

Marxism and Ethical Socialism

El Marxismo y el Socialismo Ético

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Resumen: Quizá el legado más notable del llamado marxismo analítico sea la tesis, defendida por algunos destacados representantes de esta corriente filosófica, según la cual las razones que impulsan a Marx y al marxismo a condenar el capitalismo y defender el socialismo son, en el fondo, de una naturaleza moral. Si asumimos esta interpretación de Marx y del marxismo, nos veremos obligados a reconsiderar la relación entre el marxismo y otra tradición socialista para la cual los valores morales también son fundamentales, a saber, el llamado “socialismo ético”. Si al reconsiderar esta relación dejamos de lado algunas ideas falsas, si bien muy extendidas, con respecto a la naturaleza del socialismo ético (tales como la creencia de que implica una política reformista o el supuesto de que sea idéntico al “socialismo utópico”), descubrimos que la dicotomía entre el socialismo ético y el socialismo marxista resulta insostenible, al menos en los términos en los que ha sido planteado hasta ahora.

Palabras clave: Marxismo; socialismo ético; Roy Edgley; socialismo utópico; Norman Geras.

Abstract: One of the principal legacies of analytical Marxism has been a *moralization* of Marxism, for some of the most influential analytical Marxists came to endorse the view that the Marxist condemnation of capitalism and defense of socialism ultimately derive from normative ethical considerations. If we accept this new interpretation of Marx and Marxism, with its emphasis on the moral foundations of Marxist doctrine, we are forced to reconsider the relationship between Marxism and another socialist tradition for which moral commitments are also fundamental, namely ethical socialism. If our reconsideration of this relationship avoids common misconceptions about ethical socialism (such as the idea that it implies reformism, or that it is identical to “utopian socialism”), we find that the dichotomy between ethical socialism and Marxist socialism proves untenable, at least in the terms in which it has usually been formulated.

Keywords: Marxism; ethical socialism; Roy Edgley; utopian socialism; Norman Geras.

INTRODUCTION

There seems to be little doubt that the principal legacy of analytical Marxism—leaving aside the wholly *negative* contribution, as it were, resulting from the analytical Marxists' vigorous criticism and dismissal of many basic Marxist theses—has been an unabashed *moralization* of Marxism.¹ That is to say, few would deny that, so far as the interpretation of Marx and Marxism are concerned, the most notable, lasting effect of this movement has been an insistence on, and vindication of, the normative moral dimensions of Marxist doctrine. This is evident in many of the contributions to specific debates on the moral status of Marx's thought, as well as in a number of the texts that aim at a broader, more synthetic and systematic analysis of Marx and the Marxist tradition. A good example of the latter is furnished by Jon Elster's conclusion to his *Making Sense of Marx* (1985), which vividly evokes the legacy to which I am referring:

It is not possible today, morally or intellectually, to be a Marxist in the traditional sense. ... But...I believe it is still possible to be a Marxist in a rather different sense of the term. I find that most of the views that I hold to be true and important, I can trace back to Marx. This includes methodology, substantive theories and, above all, values. The critique of exploitation and alienation remains central (p. 531; emphasis in the original).

Yet, while most commentators would probably accept the above characterization of analytical Marxism's legacy, few have considered what is, to my mind, an obvious and important implication of this development, namely, that it tends to decisively undermine the distinction—long accepted by the vast majority of Marxists—between Marxist socialism and *ethical socialism*.² In other words, to the extent that we endorse this moralization of Marxism, the familiar claim that Marxist socialism is fundamentally opposed to

ethical socialism becomes untenable. That this conclusion is unavoidable, without being the least bit undesirable (at least from a Marxist perspective), is the claim that I set out to defend in the remainder of this paper.

