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The Morality of Sanctions*

One should not rule out the thought that it could be illuminating to examine politicians' moral views, and even their implicit views about what morality is. It could be illuminating in two ways. First, such an examination may be essential to explaining how they act (though it need not involve accepting either their views or indeed their views about how their views relate to their actions). Second, it may help in clarifying the issues upon which they decide (though it may be not so much their views as the critical examination of them that does so). I suspect that Mrs Thatcher's opposition to sanctions against South Africa is such a case, in both respects.

I write this as she continues to resist the mounting international campaign for sanctions. On this issue she leads and President Reagan follows. He speaks of 'many in Congress and some in Europe . . . clamoring for sweeping sanctions against South Africa' and commends Mrs Thatcher for having 'denounced punitive sanctions as "immoral" and "wholly repugnant"': 'we believe', he says, 'Mrs Thatcher is right.' She also believes she is right. Indeed, the widespread and passionate opposition appears only to strengthen her in this conviction: as she has remarked, 'If I were the odd one out and I were right, it wouldn't matter, would it?': 'If you're alone,' she says, 'you only operate really by persuading. Your only way of persuading is by argument.'

What, then, *are* her arguments? As presented in a recent *Guardian* interview with Hugo Young,[1] these fall into three broad, though interrelated, categories, which we may call the tactical, the strategic, and the moral, though it is clearly the last to which, publicly at least, she gives most passionate voice.

The tactical argument holds sanctions to be ineffective, first, in producing the desired economic impact in South Africa and, second,

* This chapter was first published in 1987.

[1] 'Why Sanctions are Ineffective and Immoral', *Guardian* (9 July 1986).

in thereby producing the desired political impact: 'South Africa has colossal internal resources. A colossal coastline. And whatever sanctions were put on, materials would get in and get out. There is no way you can blockade the whole South African coastline. No way.' It is true, she concedes, that the banks, in pressing for the repayment of the South African debt last year, had some effect—an economic effect that, presumably, in turn affected political policies and attitudes. Yet these latter (unspecified) effects, she believes, came mainly from the influence of people inside South Africa fighting apartheid —meaning by this industry and 'some of the political parties'.

More generally, her view is that externally imposed economic pressure, even if economically effective, is politically counterproductive: 'I don't believe that punitive economic sanctions will bring about internal change' because 'even the moderates, black and white, would respond badly if they saw the West just hitting out at their country.' Indeed she claims universality for this argument: 'There is no case in history that I know of where punitive, general economic sanctions have been effective to bring about internal change.'

The strategic argument concerns the wider and longer-term effects of sanctions, in particular as these affect the interests of the West. She sees them as plainly damaging, jeopardizing supplies of raw materials and enhancing the Soviet threat:

> Platinum comes in quantity from only two places, South Africa and the Soviet Union. Are people who say there's a moral question suggesting that the world supply of platinum should be put in charge of the Soviet Union? And there are other things. Your chemical chrome, your vanadium, and, of course, gold and diamonds. They would have a fantastic effect on the economy of the Soviet Union. To me it is absolutely absurd that people should be prepared to put increasing power into the hands of the Soviet Union on the grounds that they disapprove of apartheid in South Africa.

But it is the moral case for sanctions which, in her interviewer's words, constitutes 'the central thrust of the prime ministerial argument, that part of it which elicited her most withering scorn':

> I must tell you I find nothing *moral* about people who come to see me, worried about unemployment in this country, or about people who come to say we must do more to help Africa—particularly black Africans. I find nothing *moral* about them, sitting in comfortable circumstances, with good salaries, inflation-proof pensions, good jobs, saying that we, as a matter of *morality*, will put x hundred thousand black people out of work, knowing

that this could lead to starvation, poverty, and unemployment, and even greater violence.

What, Young asked, about the black leaders? But Mrs Thatcher was thumping the table: 'That to me is *immoral*. I find it repugnant . . . And you'll really tell me that you'll move people around as if they're pawns on a checkerboard, and say that's *moral*? To me it's *immoral*.' But what of the opinion represented by black leaders such as Tutu, Mandela, the ANC, the UDF, who advocate sanctions?

I totally reject it. Because I find it very difficult to know how they can turn round and say 'Put our people into acute difficulty. They've got good jobs. They're looking after their children. But pursue a policy which can lead to children being hungry.' I find it very difficult indeed.

Indeed,

I find it astonishing, utterly astonishing, that on the one hand we're doing everything to help Ethiopia, everything to relieve poverty and starvation, everything to get the right seeds, the right husbandry. And at the same time we're suggesting that you turn people who are in work, out of work. And add to the problems you've already got. When people call that moral, I just *gasp*.

The effects of sanctions would, moreover, be harmful, not only in South Africa but more widely:

Supposing you start with fruit and vegetables. That would be 90,000 people, blacks and their families, out of work. *Moral?* Poof! No social security. *Moral?* Up would go the prices here. Some of it would be sold out of the coastline, through third countries, re-marked, and perhaps come in at a higher price. And the retaliation we could have to things we export to South Africa! What is *moral* about that?

