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*Marx's Critique of Utilitarianism*¹

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The nature of Marx's ethics has been a matter of considerable dispute since the latter part of the nineteenth century. Some have maintained that Marx had no ethics; others have claimed that his ethics is Kantian; and yet others have maintained that his ethics is utilitarian. The first two views were prominent at the turn of the century. It is the utilitarian view that seems to hold favor among a great many today. Thus Adam Schaff has claimed that 'Marxist theory ... leads to the general position that may be called "social hedonism" — the view that the aim of human life is to secure the maximum happiness for the broadest masses of the people ...'² Similarly, Derek Allen has claimed that 'it is possible ... to show that the arguments which support

1 The following discussion is limited to Marx's views with respect to utilitarianism. I do not discuss Engels's views, since I do not assume that Marx's and Engels's views were identical. Indeed, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that their views were not identical. Thus, it might well prejudice the discussion of Marx's views on utilitarianism to use Engels's works.

2 Adam Schaff, *A Philosophy of Man* (New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1963) 60

[Marx's and Engels'] moral judgments are utilitarian in all but name.³ In addition, the accounts of others, even if not explicitly, often suggest that Marx held some kind of utilitarian theory. Alfred Schmidt, for example, might be taken to be suggesting a kind of negative utilitarianism in the following passages: '... Marxist materialism is primarily concerned with the possibility of removing hunger and misery from the world. Marx shared a eudemonistic impulse with the ethical materialists of antiquity ...'⁴

In spite of these various attempts to give a utilitarian interpretation of Marx, this whole endeavor seems to me, as well as to a number of others, fundamentally mistaken. Sidney Hook, in his early work, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, denied that Marx was a utilitarian.⁵ So too have Eugene Kamenka and S. Stojanović denied that Marx was a utilitarian.⁶ However, though these commentators have denied Marx's utilitarianism, they have usually not argued in detail or at length that Marx was not a utilitarian. Too often their comments on this issue amount but to denials largely unsupported by the kind of evidence which the utilitarian interpreters of Marx marshal. And when arguments are offered quite often they are arguments which utilitarians could easily circumvent. For example, S. Hook's argument relies on linking utilitarianism with hedonism.⁷ However, not all utilitarians need be hedonistic, and if they need not be, then the weakness of Hook's answer is apparent. Something more must be done if one is to maintain that Marx's ethics is not utilitarian.

Finally, no contemporary discussion, of which I know, of either the utilitarian or non-utilitarian nature of Marx's ethics considers Marx's own pronouncements against utilitarianism. Marx's arguments that

3 Derek P.H. Allen, 'The Utilitarianism of Marx and Engels,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973) 189; cf. also Derek P.H. Allen, 'Reply to Brenkert's "Marx and Utilitarianism"', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 6 (1976) 517-34; John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton: Princeton U. P. 1978)

4 Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London: New Left Books 1971) 40

5 Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (New York: The John Day Co. 1933) 98-9

6 Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (2nd ed., rev.; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1972); Svetozar Stojanovic, *Between Ideals and Reality* (London: Oxford U. P. 1973)

7 Sidney Hook, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, 98-9

utilitarianism is an unacceptable theory are simply not taken seriously. Rather, they are treated as mistaken or misguided arguments, arguments best left to the seldom read pages of Marx's vast corpus. Thus, any discussion or mention of these arguments is greeted with an almost embarrassed silence.

This embarrassment is, I believe, unjustified. Indeed, we may arrive at a more adequate conclusion about Marx's ethical views and their possible utilitarian nature, if we discuss the arguments and comments which Marx explicitly makes against utility, utilitarianism, and/or those whom he identifies as utilitarian — e.g., Bentham, J. Mill, J.S. Mill, Helvetius, etc. It is this I shall undertake in this paper. In the course of discussing Marx's arguments I will also consider the main arguments of those who attempt on other grounds to establish that Marx is a utilitarian — in spite of his own comments to the contrary.⁸ In following this twofold course I believe it can be shown not only that Marx was not a utilitarian, but also what Marx's own views were as to the limits and weaknesses of utilitarianism. The crux of my argument shall consist in the defense of the following theses: a) Marx's views on the individual and its relation to a radical normative ethics are incompatible with those of utilitarianism; b) Marx did not, as a utilitarian must, hold that people's desires, as such, are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction; c) Marx's views on objectification and freedom forestall the entire utilitarian enterprise.

