for those who see a chance for a demagogic attack on the traditions of social insurance that started with Lloyd George's budgets in the early years of this century. This needs awareness amongst ordinary people. The remedy is fairly obvious and what is wanted is that ordinary people, particularly the ageing ones, should realise their power as voters and agitators. Awareness and organisation are needed and awareness and organisation are at the very heart of the competence of Marxism.

But unsurprisingly it is in the Third World that the most urgent needs are to be found. The CAFOD approach will not work everywhere and something rather nastier is needed. In Nigeria there would be no need for talk of the Third World at all if a small clique of military men had not succeeded in monopolising the material and economic advantages of Nigerian oil for the benefit of themselves and their epigones. But the archetypal capitalists Shell are now conniving at the murder of the Nigerian opposition, reluctantly, of course, — 'if we didn't do it someone else would'. But recent events have shown that Shell can be brought to its knees by a boycott of its products. (The fact that in this case their opponents were in the wrong is irrelevant: what matters is the demonstration of what can be done.) In a case like Nigeria Marxist analysis is relevant. In other words the going is going to get dirtier. But

with CAFOD and Marx I think Catholic social thinking is on the right lines. This enables one to sum up what was wrong with the Catholic Marxist approach. It viewed the dirty, sinful, world from afar off. We are now in a healthier position. Lenin entitled one of his pamphlets 'What is to be done'. We don't altogether know —as it turns out neither did Lenin—but we are trembling on the verge of knowing.

- 1 *Politics and History*, London, 1972, 'Marx's relation to Hegel' pp. 161–86. The French edition of this essay was first published separately in 1970. It is remarkably scrappy and superficial. The author's intention to minimise at all costs Marx's debt to Hegel is very evident. Lenin thought otherwise: "It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital* without having thoroughly studied the whole of Hegel's *Logic*". Martin Nicolaus, in his foreword to his translation of Marx's *Grundrisse*, London, 1973 has a much more balanced and informed discussion of the relationship.
- 2 He discusses the dates and circumstances of the essays that comprise *For Marx* in his preface for English readers to that book.
- 3 Once the laws of dialectical materialism had been formulated they do sound like Platonic forms. By their light men live their lives and first having created socialism they bring history to an end and create communism. Will, intelligence, purpose now reign supreme directed by a class of educated philosophers — in the Marxist sense of course. Marx always refused to speculate on the nature of communist society although some of his followers did not exercise like restraint. It is clear that communism for Marx was not some form of utopia. If it were not to be a static utopia there must be scope for development and this must proceed by some form of application of the laws of dialectical materialism. The one thing we can be sure of is that there could be no conflicts in communist society and Plato would have loved it. There is also the question how do men know when socialism gives way to communism. Marx's own criterion would presumably be the withering away of the State. If it is true as Lenin thought that communism is socialism plus electricity then the electricity supply requires an elaborate and considerable organisation that would be hard to distinguish from a State.
- 4 Engels' examples are very poor. The best illustrations would come from Darwin's *Origin of Species* where there are many examples from nature of quantitative changes in a species that result in its transformation over a long timespan. Engels, however, had certainly read Darwin. Professor Alasdair MacIntyre, who very kindly read a draft of this paper, makes an important point about the transformation of quantity into quality in a letter to me. "The 'transformation of quantity into quality': my problem with this expression is not that it does not direct our attention to a crucial set of features of both the natural and social worlds, but that it names a set of problems, not a solution, the problems of first how to characterize and then to understand the relationships between different kinds of emergent properties and that from which they emerge. A mistake made by both Hegel and Engels was to suppose that there is a single philosophical problem here, for which some general solution has to be devised, rather than a number of problems of roughly the same kind, each of which has to have its own solution. Marx in volume 1 of *Capital* tells us how as a matter of history the properties of commodity production and exchange emerged from a number of stages from labour and barter. We do not, I am inclined to think, understand this particular emergence of new properties any better by labelling it 'transformation of quantity into quality' and applying the same label to, say, the emergence of molecular properties from those of subatomic particles."
- 5 Lucio Colletti in his introduction to *Karl Marx. Early Writings* in the Pelican Marx