There seem to be several arguments here. First, there are two arguments *ad hominem*, which seek to undermine the case for sanctions by attacking its advocates. They are held to be in no position to argue their case, because of their own distance or immunity from their effects. They stand accused of, in effect, advocating the suffering of *others*, whom they thereby treat like 'pawns on a checkerboard'. Presumably, then, only the potential sufferers from sanctions have the right to make this case. Call this the *Discredit the Non-victim Argument*.

The second *ad hominem* argument accuses sanctions advocates of inconsistency. They are, it seems, for both relieving starvation and poverty and increasing them. They contradict in South Africa what they advocate in Ethiopia. Call this the *Discredit the Inconsistent Argument*. More, of course, needs to be said before an inconsistency can be shown to exist here. But note that, even if valid, neither of these first two *ad hominem* moral arguments bears on the argument for and against sanctions. The most either could show, if valid, is that those advocating sanctions are to be criticized for doing so.

Apart from these, there are two further arguments which can be discerned in Mrs Thatcher's responses to her interviewer which address the case for sanctions directly. These are inconsistent with one another; and in the light of this, it is not clear which of the two she wishes us to believe.

The first suggests that the mere fact that extensive suffering will result from sanctions is enough to condemn them—not, it should be noted, *greater* suffering than would flow from alternative policies (including inaction). What this argument proposes is that *any* suffering—or perhaps any extensive suffering constitutes a knockdown case against sanctions (or any other policy) causing it. Such suffering, as an economist might say, is given infinite negative value; no trade-off or calculations of the overall outcome are allowable. Call this the *No Extensive Suffering Argument*.

Finally, there is the argument that the sufferings sanctions occasion will, on the best estimation of likely overall effects, outweigh any good to be attained by them. The net effect of sanctions will, in other words, be negative, all things considered: they will do more harm than good. In so far as this is her argument, we need to have some idea of a time-scale, within which the judgement is being made, what the costs and benefits being compared are, and how future benefits are to be discounted against present costs, and vice versa. Clearly, the force of this entirely consequentalist argument depends on the conclusions of the tactical and strategic arguments turning out to be either unfavourable or only weakly favourable to the case for sanctions. Call this the *No Net Suffering Argument*.

The first two moral arguments are agent-relative: it is immoral for certain views to be advanced by certain people (those immune from their consequences, and those holding views held to contradict them). The second two are consequentialist, albeit incompatible (the first holding certain kinds of consequence to be absolutely inadmissible; the second claiming, on empirical grounds, that, all things considered, the consequential balance-sheet will be negative).

How powerful is this battery of arguments? About the tactical argument there is, of course, much to be said for and against sanctions—partly because of the sheer complexity of the situation, partly because of the multiplicity of different kinds of sanction, partly because of the inductive difficulties of deciding what is relevant in previous experience of sanctions, and partly because of the sheer unpredictability and contingencies of the fast-moving South African situation. But for this very reason it is plain that Mrs Thatcher's certainty about the economic and political *ineffectiveness* of sanctions is itself unwarranted. Her universal claim—that there is 'no case in history' where 'punitive, general economic sanctions have been effective to bring about internal change'—is either false or misleading. According to the Washington-based Institute for International Economics, one third of 103 episodes of economic sanctions can be counted a success (some applied by South Africa itself). If, however, 'punitive' and 'general' are given a strong interpretation, the claim is diversionary, since her argument is against any economic sanctions, taken severally, not all together, and in a 'punitive' manner (whatever this means).

There certainly are economic sanctions that could be *economically* effective. It is true that most are leaky, messy, erratic, and imperfect. It is true that South Africa has vast resources and that there would be massive evasion. Its $7 billion manufactured imports could be shipped from anywhere, and the resulting price rises would be tolerable; the oil would get in; and there would be perverse effects. The rising costs of imports would be protectionist in effect, encouraging import substitution (as with Sasol and Armscor) and the growth of a domestic (albeit uncompetitive) manufacturing industry; while forcing South Africa to default on its international debt would free resources by saving capital and interest repayments. It may have been true up to now that 'sanctions against South Africa are only rhetorically endorsed by front-line states, most of whom are secretly participating in ending the economic isolation of the apartheid state'.[2] Nevertheless, as Mrs Thatcher admits, last year's withdrawal of private loans to South Africa halved the value of the rand. A general freeze on new investment would undercut the dynamic of modernization in an economy heavily dependent on imported technology; even a partial trade embargo would have some effect (the Rhodesian analogy is imperfect here); but, above all, the readily available weapon of forcing down the gold price would have a decisive and non-evadeable effect on South Africa's terms of trade. Indeed, even announcing an intention to hold the gold price steady could have this effect.[3]

[2] Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, *South Africa without Apartheid: Dismantling Racial Discrimination* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1986), p. 120.