My essay has five sections, apart from the introduction. I begin by briefly reviewing the various meanings and uses of the term “ethical socialism” and also provide the definition of ethical socialism that I shall be using. The following section of the paper then canvasses five common misconceptions, or unwarranted assumptions, regarding ethical socialism. In section three of the paper, I argue that if we employ the definition of ethical socialism that I have proposed, avoid the errors discussed in section two and accept the view that Marxism condemns capitalism and advocates socialism partly (or entirely) on moral grounds, then the dichotomy between ethical socialism and Marxist socialism proves untenable, at least in the terms in which it has usually been formulated. In this section, I also discuss two claims often used in support of the standard counterposition of ethical socialism and Marxism. The fourth section of the essay briefly addresses an objection, advanced by some Marxists, to an interpretation of Marxism that makes normative moral commitments central to, and the foundation of, the Marxist outlook. The paper then concludes with some reflections on the implications of adopting the interpretation of Marxism that foregrounds the doctrine's moral dimension.

I

What, exactly, is “ethical socialism”?³ Given the frequency with which this term has appeared in Marxist literature, it is natural to assume that the term has a fairly determinate meaning. In fact, the term “ethical socialism”—which was not current in Marx's time and, to my knowledge, was not employed by Marx and Engels themselves—has been, and

¹ I borrow the concept of a “moralized Marxism” from Kai Nielsen (1989), p. 272.

² For a study that does examine some aspects of this development, yet without analyzing the nature of ethical socialism, see Roberts (1996), chapter 7.

³ Given the aims of this essay, I do not think it necessary to offer a precise definition of *socialism*. But I would argue that Tom Bottomore is correct in characterizing socialism, in very general terms, as “a social order in which there is the maximum feasible equality of access, for all human beings, to economic resources, to knowledge, and to political power, and the minimum possible domination exercised by any individual or social group over any others” (as cited in Self, 1993, p. 343).

continues to be, used to designate a number of different, sometimes quite divergent, theoretical and political positions. For example, the term “ethical socialism” is sometimes used as a rough synonym for what Marxists have conventionally referred to as “utopian socialism,” that is, the emancipatory projects developed by Owen, Saint-Simon, and Fourier. Then again, “ethical socialism” sometimes refers to Eduard Bernstein’s “revisionist” version of Marxism developed at the end of the nineteenth century. (Indeed, the term apparently first gained currency as a result of the debates and polemics occasioned by Bernstein’s work.) At the same time, the term “ethical socialism” is also often used to identify the early twentieth-century movement in philosophy that sought to fashion a kind of neo-Kantian Marxism. Finally, the phrase “ethical socialism” is also sometimes used to characterize or evoke the politics associated with a tradition within British socialism, the best-known exponent of which was doubtless R. H. Tawney.⁴

It should be clear, even from this extremely brief summary, that the term “ethical socialism” has been used quite broadly. But this is hardly surprising, considering that writers who avail themselves of the term seldom take the trouble to define it. For our present purposes, I think we would do well to adopt a definition offered by Roy Edgley: “the political tendency that advocates socialism as centrally involving, even based on, a set of ethical or moral values, values that are perhaps distinctively socialist” (1990, p. 21).⁵ I find this definition especially well-suited for my aims in the present essay not only because it covers the different varieties of ethical socialism already noted, but also because Edgley was himself both a Marxist and dismissive of ethical socialism. In any event, once we have accepted a definition along these lines, the question then becomes: What follows from such a

conception of ethical socialism? Or rather: Does it entail anything that a Marxist should necessarily object to?

II

As it turns out, much of the antipathy that Marxists feel toward ethical socialism would seem to derive from a number of unjustified beliefs about the concept of ethical socialism, unjustified, at any rate, if we proceed from Edgley’s definition. What are some of these beliefs?

