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Marx's Political Universalism

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## Marx's Political Universalism

Harry van der Linden

People start small revolutions, but there is not a goal for humanity, there is nothing that interests mankind, there are only disruptions. It is possible to think something like that. This thought tempts us endlessly.... But...I resist, and I know that I will die in hope; but it is necessary to create a foundation for this hope (Sartre, 1980, pp. 180-81).

### 1. Introduction

In *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, Michael Walzer argues that although people from different countries who fight for better political conditions may share some political concerns, their struggles are to be seen as separate "marches" each with their own goals rather than as struggles converging toward some final political ideal shared by all. To explicate his view, Walzer recalls a film clip of a political march in Prague during the "wonderful year 1989," which showed some protestors carrying signs with only the words "truth" or "justice" on them. Walzer states that he immediately knew what these words meant and that he thus at once felt solidarity with the marchers. On his account, the meanings that he grasped were "minimalist" or "thin," and involved disapproval of fabricated news and tyranny as well as a demand for honest leaders and impartial law (Walzer, 1994, p. 2). Such "thin" meanings are widely shared and may even be universal; they are abstracted from "thick" or "maximalist" meanings, which are detailed and vary from one cultural community (with a shared history and identity) to another. This implies that "while we [can] march in spirit with the men and women of Prague, we have in fact our own parade" (p. 8). In other words, once the marchers from Prague or we pursue our own truth and justice, or once they or we pursue political values in their maximalist meanings, our normative discourses and goals are local and particular. Walzer concludes that the traditional idea of the left that all the different marches will eventually "merge into one grand parade" is to be rejected (p. 9).

Walzer, then, rejects "political universalism," that is, the regulative idea that there is a political ideal valid for all human beings. This idea requires us to strive for a world of a unified humanity in which all people will share the same basic political values and participate in similar basic ideal institutions. Political universalism is an aspect of what Walzer in his Tanner Lectures (1990) calls "covering-law universalism," which also includes a universalism of nonpolitical values. In his view, covering-law universalists succumb to the illusion that they can transcend their own location and particularity and thus arrive at comprehensive universal moral or political proposals. Walzer (1994, pp. 41 ff.) argues that our only "maximalist" task as social critics is to develop an internal critique of our own society. Our task with respect to other cultural communities or "tribes" is "minimalist": We may hope, as Walzer himself does,

that all the different cultural communities of our world each in their own way will become democratic (sharing "thin" democracy), but we can insist only that they recognize each other's right to self-determination and seek to settle their often conflicting political aspirations (pp. ix-x and 81-83). [1]

Walzer's work reflects the pluralist and particularist orientation common to contemporary political thought, including that of the left. The writings of Karl Marx are incompatible with this orientation in that they offer a comprehensive political universalism. For Marx, communism is a universal project and its attainment involves that all humans live in democratic societies with socialized economies, sharing such values as self-realization through creative work, community, and participation. In *The German Ideology* (1845-46, p. 57), Marx maintains that communism requires a revolution by "the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously." He later modifies this view, claiming in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875, p. 346) that there will be a first phase of communism prior to full communism, a phase "still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society." Moreover, he grants in a speech that workers in some countries "may attain their goal by peaceful means" (Marx, 1872, p. 324). Throughout his writings, however, Marx views communism as ultimately a world-historical project that requires workers from all nations to set aside their cultural differences and become a universal class. The famous closing words of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848, p. 98) call for this "grand march": "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!" Marx is virtually silent about the role of the social critic, but his own life and work testify that he saw the critic's task as anything but local and particularist.

My main aim in this paper is to arrive at a defensible form of Marxian or socialist political universalism through a critical examination of Marx's own political universalism. In the next section, I will outline several moral errors that Walzer ascribes to political universalism, including Marx's, and show that Walzer largely misdirects his criticisms because what primarily accounts for Marx committing the errors is his Hegelian metaphysical conception of history, not his political universalism as such. In the third section, I will propose some modifications of Marx's philosophical anthropology as a step toward meeting Walzer's epistemic objection that the attempt to formulate a universal political ideal is pointless because it is inevitably marred by one's particularist and local perspective. I will sketch in the fourth section an alternative conception of history, a critical universal history, that avoids the moral errors of Marx's metaphysical conception. In conclusion I will briefly argue that to effect progressive change in our global economy, we need a political universalist orientation rather than Walzer's pluralist approach.

## **2. Metaphysical Universal History**

Walzer's normative criticisms of political universalism boil down to three errors that he thinks the political universalist is bound to make. The first is that the universalist judges the political, economic, or cultural endeavors of people solely in terms of their contribution to the alleged

final political ideal, with the result that historical events outside the "main march" are seen as without any real value. Walzer explicitly ascribes this error to Marx. Discussing the covering-law universalism of imperialist Christian nations, he writes:

The Lord's servants stand in the center of history, constitute its main current, while the histories of the others are so many chronicles of ignorance and meaningless strife. Indeed, there is a sense in which they have no history at all -- as in the Hegelian/ Marxist conception -- since nothing of world-historical significance has happened to them (Walzer, 1990, pp. 511-12).