But what about the political effects of these economic effects? Much here is, by nature of the case, imponderable. Certainly, no one should underestimate Afrikaner counter-suggestibility, especially under the present leader. In 1977, P. W. Botha declared the following to an interviewer:

> The Afrikaner is a very interesting species. He doesn't always tell you what he has in mind, because he has learned through the ages to be careful—he's been sold down the river on many occasions. Basically we are a very friendly people, a deeply Christian people and we would like to see others live in peace because we know ourselves what it is to be persecuted. I personally know what my family had to pay in the history of South Africa for our survival. But one thing you must accept from me: if they force us to hit back, we'll use everything we have at our disposal. Carter is awakening again a feeling that we had hoped would remain slumbering; that if they don't want to accept that we are also reasonable and civilised people with a right to self-determination and if, for their own selfish reasons, they want to spit on us and destroy us from outside, then we'll fight back. Because we are also a proud people.[4]

Nevertheless, the relevant question is rather: what are the likely consequences of *not* imposing sanctions. On this point the Commonwealth Eminent Persons pronounced themselves

> convinced that the South African Government is concerned about the adoption of effective economic measures against it. If it comes to the conclusion that it would almost remain protected from such measures, the process of change in South Africa is unlikely to increase in momentum and the descent into violence would be accelerated. In these circumstances, the cost in lives may have to be counted in millions.

If the black leadership 'comes to believe that the world community will never exercise sufficient effective pressure through other measures in support of their cause, they will have only one option remaining: that of ever-increasing violence'.[5] In short, the tactical

[3] See *The Economist* (19 July 1986), pp. 11–12.

[4] Anna Starcke, *Survival: Taped Interviews with South Africa's Élite* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1986), p. 61.

[5] Eminent Persons Group, *Mission to South Africa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 140.

argument against sanctions is not persuasive and least of all to those nearest the action, and it has no universal basis. To propose, as an alternative, internal pressure from industry and some of the political parties is either wishful or deceptive unrealism.

As for the strategic argument against sanctions, it is less plausible still. An interruption of platinum would at worst delay the introduction of anti-pollution car exhausts; and South Africa's share of chrome would not be crippling. As for gold, it is no longer essential to the world's monetary system, with the major industrial countries committed to its demonetization anyway. The international diamond cartel too could easily be broken by concerted governmental action.

As for the Soviet threat in South Africa, this is much overplayed by both Mrs Thatcher and President Botha—as ex-Prime Minister Edward Heath has been pointing out. The US Administration itself admits this. Its Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs observed recently that 'Southern Africa is practically speaking well outside the zone of primary interest, indeed of its secondary interest. We believe that Moscow is aware of this fact and, in reality, spends little time thinking about the area'.[6]

What, then, of the *moral* arguments that so concern the Prime Minister? I see no force whatever in the *Discredit the Non-Victim Argument*. First, because it would prohibit most people from taking moral stands on many issues; second, because it is the responsibility of politicians to take a stand on just such issues as this; third, because Mrs Thatcher certainly does not apply this principle elsewhere; and fourth because, in any case, there is compelling evidence that potential victims of sanctions widely endorse them anyway.[7]

As for the *Discredit the Inconsistent Argument*, it misfires because the inconsistency in question is entirely of Mrs Thatcher's making. It is generated by imputing to sanctions advocates the *goal* of increasing poverty, starvation, and unemployment. The sad truth is that there is no humane and costless way to combat the sufferings of apartheid: the question at issue is how to minimize the costs without compromising the goal. The Prime Minister's new-found concern for the poor and starving of Africa and for the unemployed is no doubt

[6] Cited in Adam and Moodley, *South Africa without Apartheid*, p. 120.

[7] *Black Attitudes to Disinvestment: The Real Story*, An overview of the survey conducted in Sept. 1985 by Mark Orkin of the Community Agency for Social Inquiry in association with the Institute for Black Research, Johannesburg, 1985.

very touching, but those who share it are not being *inconsistent* in supporting policies which will, if effective, have as by-products, poverty, starvation, and unemployment, above all if the only alternatives—the by-products of *not* pursuing them—are continued extensive suffering of this and other kinds—including 'ever-increasing violence'.

What of the *No Extensive Suffering Argument?* It is hard to see how this could be seriously meant by Mrs Thatcher or any practising politician, whose trade, after all, essentially involves accepting responsibility for just such outcomes. The argument implies a view of morality that has no obvious place in her world, in which just wars are undertaken, counterrevolutionary movements supported, and even economic sanctions imposed (against communist states). It suggests a kind of moral purism or absolutism akin to pacifism. A principled refusal to engage in certain consequential calculations, to dirty one's hands by doing harm that would do credit to a Christian idealist or a dedicated Ghandian, ill suits the Iron Lady, Victor of inflation and the Falklands.

What, finally, of the *No Net Suffering Argument?* It precisely involves the weighing of consequences and assessment of risks, and, furthermore, some judgement about what counts for more and what for less (the relief of suffering, the promotion of welfare, the according of dignity?). One thing, however, is clear: there is no moral certainty in the offing.