First of all, there is a not uncommon tendency to believe that ethical socialism denotes much the same thing as “utopian socialism.” In other words, Marxists tend to conflate ethical and utopian socialism⁶ or to assimilate the former to the latter. Yet there is, in fact, a scant justification for such a belief, as becomes clear if we recall the defining features of utopian socialism. Gareth Stedman Jones (1983) summarizes these features as follows: first, the ambition to construct a new science of human nature; secondly, a focus on the moral/ideological sphere as the determining basis of all other aspects of human behavior; third, the ambition to make this sphere the object of an exact science which will resolve the problems of social harmony; fourth, the assumption that pre-existing moral, religious, and political *theory* is the main obstacle to the actualization of the newly discovered laws of harmony; and, finally, the rejection of any distinction between the physical and social sciences (p. 505; emphasis in the original).⁷ One might also mention, of course, other views for which Marx and Engels took the utopian socialists to task, such as their proclivity for creating detailed political blueprints for the future, their failure to ground their theories in objective social tendencies or their disregard for the question of revolutionary agency. At any rate, the point is

⁴ I do not mean to suggest that this list is by any means exhaustive, but I would argue that it does cover the most important uses of the term.

⁵ Cf. the definition of ethical socialism proposed by Peter Self (1993): “the belief that socialism must be founded upon and reflect the acceptable moral principles of a good society” (p. 337). A much more idiosyncratic definition of ethical socialism is provided by Norman Dennis and A. H. Halsey (1988): “Ethical socialism is a radical tradition which makes heroic claims on people and on the society that nurtures them. It offers both a code of conduct for individuals

and a guide to social reform aimed at creating optimal conditions for the highest possible moral attainment of every person” (p. 1).

⁶ See, for example, Anderson (1980, p. 98); Nielsen (1989, p. 19); and Levine (2005, p. 625).

⁷ In fact, Stedman Jones identifies the theses listed here as “common presuppositions distinctive of pre-Marxist socialist thought,” but the brief essay in which they appear is a dictionary entry on “utopian socialism.”

that ethical socialism per se does not imply any of these things, at least if we accept Edgley's definition of this concept.

A second misconception shaping Marxists' thinking about ethical socialism (and probably a result of the habit of identifying ethical socialism with utopian socialism) involves the tendency to assume that ethical socialism necessarily implies a commitment to (cross-class) moral advocacy or moral suasion as the primary means, or principal mechanism, for bringing about socialism.⁸ That is, it is widely assumed that if we conceive of socialism "as centrally involving, even based on, a set of ethical or moral values, values that are perhaps distinctively socialist," it follows that we must privilege, if not rely exclusively on, moral appeals and exhortation—ethical consciousness-raising, as it were—to the neglect of other forms of political engagement, such as party activity, the mobilization of labor, etc. Yet this assumption likewise proves ill-founded, conflating as it does two distinct aspects of agency, namely *the motivational or justificatory aspect of agency*—the reasons that prompt a disposition to act for certain ends—and *the operational aspect of agency*, that is, the actual actions that an agent performs with a view toward achieving her ends. To "advocate socialism as centrally involving, even based on, a set of ethical or moral values, values that are perhaps distinctively socialist" in no way implies, either logically or in practice, a commitment to moral advocacy as the preferred, if not exclusive, method for bringing about socialism.

A third, typical error in thinking about ethical socialism consists in equating ethical socialism with reformism.⁹ On this (erroneous) view, ethical socialism entails a commitment to parliamentarism as the only legitimate means of effecting the transition to a socialist society, and so more or less

excludes, among other things, recourse to violence. Once again, such a conclusion simply does not follow from the conception stated above: there is nothing inconsistent about the idea of using revolutionary measures—notably, violence—to bring into being a system that embodies a particular set of moral values, just as there is nothing inherently inconsistent in a police officer's use of violence, or a country's resort to war, to bring about a state of peace (we should bear in mind, incidentally, that all major ethical theories license the use of violence under certain circumstances, and most versions of one highly influential moral theory, utilitarianism, even enjoin it in many instances to secure the best result). In any event, the notion that advocacy of socialism "as centrally involving, even based on, a set of ethical or moral values" amounts to a prohibition on violence appears especially bizarre when one recalls that some of the most resolutely and unambiguously ethical socialists have ultimately taken up arms to achieve their aims. Think, for example, of the case of Camilo Torres, the Colombian priest whose moral outrage over social injustice led him to become a guerrilla insurgent (and to die in combat).¹⁰