For Walzer, no march has world-historical significance, whether it be the 1989 demonstrations in Prague, the long march of the Chinese communists, or Israel's exodus from Egypt (Walzer, 1994, p. 9). Instead, we should view history as what Odo Marquard (1991, p. 51) calls a "multiversal history." Walzer states: "The exodus from Egypt liberates only Israel, only the people whose exodus it was.... [T]here is no universal history, but rather a series of histories...in each of which value can be found" (Walzer, 1990, p. 514).

The second practical error of political universalism is misguided pride and absolute moral confidence about the rightness of one's cause. The covering-law universalists take themselves to be "the chosen, the elect, the true believers, the vanguard" (Walzer, 1990, p. 512). The two errors contribute to the final and most serious error: The political universalist tends to accept or even support oppressive practices viewed as conducive to the realization of the final political ideal. Walzer sees this error exemplified in Marx's articles on India. Marx held that although England caused immense suffering in India by destroying its traditional village system, it also unwittingly served the interest of humanity by modernizing and industrializing India. He wrote:

[C]an mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. [So] we have the right...to exclaim with Goethe: 'Should this torture [of India] then torment us, since it brings us greater pleasure? Were not through the rule of Timur, souls devoured without measure?'" (Marx, 1853, p. 307).

Walzer (1990, p. 542) comments that Marx's view here rests on the wrong "belief that mankind has a single destiny, which all its members must alike 'fulfill'." Moreover, his "benevolent intention" assumes that the victims "are dim, unenlightened, barbarian, ignorant, and passive" and are "helplessly waiting to be rescued by the more advanced nations" (p. 543).

In my view, Walzer correctly points to some serious moral errors in Marx, but explains them in the wrong way: Their real source is Marx's Hegelian understanding of historical progress, not his political universalism as such. It seems that Walzer goes wrong partly because he conflates Marx's political universalism and his Hegelian conception of history. I will proceed to outline Marx's Hegelian conception and show that it leads him not only to commit the errors that Walzer notes but some other moral errors as well.

For Hegel, history is the unfolding of Reason, or the process through which Reason becomes aware of its own essence. This implies that history loses its contingency and becomes meaningful, and even justified, as a process of human emancipation, for Reason or Mind can only attain self-awareness through the finite human mind. It also implies that Reason acquires full self-knowledge through Hegel's work, or, as Leszek Kolakowski (1978, p. 60) puts it, his work is the "Mind's autobiography." The unfolding of Reason requires a growth of human freedom, and Hegel argues that Reason uses "world-historical figures" to bring about higher forms of the state that guarantee this freedom. The process culminates in constitutional monarchy in which civil servants are the "universal class" with the task of promoting "the universal interests of the community" (Hegel, 1821, p. 132).

Marx takes over Hegel's schema (see also Van der Linden, 1988, 260ff.): Communism, as articulated in his own work, is "the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution." Marx continues: "The entire movement of history is...the *actual* act of creation of communism" (Marx, 1844a, p. 348). Analogous to Hegel's self-realizing journey of the Mind, this movement starts with primitive communism, goes through a long history of alienated existence, and culminates in mediated or self-conscious communism. History, then, is communist humanity coming into existence, and leads to "the complete restoration of man to himself as a social being" (p. 348). The proletariat must execute the final step of humanity's recovery of its social nature on a higher plane. Marx's first statement of this idea is primarily a Hegelian philosophical deduction (cf. Kolakowski, 1978, p. 130). Marx (1843-44, p. 256) searches for the "universal class" whose emancipation will constitute the emancipation of humanity and argues that a class that is totally negated by society, or is "the *total loss* of humanity," is the universal class because its emancipation as the negation of the negation will be "the *total redemption of humanity*." Marx concludes that the proletariat is this universal class, even though he had at the time little empirical knowledge of the proletariat.

Both Hegel and Marx offer a history of humanity, or a universal history, that is based on a metaphysical or dogmatic teleology, not on a critical teleology in Kant's sense; for the *telos* of history is seen as immanent to, and constitutive or determinative of, history. At some places in his work, Marx explicitly rejects such a teleology, stating, for example, that history is "speculatively distorted" when "later history is made the goal of earlier history" (Marx, 1845-46, p. 58). Yet, Marx never totally freed himself from Hegel's influence here, and throughout his writings he supplements or substitutes causal explanations and predictions by statements to the effect that certain events inevitably will occur, or simply had to occur, because they constitute a necessary link in history as the unfolding of communism. [2] One example of this is that Marx on basis of his philosophical deduction of the historic mission of the proletariat argues that this mission "is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at this moment *regards* as its aim"; rather, "[i]t is a question of "*what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do" (Marx, 1844c, p. 47). One problem here is that Marx in effect protects his view of the future role of the working class from modification or refutation by his own later empirical research.