Moreover, one must ask: with what are the net results of various forms of economic sanctions to be compared? The right answer is: with the likely net effects of not applying them (within some given time period). Avoiding or at least minimizing suffering is, of course, a properly moral aim, but it only tells against sanctions if there is a no-sanctions alternative causing less. Is it really plausible to suggest that allowing internal developments to unfold without external pressure (other than endlessly seeking to encourage dialogue à la Geoffrey Howe) looks more promising on balance—in the face of Afrikaner intransigence and deteriorating violence in the townships where the prospect looms of future 'killing fields' of Young Comrades, Cambodia-style, taking over the leadership of black revolt? Tragically, the possibility of a clean or a cleaner route to the dismantling of apartheid may be long past; and it may be that the human costs of *every* option can only mount as time passes.

What does this summary examination of Mrs Thatcher's morality

(and her view of morality) with respect to sanctions illuminate? First, it is a striking and momentous instance of her so-called conviction politics, passionately claiming a moral certainty that purports to derive from arguments (we have looked at six) that do not survive dispassionate scrutiny. A moral passion, exuding certainty, claiming no other basis than reason. In fact, her position on sanctions is not so much moral as moral*istic*, substituting preaching and invective for argument and analysis, obscuring the issues of which it claims such clarity of vision. Second, it seems that, of all these arguments, only the last is worth taking seriously, but even this could only carry conviction under circumstances that are, tragically, by now all too implausible.

18
The Principles of 1989: Reflections on the Political Morality of the Recent Revolutions

In January 1990, as I write this, it is probably still too early to achieve an adequate understanding of the significance of last year's momentous events in China, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. It is, however, already clear that the basic tenets of kremlinology stand in need of revision, as, almost daily, transformations occur that academic orthodoxy had declared systemically impossible. The theory of revolutionary change needs drastic attention, in the face of the democratic revolutions of Eastern Europe, which occurred without war between states or within them (apart from Romania) or fanaticism or vanguards, in a self-limiting manner and for goals that were limited and procedural rather than global and visionary. And, in general, the social scientists studying communist regimes should perhaps reflect on their collective failure to foresee even the possibility of most of what occurred. Perhaps that failure has something to do with their virtually total neglect of the moral dimension of political life. For it is a striking fact that morally motivated actions and reactions, and *demoralization*, played a central role in all these events, from the Polish Round Table through the demonstrations and massacre in Tiananmen Square to the fall of Ceausescu.

One way of interpreting the significance of these events, now prevalent among journalistic and political commentators, is to see them simply as the collapse of one political ideology and the triumph of its rival. Thus, for *Newsweek* (1 Jan. 1990), '1989 was the year the communist god finally failed'. Others would extend the failure to the

This chapter was first published in Spring 1990. In writing it, I was much influenced by the ideas advanced by Maurice Glasman in an inspiring and impressive paper, 'The Rawlsian Revolutions in Eastern Europe', recently delivered to my seminar at the European University Institute, Florence. I hope he will develop them further.

socialist project as a whole, others to the very idea of the Left itself. Conversely, according to the *New York Herald Tribune* (15 Jan. 1990), 'the revolutions of 1989' were 'dominated by the ideals of pluralistic democracy and civil rights, a region-wide triumph for Western liberalism'. Others, who take such liberalism to be indissoluble from a more or less unbridled capitalism, see the revolutions as marking the definitive failure of a century-long mega-experiment in social, economic, and political progress and a return to the market-based system it was intended to transform and supersede.

There is doubtless much to be said for these interpretations. Certainly, there is no shortage of voices in Eastern Europe, and indeed in the Soviet Union, that will speak with enthusiasm in favour of them, and more particularly for their more stringent and strident versions. Nevertheless, in what follows here, I propose to take a different, and less ideological, tack, by asking two connected questions about political morality. First, what were the distinctive features of the prevailing political morality of communist regimes that was so massively rejected? And second, in the name of what? What distinguished the alternative political morality to which the revolutionary movements of 1989 in turn appealed?

By 'political morality' I mean a set of principles, that can be characterized at a fairly high level of abstraction, that underlie different, particular political positions that may be taken up by those who share them at any given time, or across time. They are, as Ronald Dworkin says, 'constitutive': 'political positions that are valued for their own sake', such that 'every failure fully to secure that position, or any decline in the degree to which it is secured, is *pro tanto* a loss in the value of the overall political arrangement'. Derivative positions, by contrast, are 'valued as strategies or means of achieving the constitutive positions'.[1] Thus different derivative views on policies—about taxation, say, or education, or, more generally, about the nature and scope of state intervention in the economy—may appeal to, or be justifiable by, the same set of constitutive principles; and likewise clusters of such derivative views will replace one another over time, as, say, New Deal liberalism replaced Old Deal liberalism (the example is Dworkin's). Of course, constitutive political positions may conflict with one another, for

[1] Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 184, 408, 184.

political moralities will almost inevitably embody conflicting values. But by a 'political morality' I here intend to mean the underlying structure within which and by virtue of which political value judgements are made and justified by those who share it, and which sets limits to the *kinds* of judgements that can be made.

