

satisfactory philosophical answer to the question of how ideological prejudice is to be distinguished from honest conviction, there are few men more adept than he is in actually demonstrating that distinction in the detailed analysis of a literary text. The sense of disinterestedness he adopts is one which allows him to reject the twin errors of naturalism and egoism, and so to unify in his own writing a generous responsiveness to actual things with the sharpest personal convictions.

It is, one should emphasize, unity and not compromise. Hazlitt's antithetical style ('The one is the slave of habit, the other is the sport of caprice') expresses a dialectical rather than a vacillating mind. If he continually assaults extreme positions, it is not because he believes the truth of which they are distortions is in the least tame. So much is clear from his comments on the *Common-place Critics*:

He considers all enthusiasm as a degree of madness, particularly to be guarded against by young minds; and believes that truth lies in the middle, between the extremes of right and wrong. He thinks that the object of poetry is to please; and that astronomy is a very pleasing and useful study. He thinks all this, and a great deal more, that amounts to nothing.

## Morality is Marxism—II

by Denys Turner

### II

The challenge which faced all Greek intellectuals alike, can be reconstructed in the form of a dilemma. Either some way of fixing a descriptive meaning for the language of moral evaluation had to be found, or, in the absence of any such method, moral and political virtue would have to be taught as a way of living well in a world where prescription was the basis of morality. In either case the fact remained that virtue would have to be taught.

Those who, like Plato and Aristotle, opted for the first alternative were faced with the problem generated by their adherence to the old assumption: namely that the descriptive meaning of moral evaluation was discoverable only in terms of some social order, some *polis*, to be a good member of which was to be a good man. But the very fact that it was now problematic what one's *polis* was, meant that the search for moral knowledge had to be seen as the proper object of some specialized form of enquiry into the question, that is, of what those social roles and relationships are, to understand which is to understand how the good man acts. Thus it is that if political virtue can be taught it also needs to be taught. It *can* be taught because everyone knows what the universal virtues of the political life are, and that they are virtues—for, as Thucydides had emphasized, even bad men justify their vices in the language of

those virtues. But it *needs* to be taught because, in the absence of any informal, directly given and self-guaranteeing perception of what one's social order was and what interpretation of it was *knowledge* of it, no one can know what to live those virtues well amounts to. To know what justice is, Plato argued in the *Republic*, is to know in what form of society it is to be lived. But to know that one needs a theory or, if you like, a science. In that recognition was born, of moral parents, the need for a form of social knowledge which is scientific.

And this was exactly Plato's problem, the problem with which he was exercised, almost exclusively, throughout his career. Admittedly he stated it with unhistorical absoluteness as the search for a *definition* of knowledge, but we must not, all the same, be misled by our recognition of this fact. Plato's conception of epistemology is implicitly relativistic in a way in which our modern conceptions often are not. The implicit assumption of much contemporary meta-science is that formal and quasi-eternal methodological characteristics of science determine what will be its proper objects. Whereas for Plato exactly the reverse is true: what we need knowledge *for* determines what we will regard as its proper objects; and they, in turn, define for us an appropriate method. The teleology of knowledge is prior to the methodology.

In the first place, on Plato's view, the pursuit of a definition of knowledge was a search for those *objects* of thought to grasp which was to know. The basic distinction between knowledge and opinion was made not on formal grounds, as one might, say, distinguish between two kinds of mental act, or between methods of argument, verification procedures, and so forth. This distinction does not even coincide, as we shall see, with the distinction between logical truth and falsity. The basic distinction is made out in terms of whether what is in question is perception of 'the good' or, by contrast, 'the 'apparently good', which, for Plato meant the difference between perception in the good and perception in the apparently good *society*. Scientific knowledge, then, is both knowledge *of* the good society and possible only *within* the good society. The pursuit of the definition of the good society in Plato's thought is both the object of scientific enquiry and the pursuit of a definition of those social conditions within which scientific knowledge is possible.

