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Philosophy and Ideology: Marxism and the Role of Religion in Contemporary Politics

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In this chapter, I will first describe Marx's account of religion and then use it to explore the role of religion in contemporary politics. This has reached an unprecedented level in recent times. How can Marx's work help us to understand this and respond to it?

Marx appears to adopt two quite different kinds of approach to religion. On the one hand, he regards it in traditional philosophical terms; on the other hand he treats it as a form of ideology. There seems to be a tension between these two approaches.¹ Marx's purely philosophical attitude to religion is made clear in his well-known dictum that religion is the 'opium of the people' (Marx 1975b: 244). Marx is a materialist and atheist. He regards religious beliefs as false and illusory. There are no gods, there is no supernatural realm. The physical world is all that there is.

Philosophical materialism and atheism of this sort was not invented by Marx and it is not peculiar to him. Indeed, such ideas can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. They were taken up and developed by Enlightenment thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The success of the natural sciences in explaining the material world led many at that time to reject religious conceptions as illusory and to maintain that everything that happens can be accounted for in the materialistic terms of the natural sciences. Religious beliefs, according to this view, are fanciful and absurd. They have no valid content. They arise from ignorance and fear of the unknown. They will be dispelled, like a morning mist, by the spreading light of reason and scientific knowledge. According to Hobbes, for example, 'anxiety of the time to come' is one of the main causes of religious ideas.

This perpetual fear, always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the Dark, must needs have for object something.

And therefore when there is nothing to be seen there is nothing to accuse ... but some *Power* or agent *Invisible*; in which sense perhaps it was that some of the old poets said that the Gods were first created by humane feare. (Hobbes 1985: 169–170)

Marx, too, rejects religion philosophically. Beyond that, however, his approach is quite different. His primary concern is to understand the role that religion actually plays in peoples' lives and to explain why religious beliefs are held. This involves seeing religion not only in rational and philosophical terms, as a body of (false) ideas, but also as a social and psychological phenomenon with specific material causes as a form of *ideology*.

There are two aspects to this approach. It involves an account of the content of religious beliefs, and an explanation of their form. I shall discuss these in turn. As regards content, Marx does not simply reject religious ideas as pure error and illusion. In this, he follows the lead given by other philosophers at the time, particularly Feuerbach. Feuerbach starts from the fundamental thought of what Marx calls 'irreligious criticism', that 'man makes religion, religion does not make man' (Marx 1975b: 244). Feuerbach likens religious beliefs to dreams, but not simply to dismiss them as illusory. On the contrary, Feuerbach argues that they express genuine human wishes and aspirations, but in a projected and alienated form.

Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality ... Hence I do nothing more to religion ... than to open its eyes, or rather turn its gaze from the internal to the external, i.e. I change the object as it is in the imagination into the object as it is in reality. (Feuerbach 1957: xxxix)

What is the 'real object' of religion? What is the true content expressed in it, though in an illusory form? According to Feuerbach, the idea of God expresses human hopes and aspirations in a projected and inverted form. 'Man ... projects his being into objectivity, and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject' (Feuerbach 1957: 29–30). The roles of man and God are inverted.² The qualities that we attribute to God love, wisdom, compassion, justice are in fact human qualities, projected and objectified. As Marx puts it, what Feuerbach shows is that 'the earthly family is ... the secret of the holy family' (Marx 1975a: 422).

There is an illuminating analogy here with the approach that Freud later adopts in his analysis of dreams and other neurotic symptoms (cf. Althusser 1971a). Before Freud, most psychologists and philosophers had dismissed dreams as purely imaginary and false mental creations. In this respect their attitude was like that of Enlightenment materialists towards religion. This is indeed the appearance that dreams present, their 'manifest content'. But Freud does not stop with this. By investigating the role that dreams play in human life he shows that they can be interpreted as the disguised and distorted expressions of real feelings and thoughts of the dreamer. He comes to see them as symptoms which reveal a true 'latent content' (Freud 1974, Part II). The true objects of a dream are the real, though often repressed, feelings and thoughts which are disguised but expressed within it.³

In a similar way, according to Feuerbach, religious beliefs and feelings, although they have a mistaken and illusory form, have a real and valid content. Thus, Feuerbach insists,