I

Marx appears to have four criticisms of utilitarianism: (a) Utilitarianism uses an abstract principle; it reduces all relationships to the single relation of usefulness. Consequently, each relation loses its particular meaning and significance. (b) Utilitarianism is restricted to the criticism of relations within the *status quo*; hence it is a conservative theory. (c) Utilitarianism is an egoistic theory. (d) The utilitarian view of individual interests vis-à-vis the general interest is a mistaken, alienated view. In fact, I believe that these criticisms reduce to two main objections since in the explication and defense of the second criticism, not only must the third and fourth criticisms both be brought in, but also

⁸ I will mainly concern myself with the claims of Derek Allen (cf. footnote no. 3). His defense of the utilitarian interpretation of Marx's ethics is more detailed and worked out than the accounts of others.

they, as well as the second criticism, are really only plausible in the context of one another.⁹

There is no doubt that Marx's objections may seem misguided and misconceived. For instance, consider Marx's criticism of utilitarianism for its conservative nature. Instead of criticizing the relations of bourgeois society, utilitarianism supposedly accepted them. Those criticisms it did raise against society were limited to attacks on feudal or medieval relations which had been carried over into bourgeois society:

The whole criticism of the existing world by the utility theory was ... restricted within a narrow range. Remaining within the confines of bourgeois conditions, it could criticise only those relations which had been handed down from a past epoch and were an obstacle to the development of the bourgeoisie. Hence, although the utility theory does expound the connection of all existing relations within economic relations, it does so only in a restricted way.¹⁰

Now it certainly is true that utilitarians such as Bentham and J.S. Mill did not condemn various aspects and relations of bourgeois society which Marx did. For example, Bentham and Mill continued to support the division of labor, private property, the family, and the use of money. Further, they assumed that certain aspects of bourgeois society were unchangeable and hence not even susceptible to criticism by the principle of utility. Thus, J.S. Mill explicitly claims that 'the laws and conditions of the production of wealth, partake of the character of physical truths'¹¹ — a claim which Marx rejected. Those, Marx argued, who maintained such claims simply revealed their conservative nature, their inclination to continue the status quo. Both production and distribution are susceptible to changes imposed by man. Future communism will be proof of this. Thus, Marx held that utilitarians such as Bentham and Mill

9 Marx's explicit arguments and comments against utilitarianism are concentrated in roughly two periods of his work: 1844-1846 and 1865-1867. Some idea how infrequently Marx turned to the discussion of the utilitarianism of Bentham, James Mill and J.S. Mill can be obtained by noting the number of times Marx refers to these philosophers in his published and unpublished work. If one excludes personal letters, the *Grundrisse*, and *Capital* (all four volumes), Marx mentions Bentham only twice, James Mill four times, and J.S. Mill a total of seven times in the thirty seven years between 1846 and 1883.

10 Cf. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. V (New York: International Publishers 1976) 413

11 J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, ed. Donald Winch (Baltimore, Md.: Pelican Books 1970) 349

were essentially defenders of the *status quo*. Utilitarianism was not the radical theory which many took it to be.

The problem with this criticism of utilitarianism as a normative theory is that there is no apparent reason why a proponent of the principle of utility would have to hold the views of Bentham or Mill about private property, the division of labor, or even the immutable nature of the laws of production. Seemingly a utilitarian could measure both these institutions by the principle of utility and find it wanting. Similarly, there is no reason why a utilitarian could not believe that the received laws of production were simply the historical results of bourgeois society. Thus, Marx's criticisms of utilitarianism for its conservative nature would seem clearly mistaken. Accordingly, a utilitarian interpretation of Marx might seem possible.