Jon Elster (1985) provides numerous other examples of how Marx's metaphysical teleology had a distorting effect on his otherwise path-breaking empirical research. My main concern, however, is its negative normative implications. A first consequence is the misplaced moral confidence that Walzer detects in Marx, which, I think, helps to explain the latter's moral mistake of treating many socialists, including Proudhon, Weitling, Lassalle, and Bakunin, in a contemptuous manner, both in person and writing. The contempt partly rests on Marx's conviction that they lacked insight into the true course of history, whereas he had solved the riddle of history and knew its direction. Replying to a letter in which Marx had attacked a fellow socialist, Proudhon perceptively wrote back: "[L]et us show the world an example of a learned and far-sighted tolerance; but simply because we are at the head of a movement, let us not set ourselves up as the leaders of a new intolerance" (cited in Wilson, 1940, pp. 154-55). The plea fell on deaf ears, and intolerant polemics all too often have characterized Marxism since its inception.

Marx's misplaced moral certainty also seems a factor in his ultimate acceptance of the oppression and suffering that the British inflicted on India, for this harm is conceived as one that is destined to lead toward the good. What further facilitates this attitude is that Marx follows Hegel in seeing history as a cunning and retributive process. Hegel maintains that the world-historical figures, such as Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon, "trample down many an innocent flower," but when their task is done "they fall off like empty hulls from the kernel": They die young, are murdered or exiled, while the Spirit triumphs because the state has evolved into a higher form (Hegel, 1822-31, pp. 31-33). Marx states his version of the "cunning of reason" in the *Manifesto*, whereby the bourgeoisie and the productive forces fulfill roles analogous to Hegel's world-historical figures and the state, respectively. Competition among capitalists forces them to continuously expand the productive forces and exploit the proletariat. This creates the material conditions for communist society, as well as the impulse for revolution, and so the bourgeoisie cannot help but produce "its own grave-diggers" (Marx, 1848, p. 79). Elsewhere, Marx (1856, p. 300) sums up the matter by stating that "History is the judge -- its executioner, the proletariat." We may assume that Marx also saw this retributive justice appear on the horizon in India, viewing the Sepoy mutiny of 1857 as foreshadowing it. He wrote in response to this rebellion that "[t]here is something in human history like retribution; and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself" (Marx, 1857, 353).

Marx's error of disvaluing historical events outside or against the unfolding of communism can also be traced back to Hegel, who describes events outside Reason's march as deserted by the living Spirit; these events are actual, but not real (*wirklich*). Hence, Marx (1853, p. 306) echoes Hegel when he states that Indian village life before the arrival of British capitalism harbored "undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life." No doubt, Marx's judgment partly simply reflects a lack of empirical knowledge on his side (cf. Chandra, 1981, pp. 13, 32, 47), but the point is that his Hegelian notion of progress predisposes him to his erroneous view of India. For Marx, the productive forces are "real," as is reflected in his materialist conception of history (cf. Singer, 1980, pp. 41-42) and his praise for the bourgeoisie as having created "more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together"

(Marx, 1848, p. 72). India before British colonialism was outside the "real" movement of history. So were most people in Europe until the bourgeoisie through the creation of large cities "rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life" (p. 71). Marx further describes peasants of his own time as "reactionary" because they "try to roll back the wheel of history" (p. 77). On his account, then, it is better to be in the center of history, to be "living" and exploited, than to be outside or in opposition to history's course, to be deserted or "dead."

Going beyond Walzer, it should be noted that Marx's metaphysical universal history also invites a misguided evaluation of struggles that are progressive on his own account in that they are judged in instrumentalist terms only. Marx comes close to making this mistake in a speech to radical workers in London, stating that from the angle of the future proletarian revolution the "so-called Revolutions of 1848 were but poor incidents," and that "[s]team, electricity, and the self-acting mule were revolutionists of a rather more dangerous character than even citizens Barbès, Raspail and Blanqui" (Marx, 1856, p. 299). Here Marx certainly displays little sensitivity toward people who with great harm to themselves sought to improve the condition of the working class: The productive forces are seen as more significant instruments in bringing about the final ideal. [3]

So the problem is that the historian who adopts a Marxian metaphysical teleology might rob historical agents of their dignity, reducing them to means only. Relatedly, how can Marxian historical agents avoid seeing themselves this way? Another moral shortcoming of Marx's Hegelian dialectical view of history is that it predisposes him to the view that the emancipation of the proletariat (as the negation of the negation) must take place through revolution and will be motivated by immediate need or self-interest without considerations of justice. The result is that moral reflection on the means of emancipation becomes irrelevant. More broadly, Marx's metaphysical teleology encourages one to see practical choices as only theoretical problems of determining the future course of history. Marx made this error when he dismissed peasant struggles as "reactionary" because they go against the "wheel of history." In the *Manifesto*, he also includes in this dismissal the struggles by shopkeepers, small manufacturers, and artisans. A familiar tragedy of the communist movement is that many communists left it to their leaders to figure out the course of history and thus determine the direction of their future political actions. The rank and file members relinquished their own independent moral judgment and undermined their integrity.