I by no means say: God is nothing, the Trinity is nothing, the Word of God is nothing, etc. I only show that they are not *that* which the illusions of theology make them ... The reproaches that according to my book religion is an absurdity, a nullity, a pure illusion, would be well founded only if, according to it, that into which I resolve religion ... namely *man's anthropology*, were an absurdity, a nullity, a pure illusion. (Feuerbach 1957: xxxviii)

These ideas provide Marx's starting point. Like Feuerbach, he begins from the premise that religion is a human creation, and he regards the 'manifest', the rational and philosophical content of religious ideas as illusory and false. This is part of what he means when he says that religion is 'the opium of the people'. And yet in the very passage in which this phrase occurs, Marx equally insists that religious ideas should not be dismissed as mere errors. Following Feuerbach he treats religious beliefs as 'symptoms'. They embody a real and valid content, but this is expressed in a disguised and distorted form by being projected into a transcendent beyond. 'Religious suffering is at one and the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.' (Marx 1975b: 244)

To understand religious beliefs, therefore, it is not satisfactory simply to criticise them in traditional philosophical fashion as mistaken and

false; the suffering and hope which they express must also be brought to light. If religion is a distorted protest against a 'soulless' situation and a 'heartless' world, these conditions themselves need to be revealed and addressed. Marx's aim in this is not only theoretical but also practical. 'Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower' (Marx 1975b: 244).

In this way, the unmasking of religious alienation and mystification leads to a criticism of the conditions which give rise to it. 'The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to *call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions*' (Marx 1975b: 244). The criticism of religion thus leads directly to social criticism.

In brief outline, this is the first, Feuerbachian, aspect of Marx's account of religion. He develops it early in his life,⁴ and it remains a part of Marx's outlook thereafter. There is no reason to believe that he later abandons it, or that it should be rejected as, for example, Althusser argues (Althusser 1969). On the contrary, it can be used to shed important light on the role that religion plays in the world today, as I shall argue in due course. However, Marx soon became aware of the limitations of this approach and he goes on to extend and deepen it. For although it points to the hidden content of religious and other ideological illusions, it does not explain why people perceive their situation in distorted and alienated ways.

Feuerbach does not explicitly address this question. He treats the distortions of religious consciousness simply as subjective intellectual errors. As with the Enlightenment materialists, the implication is that these can be overcome by rational argument alone. Marx's critique of this approach is presented in brilliantly clear and concise terms in the fourth 'Thesis on Feuerbach'.

Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, of the duplication of the world into a religious imaginary world and a real secular one. His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing this work the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular basis detaches itself from itself and establishes itself as an independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the cleavages and self-contradictions within this secular basis. (Marx 1975a: 422)

This is the approach that Marx follows from this time on. It involves not only interpreting and criticising religious beliefs philosophically, but also comprehending them in causal terms as the products of material conditions. Religious ideas are not purely intellectual phenomena located only in a 'space of reasons'. They are social products. They are objectively rooted, they develop and change only with social and economic conditions. The religious outlook can be overcome, therefore, only when the material and social causes which give rise to it are superseded.

It should be noted that, according to the materialist view, the general point here applies to all beliefs not just to religious ones, in that all beliefs are material and social phenomena. Rational argument also involves causal processes according to this view, and these may well be sufficient to change beliefs. Religious ideas, however, are not susceptible to change by rational argument alone, they involve projections and distortions which have other – social and material – causes (Sayers 1989).

Unfortunately Marx does not go on to provide a detailed account of the social and material roots of religion. After his early interest in the topic his focus shifts to the secular realm of economics. His fullest and most illuminating discussion of ideological illusion is in that context, in the account of the 'fetishism of commodities' in Volume I of *Capital*, in which religion figures only in a secondary and subordinate way.

By the 'fetishism of commodities', Marx refers to the fact that, in a market society, economic value seems to be an objective property of things, and the economic laws which are associated with it appear to have an independent character and to assert themselves 'like an over-riding law of Nature' (Marx 1967: 75). According to Marx, however, these are false appearances. In order for a thing to have an economic value it must enter into particular social and economic relations in a particular way. Value is the property of a thing, therefore, only in so far as it is embedded in the social relations of commodity production and the market. Value is a social phenomenon, a social relation.