However, to write off Marx's criticism as misconceived, to explore it no further, would itself be mistaken. There is a more interesting reason why Marx criticised utilitarianism for its conservative nature. This reason tells us more about Marx's views on the nature of moral theories, the manner in which he evaluates them, and, specifically, why Marx could not be a utilitarian.

Marx, it must be remembered, is concerned not so much with any moral theory that speculation might spin, but with that or those moral theories as they are embedded in the social context in which they play a determinate role and of which they are representative (or to which they correspond). The ideas of present or past moral philosophers are of interest to him, accordingly, only *within* a social setting.¹² This manner of proceeding is demanded by his views on historical materialism, ideology, and the unity of theory and practice. Hence, Marx holds that moral theories of the generality of the utility theory are relatively empty until the specific social contexts which they presuppose are indicated. 'From the outset', Marx claims, 'the utility theory had the aspect of a theory of general utility, yet this aspect only became fraught with meaning when economic relations, especially division of labor and exchange, were included.'¹³ What, then, are the various features about individuals and society which utilitarianism presupposes? The nineteenth century utilitarian clearly assumed a social context in which there was division of labor, money, exchange, and private property. However, as pointed out above, there would seem to be no necessity to

12 This indicates one way in which Marx was not a (moral) philosopher in the contemporary Anglo-American sense.

13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' 413

this. And because there is no such necessity there would seem to be no good reason why a twentieth century utilitarian might not reject these. The question which must be asked, then, is 'Why did Marx apparently think that there was a necessary relationship between utilitarianism and private property, or the division of labor, etc.?' Unless he thought there was a necessary relation he could hardly criticise utilitarianism for its conservative nature.

The answer rests upon his view that utilitarianism assumes, in its calculation of utilities, the particular kind of individual characteristic of civil society — viz., one who was defined by and concerned with various private ends. That is, in order to determine which actions or rules will promote the greatest good,¹⁴ utilitarianism makes reference to individuals who define themselves and manner of life privately. Now given that utilitarianism assumes this kind of individual, there is only one other condition required for it to follow that utilitarianism must also support the division of labor, private property, etc. That condition is the view that such institutions produce the greatest good when society is constituted by private individuals. That is, if one assumes that one is to promote the greatest good; that people are essentially defined by their private interests; and that under these conditions the division of labor, etc., would maximally increase the good produced, then it necessarily follows that one should accept and support the division of labor, etc. In this sense, utilitarianism is necessarily connected with the division of labor, private property, etc.

Marx's view, then, that utilitarianism is conservative, his criticism and distance from it, actually rests upon a more basic criticism which he makes of utilitarianism — viz., it assumes that individuals are private individuals. What Marx's objection indicates is that utilitarianism does not merely consist in the normative principle that that action is morally right which promotes the greatest good over evil, but that it also consists in a certain unacceptable view of individuals, their goods, and their relation to the social and general good.

Marx generally states this objection in the form that utilitarianism, or the individual presupposed by utilitarianism, is egoistic. Accordingly, he contends that on Bentham's utilitarian views 'each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of

14 For simplicity, from this point on, I will generally speak of utilitarians determining which *actions* produce the greatest good. That is, I will not also refer to *rules*. By this I do not mean to limit the discussion to act-utilitarianism, or take any position on the relation of act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism.