I

What, by 1989, was the political morality of Official Communism? This may seem an odd question to those who are impressed by the corruption and cynicism of the élites ruling these regimes. Certainly 1989 was not lacking in lurid evidence of the former, notably from China, East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria. Nor do I wish to imply that these regimes enjoyed a moral legitimacy among their populations—though this is a complex question, and there have clearly been variations across the communist world in this respect: compare the German Democratic Republic with Poland or Czechoslovakia, or indeed Czechoslovakia before and after 1968. It is, further, true, as Leszek Kolakowski has said, that in Poland at least by the mid-1980s, 'Marxism both as an ideology and as a philosophy' had 'become completely irrelevant . . . Even the rulers [had] largely abandoned this notion and even its phrases'.[2] What is, however, indisputable, is that Marxism, of however deformed or debased a sort, dominated, indeed monopolized the public sphere of these societies for decades (seven in the case of the Soviet Union) and provided the sole framework and discourse within which the governing élites could seek to justify their policies to their subjects, to themselves, and to the outside world. It is, therefore, worth trying to identify the constitutive features of that framework and discourse.

Marxism has always been a peculiarly bibliocentric creed. There were times of faith when the massive ideological apparatuses achieved success in inspiring hearts and shaping minds within the Party and far beyond. In the subsequent times of demoralization, the propaganda machine remained intact, its wheels went on turning, and the flow of words in work-places and offices, schools and universities, newspapers, radio, and television continued unabated, but now as 'noise' blocking out alternative forms of thought and

[2] Cited in V. Tismaneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology in Eastern Europe: The Poverty of Utopia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 115.

expression.[3] But the words always related, directly or indirectly, to texts, and ultimately to the founding texts of the Marxist canon. And this was not just a question of the time-honoured practice of quotations from the Founding Fathers but went deeper and wider. The old books and pamphlets set their mark on vocabulary and syntax, on conceptual apparatus, polemical style, and forms of argumentation, indeed even furnished the criteria of what was to count as a valid argument.

This helps to explain the remarkable coherence and continuity of Marxism as a political morality across the entire continuum that ranges from its historically significant incarnations as a political ideology propagated by political élites to the most refined and intellectually sophisticated theories favoured by intellectuals, orthodox or 'critical'. For different reasons the same corpus of texts served as meat and drink to both. My claim is that, considered as a text-based structure of thought, the political morality of Marxism is more or less firmly imprinted on all the significant varieties of Marxism, official and deviant, vulgar and refined, deformed and revised.

What are the essentials of that structure? What distinguishes Marxism as a political morality is that it is a morality of emancipation. It promises communism as universal freedom from the peculiar modern slavery of capitalism through revolutionary struggle. The promise is (usually) long-term: the prospect of a world of abundance, co-operation, and social rationality—the free association of producers whose communal relations have overcome egoism, in full collective control of both the natural and social worlds which have become transparent to them. The world from which they are to be emancipated is one of scarcity, private property, the dull compulsion, anarchy and irrationality of market relations, exploitation, class domination, human degradation, reification, and alienation. The access to the promised realm of freedom is through struggle: hence the consistent appeal throughout the Marxist tradition of the metaphors of war, of strategy and alliances, of forward marches and glorious victories, and its ingrained suspicion of compromise. In short, as a political morality, Marxism is future-oriented: it is, indeed, a perfectionist form of long-range consequentialism.[4] The

[3] Tismaneanu's book, cited above, is a good recent study of all this.

[4] For an explanation of this claim, see my *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), Conclusion and Chapter 10 of this volume.

practical question, 'What is to be done?'—how to act? what policy to pursue?—is always to be answered only by calculating what course is likely to bring nearer the long-term goal, the leap into the realm of freedom. The anxiety generated by that question is, however, traditionally diminished by two further assumptions: that capitalism is doomed, and has nowhere to go but its death; and that history is on the side of the working-class struggle, that long-term objective processes are at work that favour, and perhaps eventually guarantee, the leap into freedom.

There is, of course, as the history of Marxism superabundantly shows, enormous scope for dispute about all the elements in this picture: about how exactly to characterize socialism and/or communism, and in particular how economic planning and political decision-making are to proceed and relate to one another (on which the canon is studiedly unforthcoming); about what are the essential evils of capitalism, and which has explanatory priority, and through what kind of crisis they will issue in death; and about the famous problem of the 'transition'—how warlike, and what kind of war? how parliamentary? how reformist? All these sources of indeterminacy become all the more confusing, of course, as the two anxiety-diminishing assumptions lose their power to persuade.

But, even in the present confusion, it is clear that Marxism has always held, as a constitutive triad of positions: (1) that capitalism belongs to the realm of necessity; (2) that communism signifies the promised realm of a higher kind of social freedom; and (3) that emancipation into the latter from the former is a discontinuous change, a qualitative transformation of economy, polity, and culture. In this respect, Ernst Fischer was right to say that for Marxism,

> Only the future is interesting, the fullness of what is possible, not the straitjacket of what has already been, with its attempt to impose on us the illusion that, because things were thus and not otherwise, they belong to the realm of necessity.[5]

From the perspective of Marxism, in short, certain necessary facts are, rather, historically contingent: falsely to suppose them to be necessary facts is to cling to an ideological fiction blocking human progress. Four such 'facts' strike me as of central importance. I shall call them the facts of scarcity, particularity, pluralism, and limited rationality.