A fourth unjustified assumption regarding ethical socialism consists in the belief that advocating socialism "as centrally involving, even based on, a set of ethical or moral values" is in some sense at odds with the belief that workers and their allies should, and do, struggle for socialism because it is in their material interests. Apart from the fact that adherence to a doctrine may of course be motivated by more than one basic consideration, one reason that it is a mistake to counterpose a political commitment based on material interests to one based on moral values is that a person's moral values

⁸ "As they [Kautsky, Lenin and others] saw it, the various non-Marxian schools of socialist thought could be called 'ethical socialism' since they tended to predicate socialism on the moral 'ought'" (Tucker, 1969, p. 33). The assumption that I am discussing is implicit in the view described by Tucker, and is likewise implicit in Edgley's remark (1990) to the effect that "the ideological character of its [ethical socialism's] idealist moralism weakens the socialist movement...by devaluing the need both for theory and practice. For if (moral) ideas are prior to action, what is chiefly necessary, if we are to change things, is to get our (moral) ideas right, and the rest will follow" (pp. 27-28). Rosa Luxemburg (2004b) implicitly identifies this assumption with "utopian socialism" (p. 242).

⁹ This is, for example, the tenor of the entry on ethical socialism in an East German dictionary of "scientific socialism" (*Ethischer Sozialismus*, 1984) which explicitly associates this doctrine with Eduard Bernstein (p. 94). For another text that associates ethical socialism with reformism, see the last source cited in note 5.

¹⁰ The case of William Morris, in many ways a paradigmatic ethical socialist, is also instructive in this connection. As E. P. Thompson (1994) has noted, at the end of his life Morris regarded "an ultimate revolutionary confrontation" (i.e., violence) as inevitable, even though Morris's views followed from what Thompson calls "his moral criticism of society" (pp. 67 and 66).

normally play some part in defining her interests, or at least her perception of these interests. I shall return to this question below.

The last unwarranted assumption that I wish to mention consists in the notion that an *ethical* socialism is necessarily incompatible with a *scientific* socialism, by which I mean, to quote Hal Draper (1990), a conception of socialism “base[d]...on a knowledgeable analysis of the real forces operating in society” (p. 7). Despite its widespread acceptance, the dichotomy between ethical socialism and scientifically-based socialism plainly represents a *false* dichotomy. One can be committed to both a scientific analysis of real social forces and trends, an empirically informed revolutionary perspective, and so on, and at the same time bring an ethical or normative framework to bear on one’s assessment of these trends and to guide one’s political activity. Indeed, it is difficult to see how one could possibly do without the latter. This is, of course, merely another way of suggesting that far from there being a fundamental incompatibility between positive and normative considerations, the fact/value distinction (or the “is/ought” problem) actually requires that we supplement science with normative commitments. I say a bit more about this below.

III

It should now be evident, I hope, that ethical socialism, construed as “the political tendency that advocates socialism as centrally involving, even based on, a set of ethical or moral values, values that are perhaps distinctively socialist,” does not necessarily imply any of the theoretical views or substantive positions with which it is usually associated, and owing to which it is generally dismissed, by Marxists. For this reason alone, the characteristic Marxist hostility toward the idea of ethical socialism appears entirely unwarranted. Indeed, rather than rejecting ethical socialism outright, as

they often do, Marxists should acknowledge that Marxism has much in common with ethical socialism, at least if they believe that Marx and Marxists base their denunciation and rejection of capitalism, and advocacy of socialism, partly on moral grounds, such as a commitment to some form of distributive justice.¹¹