Political pluralism does not really solve these moral errors that Marx himself committed or that his work promoted: Local metaphysical histories may involve that basically the same errors are repeated within each local framework. This underlines that Walzer's normative objections to political universalism is misdirected. This critique only shows that Marx's metaphysical teleology must be rejected. I will sketch in the fourth section a more adequate conception of history -- a critical universal history -- in accordance with the communist political ideal.

### 3. Shared Humanity

Marx uses his anthropology of the *1844 Manuscripts* both to criticize capitalist society and to formulate his communist alternative. For Marx (1844a, 348), communism is "the true *appropriation* of the human *essence* through and for man." The appropriation of the human essence "through man" involves both a humanization of our "natural being" and a naturalization of our "human being." Our "human being" consists of our distinctively human capacities or powers, and communist individuals will use these powers to make the functions that they share with other animals (their "natural being") distinctively human. Their "human being" will be naturalized in that they will express their uniquely human capacities in material objects and feel also no opposition between their natural and distinctively human powers. The appropriation of the human essence will be "for man" in that projects of self-realization in communist society will be mutually enriching and affirming rather than mutually restricting, as in capitalist society (Marx, 1844b, pp. 277-78).

Marx believes that in all societies thus far our powers have been realized in an incomplete and distorted manner. One reason for this is that "not only the five senses, but also the so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, the *human* sense, the humanity of the senses -- all these come into being only through the existence of *their* objects, through *humanized* nature (Marx, 1844a, 353). So only "the society that is *fully developed* produces man in all the richness of his being" (p. 354). What is further at stake is that all societies have been oppressive, leaving most individuals with few opportunities to develop their capabilities and distorting the humanity of everyone's senses. Marx focuses on capitalist society and how it with its division of labor has stunted the individual and social development of workers. He also notes that in capitalism everyone is estranged from their senses because objects are enjoyed only if owned (pp. 351-52).

Since Marx holds that there is a shared humanity, or a set of essential human powers, his anthropology offers a standard for comparatively assessing societies across cultures or time. The standard is the degree and scope of the realization of our essential capabilities and is an important element of the critical universal history that I will sketch later. Marx, however, did not provide a systematic and detailed explication of our essential capabilities, and so his anthropology must be elaborated and improved. The recent work of Martha Nussbaum is promising for this purpose.

Following Aristotle's idea that the good society must provide for the conditions of good human functioning, Nussbaum argues on basis of an "Aristotelian political conception" for social democracy. She claims that Marx adhered to the same political conception (Nussbaum, 1988, pp. 183-84), but draws less from his work, presumably because he did not fully explicate this conception. Her argument proceeds in three steps. The first is a formulation of "the constitutive circumstances of the human being." Here Nussbaum (1990) seeks to state defining features of human life that are shared by people across cultures and time. The second step is to formulate on basis of these universal features a list of "basic human

functional capabilities." The final step is to sketch the institutions that --for our time -- optimally enable everyone to develop fully their basic capabilities according to their own choices.

Some constitutive elements of human life are that we are mortal, have bodies in need of food, drink, shelter, and movement, have sexual desire, are able to experience pleasure and pain, and need care and protection of others for our initial growth (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 219-22). For Marx, these elements are aspects of our "natural being," and what characterizes "man" as "natural being" is that "the *objects* of his drives exist outside him as *objects* independent of him," forcing him to appropriate them (Marx, 1844a, p. 389). Additional constitutive elements of human life are sense-perception, imagination, thinking, the feeling of concern for and connectedness to other humans, and the sense of being part of nature. Marx (1844a) describes all but the first of these as distinctively human characteristics, arguing that what distinguishes us from other animals is that we engage in self-conscious, free, and planned work in cooperation with others, use all of nature as our field of operation, produce according to the standard inherent in each thing, and thus also produce "in accordance with the laws of beauty" (p. 329). Only Nussbaum (1990, pp. 222-23) stresses as defining human experiences that we feel separate from others (living our own life), desire some private space and things for ourselves, laugh and play, and use practical reason in managing our own lives and reflecting on what is good and right.