The social character of economic value was discovered by the classical political economists of the eighteenth century; but this was not in itself sufficient to dispel the appearance of objectivity which value presents.⁵ For the seeming independence of economic categories is not a merely subjective illusion, it is an objective feature of the situation, 'the *objective appearance* of the social characteristics of labour' (Marx 1967: 82

my emphasis). The roots of such ideological illusions, according to Marx, are objective and social. Such illusions cannot therefore be dispelled by intellectual criticism alone; they pass away only with social and economic change.⁶

According to Marx, a similar situation holds with religious beliefs. They too persist even in the face of prolonged philosophical criticism and secular influence. This cannot be comprehended if religious beliefs are seen only as subjective intellectual phenomena. They should not be treated only as philosophically mistaken views, they must also be seen as ideological creations, rooted in and reflecting specific social conditions, not only in their content but also in their form.⁷

How are such ideological beliefs related to objective conditions? What accounts for their enduring character? A number of writers have tried to explain this. According to Cohen, ideological illusions 'survive theoretical exposé because theory does not cure the conditions which produce them ... They are not, in the first instance, errors of thought, but distortions in the world, which theory is impotent to rectify' (Cohen 1978: 340). Ideology is the result of a reality which is itself in some sense 'distorted'.

A similar theory is put forward by Larrain who picks up on Marx's early Feuerbachian language (Larrain 1979). In a key passage, upon which Larrain relies for his account, Marx writes,

[r]eligion is ... the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But, *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man* – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. (Marx 1975b: 244)

In ideology, Larrain argues, reality is subjectively perceived in an 'inverted' way because the objective situation which gives rise to it is itself 'inverted' (Larrain 1979: 57).

In this way, for both Cohen and Larrain, ideology is a *true* consciousness of what is, in some sense, a 'false' and 'inverted' or 'distorted' world. Suggestive as these ideas may at first appear they are ultimately of little real value in explaining the specific character of ideological illusion. It is true that 'inversion' in the Feuerbachian sense may be said to be involved in religious thought, in that God is treated as cause and creator, whereas mankind and the material world appears as effect. However, it is not helpful to maintain that this is a 'true' perception of an 'inverted

reality'. What can it mean to say that reality is 'inverted' other than that our ideas of it are? In so far as this means anything it merely restates in a metaphorical way that religion has an 'objective' character, which is what was to be explained in the first place.

A more fully worked out and illuminating account of the objective character of ideology is developed by Althusser. He argues that it is contained not only in beliefs, it is also inscribed in social relations and institutions, in material practices (Althusser 1971b). Althusser's detailed analysis is concerned particularly with the ideology of the 'subject', about which he says much that is important and illuminating. Ultimately, however, in his account the idea of the 'subject' turns out to be a mere construct of objective 'ideological apparatuses'. Thus for Althusser, as with Cohen and Larrain, the illusions and distortions of ideology are seen as objective *as opposed to* subjective creations.

This sort of account is in effect the diametric opposite of the Enlightenment materialist view that ideology is mere subjective illusion. Neither extreme is satisfactory. Neither can satisfactorily account for the character of ideological illusion. The source of such illusion is not located exclusively either in purely subjective consciousness or in the objective world considered on its own. Subjectivity and the objective world are more closely inter-related than either of these views suggest. Our consciousness of the world in the form of religion, economics or whatever is never only a subjective creation, nor is it simply a direct and passive reflection of external and independent objective conditions. These two aspects the subjective and the objective, consciousness and world are more intimately connected and closely implicated with each other than either of these views suggest.

This is a fundamental theme of classical German philosophy from Kant onwards.⁸ Both Hegel and Marx are working within this tradition and it is vital to see their work in this context. For Kant, self and world have the universal and unchanging forms given to them by the operation of pure reason and the 'categories'. Hegel's distinctive and revolutionary contribution is to argue that self and world pass through a series of historically evolving shapes which involve both different forms of self-consciousness and different kinds of social practice.⁹

Hegel sees religion as a social and historical phenomenon and analyses it in these terms. According to Hegel 'the first form of religion is immediate religion, nature religion [*Naturreligion*]' (Hegel 1988: 205).¹⁰ Hegel cites religious beliefs that had recently been reported when he was writing (1827) by explorers from African and Eskimo tribal groups, and

from China and India (Hegel 1988: 229–235). The religions he is talking about are sometimes thought to involve the worship of natural entities such as the sun, animals, mountains and rivers, etc. Hobbes for example makes great fun of the variety of religious beliefs in these terms.