[5] Cited in Tismaneanu, *The Crisis of Marxist Ideology*, p. 216.

By 'scarcity' I mean limits to desired goods. It may take at least the following four forms: (1) insufficiency of production inputs (e.g. raw materials) relative to production requirements; (2) insufficiency of produced goods relative to consumption requirements; (3) limits upon the joint realizability of different goals, resulting from external conditions (e.g. limitations of space or time); and (4) limits upon the joint realizability of different goals, resulting from the intrinsic nature of those goals (e.g. 'positional goods'—we cannot all enjoy high status or the solitude of a neighbourhood park). Marxism, in promising abundance, considers only scarcity (1) and (2), which it promises to overcome through the mastery of nature and through a superior form of economic and social organization, combined with appropriate changes in preferences brought about by higher, communal relations. It has nothing to say about (3) or (4), nor does it address contemporary ecological concerns about the eliminability, or costs of seeking to eliminate, (1).

By 'particularity' I mean that we are not all Kantians, or utilitarians: that human beings have their separate lives to live and are properly motivated by a whole range of distinct interests, from the purely personal through a whole gamut of more or less local or partial or particular concerns, to the most abstract and universal. In deciding how to act, we rightly give weight, at different times, to demands or claims that have different sources, but include our commitments and loyalties to relationships and activities that are special and exclusive. Marxism as a political morality belongs with those monistic moralities which require of individuals that they adopt a single privileged standpoint that abstracts from this motivational complexity and range, in its particular case requiring of individuals that they act solely in the postulated universal interests of future generations—or that they adopt the social identity and thus standpoint of the imminently victorious class, which, together with its standpoint, will wither away into the universal standpoint indicated. Without that extravagant assumption, Marxism has always had the greatest difficulty in linking its monistic motivational requirement with the likely motivations of actual people.

By 'pluralism' I mean the coexistence of different views about what is of central importance and value in human life, of what John Rawls has called divergent 'conceptions of the good', where the differences or divergences are not simply alternative way of spelling out a set of common principles that the adherents of each could

recognize as shared in common among them. Alternative moralities, religions, world views, value-standpoints are in this way 'pluralistic', implying alternative conceptual structures, priorities of value, and forms of life when these are unassimilable to one another without destroying what is constitutive of each. Marxism does not address the possibility of pluralism, thus understood, in a general form, nor, therefore, the question of how to respond to it, for it simply assumes, in the manner of the Enlightenment, that Humanity is progressing, along however dialectical a path, towards moral convergence. That is why it has always typically treated actual instances of pluralist divergence—particular forms of religion or nationalism or indeed secular moralities such as utilitarianism—as deviations, if sometimes as useful short-cuts (as Lenin saw nationalism), along that path.

Finally, by 'limited rationality' I mean limits upon the capacity of human beings in real time to solve certain problems, theoretical and practical, or to do so without creating others that undermine their solution. These limits may be of various kinds—of access to or ability to process information, of theoretical knowledge or the means to apply it; and they may result from human incapacities, or from the nature of the object—from social complexity, say, or from ineliminable risk or uncertainty. To such contemporary concerns Marxism answers, once more with the voice of the Enlightenment, this time with a Hegelian, teleological accent: mankind only sets itself such problems as it can solve. The future is not only radiant but transparent: the social and natural worlds are alike in being in principle amenable to full prediction and control.

Marxism denies that these facts are necessary, but in doing so what does it deny? Not merely that they are present in all actual societies that have reached a certain level of economic development and social complexity. Not merely that, on the best estimates, they will be so present in all empirically feasible societies. (Marxism, after all, proposes a discontinuous leap into the realm of freedom, which our best estimates could not therefore predict, since they are based on present knowledge, which therefore draws the bounds of feasibility in the wrong place.) To say that these facts are necessary is to say that we cannot conceive of developed and complex societies that do not exhibit them—or could only do so at an unacceptable cost, by abandoning too much of all the rest of what we know and believe. They are facts at the very centre, rather than the periphery, of our

cognitive universe. To imagine them, as Ernst Fischer says, otherwise, is, for us, literally to imagine Utopia.

I have argued that Marxism as a political morality takes scarcity, particularity, pluralism and limited rationality to be false necessities, as historically overcomeable (and in its confidently optimistic phase imminently so). What, then, follows from taking them to be real necessities? The most general answer to this question is, I suggest, the recognition of the need for principles of justice for the regulation of social life. For, taken together, these 'necessary facts' can be seen as constituting what Rawls calls the 'circumstances of justice'. They are conditions that *must*, in the appropriate sense, face the citizens of every conceivable society of a certain complexity and level of development. Within any such society (I here leave aside the question of inter-societal relations), they imply the inevitability of various kinds of conflict of interest that are, given these facts, structurally determined: a distributive struggle, involving conflicting claims upon limited resources of various kinds; conflicts facing both individuals and decision-making bodies at all levels of society, standing in the overlap of multiple intersecting circles of interest—individual, familial, local, regional, national, international, ethnic, religious, occupational, recreational, commercial, political, and so on—having to draw (different) lines between what is public and what private, and allocate priorities; cultural conflicts between different ways of life expressing divergent value-standpoints that cannot be flattened into 'shared understandings' or 'common meanings'; and policy conflicts over problems for which the 'correct' solution is neither on offer nor in the offing. To acknowledge all this is to accept that such a society can only have a chance of being both stable and democratically legitimate if its citizens are able, *as citizens*, to step back from all these conflicting interests and acknowledge as binding upon them a set of principles for the distribution of benefits and burdens, and for the assigning of rights to protect interests and corresponding obligations.