Nussbaum (1990, p. 225) derives the following list of basic human functional capabilities (stated in abbreviated and paraphrased form): (1) Being able to live a complete life; (2) being able to move, have good health, adequate food, shelter, and sexual opportunities; (3) being able to avoid needless pains and have pleasures; (4) being able to imagine, think, and use all the senses; (5) being able to develop attachments to things and persons; (6) being able to use practical reason; (7) being able to live with and for others; (8) being able to relate to nature; (9) being able to laugh and play; and, (10) being able to live one's own life in one's own setting. For Nussbaum, a life lacking any one of these functional capabilities falls significantly short in humanness (p. 225). She also argues that (6) and (7) have an "architectonic role in human life, suffusing and also organizing all the other functions -- which will count only as truly human functions only in so far as they are done with some degree of guidance from both of these" (Nussbaum, 1993, p. 266). [4] So it is, for example, in the planning of a meal and enjoying it with others that our need for food is truly humanized.

It is not crucial for my purpose here to discuss how Nussbaum argues for social democracy from the general claim that a good society must enable citizens to function well in terms of the ten capabilities. Instead, it should be noted what Marxian political thought can gain from her work. To begin, Marx offers a too-limited account of how to arrive at an explication of our shared humanity. He claims that it is how we produce that sets us apart from other animals, but then further restricts this approach by stating that industry is "the *open* book of the essential powers of man" (Marx, 1844a, p. 354). Nussbaum (1992, pp. 215-16) holds that we can derive the constitutive elements of human life from the actual self-understandings of people in different times and cultures, especially from their stories and myths concerned with

reflecting on what defines our humanity. Her approach leads her to neglect that the very fact that we meet our needs and acquire new needs through social labor is a fundamental aspect of our humanness. [5] On the other hand, Marx's focus on industry, and even his broader focus on productive activity (which also includes, for example, art and music), leads him to pay inadequate attention to the importance to human life of our capacity (6) to use practical reason, and especially moral reason. Two correlated mistakes are that Marx thinks that the emancipation (socialization) of labor will automatically lead to human emancipation, and that he describes full communist society as beyond justice and rights (Marx, 1875, pp. 346-47). Our "separateness" by itself already shows the inadequacy of this description in that rights are needed to protect our capacity (10) to live our own lives. Marx, however, seems to have believed that communism would dissolve all conflicts between the self and others. A final way in which Marx's view of human flourishing should be broadened is that he underestimated our need (9) for play and leisure.

Nussbaum's procedure of arguing from human capabilities to ideal institutions points to Marx's failure to discuss in any detail the institutions that enable optimal human functioning. His Hegelian understanding of progress helps to explain why he failed to see that elaborated visions of political ideals are important to motivating and directing emancipatory struggles (cf. Lukes, 1985, p. 43). One specific shortcoming of Marx's vision is that he both suggests that human self-realization will take place through material production (in contrast to alienated work in capitalist society) and that the "realm of necessity" must be reduced as much as possible so that free human development will be maximized outside production (Marx, 1863-67, p. 820). He was also unclear about the market and economic planning in communist society. Moreover, Marx never really explained how the communist state could lose its "political character," and, yet, retain elections, engage in planning, and provide for collective goods (Marx, 1874, p. 336; 1875, p. 345). Recent Marxists (see Bardhan, 1993; Roemer, 1994) have done much to overcome what Irving Howe rightly described as "an intellectual scandal," namely, "[socialism's] paucity of thought regarding the workings of socialist society" (cited in Lukes, 1985, p. 46, from *Dissent*, 1981, 493). However, some of the recent proposals assume that what primarily makes communism (socialism) superior to liberal capitalism is greater equality in the distribution of material resources. A Marxian approach that emphasizes good human functioning may make a stronger case for communism by also arguing, for example, on basis of capabilities (6), (7), and creative productivity for workplace democracy. Moreover, a normative framework of good functioning will more directly focus our attention on the question of how socialism can overcome the obsessive consumption patterns of capitalism.

It is clear that the formulation of universal ideal political institutions is an ongoing task, but is the task misguided, as Walzer claims? The weakness of Walzer's own pluralism shows the strength of political universalism. Consider his discussion of another important political event of 1989, the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square. Walzer argues that the solidarity he felt with the Chinese students underlines his own pluralist view because the basis of this feeling was a minimalist rejection of tyranny, not a maximalist support of their different view of democracy (Walzer, 1994, pp. 59-60). Walzer continues to state that if he were invited to lecture about democracy to the students he would tell them what the idea means to him, and