There is almost nothing that has a name, that has not been esteemed amongst the Gentiles,¹¹ in one place or another, a God, or Divell ... The unformed matter of the World, was a God, by the name of *Chaos*. The Heaven, the Ocean, the Planets, the Fire, the Earth, the Winds, were so many Gods. Men, Women, a Bird, a Crocodile, a Calf, a Dogge, a Snake, an Onion, a Leeke, Deified. Besides that, they filled almost all places, with spirits called daemons: the plains, with *Pan*, and ... Satyres; the Woods, with Fawnes, and Nymphs; the Sea, with Tritons ... every River, and Fountayn, with a Ghost of his name ... and in the night time, all places with ... Ghosts of men deceased, and a whole kingdome of Fayries and Bugbears. (Hobbes 1985: 173–174)

According to Hegel, however, this involves a fundamental misunderstanding. The religion of nature does not involve the worship of natural things as such. The object of worship in this, as in all forms of religion, is spiritual not purely natural. It is 'a religion in which the noblest element for human beings is what is spiritual, but the spiritual [recognised] first in its immediate and natural mode' (Hegel 1988: 219). Even in its least developed form, which Hegel terms the 'religion of magic', man shows that he is a self-conscious being (a being-for-self) who has 'cut himself free' from what is purely natural (Hegel 1988: 229). The important point about this in the present context is that subject and object, worshipper and the object worshipped, correspond to and reflect each other.

Nature religion is the earliest form of religion. It is associated with the stage when the self is only just emerging as something distinct from its natural environment and its natural bonds with others, such as those of family or herd. At this stage, according to Hegel, nature is seen as the objectification of the self's dawning subjective sense of something 'higher, essential and universal', but also as 'cause and power' (Hegel 1975: 315). 'There is a fear present here, a consciousness of negation ... a fear of contingency, of the forces of nature, which display themselves as mighty powers over against humanity' (Hegel 1988: 225).

Again, however, Hegel's account is quite different from that of Hobbes cited at the beginning (1988: 224). Religion is not a blind fearful

illusion. On the contrary, according to Hegel, it gives subjective expression to the particular form of relation of individuals to the natural world, to each other, and to themselves. Thus a particular form of religious consciousness is bound up with a particular level of social and historical development.

The principle by which God is defined for human beings is also the principle for how humanity defines itself inwardly, or for humanity in its own spirit. An inferior god or a nature god has inferior, natural and unfree human beings as its correlates; the pure concept of God or the spiritual God has as its correlate spirit that is free and spiritual, that actually knows God. (Hegel 1988: 203)

Marx's account of religion is directly descended from these views. Marx criticises Hegel's idealism, but he does not repudiate the fundamental insight into the unity of subject and object which Hegel's philosophy involves nor its historical account of the development of consciousness and its object (Sayers 1985: 43–45). On the topic of religion, in particular, he holds that 'the religious world is but the reflex of the real world' (Marx 1967: 79).¹² Its content and development go hand in hand with real economic and social conditions.

In the earliest forms of society, according to Marx, economic activity is at a 'low' stage and 'the social relations within the sphere of material life, between man and man, and between man and Nature, are correspondingly narrow'. Marx's account of the religion of such societies is similar to Hegel's. The economic 'narrowness' of such societies 'is reflected in the ancient worship of Nature, and in the other elements of the popular religions' (Marx 1967: 79).

Here, as with Hegel, this should not be interpreted in the terms suggested by traditional philosophical positions. In particular, we must avoid assuming either that ideology is a purely subjective form of narrowness and ignorance, or that it is a direct and immediate reflection of external social conditions. As I have been arguing, neither of these views adequately captures Marx's position. Both treat subjectivity as something metaphysically separate and distinct from the objective world. For Marx, by contrast, consciousness is conscious existence, it is inseparably bound up with our relations to nature and to one another. 'Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process' (Marx and Engels 1970: 47).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx describes the consciousness involved in nature religion as follows.