Given the limited scope of the present essay, I will not attempt to provide the argumentation needed to defend this last claim, which remains somewhat controversial. Rather, I will simply assume that those who have argued that Marx and Marxists condemn capitalism as unjust and espouse socialism/communism on normative ethical grounds—at least in part—are correct. I will simply assume, in short, that the countless passages in which Marx and Engels (and subsequent Marxists) criticize capitalism for being inimical to *self-realization*, *community*, and *equality* warrant the conclusion that their condemnation of capitalism represented, at least in part, a *moral* condemnation.¹² Anyone interested in these issues would do well to consult Norman Geras’s indispensable essays on Marx and justice (1986; 1992), which provide a comprehensive survey of the relevant debates, while also establishing beyond doubt that Marx did indeed condemn capitalism as unjust.¹³ Yet although I cannot review the debates on Marx, Marxism, and justice here, I would like to address briefly two lines of reasoning against “moralizing” Marxism that, on the one hand, have been somewhat neglected in these debates and, on the other, are relevant to two of the putative deficiencies of ethical socialism that I have mentioned. The first line of reasoning holds that Marxism does not appeal to moral values at all because it is a science, while the second one holds that Marxism need not appeal to moral values because material interests can, by themselves, generate sufficient revolutionary motivation. Both lines of reasoning imply that Marxism is fundamentally different from ethical socialism.

¹¹ According to one such interpretation, that of the influential analytical Marxist John E. Roemer (1994), “the *ethical* condemnation of capitalism that should be taken to lie at the foundation of the Marxist charge of exploitation is, in fact, one based on the unjust inequality of distribution of ownership rights in the means of production” (p. 15; emphasis added).

¹² Here I am following G. A. Cohen (1995) in identifying human self-realization, community and equality as goods that are central to the Marxist outlook (p. 5). There are countless passages in Marx and

Engels’s writings that plainly reflect a commitment to one or more of these goods. For a few brief examples of such passages, see Marx (1975), pp. 273-77; Engels (1975), pp. 246 and 248-49; Marx and Engels (1976), p. 439; Marx (1986), p. 530; Marx (1987), p. 91; and Engels (1987), pp. 95-99 and 277-80.

¹³ According to G. A. Cohen (1995), “while Marx believed that capitalism was unjust, and that communism was just, he did not always realize that he had those beliefs” (p. 139). I believe that Cohen is right.

As for the first of these responses, namely that Marxism is fundamentally different from ethical socialism because Marxism constitutes a science, two questions need to be addressed. The first question concerns the scientific status of Marxism: Is Marxism a science? Or, rather: In what sense, if any, can it plausibly be called a science?

I think that it is quite clear today that Marxism's credentials as science are rather unimpressive, at least if we take a more or less familiar notion of science as our standard. In one sense, this should not surprise us, for in explaining the purportedly scientific character of Marxism, Marxists typically employ a decidedly loose concept of science. For example, when Rosa Luxemburg (2004a) has occasion to clarify the "scientific basis of socialism," she simply points to the fact that Marxism, unlike some rival socialist doctrines, duly appreciates "three results of capitalist development": "the growing *anarchy* of the capitalist economy...the progressive *socialization* of the process of production...and the *organization and class-consciousness* of the proletariat" (p. 132; emphasis in the original).¹⁴ Of course, others might well cite Marxist economics in arguing for the "scientific" character of Marxism, but this is hardly a promising strategy: quite apart from the problems that arise in reducing Marxism to its economic component, many question the soundness of Marxist economics, or at least important elements of it.