he "would try to avoid the missionizing tone, for my views include the idea that democracy in China will have to be *Chinese* -- and my explanatory powers do not reach to what that means" (p. 60). In response, it should be first of all noted that the political universalist who sees the formulation of ideal institutions as an ongoing task would certainly not proceed in a missionizing tone. To the contrary, the universalist would listen carefully to the Chinese students, for, unlike Walzer, she assumes that she and her audience share a substantive common humanity and that they might have proposals that increase her understanding of how democratic institutions can improve human functioning. [In fact, the democratic struggles of 1989 stimulated renewed interest in democracy in Western Europe and the U.S.] Further, what can the Chinese students gain from Walzer if he is right that we are all deeply embedded in thick moralities and only share abstracted thin or minimalist moralities? If he cannot contribute to the formulation of *Chinese* democracy, how can his audience grasp and assess his *American* democracy? It is only really important for the students to hear Walzer if they assume that his thick conception of democracy can significantly (not just in a "thin" manner) become their own. Walzer wrongly places the emphasis: The issue is not *Chinese* democracy, but Chinese *democracy*. The universal is "thick" here, while the particular is "thin." And, of course, the political universalist has no stake in denying that the same basic institutions may have local variations. Rather, she only assumes that the more people are freely creating their own societies and debating with each other which institutional arrangements are best the more their basic institutions will converge. The views of the participants will be deeply influenced by their traditions, but their shared humanity can both sustain and direct the debate.

#### **4. Critical Universal History**

The fundamental philosophical premise of critical universal history, as based on Kant's critical historical teleology, is that the ideal of a humanity unified through common basic political institutions and shared values may be postulated as the goal of history, but this goal must be seen as setting a task for empirical humanity, not as a goal determinative or constitutive of history -- except, of course, when empirical humanity finally makes the postulated goal its own. [6] Like the metaphysical historian, the critical historian recognizes that in light of the (postulated) goal of history the past has led to unintended progress, but the critical historian denies that unintended good consequences in any way justify oppressive practices and are to be seen as inevitable moments in the unfolding of the good. Now precisely because the future is open according to the critical historian, despair may emerge: Will empirical humanity ever take on the task of promoting the goal of history? In the words of Sartre (cited earlier), what creates despair is that perhaps "there is nothing that interests mankind, there are only disruptions." This despair undermines the hope that we might derive from humanity's tremendously increased technological abilities to provide a decent life for all.

A primary task of critical universal history is to recover or support hope through showing that empirical humanity is concerned with the ideal of a unified humanity. Kant sought to do this on basis of the enthusiasm that the French Revolution (in its early stages) generated among its spectators. On his account, this enthusiasm showed that there is a "moral tendency of the

human race" because it was directed toward international peace and the liberal state as the political ends promoted by the Revolution, and these ends facilitate the realization of a unified humanity, or the kingdom of ends (Kant, 1798, pp. 182-83). Kant did not deny that the revolutionaries in their initial enthusiasm had similar moral concerns, but this would be harder to establish because their self-interest was at stake in their struggle, while the enthusiasm of the spectators was against their own self-interest due to oppressive responses by their governments. Another reason for turning to the spectators is that this grounds hope: The spectators, including those of future generations, might become the new revolutionaries when suitable conditions for political change occur once again. Marx (against his "Hegelian self") also sought to reveal the universal in the particular historical event. His event is the Paris Commune, "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor" (Marx, 1871, p. 212). Marx sees the revolutionaries as deeply committed to this goal: "Working, thinking, fighting, bleeding Paris -- almost forgetful, in its incubation of a new society, of the cannibals at its gates -- radiant in the enthusiasm of its historic initiative!" (p. 220). For the same reason as Kant, Marx is also concerned with the spectators, stating in the closing words of *The Civil War in France* that "[w]orking men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class" (p. 233).

Critical universal history grounds hope but offers no guarantee for progress. Historical certainty or optimism presumes a metaphysical view of progress. To be sure, it is important to examine the social conditions that make progressive collective action possible and successful - Marx was right to emphasize this in opposition to the utopian socialists -- but, as the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe confirm once again, we are not really able to predict when such conditions will occur. Another comparative strength of critical universal history is that it upholds the dignity of historical agents. The historical actors are not evaluated in terms of their political success, or viewed as a link in the road toward the ideal. Rather, the critical historian will esteem the historical actors because they were inspired by the ideal of a unified humanity and tried to promote it. Here critical universal history places an important -- but in the Marxist tradition, often neglected or dismissed -- moral limiting constraint on emancipatory struggle: The historian can only illuminate the ideal of a unified humanity in the historical event if the actors do not deny this ideal through their own actions. Ernst Toller, one of the leaders of the last phase of the Munich Revolution of 1918-19, provides the guideline: "We were demanding humanity, and we had to show humanity ourselves" (cited in Keck, 1975, p. 421). Following this guideline, politically committed individuals can uphold their dignity in the face of progress, for they share a common ideal and intention with their historians. Revolutionary politics of terror, to the contrary, obscure the vision of the ideal (cf. Sartre, 1980, pp. 174-75), and the revolutionaries in their attempt to justify terror for the sake of the good reduce themselves to what a metaphysical history tends to make all individuals who struggle for emancipation: "means only."