My argument has been that Marxism, official and unofficial, is constitutively inhospitable to this conclusion, essentially because it views all these conflicts as the pathologies of prehistory, and in particular as stemming from the anarchic production relations and class conflicts of capitalism. And it believes this in part just because it takes the facts of scarcity, particularity, pluralism, and limited rationality to be contingent, not necessary.

As supporting evidence, I would cite the consistent polemics that have characterized the Marxist canon, from Marx's *On the Jewish Question* onwards, against all talk of morality and in particular against the vocabulary of 'justice' and 'rights'—or, to be more precise, against the idea of believing in such notions, rather than adopting and propagating them, where appropriate, in the course of the struggle. So, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx writes of the notions of 'equal right' and 'fair distribution' as 'ideological nonsense', as 'ideas which in a certain period had some meaning but have now become obsolete verbal rubbish'.[6] In 1864, he apologized to Engels in the following terms; 'I was obliged', he wrote, 'to insert two phrases about "duty" and "right" into the Preamble to the Rules [of the International Working Men's Association], ditto "truth, morality and justice" but these are placed in such a way that they can do no harm'.[7] 'Justice', Engels once observed, is 'but the ideologized, glorified expression of the existing economic relations, now from their conservative, and at other times from their revolutionary angle'.[8] But it was Lenin who put the whole matter most clearly, to a Komsomol Congress in 1920:

> We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle . . . Morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all the working people around the proletariat, which is building up a new, a communist society . . . To a communist all morality lies in this united discipline and conscious mass struggle against the exploiters. We do not believe in an eternal morality, and we expose the falseness of all the fables about morality.[9]

But, surely, it will be said, Marxism has a powerful moral message. In particular, is socialism not about justice? And have Marxists not an honourable place in countless struggles against injustice and the violations of rights. President Havel himself recently, and eloquently, observed:

> There was a time when . . . for whole generations of the downtrodden and oppressed, the word socialism was a mesmerising synonym for a just world,

[6] K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), ii. p. 25.

[7] Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), p. 182.

[8] Engels, *The Housing Question*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, i. pp. 624–5.

[9] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960–3), xxxi. pp. 291–4.

a time when for the ideal expressed in that word, people were capable of sacrificing years and years of their lives, and their very lives even.[10]

But this objection misses the point. Of course Marxism has offered victims of injustice and oppression and those who sympathize with them an inspiring vision of a future free of both. The objection misses the inspirational core of that vision. What inspires those who grasp what Marxism promises is not the prospect of a complex, conflictual, pluralistic world regulated by principles of justice and the protections of rights, but rather the overcoming of complexity, conflict, and pluralism, of the very conditions that require such principles and protections—the prospect of a world in which justice and rights, together with class conflict and the oppression of the state, will have withered away. Communists have promised an end to injustice and oppression. What they promise, however, is not justice and rights, but, rather, emancipation from the enslaving conditions that make them necessary.

II

I turn, finally, to the second question I asked at the outset of this essay: to what and because of what political morality did the revolutionary movements of 1989—those that succeeded and those that did not, or have not yet—appeal? A properly academic answer to this question would doubtless distinguish among the different kind of evidence required properly to answer it, each of which would be given its proper weight—the writings of intellectuals, the speeches of leaders, the slogans and graffiti, the responses of the crowds, the oral evidence of different kinds of participants, the impressions of journalists, and so on, and among the different, though increasingly interdependent movements, and even among the different stages of these ever faster-moving events. Nevertheless, even without the benefit of these indispensable discriminations, which future scholarship will not fail to furnish, it already seems clear, at this short distance from them, that the revolutionary movements of 1989 were at one on at least the following decisive points.

First, they were citizens' movements and actively invoked the idea

[10] V. Havel, 'Words on Words', *New York Review of Books*, 36/21–2 (18 Jan. 1990), p. 6.

of citizenship. In virtually every case, they were appeals by and to citizens, that implied the stepping back from more particular and immediate commitments, loyalties, and interests. Hence the rhetoric of 'round tables' and 'forums', one of which was, indeed, civic and the other new in, among others, just this respect. The students of Tiananmen Square were seeking to transcend their generational and occupational identity and speak in the name of the 'people'; and indeed from mid-May, the demonstration expanded to over a million people, and included workers, Party bureaucrats, professionals, and even units of the military. One of the slogans shouted in demonstrations in East Germany, which, it seems, were similarly inclusive in composition, was 'We are the people!' The point is, perhaps, most dramatically made by the insignificance of ethnic and religious factors in the Timişoara uprising. It originated with the protests of Hungarian Protestants, but these, emphatically, were not what it was *about*. Only in the Caucasus and in Yugoslavia, especially Serbia, does this commitment to a pluralism-encompassing citizenship seem to be seriously in jeopardy.