each.¹⁵ Utilitarianism is a 'theory of mutual exploitation.'¹⁶ However, stated in this way, contemporary utilitarians would once again say Marx's objection is woefully misguided. Utilitarianism is not an instance of ethical egoism; it is not the ethics of self-love. In reply, two points are relevant. First, it is worth noting, for historical accuracy if for no other reason, who it was that Marx attacked with this objection. Marx's criticism was made primarily against Holbach, Helvétius, Bentham, and James Mill. John Stuart Mill's work on utilitarianism, as well as his monograph entitled *Utilitarianism*, did not appear until long after Marx had settled his philosophical conscience with regard to utilitarianism.¹⁷ Thus, the utilitarianism Marx had in view was hedonistic, quantitative, and dependent upon associationist psychology for its answer to egoism. Indeed, the egoism of Helvétius and Holbach was but faintly covered by the utilitarianism they professed. Even Bentham and James Mill held that egoism was man's strongest and original motive. Only through an association which might be set up between the goods others experience and one's own experience of goods, could one possibly come to value the goods of others without reference to oneself. At base, or originally, however, one was egoistic. That one overcame this was a contingent psychological fact.

Now given these views it is clear that Marx's criticism is not wholly wrong-headed. However, even though this would save some historical significance for Marx's objection, what must be shown is that Marx's objection is also applicable to later utilitarians, that it is not limited to a particular phase of utilitarianism. It is at this juncture that a second point is relevant.

Marx does not use the criticism 'egoistic' in a single, unambiguous sense. Rather, he uses it in at least two different senses. Normally to say that someone is egoistic is to say or imply that he either does or should act to promote his own good without regard to the well-being of other sentient beings. Marx uses 'egoistic' in this sense. The earliest utilitarians may well have been susceptible to this criticism. However, clearly, later utilitarians are not. But Marx also brings another criticism under the rubric 'egoistic.' Thus, Marx holds that a position is egoistic if it assumes or implies that the individuals involved are private individuals, as opposed to social individuals. Such private individuals may, of course,

15 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (New York: International Publishers 1972) 176

16 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' 409

17 Mill's *Utilitarianism* was originally published in 1861.

tend to be egoistic in the preceding sense. However, whether or not they are egoistic in the usual sense, they are also egoistic simply by virtue of the fact that their individualities, their desires and ends, are privately rather than socially defined. By this it is not supposed that others and society do not causally influence an individual's desires and net good. They do. Rather it means that each individual's desires and interests are ultimately subjectively determined, that each individual is the best or final judge of his own interests, that the relations in which individuals stand to one another are incidental to, rather than constitutive of, what they are. Thus, individuals view themselves as divided and opposed; they do not, in general, closely identify or experience a harmony of interests with others; they view others and society instrumentally. Individuals defined in this manner are termed private, 'egoistic,' individuals by Marx. And it is the net utility which an act might have on the desires and interests of such individuals which the utilitarian is at pains to sum in order to determine the greatest good. Now though the general good need not simply be the sum of the individual goods — it could be the product, etc. — it is taken to be some function of these individual goods and evils. That is, given the utilitarian view of individuals, their desires and goods, the general good is merely the whole of which the individuals' goods are the parts. It is nothing other than the individuals' goods of which it is composed.

Marx's objection to the private individual is that such an individual embodies a mistaken or alienated relation between individuals themselves and society. On the contrary, Marx holds that individual goods and the general good are not properly related as parts and wholes. Instead, Marx suggests that the relation of individual good and social good should be taken in the sense in which

every particular social activity as a species-activity merely represents the species, i.e., an attribute of my own nature, and in which every person is the representative of every other. He is here representative not because of something else which he represents, but because of what he *is* and *does*.¹⁸

That is, the individual good, in its very nature, represents or exemplifies the communal good. It is not separate from the general good. Contrariwise, the general good is not the sum of many diverse — or even contingently similar — individual desires or interests. Rather, it is a way of acting and living which is reflected or represented in its various in-

18 Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1975) 119

stances. Thus, Marx claims that 'Man's individual and species life are not *different*, however much — and this is inevitable — the mode of existence of the individual is a more *particular* or more general mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more *particular* or more *general* individual life.'¹⁹