The works of Kant and Marx illustrate that there exist different explications of the ideal of a unified humanity, especially with regard to the basic political institutions of the ideal. This does not undermine, however, the task of critical history to support hope, nor does it pose a

threat for the dignity of historical actors. We have noted that there is significant cross-cultural and historical continuity in what counts as basic elements of human flourishing, and this continuity makes it possible for critical historians and historical actors with different conceptions of the ideal of a unified humanity to engage in a moral dialogue, actually or counterfactually, concerning its most adequate articulation. The historians and the actors share a concern for a humanity that seeks to promote the good human functioning of all, and their dialogue about this ideal safeguards that historical actors receive the memory that is owed to them in light of their emancipatory efforts. The dialogue may also be a source of hope: There is progress in the articulation of the ideal of a unified humanity.

It can now readily be seen that Marx's political universalism, conjoined with a critical universal history, avoids the errors that Walzer ascribes to it. Had Marx been a critical historian, he would not have tolerated the "crimes" of England in India on the ground that England was "the unconscious tool of history" in bringing about India's ultimate emancipation, for this prediction is based on a metaphysical teleology that goes beyond the limits of reason (knowledge). Also, and more importantly, the critical socialist historian is committed to the view that the means of progress must reflect her political ideal. Kant sets the example: He vehemently condemned the commercial exploitation of non-Western nations by the European nations, even though he also noted that capitalist trade may in the long run be conducive to political liberty and international peace. The "critical" Kant (1795, pp. 106-07) writes that "China and Japan, having had experience of such guests, have wisely placed restrictions on them"; the "metaphysical" Marx (1848, p. 71), however, notes with approval that "the cheap prices of [the bourgeoisie's] commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate."

The critical universal historian also will not commit the error of pride and misguided moral certainty, recognizing that the formulation of the socialist ideal is an ongoing task. Further, she will not make the error of disvaluing events outside the "main march." One reason for this is that she denies the very notion of a main or single road toward the political ideal, seeing universal significance in many "marches." Marx made a step in the right direction when he granted that communism may be realized through parliamentary reform in some countries (Marx, 1872), and when he proposed that in the event of a Russian revolution the Russian peasant commune could be a crucial contribution to the emancipation of labor (Marx, 1881). Even small historical events may have universal meaning. Marx (1844a, p. 365) himself offers the example of how "the brotherhood of man" is visible in the meetings of French socialist workers. Last, the purpose of critical universal history must be kept in view: To support the commitment to universal political praxis by showing that empirical humanity is concerned with the ideal of a unified humanity. There are many valuable activities, political or otherwise, that simply fall outside the perspective of universal history, but that does not make them less valuable.

What distinguishes the critical universal historian and the multiversal historian, then, is not that the universal historian claims that "marches" lack value simply because they are only of

local or particular significance, but rather that the multiversal historian denies that "marches" may have universal significance. It seems, however, implausible to view the French Revolution and the Paris Commune as primarily local events, or as having thick meaning for only the French "parade." Likewise, the events of 1989 are more than occasions of "minimalist" solidarity, no matter how deeply felt. The immediate spectators of the French Revolution and the Paris Commune were still relatively local; the world-wide response to the events of 1989 provides us with the hope that a world public concerned with universal human emancipation is forming.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

My main focus thus far has been to try to show that a socialist political universalist perspective is tenable and offers a good interpretive framework for history. Let me conclude by arguing that progressive change in our world requires a political universalist approach instead of Walzer's pluralist orientation. A first problem with Walzer's view is that he holds that social critics should limit their maximalist critiques to their own cultural communities, and they may only launch minimalist critiques of other cultural communities. On his account, "[s]ocial critics [should] mostly work out of a Home Office" (Walzer, 1994, p. 49). Who is, however, to determine what counts as the home office? Walzer's reasoning invites an endless multiplication of cultural communities that reject "maximalist" criticisms of their mode of life as "external." Walzer is unclear concerning the possible content of "minimalist critiques," but it seems that only cultural communities that engage in gross violations of human rights or are belligerent fall within the scope of this critique. So Walzer's pluralism undermines rigorous substantive political debate in the public sphere, whether it be local, national, or international, and thus eliminates an emancipatory source for cultural communities with modes of life antithetical to human flourishing. Socialist political universalism, to the contrary, holds that no cultural communities are exempt from normative criticisms in terms of how well they allow the development of our human capabilities.