Knowledge in a social order which is not in fact just must therefore be 'imperfect' in so far as it is forced into a dialectical relationship with the given order of things which is unjust precisely in so far as it is the product of opinion. In other words, precisely because the status of the, as we would nowadays say, ideologies which actually govern everyday understanding of the social order is that of opinion, and since opinion is illusory, a society whose working is based on non-scientific ideologies is an illusory society, a society dominated by false consciousness.

In more contemporary language, it would be the same thing to say that, in part, Plato is criticizing the *verstehen* theory of method in social science. *Verstehen*, like Plato's *doxa*, at the very best will tell you only what the structures of a society's illusions are. It may even give true opinion, but for Plato, in contrast with modern thought, true opinion is not knowledge, if it is true understanding of an illusion, as here of a false social order, and therefore of an illusory 'good'. In short, it is not only the case that if you are to know how the just man will act you need scientific knowledge of the just society; it is also the case that scientific knowledge itself is defined as that which, if it were the ordinary experience of everyday social relationships would constitute justice in society. It is, therefore, the knowledge one would have of one's society if one's society were a just one.

### *Plato: Participation*

Notoriously, however, Plato's dialectic allows but a two-term, one-way relationship. The 'just society' stands in a unilateral relationship to actual, empirical societies, for they merely imitate or participate, to a greater or lesser degree, in the abstract model which is their paradigm. The dialectic would, however, be a true moral dialectic only if the just society were some dialectical *function of* imperfect societies, instead of being, as for Plato, but an ideal 'lying behind' the appearances given to us in everyday social understanding. Thus, at the level of methodology, because the objects of true knowledge are separate entities which are only logically related to the copies of which they are the models, the criticism of *doxa* is the criticism of comparison, not an internal dialectic.

As a result *doxa* is simply dismissed in Plato's thought as an irrelevance, as in every sense an illusion, and hence it in no way fills any role in the process of discovering what the good society is. In ethical terms, if the knowledge in question is to be knowledge of men's *real* wants or of what would be in their interest, then it is essential to recognize what Plato missed, namely the *historicity* of such knowledge. What a man can be said *really* to want must be some function of what he actually wants; what can be said to be in a man's true interest must be some function of what he in a sense truly interprets as being in his interest, even if his desires and interests can be said to be 'false'. That being the case it is essential for knowledge of 'the good' that we have true knowledge of actual desires and interests, however 'false' they may be. The dialectic of the criticism of desire and interest at the ethical level, and the dialectic of everyday social understanding at the level of social knowledge, must be a two-way dialectic if it is to be more than a purely symbolic critique.

This, in a way, is what Aristotle recognized. He saw that Plato's

merely external critique of *doxa* was incapable of generating norms for action. Reasons for acting, to be such, must touch in some way on a man's actual desires. It is no use, in moral argument, to tell a man that, though in terms of his actual desires he cannot, logically, want a just society, nonetheless, if he were in a just society he would *then* have the appropriate desires. For that does not offer a man reasons why he should *now* want a just society to come about. An argument why a man should want something must, if it is to offer a genuine reason, offer a reason why, on some interpretation of his present desires, he *does* want it.

### *Aristotle: Induction*

Nonetheless, though Aristotle certainly recognized the force of this point, his account of what interpretation is needed is thoroughly non-dialectical. His hermeneutics of the diversity of men's actual desires is straightforwardly inductive. Roughly speaking, if, at the level of everyday utterance—or as he would put it, *endoxa*—people offer very different views about what the good man should desire, the philosopher's contribution to the hermeneutics of that diversity is simply to make the best compromise with it. As he puts it: 'Our proper course with this subject as with others will be to present the various views about it, and then, after first reviewing the difficulties they involve, finally to establish if possible all or, if not all, the greater part and the most important of the opinions generally held. . . since if the discrepancies can be solved, and a residuum of current opinion left standing, the true view will have been sufficiently established'.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast with Plato, therefore, the major premisses of Aristotle's moral arguments are not provided by knowledge of the best society. Aristotle's own descriptions of the 'ideal states in principle' in the *Politics* are mere exercises in model construction, not, as with Plato, the objects of rational thought as such. For Aristotle it is indeed 'reason' which tells us what men should seek, but by means of a sort of combinatory analysis of what, in the given society, they actually do seek. If, for Plato, knowledge of the good was knowledge of the best society, for Aristotle it was knowledge of the best one could make of actual society. If Plato's science is non-dialectical because it is a level of explanation which by-passes ordinary experience, Aristotle's is non-dialectical because it offers merely an inductive resolution of inconsistencies at the level of that ordinary experience.