Accordingly, as opposed to the private individual, Marx's theory demands a social individual whose interests coincide with the general good and whose affective life permeates and is permeated by the affective lives of others. Marx's social or moral individual is one whose very existence, activity, spirit, and wealth are essentially bound with others and the community. That which he makes of himself, he makes of himself for others and society.²⁰ Consequently, one's relations with others and the community are much closer, much more intimate, than on the private individual model. Marx claims that the production as well as 'the senses and enjoyment of other men have become my own appropriation.'²¹ There is no implicit argument from analogy to the reality of other individuals; I do not share the enjoyments and objectifications of others only by association. Marx holds that we can share them directly and personally, not simply indirectly and inferentially. There is a close identification of one person and others.

Thus, Marx charges utilitarianism with relying upon a conception of the individual which, though not necessarily egoistic in the traditional sense, is egoistic in Marx's own particular sense and in a sense he condemns. Assuming this view of the individual, utilitarianism is inevitably drawn to a defense of private property, the division of labor, etc. In short, given the private individual, utilitarianism, however critical and radical it may fancy itself, remains trapped by the status quo, restricted 'within the confines of bourgeois conditions.'

However, it might be objected that not only does utilitarianism not assume an individual egoistic in the traditional sense, but also it need not assume the private individual Marx condemns. Thus, the crucial step which leads to Marx's charge of conservatism can be still blocked. That there is some truth to this objection must be conceded. Utilitarianism does not seem logically wedded to the conception of persons as private individuals. It is conceivable that a utilitarian theory might be adopted which assumed or referred to some kind of social in-

19 Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1975) 299

20 Cf. Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism,' 298

21 Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism,' 300

dividual. J.S. Mill himself suggests that 'utility would enjoin ... that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness or (as, speaking practically it may be called) the interest of every individual as nearly as possible in harmony with the interests of the whole.'²² Accordingly, a utilitarian theory might allow that the interests of individuals harmonise, that individuals identified closely with others. Does this not, then, undercut Marx's criticism?

I do not think that it undercuts it, though it does indicate an important limitation to it. The limitation is that if utilitarianism can accept a non-private view of the individual, then, Marx's present criticism does not show that utilitarianism is restricted to capitalism and could not play a role under some form of communism. I say 'some form of communism' because there are other reasons, we will discuss in the following sections, why utilitarianism is incompatible with Marx's view of communism. Still, if utilitarianism can accept some concept of a non-private individual, Marx's criticism of utilitarianism as conservative must be said to be limited in its import. That it is not wholly undercut, that it remains an important criticism, is what I will now argue.

Though it must be admitted that utilitarianism is not logically wedded to the private individual in its theory, though utilitarianism could operate with some conception of a social individual, the point that needs to be made is that utilitarianism does not, on the other hand, promote or defend any particular view of the individual. Utilitarianism is a normative theory about which actions are right or wrong. Whether I am a private individual who prefers to live emotionally and psychologically detached from others, who sees in the interests of others threats to my own interests, or a social individual who desires a close identification with others, who sees in the interests of others a fulfillment and realisation of my own interests, is not as such a question for utilitarianism. Whether one is closely identified with others or is only distantly, neutrally, abstractly related to others through their products, money, etc. is indifferent to utilitarianism. Utilitarian theory itself does not demand that people identify closely with others, that they experience each other such that they share enjoyments or share in the significance of their own creations. Far from this being an incidental feature of utilitarianism hardly worthy of notice, it is claimed that

the whole bent of the utilitarian outlook is toward toleration of other people's tastes. It is precisely in the belief that other people must be free to have their

22 John Stuart Mill, 'Utilitarianism,' in *Utilitarianism and Other Writings/Mill*, ed. Mary Warnock (New York: New American Library 1962) 268. Derek Allen points this passage out in his article, 'Reply to Brenkert's "Marx and Utilitarianism"', 526.

own values that utilitarianism is distinctive — it is austere neutral in the matter of choosing the kind of life one wishes to live.²³

Thus, though utilitarianism could operate with a non-private individual, it does not demand that such individuals come about.