Even though Walzer (1994) maintains that "[t]he crucial commonality of the human race is particularism: we participate, all of us, in thick cultures that are our own" (p. 83), he also notes that "[c]onfronted with modernity, all the human tribes are endangered species" (p. 72). He adds that there is a right "to build walls against contemporary culture," but that the political recognition of this right "cannot guarantee the success of the resistance." Walzer's insistence on our inevitable cultural particularity, then, is partly wishful thinking in that he fears that our world is becoming increasingly culturally homogeneous. I do not share Walzer's sense that all cultures are intrinsically valuable and deserve to be preserved; rather, cultural change for the sake of fuller human flourishing is desirable. However, the rich and diverse self-realized individual envisioned by Marx presumes cultural diversity (cf. Kain, 1993, pp. 245ff.), and the dreams of global corporations of a world-wide cultural homogeneity are indeed nightmares (cf. Barnett, 1994). But how can we prevent the emergence of a superficial universal culture centered around the consumption of goods that are produced and aggressively marketed by global corporate giants? How can other harms that these corporations inflict, such as global environmental destruction, depletion of resources, the violation of basic rights in the

workplace, subsistence wages in the Third World, and the breakdown of local communities everywhere through capital flight, be prevented?

Marx rightly stressed that the emancipation of the working class required the formation of solidarity among workers, both within individual states and across states, and he correctly saw that nationalism is antithetical to this goal. Marx's mistake was that he generally underestimated the depth of nationalist feelings among the working class. Walzer's work is an antidote to this mistake, but falls into the opposite trap of describing each of us as "locked" in our particular cultural communities. Thus his work blocks off the road toward the kind of very close international human cooperation that is needed to address the harms inflicted by the giant global capitalist companies. Andrew Collier (1992, p. 90) calls, for the sake of this purpose, for a "new internationalism" among workers of all nations; more broadly, what is necessary is a "globalization from below" consisting of intense cooperation between human rights groups, peace movements, feminist groups, environmental movements, consumer protection groups, etc. from across the globe (Brecher, 1994). Cooperation between these groups may locally control or prevent corporate abuses, but, more importantly, it is needed to pressure national governments into adopting far-reaching international economic and environmental agreements -- covering investments, corporate taxation, workers's rights, minimum wage, safety standards, pollution standards, etc. -- that enable local communities everywhere to shape their own future (cf. Robinson, 1995, p. 380). Regional economic and environmental agreements are also needed. From a socialist perspective, the ideal of flourishing communities ultimately requires that the means of production are socialized and come under democratic control, and this aim would necessitate even greater global cooperation. It is clear, however, that even modest steps toward improved lives for all human beings demand that social critics and activists from all nations come to think and work together, not in a "minimalist" fashion, as Walzer would have it, but in a "maximalist" way.

### Notes

1. Walzer (1990) calls his own view reiterative universalism, reflecting that the different cultural communities reiterate self-determination, justice, truth, etc., in their "thin" or "minimalist" meanings. I find this terminology somewhat confusing in that the basic content of what is reiterated is particular. I will use the term "political pluralism" to refer to Walzer's view, but it should be noted that his pluralism is a "modest" one.

2. Cf. Lukes, 1985, pp. 43-44, and Elster, 1985, pp. 109ff. Elster speculates that the strong rejection of historical teleology in *The German Ideology* (just cited) is due to Engels (as co-author of this work). Elster explains: "Although capable of wild flights of fancy, Engels may have had a more sober attitude towards history than did Marx, corresponding to his better judgment concerning specific historical events" (pp. 109-10). I would like to suggest a more fundamental explanation: Marx spent many more years than Engels, and with much more

depth, studying and criticizing Hegel prior to turning to communism and the study of economics (cf. McLellan, 1978, 98-99). So we may assume that Hegel's teleology had a greater impact on Marx.

3. Barbès, Blanqui, Raspail were leaders of the Paris working class and received long jail terms for their role in the Revolution of 1848. Barbès was a religious socialist, Blanqui espoused a "revolutionary voluntarism," while Raspail has become best known for promoting social medicine and prison reform.

4. Nussbaum's emphasis on practical reason means that there is a significant overlap between Kantianism and her Aristotelianism, especially so for a left Kantianism that argues that society must provide for the material and institutional conditions that enable a life of moral autonomy. Some differences between the two approaches can be inferred from her interesting criticisms of John Rawls. See Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 210-13, 227-28, 242-43; 1992, pp. 233-34.

5. Nussbaum claims that monotonous and mindless work goes against good human functioning. She does not fully explain why this is so, but it seems that the reason is that such work blocks capabilities (4), (6), and (7). See Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 230-31. What she does not argue, however, is that the capacity for free labor is a basic feature of human life.

6. I discuss most of the issues in this section in more detail in Van der Linden, 1988, Ch. III, sections 1 and 3, and Ch. VII, section 3.

7. An important exception is that Marx argued in a letter to Engels (12/10/1869) that the nationalist conflict between English and Irish workers in England prevented the emancipation of both of them. See further Gilbert, 1980, pp. 197ff.

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