Library, London, 1975, pp. 10 *et seq* gives a much more serious account of Marx's relationship to Engels than Althusser. After the theses on Feuerbach that precede the Communist Manifesto (1848), Marx abandoned philosophy altogether. Engels produced what was long taken as the Marxist philosophy, notably in *Anti-Dühring* and the *Dialectics of Nature*, where he described what he thought were the central doctrines of the Marxist system, namely the transformation of quantity into quality and the negation of the negation. He dubbed the Marxist method of arguing, dialectic and named the whole system dialectical materialism. Marx never had the chance to comment on any of this. There seems little doubt that Engels' heavily positivistic version of Marxist philosophy would not have been to Marx's taste: his understanding of Hegel was very different. But Marx must have had some idea of what was going on in Engels' mind and he never repudiated his ideas although he never endorsed them either. In the next generation Russian Marxists came into greater prominence. Unlike the Germans, the Russians thought the philosophy of Marxism very important. It was natural though mistaken to suppose that Marx and Engels always spoke with one voice — that is until the early 1930's when Marx's early philosophical writings were first published. Stalin preferred the version of Marxism he was used to and his minions were given the hint to rubbish the early writings as far as they dared. But from then on there were always some Marxist commentators who took them seriously until after the death of Stalin they became a flood. Since then Engels has been very much in eclipse but he did raise important points that cannot be evaded.

- 6 M. Althusser was the master of the single apostrophe as the typographical sneer. These apostrophes are not called for by the sense. They show with what follows that Althusser was an unrepentant Stalinist.
- 7 Lucio Colletti in his introduction to his edition of Marx's early writings, p. 15 makes an important point against Althusser and his structuralist version of Marxism: "Nevertheless the sheer rigidity of official doctrine, the *rigor mortis* which already gripped Marxism under Stalin, contributed in no small way to the cool reception the writings met with when they appeared, to the absence of any debate about them, and to the manner in which they were immediately classified and pigeon-holed. They became almost at once the 'early writings'. The description is of course formally unexceptionable: they were composed in fact when Marx was a very young man of twenty-five or six. Yet this is the age at which David Hume had already composed his philosophical masterpiece, the *Treatise on Human Nature*, and age was never considered a criterion in evaluating the work of the Scottish philosopher. The adjective 'early' served to emphasise their heterogeneity and discontinuity *vis à vis* the doctrine of the subsequent period." Althusser's cavalier treatment of the Marxist classics when they did not say what he thought they should have is commented on by E. P. Thompson in his *Poverty of Theory*. Althusser savaged Engels, corrected Lenin and swept any awkward works by Marx under the carpet. He seems to me the archetypal *kleinbürgerlich* corrupter of Marx he is always complaining about.
- 8 A limited edition was published in Moscow in 1939 and 1941 respectively. According to R. Rosdolsky, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marx'schen Kapital. Der Rohentwurf des Kapital, 1857-8*, Frankfurt and Vienna, 1968, only three or four copies of this edition reached the West. He doesn't say—he probably doesn't know—how many copies were circulated in the Soviet Union.
- 9 The war between Argentina and the United Kingdom is relevant here. The fascist junta that governed Argentina through the jackboot and the murder squad tried to embellish their fading appeal by a patriotic war. They lost and the result was something of a revival of a sense of nationhood and a much less oppressive government. It will be interesting to see if these results are permanent results and if the discredited military remain discredited. It is fair to point out that although it is

some years since the Chilean dictator, General Pinochet, 'fell' he lives on in Chile, by all accounts a power behind the scenes.