### *Sophists: The irrelevance of the Polis*

If these were the responses of Plato and Aristotle to the challenge which faced them, the response of the sophists was utterly different. The sophist took the other way out of the dilemma,<sup>2</sup> which is, in

<sup>1</sup>EN 1145b 2-8.

<sup>2</sup>Mentioned on p. 117.

effect, to avoid the issue. For the sophists social knowledge was irrelevant to moral knowledge, for what the sophists claimed to teach was the knowledge which a man would need if he was to be a good member not of his *polis*, nor of the best *polis*, but of any *polis*. And thus it was that the purely formal, non-moral art of rhetoric is the skill the sophist thinks the good man needs.

For clearly, given the sophist conception of the good man, the skill needed was one which would serve a man well *anywhere*, one the value of which is not derived from the acceptance, in any absolute way, of the laws and conventions of any particular *polis*. If a man was good *qua* man only if he could do well in any social conditions, then his *techné* would have to be one which is neutral as between the aims, the value-judgments, norms or virtues which are demanded by any particular set of social conditions. In detaching the wisdom he taught from every kind of end that wisdom might be held to serve, the sophist argued for a kind of wisdom which could be exercised in the pursuit of any end a man might want to serve. Hare's prescriptivism thereby received its first explicit formulation.

Effectively, then the sophist conception of political virtue represents as radical a departure from the main-stream of the Greek tradition as Hare's does from the Marxist's. For the sophists explicitly rejected the doctrine that there was some *polis*, or, more broadly, any way of conceiving social relationships—an understanding of which determined the nature of the good man's virtues. Their answer to the question I proposed as crucial 'What is one's *polis*?' is to reject it; and in practice this meant that they saw the problem of how to be a good man as the problem of how to be moral in a world where there are only moralities. Exactly as with Hare, this came to mean the search for a form of judgment one can make *in propria persona* which as a form, will neither appropriate nor be appropriated by any content which is derived from considerations of fact. Negatively, then, the sophist's response to the situation in which everyday knowledge of one's *polis* can no longer be regarded as a source of social value is not, as with Plato and Aristotle, to argue for social *science*, but for the detachment of value from social knowledge. It is, therefore, or at least it amounts to something very like the argument we know so well, for unscientific, indeed 'non-cognitive' a-social morality and, as its correlate, a-moral social science.

### III

How, then—in the light of this historical analogy—are we to conceive of Marxist social-science? As I understand it Marx's studies of a capitalist society should be seen, methodologically, as a development, with the introduction of historicist assumptions, of the classical morality which is, in principle, both teleological and

dialectical. Marx's works are a teleological and dialectical hermeneutic of the structures of everyday ideologies of capitalist society. They are the attempt to uncover the real significance of the wants and interests which capitalism on the one hand generates, but on the other cannot satisfy, in order to reveal, therefore, what would satisfy them. This, I suppose, will be regarded as truistical, at any rate by Marxists. But why do I insist that this dialectical hermeneutic is, or must be, also teleological in character? The reason is that from the point of view of methodology alone, to regard nineteenth-century society, or for that matter our own, as being in the relevant respect *capitalist*, represents only one option out of a range of equally valid descriptions. Methodological considerations alone, in other words, leave and must leave it a quite open question which description out of a range of possible descriptions is the *relevant* one, from the point of view of fact and of evaluation.