Yet let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Marxism does indeed constitute a science in a conventionally recognized sense of the term: Would this fact alone suffice to generate the characteristically Marxist condemnation of capitalism and defense of socialism? It should go without saying that this could only be the case if we were to reject the fact/value distinction, and assume that one can indeed uncontentionally derive an "ought" from an "is," that is to say, proceed from descriptive premises to a prescriptive conclusion without introducing some normative premise in one's argument. Now, some Marxists, underscoring that Marx himself appears to reject the fact/value distinction,

suggest that it is this perspective that allows one to deduce both a condemnation of capitalism and a commitment to socialism from Marxist science.¹⁵ The trouble with this position is, at bottom, twofold. First, whether or not Marx himself rejects the fact/value distinction, such a rejection constitutes a highly questionable theoretical stance. Second, even if it is possible to derive facts from values, it is still necessary to show why, precisely, *these* values—e.g., a commitment to socialism—follow from *those* facts; in other words, why, if the materialist conception of history is true, it follows that we ought strive to bring about socialism. As Rudolf Hilferding once put it, "it is one thing to recognise a necessity and another thing to work for this necessity. It is quite possible for someone convinced of the final victory of socialism to fight against it."¹⁶ Of course, if, on the other hand, we are skeptical of Marxism's scientific pretensions, or must implicitly use a *very broad* notion of science in granting Marxism's status as a science, then surely we should regard Marxism as essentially a political philosophy, and therefore in part a moral outlook, as political philosophies inevitably contain a normative moral component.

A second way of denying the thesis that Marxism is based on, or need be based on, moral values consists in arguing that such foundations prove unnecessary because Marxism appeals directly to material interests.¹⁷ This approach or strategy is, however, open to challenges on a number of grounds. Let me mention three of these. In the first place, we may note that avowed Marxists of all schools and stripes have regularly denounced capitalism in explicitly moral terms, which are often also the very terms that they use in presenting their own political ideals.¹⁸ In a similar vein, they have often underscored the higher moral caliber of militants inspired by Marxist thought; this was the case, for instance, of Alvaro Cunhal (1975), historic leader to the Portuguese Communist Party, who once published a pamphlet titled "The Moral Superiority of the Communists".¹⁹

¹⁴ Cf. Hal Draper's characterization of scientific socialism cited earlier.

¹⁵ See the brief discussion in Kamenka (1972), pp. 2-3, and cf. Sayers (1989), p. 95.

¹⁶ Cited Kamenka (1972), p. 2.

¹⁷ We find one statement of this idea in Levine (2005), p. 625.

¹⁸ For some relevant passages from Marx, see Geras (1986; 1992). Many relevant passages from subsequent Marxists (as well as Marx and Engels) are cited in Lukes (1985).

¹⁹ Lenin (1965) expresses a similar idea, when, in discussing the efforts of workers who performed voluntary labor, he refers to "the moral and political authority of the proletariat" (p. 423).

Secondly, the strict separation of interests from morality is implausible, for the simple reason that interests are in part constituted—that is, their content is determined—by moral beliefs. This is obviously the case if we conceive of interests along the lines of the definition suggested by the philosopher Simon Blackburn (1994), according to whom interests can be understood as “those things that a person needs, or that are conducive to his or her flourishing and success” (p. 196). But it is also obvious if we think of the conception of interest favored by many political scientists, who typically hold that interests reduce to fully informed preferences (Braybrooke, 1987, p. 202), and bear in mind that the latter are, in turn, at least partly informed by values (albeit not necessarily moral values).

Finally, it is in a sense disingenuous for Marxists to claim that by appealing to material interests they can dispense with any appeal to moral considerations, for Marxists actually use a notion of interests that subsumes morality, or at the very least conflates it with interests, insofar as moral commitments are a (superstructural) correlate, or expression, of certain class interests generated by the prevailing relations of production. Indeed, the connection between interests and morality tends to be, for Marxists, even tighter than it is for, say, non-Marxist political scientists (who, as already noted, tend to equate interests with fully informed preferences); and the rough characterization of this connection offered by Howard Selsam (1988), a mid-twentieth-century American Marxist philosopher, is one that many Marxists would surely accept: “The struggle of the working class for the overthrow of capitalism is justified and right not only because it expresses their [*sic*] needs and interests, hence their ethics, but because their ethics is the highest or best possible at this stage of history” (p. 174).