Nature ... first appears to men as a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force ... by which they are overawed¹³ ... This natural religion [*Naturreligion*] or this particular relation of men to nature is determined by the form of society and vice versa. Here, as everywhere, the identity of nature and man appears in such a way that the restricted relation of men to nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted relation to one another determines men's restricted relation to nature. (Marx and Engels 1970: 51)

What Marx means is illustrated by an account he gives of traditional Indian village society and religion, as follows.

These idyllic village-communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism ... they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies ... We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man [to be] the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow. (Marx 1958: 350)

With economic and social development, human consciousness develops and changes. In a more complex society, involving private property and the free market, 'Christianity with its cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism, &c., is the most fitting form of religion' (Marx 1967: 79).

Thus religious ideas are social and historical products. They alter not simply as a result of intellectual and philosophical criticism, but only with social change. Marx, in contrast to Hegel, sees these social changes primarily in material and economic terms, and he believes that their

ultimate result will be the disappearance of religion altogether. 'The religious reflex of the real world can ... only ... finally vanish, when the practical relations of every-day life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to Nature' (Marx 1967: 79).

How can these ideas help to illuminate the role of religion in the world today?¹⁴ To anyone of my generation this seems both extraordinary and puzzling. In the 1950s and 1960s, when I was growing up, it seemed inconceivable that religious ideas of an explicitly irrational and fundamentalist character could ever come to hold such sway in the modern world. At that time the main divisions in international affairs were those of the Cold War, between capitalism and liberal democracy on the one side and Soviet-style Communism and various forms of socialism on the other. Religious politics was confined to a tiny handful of zealots and extremists. This seemed marginal and irrelevant, a dwindling vestige of a medieval mind-set which had somehow survived on into the modern world.

Even in areas like the Middle East and Northern Ireland then, as now, divided along religious lines, politics had a predominantly secular form. Progressive aspirations, for national independence, for political power and control of economic resources, took broadly socialist forms for the most part. This was the case, for example, in Egypt. When Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956, he did not invoke Allah, he spoke the language of secular nationalism. (This did not inhibit the British and the French, with the help of Israel, from invading and trying to overthrow him.)

In Iran, likewise, it was the secular politics of national independence that led the Mossadeq government, after it was elected in 1951, to try to assert control of the Iranian operations of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. That government was swiftly overthrown by a coup engineered by the United States and Britain, who then installed the Shah. The Shah's regime continued on a mainly secular, Western-style path of development, but in a way that was more compliant to Western oil and other business interests.

All that changed with the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which overthrew the Shah and instituted the Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. That event sent shock waves through the Middle East and beyond, the results of which are still being felt today. To begin to comprehend these events it is important to understand the way in which capitalism has impinged on societies in the region. Until very recently the Middle East was made up of traditional, predominantly agrarian or

even nomadic peoples, involved in pre-capitalist, quasi-feudal social systems, which had remained largely unchanged for centuries.

Quite suddenly their isolated existence and traditional ways have been broken in upon. They have been subjected to the forces of the world market. They have been pitched into the modern world. They have been invaded by an irresistible flood of mass produced goods of every kind, cars, electronic and other consumer goods, jeans, trainers, T-shirts, even hamburgers, Coca-Cola and other alien forms of food and drink. This has undermined the livelihoods of local producers and destroyed existing social structures and economic relations. At the same time, these communities are being bombarded with images, sounds and ideas from the West which clash with traditional beliefs and subvert established values.

This process has been occurring all around the world for over two hundred years. Its effects are explosive. Typically, there are two contrasting kinds of response in the societies affected. Some members of those societies believe that they must 'modernise' in the face of these forces. They argue they must ultimately embrace Western ideas and values if they are to survive and prosper in the modern world. We may call these the 'modernizers'. Others, however, see in Western influences only a threat to established ways of life and values. They oppose and resist them in the name of the traditional culture. In response to the Western threat they cling on to traditional ways and values which are often embodied in religious beliefs, practices and institutions. This is the 'traditionalist' response. Similar divisions have occurred in many other parts of the world in the face of the onslaught of global capitalism.¹⁵

In view of the argument I have been developing it is not surprising that there should be these two sorts of responses. The impact of global capitalism on these communities has been so rapid and intense that people in them are in effect living simultaneously in two quite different and incommensurable social worlds, traditional and modern, which have suddenly and violently been thrown together. The contrasting responses to this situation that I have been describing are products of these different and conflicting sets of social relations. The modernisers maintain that their societies should embrace the new social order created by the global market, or at least they believe that they have no realistic alternative but to do so. The traditionalists, on the other hand, want to protect and preserve their established ways, and they believe that they must resist and exclude the forces of capitalism in order to do so.