- 10 Althusser borrowed the concept of overdetermination (*Überdeterminierung*) from Freud and devoted chapter 3 of his *For Marx* to it. To the unbeliever it seems like an escape route for thinkers like Freud and Althusser who wanted to claim the authority of natural science for what they were doing. The procedures of natural science enable one to make predictions about the outcome of certain actions in defined universes of discourse. Neither Freudian theory nor whatever you like to call what Althusser was doing were very good on accurate predictions. They could have cited a genuine but imprecise science like meteorology by way of example. (In the case of Freud many of the current criticisms of his theory would be turned by maintaining that Freudianism was a science but an imprecise science.) But what use would the accuracy of a weather forecast have been to a man trying to predict the arrival of a revolutionary situation? (Or in the case of Freud to explain why Little Eyolf obstinately refused to develop an Oedipus complex.) To be fair to Althusser he does in the chapter referred to give a persuasive explanation as to why the first socialist revolution took place in Russia using the concept, outlining the accumulation of factors that led to the breakdown of social equilibrium. What he fails to see is that he is doing the very historical thing of explaining what happened, not the natural scientific thing of predicting what must happen. To ordinary people what it all amounts to is seeking the straw that broke the camel's back. Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out to me that Althusser's structuralism "did assist him in grasping about political economy what Kuhn grasped about physics, namely that the data by reference to which the explanatory power of political theories is tested are themselves always identified and characterized, at least partially, in theory-laden terms. One of the reasons why the protagonists of post-Marshall economics, whether they stand with Marshall or Keynes or the monetarists, suppose they have refuted Marxism is that they confront Marx's theory with the data characterized in their own terms and then demonstrate triumphantly that Marx's theories can make nothing of the phenomena with which they are concerned. Thereby they miss the point and Althusser saw that."
- 11 Manchester was an early and important centre of social studies. Its very distinguished professor of Social Anthropology, Max Gluckmann, was a professed member of the scientist school but his work was much less imbued with the ethos of that school than that of many of his colleagues. He was either a pupil or at any rate an associate of Evans-Pritchard. The University of Manchester in its unwisdom permitted the professor of Chemistry, Michael Polanyi, to convert himself into a professor of Social Studies. His notion of sociology was a total rejection of scientism. So far so good but further on much less good. He also rejected any notion of an empirical social science and patronised ideological and wholly theoretical explanations of social phenomena. It seems to me in retrospect that his influence was disastrous but at any rate it is clear that a crucial time in the history of the subject Manchester was very much at the centre of the debate about the nature of social science.
- 12 A generation ago seventeenth-century studies were rent by a controversy as to whether the English Civil War was occasioned by the rise of the new class of gentry, as Tawney with Marx's posthumous blessing maintained or whether Trevor-Roper, now Lord Dacre of Glanton, was right to argue that the class of gentry was declining not rising and the civil war was the consequence of that class's fight to maintain its position. Lord Dacre of Glanton's name will for ever be linked with his blessing of the Hitler Diaries, although if Channel 4 is to be believed he could not read German but he blessed them just the same. Tawney it is less well-known was also offered a peerage, a hereditary one in his case, by Attlee and refused it because he said he was too old a dog to go round with a tin can tied to his tail. (My information came from

the late V. H. Galbraith who knew Tawney well.) In this case both parties were barking up the wrong tree. Tawney was using the concept of class in the classical Marxist sense, i. e. its members were defined by the way they earned their incomes. (Marx's definition of the proletariat was more complex than this and placed the main weight on the ownership of the means of production:but the point of owning the means of production is to generate income which I use here as a convenient shorthand term.) Trevor-Roper meant by class what Max Weber called a status group, that is a class defined by what the members of the group spent their incomes on. (Trevor-Roper in a review of a book on George Herbert in the *New Statesman* now reprinted in his *Historical Essays* actually said it is not how men earn their incomes that is interesting but what they spend them on). A little reading in elementary sociology would have made this controversy meaningful and perhaps useful. Likewise the quarrel of a generation earlier about the responsibility or lack of it of Protestantism for the rise of Capitalism might have made sense if the protagonists had actually read Max Weber whom Tawney credited with inventing the thesis. Tawney supposed that Max Weber was arguing that Protestantism caused Capitalism in the crudest possible sense of cause. But Max Weber rejected the notion of cause here. (R. G. Collingwood, in his *Essay on Metaphysics*, had likewise pointed out that cause is an ambiguous and slippery term but historians do not read philosophy at all, with sometimes disastrous results.) What Max Weber said was that there was an elective affinity between the two, echoing the title of Goethe's novel *Die Ausgewählte Verwandtschaften*. His demonstration of this seems pretty convincing, rendering Trevor-Roper's attempt to finally disprove that Protestantism caused Capitalism superogatory. There is an important field of study here as to the elective affinities of Protestantism and Capitalism.