Second, these were movements that appealed to a sense of distributive justice and fairness. For they were protests against the arbitrary allocation of advantage and opportunity, against the failed command economy that was itself a major source of scarcity as well as injustice, and in general against a system governed by no rationally defensible distributive principle, in which, from the ordinary citizen's point of view,

> 'they' can do everything they want—take away his passport, have him fired from his job, order him to move, send him to collect signatures against the Pershings, bar him from higher education, take away his driver's licence, build a factory producing mostly acid fumes right under his windows, pollute his milk with chemicals to a degree beyond belief, arrest him simply because he attended a rock concert, raise prices arbitrarily, anytime and for any reason, turn down all his humble petitions without cause, prescribe what he must read before all else, what he must demonstrate for, what he must sign, how many square feet his apartment may have, whom he may meet and whom he must avoid.[11]

There was, of course, no unified agreement about what distributive principles *would* be just, only that they should prevail; though all, including the gracefully departing élites, were further united in the

[11] Id., 'An Anatomy of Reticence', *Crosscurrents: A Yearbook of Central European Culture* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan Press, No. 5, 1986), p. 5.

view that they could only do so if markets—including capital and labour markets—play a key role in both to the transition to and functioning of the future economy. The burning question for the future is, of course, just what kind and degree of public intervention in markets justice will require. One real possibility is that, in full recoil from real socialism, the post-revolutionary élites will embrace the full package of the counter-ideology of free-market liberalism, which, like Marxism but on different grounds, also rejects the very notion of 'social justice'.[12] Such an outcome, occurring under conditions of economic decline and crisis, and at the periphery of the world capitalist system, would indeed be a novel, late-twentieth-century version of the revolution betrayed.

Third, they were defensive movements, aiming at revolution in the name of procedural justice, the rule of law, the protection of individuals' basic constitutional rights and liberties—the Principles of 1789, as distinct from the positive social and economic rights added to them in the Universal Declaration of 1948. In part, they were directed at abuses and corruption by individuals (Ceausescu, Honecker, Zhivkov) and by a whole political class, as in China. These were certainly important in mobilizing people over grievances that took visible and outrageous forms. But at root the issue was the rejection of an entire institutional system that worked through command restrained only through bargaining and whose official rationale lay entirely in the future it promised rather than in its responsiveness to present, actual individuals' interests. Moreover, there was one particular individual right that was of especial significance in 1989: the right to free travel across frontiers. It was the mass effective exercise of this right and its subsequent recognition by the state that unleashed the East German events and thus all that followed from them. The right to leave one's country is, as Locke intimated, a right of peculiar significance, for only where it is effective can the according of consent to a regime or a system be a genuine choice. Clearly, Egon Krenz, in granting it, hoped thereby to establish the legitimacy of the German Democratic Republic; at the time of writing, that hope looks indeed forlorn.

Fourth, they were pluralist movements that demanded an end to the monopoly of power, to the *Nomenklatura*, to the euphemistically described 'leading role' of the Party, to 'ghost parties' in false

[12] For discussion of these grounds, see Chap. 4, above.

'alliances' playing proportional roles based on frozen statistics from the past, to the suppression of local, regional, and national issues, and of the real history (as in the Baltics) of how nations were incorporated into the Soviet Empire, and to the denial of expression, and institutional embodiment, to cultural, notably ethnic and religious, identities. In part, they embodied the expression of this pluralism or diversity, but, more significantly, they also expressed, often very clearly, a vivid sense, unavailable to the ruling structures, of the value of it.

Finally, they were sceptical movements—utterly sceptical not only of the content of what socialism had promised, both materially and morally, but of the very cognitive pretensions of the ruling parties who had in any case lost their way and abandoned any serious claim to knowledge-based, let alone science-based, authority. This is, in part, obviously a result of the massive economic failure of the prevailing system, as well as justified doubts about all the various attempts to reform it from within, from the Hungarian economic reforms onwards. But it also, perhaps, exhibits a deeper and more universal trend: a new sense, arising out of green concerns, of the complexity and uncertainty of the interaction between Man and Nature, and in consequence an awareness of the ecological consequences of the old Promethean Marxist vision of ending human exploitation through the exploitation of nature.

These were, in short, revolutions, some attempted, some successful, against *hubris*—the hubris of individual leaders, political élites, and indeed of an entire political class. They were also revolutions against the hubris of an arbitrary and oppressive system, economic, social, and political, whose claims to legitimacy were no longer, for the most part, even proclaimed by its rulers. But, above all, they were revolutions against the hubris of a political morality that for decades sustained that system and its leaders. In this sense, they were revolutions of fallen expectations, revolutions in the name of freedom—but of freedom as the recognition of necessity.

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