Just *why*, therefore, is it important, or rather *necessary* to describe our society as capitalist? Just why, to take up Marx's own question in the *Grundrisse*, does it matter whether we regard modern economies as systems of production rather than, as did the classical economists, systems of distribution? We know, of course, in what way the two points of view differ as regards their results. The rate of exploitation in nineteenth-century industrial economies is a relevant concept at all (i.e. it is explanatory) only within a conception of those economies according to which they are essentially systems of capitalist production. Within a conception according to which they are, essentially, systems of distribution, the rate of exploitation is neither quantifiable nor, as a notion, can it have any role.

#### *Capitalist production as the most adequate explanation*

In the *Grundrisse*<sup>1</sup> Marx at first appears to defend his option on methodological grounds alone. Regarding production as the key to contemporary advanced economies enables one to explain more, and more coherently. Within the distribution model consumption appears as a non-economic factor, or at best as a marginally interesting economic factor. Whereas on his own model, to which capitalist production is the key, the whole set of factors, production, distribution, exchange and consumption can be seen as an interacting, 'organically interlocked' system, in which, nonetheless, production 'predominates'. Put in more strictly accurate methodological terms, these four factors, when related through the central feature of the production process, can be shown to be *necessarily* related in certain ways which are quantifiable, whereas on the distribution model one of the factors, consumption, can be related only contingently with the others.<sup>2</sup> On the quite general methodological assumption that it is an aim of science to show necessary

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Grundrisse*, ed. and trans. D. McLellan, London, 1971, pp. 22-33.

<sup>2</sup>*Op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

connexions, or rather, to construct hypotheses which generate necessary connexions between phenomena there are, therefore, good grounds for preferring Marx's model to that of the classical economists.

Still, if this answers the question why a methodological option which is in this way more adequate is to be preferred, it does not answer the question why it is necessary, as a matter of truth, to adopt it. It is not, in fact, even Marx's answer in the *Grundrisse*. For Marx sees pretty clearly that the 'categories' themselves out of which the competing hypotheses of classical and his own economics are constructed—labour, division of labour, demand, exchange-value, and so forth—are both, as he says, scientific *constructs on* real life conditions and, on the other hand, *products of* those conditions. In particular the abstract undifferentiated concept of 'labour' which we find for the first time clearly understood in Adam Smith we find for the first time *then* because it is in fact a phenomenon only of modern conditions that labour has become, in real-life terms, 'abstract'—i.e. mediated uniformly through the movement of capital.

Thus Marx says that, in modern economies, 'labour has become, not only categorically, but really a means of creating wealth in general and has no longer coalesced with the individual in one particular manner. . . . It is only here that the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour in general', labour *sans phrase*, the starting point of modern political economy, becomes realized in practice. Thus the simplest abstraction which modern political economy sets up as its starting point, . . . appears truly realized in this abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.'<sup>1</sup>

### *Capitalist Production as the Condition for Explanation*

Economics as a science is not possible, therefore, until such abstract conceptions become available. For without these 'simple categories' as a starting point there is no way of reconstructing, in terms of necessary connexions, the real life activity of actual economies. But if, above all, it is the category of 'abstract labour' which makes scientific economics possible, and if it is the case that labour has become, in real life, 'abstract' only through the mediation of capital, it follows that what makes economics possible as a science also makes it necessarily to be about capital. It is therefore false to say, as Emmett and MacIntyre do,<sup>2</sup> that economics is a science which defines itself by its *methods*, or at least if this is true it is only a half-truth. It is certainly not the case, if Marx is right, that the method of economics can be defined without reference to what crucially constitutes its subject-matter: which point, generalized for all science, is the point we saw Plato to be making.

A final question: even if economics is crucially about capital,

<sup>1</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>See their introduction to *Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis*, London, 1971.

what is it that makes economics a form of knowledge which it is *crucial to have*, from the point of view of human need? For it is certainly the main claim of the Marxist that economics is the critically necessary form of social knowledge and the claim which, if borne out, constitutes its relevance to the moral question: what are the facts relevant to judgments about acting?