IV

If we grant, then, that Marxism contains, as a central component, a normative moral orientation, and likewise grant that ethical socialism does not necessarily have any of the problematic or objectionable—from a Marxist standpoint—implications discussed above, the conventional

contrast between Marxism and ethical socialism appears to lose much of its justification. Nonetheless, it remains true that even many Marxists who acknowledge that values figure centrally in Marx’s critique of capitalism and that Marxism includes a moral perspective tend to be dismissive of ethical socialism, when not actually employing the term as a slur.²⁰ The reason for this abiding aversion to the idea of ethical socialism surely derives, in most cases, from a rejection of anything smacking of a moralized conception of Marxism. Earlier I discussed the problems besetting two lines of reasoning against moralizing Marxism, that is, against the claim that Marxism does, or must, appeal to some moral commitments. (I should perhaps note, to avoid possible misunderstandings, that in referring to a “moralization of Marxism,” I am not endorsing *moralizing*, whether from a Marxist outlook or from any other perspective.) Before concluding, I would like to address briefly one other concern registered by some commentators who are critical of approaches to Marxism that emphasize its normative ethical dimensions. For these commentators, the problem is, as Andrew Collier (1981) succinctly puts it, “that there are no *specifically* socialist values,” and this is why we should refrain from “basing the case for socialism on values” (p. 22; emphasis in original).²¹ In short, if one appeals to putatively socialist values in advocating socialism, one will be appealing to values that are also central to other political philosophies and doctrines, and so be making the case for them as well.

It is probably true that “there are no specifically socialist values”: freedom, equality, community, non-domination, self-realization and the other values, or goods, usually invoked by Marxists are also upheld by adherents of rival political philosophies and doctrines. In fact, one interpretation of Marxism, that which views it as an “immanent critique” of liberalism, effectively identifies the values of Marxism with those of liberalism.²² At any rate, to argue that we ought not to base the case for (Marxist) socialism on values because there are no specifically socialist values is to ignore the fact that a political philosophy’s (or doctrine’s) *interpretation* of the values that it defends matters as much as the values themselves in defining the essence of

²⁰ For one example, see Nielsen (1989), p. 19.

²¹ The second citation from Collier is in fact a section heading. Cf. Roberts (1996), p. 208 and Levine (2003), p. 27.

²² See, for example, Gamble (1999), p. 4 and Mills (1962), p. 26.

the political philosophy in question. (For this reason, it makes sense to say that different political philosophies appeal to the same values only if we consider the values as abstract generalities.) Different interpretations, and combinations, of the same values yield different theoretical conclusions and imply different practical policies, which is why, say, socialist democracy does not mean the same thing as liberal democracy. In short, to the extent that (Marxist) socialists' understanding of certain values (or goods) differs from the understanding of these same values in rival political traditions, it seems quite reasonable to appeal to these values in arguing for socialism.

V

By way of conclusion, let me mention a few of the benefits of duly appreciating the moral dimensions of Marxism. To begin with, this interpretation of Marxism affords us an accurate understanding of the essence of Marxism as a theoretical tradition and political project, something that remained beyond reach so long as Marxism “sought to obscure from itself and others a feature integral to its nature” (Geras, 1992, p. 65). Secondly, the moral interpretation of Marxism also helps to elucidate the significant affinities between Marxism and religion, which mainly concern moral commitments and have very little to do with the superficial parallels that are so often cited in this connection. Thirdly, this understanding of Marxism facilitates a more robust unification of Marxism and feminism, which will never occur so long as we think of the former as a non-moral scientific project and the latter as a politico-moral philosophy, or doctrine. Finally, the moral interpretation of Marxism offers us insight into Marxism's enduring appeal, which is, without question, far greater than that of any form of ethical socialism, and understandably so.

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