In previous years, as I have said, most progressive forces for national liberation were of a 'modernising' kind. They put their hopes in some

sort of socialism. With the demise of the Soviet Union, and the eclipse of every sort of socialist movement which occurred at the same time throughout the world, those hopes have dimmed, for the present at least. Many people in developing societies have lost faith that the path of economic modernisation could ever lead their societies in the direction of independent development and freedom. Those with radical aspirations for national autonomy and progress have looked elsewhere, and increasingly to traditional and religious ideas. Many, particularly in the Middle East, but elsewhere too, have looked to a resurgent Islam.

In this way, religious ideas have given expression to people's distress and come to embody their hopes for liberation and their aspirations for a better life. These ideas involve illusion and error, I have been arguing, but they are not simply a result of ignorance or intellectual confusion. As with the religion of nature described earlier, they are produced by objective social conditions. In particular, the kind of modern religious politics that I have been discussing has its roots in the impact which global economic forces have had in what used to be a local and familiar world. It is a result of the way in which these forces have suddenly come to affect people's lives – in ways which they do not understand, which they are powerless to influence, and in the face of which they feel frustration and despair.

I will conclude by citing some anecdotal evidence to illustrate the points I have been making. When I first taught at the University of Kent in the 1970s, there were many Iranian students on the campus. I ran a postgraduate course on Political Theory which regularly attracted a number of them. They were often very good students, strongly engaged in their studies, intensely concerned about the future of their country and committed to doing something about it. For the most part they were fervent nationalists whose sympathies inclined towards socialism or Marxism.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which brought the Ayatollahs to power, a new breed of student began to appear. A number of Islamic fundamentalists began to sign up for the course. It seemed strange that these students should opt for a course on Western political thought, since its approach conflicted with so many of their beliefs. When one talked to these students, however, it soon became clear that many of them had political outlooks not so very different from those of the earlier generations of socialists and Marxists. They had similar aspirations for the independence and self-determination of their country. When one put it to them that these were secular political aims and asked them why they were committed to realising them through Islam, a frequent

reply was that Western political ideologies had failed and provided no solutions for the problems of their society. Neither capitalism nor communism were satisfactory, they said, but Islam showed the way towards a better world and offered hope for the future.

Clearly, Marxism does not share that view. To repeat, it regards religious beliefs, of whatever kind, as erroneous and illusory. Moreover, the fundamentalist variety often involves attitudes which seem barbaric and inhuman by Western liberal standards.¹⁶ However, it is not sufficient simply to reject and dismiss these beliefs in these terms, as fallacious and immoral. Religious ideas, as I have been arguing, can give powerful expression to people's sufferings, and embody their hopes for liberation and aspirations for a better life. The illusory form in which they are expressed is rooted in the social and economic conditions which give rise to them.

What role can philosophers and other intellectuals play in this situation? As I have been arguing, philosophical and purely theoretical criticism alone is not sufficient to dissolve ideological conceptions; their roots are material, they lie at the social and economic level. Nevertheless, it is important to insist that theoretical criticism plays an important role in bringing about social and economic change. It is an essential part of the process of creating new social conditions. There is and remains a role for traditional philosophical criticism, and the account that I have been giving should not be taken to deny this.¹⁷

Equally, however, an adequate theoretical response to ideology must go beyond traditional philosophical forms. As well as criticising ideological views as irrational and false, these must also be interpreted and understood as 'symptoms'. For hidden within their false form there often lie valid aspirations which are a response to real social conditions. These conditions must be acknowledged and addressed if there is to be peace and understanding in the world. That is the lesson of Marxism.¹⁸

Notes

1. See Sayers (1989) for an earlier discussion of this topic.
2. Following the authors I am citing and for stylistic reasons I use 'man' in its generic sense to include also women.
3. See Sayers (1985, chapter 5) for a fuller account of Freud from this perspective.
4. In 1843–1844, when he was 25–26 years old.
5. 'This fact appears to the producers, notwithstanding the discovery [of the social nature of value], to be just as real and final, as the fact, that, after the discovery by science of the component gases of air, the atmosphere itself remained unaltered' (Marx 1967: 74).