- 13 A classic example of this is provided by what I think is a quotation from Carlyle though I cannot remember the context. Carlyle was a guest at a dinner party at which a business man, at once pompous, arrogant and ignorant, was holding the floor. 'Mr Carlyle', he said, 'all you write is full of nothing but ideas. How can a sensible man like me have any interest in them?' 'Sir', said Carlyle, 'there was once a man called Rousseau who wrote a book that was full of nothing but ideas and all the sensible men like you laughed at it. The second edition of the book was bound in the skins of those who laughed at the first.'
- 14 Samuel Smiles and his lives of the great engineers with its total neglect of the nature of the society the 'great engineers' operated in is a fair example here.
- 15 E. P. Thompson, *ibid* p. 235 makes the point very well. "... we might call this the dialectics of historical knowledge. Or we might have done so before 'dialectics' was rudely snatched out of our grasp and made into the plaything of scholasticism."
- 16 In *The Independent* 21. v. 96 Julian Critchley made some relevant remarks on the attacks of the British popular press on the European Union. He points out that the papers concerned are all owned by non-Britons. (He makes the surely immortal remark about Rupert Murdoch:that he changes his nationality as easily as he changes his shirt.) His point is that the EU is the only possible defence against the multi-nationals and that the hatred the multi-national barons feel for the EU is directly connected with this. Murdoch's *Sun* is the epitome of the little Englander, the wogs begin at Calais approach. The fact that Mr Murdoch has no secure nationality, that he has no roots, no secure base except on the Internet, that he will do anything for money provided the sums are astronomical, escapes *Sun* readers.
- 17 *From Rousseau to Lenin*, New York and London, 1972.
- 18 *op. cit.* p. 10 *et seq.*
- 19 The late Peter Hebblethwaite in his obituary of Archbishop Warlock (*The Independent* 9. ii. 96) remarked that Justice and Peace is the Catholic euphemism for politics.

- 20 One piece of evidence for this is the pre-war thesis widely popular in progressive circles that Plato was a fascist. The classic expositor of this view was the late R. H. S. Crossman (his book was called, by a contributor to a *New Statesman and Nation* competition, *Plato Alluptodateo*.) The thesis was killed a few years ago by Alasdair MacIntyre in his *Short History of Ethics*. He said he didn't know whether Plato was a fascist but he did know that if all fascists were like Plato the world would have been safe for social democracy years ago.
- 21 Che Guevara was an archetypal figure of a Platonic philosopher, a curious example of a point made by A. N. Whitehead, that all subsequent Western philosophy was a series of footnotes to Plato.
- 22 A friend of mine, a former senior civil servant, once said to me the Home Office was fascist but they were so old-fashioned they didn't know what it meant. They have since learnt.
- 23 A parish priest of my acquaintance, nurtured on *The Universe* and *The Sun*, on being offered the entry announcing the Justice and Peace collection for the Parish Newsletter, remarked 'Not landmines again, how boring, we had them three months ago'. Princess Diana's much publicised visit to Angola has given a real boost to the anti-landmine campaign. There seems real hope that they will be subject to a total ban.
- 24 Liberation theology belongs to special world of Latin America. I cannot see what I have called the CAFOD approach working here. When the Pope visited Latin America a few years ago he appealed for clemency for some radical agitators: the news of their execution greeted his arrival. But he didn't react in the obvious ways. Many of the Liberation theologians seem to feel that something in the nature of a full-blooded Marxist approach is necessary. They should know. But recalling Lenin's definition of a revolutionary situation one cannot help but doubt that there can be such a situation until the armies split and quarrel amongst themselves. So far there is no sign of this. The ideologues of the Right have read their Lenin too. There is an excellent and illuminating appreciation of Liberation theology in Christopher Hill, *The English Bible* pp. 447 et seq.
- 25 We need a much more thorough enquiry into the relationship of the Marxist notion of social class to the Weberian notion of status group than we have so far had. It seems to me that a shift of consciousness from status to class is likely to be of importance in the future development of political thinking and behaviour.
- 26 In the course of writing this paper I became aware that my own income (I am a retired University teacher) is largely derived from the dividends earned by a vast block of shares in BP, Shell and BAT.
- 27 The consequences of the way pension funds are constituted are soon illustrated. What are called pension holidays are a popular form of corporate life at the moment. This means that a pension fund has accumulated a sum of money surplus to requirements. The managers of the fund, usually at the behest of the employers, declare a holiday until the surplus is dispersed. This means the employees do not have to pay contributions: nor, of course, do the employers. But the third option of increasing the pensions of the retired employees is almost never brought up. Although, as a result of the Maxwell case the power of companies to raid pension funds has been restricted, it is far from clear how strong the safeguards really are.