### *Knowledge as Liberation*

For an answer to this question I think that we can only turn, once again, to Plato, and to that problem which challenged both him and his contemporaries. Economics became a necessary form of knowledge just as soon as, and for the same reason that it became possible. It is clear that by the mid-eighteenth century the categories—or, if you like, the symbolic interpretations—of everyday European social life were becoming in certain crucial respects inadequate to the task of explaining the way that social life functioned. New categories were needed, a new method required if men were to know how to act in the new conditions, and to act to the end of controlling them. The price of not being able to control one's society is the slavery of being controlled by it. But the first condition of controlling one's society is being able to interpret it. To be able to interpret it requires that one has the symbolic instruments adequate to the task. In short, economics, as a specialized discipline arose in response to the human demand for emancipation, emancipation, that is, from the determinism of the social categories for which we lack the appropriate symbols. Here again we return to Plato's conception. Not to understand the nature of the human interest which economics serves is to fail to understand why we regard it as knowledge, and why we regard knowledge as worth pursuing at all. We want to know because we want to be free: and from time to time we learn to call by the name of 'knowledge' those forms of enquiry which we need if we are indeed to free ourselves from the symbols which, from time to time, distract us from this goal.

Thus it is that the different forms of theoretical enquiry which have, in the course of history, passed in and out of the academic canon have done so as the result of social changes which have caused us to redefine and reorientate the perspective of that search for emancipation. For just where and just why for any given society or culture, the rupture occurs between the symbols which govern our interpretations of everyday behaviour and the forces which, in our ignorance, determine that behaviour, is an historical matter. It is therefore, an historical matter what is to count as 'science' and what 'opinion'. At one extreme, in that simple model of a society in which human relationships are nothing more than what they are understood to be, theory is dispensable, social science irrelevant, art a mere embellishment of everyday life, never a protest in terms of alternative symbols against it, morality *is* everyday life and religion not dis-



tinguishable from either. Emancipation in such a world, from everyday symbolic understanding would be an idiotic, unintelligible ideal.

At the other extreme, as now, and as in the time of the sophists, it is possible to see the conscious symbols of everyday life as being so very inconsistent with the real life of one's society that the only way of describing the relationship is as one of *false-consciousness* or mystification. In such circumstances the unmasking of those false symbols becomes an urgent task, and I would say, a moral task, for it is a task demanded of men by the stake they have in their own autonomy, their own emancipation.

But, finally, that task would become redundant once again given one sole condition—given, namely the emergence of a single, indisputably true body of scientific knowledge of society. For if any such body of knowledge were available, and if it were, moreover, universally believed to be true, then it would once again be the case that the symbols of everyday social life would be perfectly continuous with the real structures of everyday life. What men interpreted their society as would be identical with what it was, not in the primitive sense that thought could not transcend everyday conditions but because knowledge would be the perfectly adequate instrument for the control of them. Even if it were not the case that such a state of affairs could ever come about it would necessarily be the case that such a state of affairs would define the *telos* of social knowledge. But if it is true, as Marx claimed, that it will come about, that there is a class in society which already embodies the practical truth of which his work is the theory, then that *telos* is a moral because practical goal, and the science which demonstrates it moral knowledge.

Hence I conclude as I began: Marxism is shown to be or not to be morality by whatever shows it to be true or false science. If it is true then it is moral knowledge. If it is false, however, then I am sure that we do not know what morality is.

## What Sort of Bread did Jesus want us to Pray For?

Aelred Baker, O.S.B.

Can you say a prayer prayerfully with words in it you don't understand? Yes, because for centuries Greek Christians have done precisely that. Wilfully, day in day out, they have asked God to give them *epiousion* bread in the Our Father. Every attempt to understand this word is more or less guess-work, so that after nineteen centuries of saying the Lord's Prayer, we are still at square one. Square one