6. 'The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan' (Marx 1967: 80).
7. Religious beliefs also have psychological causes. Marx does not discuss these, nor shall I in this paper, except to acknowledge that they exist and need to be considered in any full account of religion.
8. This theme has recently been taken up by writers in the analytic tradition as well, for example McDowell (1994).
9. Hegel traces this process in general terms in his account of the development of 'spirit' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and in greater detail in his accounts of the development of art, religion and philosophy in his *Lectures* on these topics.
10. See especially Hegel (1988, Part II.A), Hegel (1977: 416–424), see also Hegel (1975: 303–361).
11. That is heathens or pagans (*OED*).
12. This sentence does not appear in the German text of 1867. It was added to the French edition of 1872–1875, for which Marx made numerous revisions (Marx 1969: 90). The English translation of 1886, supervised by Engels, incorporates these changes, see Engels, 'Preface to the English Edition 1886', in Marx (1967). 'Reflex' is the translation of the French 'reflet' (reflection).
13. 'like beasts', Marx adds, 'it is thus a purely animal consciousness of nature (natural religion [*Naturreligion*]) just because nature is as yet hardly modified historically' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 51). Marx's language here is careless. For Marx, as for Hegel, even the earliest kind of religion is a distinctively human phenomenon. Religion is a form of reflective consciousness of the world and of oneself, it involves being-for-self of which animals are not capable. Marx acknowledges this earlier in the same passage. 'Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not enter into "relations" with anything, it does not enter into any relation at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all' (Marx and Engels 1970: 51).
14. In what follows I focus on radical Islam. Arguably, the same principles can be used to explain the striking role that fundamental religion has come to play in US politics, but an analysis of that phenomenon must be developed out of the specific features of contemporary American social conditions, which is beyond my competence. An account which bears out the view that fundamental religion expresses real anxieties and aspirations among people in the American 'heartlands' is developed in Frank (2004).
15. In nineteenth-century Russia these groups were called the 'Westernizers' and the 'Slavophiles' (Walicki 1979).
16. Shared by Marxism and, indeed, all forms of socialism.
17. This point is well understood by Lenin. Like Marx he believes that religion is a social product, hence that 'religious prejudices [cannot] be dispelled by purely propaganda methods' (Lenin 1969b: 10). Nevertheless, he does not deny the value of intellectual argument. 'Does this mean that educational

books against religion are harmful or unnecessary? No, nothing of the kind. It means that Social-Democracy's atheist propaganda must be *subordinated* to its basic task – the development of the class struggle of the exploited *masses* against the exploiters' (Lenin 1969a: 22).

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9 Intellectual Labour and Social Class

David Bates

How should one conceive of the class location of intellectual labour? For Marxists, this is not simply a problem of interest, but rather a fundamental political problem. Marx placed the notion of proletarian self-emancipation at the heart of his theory of revolution,¹ but simultaneously maintained that the capitalist labour process tends to render opaque to its subjects both its exploitative basis and the possibility of future non-exploitative alternatives. Such opacity necessitated the use of social scientific tools.² Yet these tools – and the intellectual labourers who use them – have typically been considered as external to the proletariat.³ The idea of intellectual labour as external to the proletariat was of course emphasised by Lenin. Left to their own devices, the workers in *What is to be Done?* could not reach beyond the immediacy of the economic struggle, beyond 'trade union consciousness'. The agents of social science – that is intellectuals of petty bourgeois origin – would therefore be required to bring revolutionary consciousness to the workers from without. I do not wish to comment on the cogency or otherwise of Lenin's position, a position which must always be assessed in terms of Russian conditions. However, in the context of contemporary capitalism, the idea of intellectual labour – and hence academic social scientific knowledge – as external to the proletariat is undergoing a process of erosion. Contemporary intellectuals I shall argue in the course of this chapter are largely proletarian in character, and therefore subjected to many of the processes of oppression, 'degradation' and exploitation which impact on this class as a whole.

In assessing the class location of intellectual labour, there are numerous Marxist authors on which one could focus, though it must be noted that this issue has not always received the attention in the Marxist tradition which it deserves. In this chapter I begin by making some critical