Accordingly, the individual utilitarianism operates with must be taken from outside the utilitarian theory. From what source does it take its notion of the individual? The answer is that it takes it from the society in which it is embedded. Utilitarianism asks which actions are right or wrong. It answers: those actions which produce the greatest good. The greatest good, however, is measured against the experiences, responses, satisfactions, and/or preferences of those people in the society or situation in which the question is asked. That is, 'the concept of utility ... is tied directly to the actual needs and desires of individuals as they are experienced by them and revealed in their choice behavior.'²⁴ Just as Marx considers utilitarianism itself as embedded in, a reflection of, bourgeois society, so too he considers that utilitarianism, though it may entertain various speculative ideas about this or that individual, must in the end operate with the individual of the society in which it is embedded — and that is the private individual under capitalism.

Now it may correctly be pointed out that utilitarianism need not accept literally any desire or preference a person might have. These may be based, for example, on factual misinformation or constitute an inconsistent set of preferences. Instead, utilitarianism may measure the good produced against the 'corrected' preferences, the 'refined' experiences and satisfactions, the 'improved' responses of people. Still, such a move would not be sufficient to alter significantly the concept of the individual against which utilitarianism measures utility. On the other hand, to the extent that utilitarianism remains committed to the actual — though perhaps corrected — preferences of individuals, it remains committed to the notion of the individual dominant in the society in which it plays a role:

To maximize a single person's utility is to provide what he has chosen or would choose from among the available alternatives that might be produced. To maximize the utility of all persons affected by an action or policy is to maximize the utility of the aggregate group. Utility is translated into the satisfaction of

23 Jan Narveson, *Morality and Utility* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967) 82

24 Rolf E. Sartorius, *Individual Conduct and Social Norms* (Encino, Cal.: Dickenson Publishing Co. 1975) 28

those needs and desires that individuals choose to satisfy ... Utilitarians do not attempt by cost/benefit techniques to ascertain what people *ought* to prefer. They attempt, rather, to determine what ought to be done based on what people *do* prefer.²⁵

On the other hand, if we take Marx's historical materialism seriously, even though theorists may seek to formulate in their theories certain ideas and concepts at odds with the present society, e.g. a social individual, the concepts and ideas embodied in a society are the ones which remain and must remain dominant given that present society. To think otherwise, Marx claims, would simply be speculative wishing. His comment on theories diverging from society is apropos:

The division of labour, which we already saw above ... as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labor, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the formation of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves. Within this class this cleavage can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts, but whenever a practical collision occurs in which the class itself is endangered they automatically vanish, in which case there also vanishes the appearance of the ruling ideas being not the ideas of the ruling class and having a power distinct from the power of this class.²⁶

Accordingly, it is correctly said of utilitarianism that it takes people essentially as they are and asks what they ought to do. Under capitalism it takes and must take individuals as private individuals when it asks what they ought to do.

The upshot is that Marx's criticism of utilitarianism as conservative is — in three different senses — legitimate. First, utilitarianism is conservative in the sense that it measures its pronouncements against the individual characteristic of the society in which it functions. It takes its notion of the individual from the society in which it functions. It cannot itself generate this concept of the individual. It takes what it is given, as it were, and what it is given is the present view of the individual — the status quo view of the individual. Thus, it preserves the status quo — whether that might be feudal, bourgeois, or some form of communism.

25 Tom L. Beauchamp, 'Utilitarianism and Cost/Benefit Analysis: A Reply to MacIntyre,' in Tom L. Beauchamp and Norman E. Bowie eds. *Ethical Theory and Business* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall 1979) 280

26 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' 60

Such a theory is plausibly called conservative; certainly it is not radical. Second, Marx's criticism suggests that if utilitarianism tries to be radical, with the concept of the individual dominant in the society in which it functions, it is in the position of trying to pull itself up by its own boot straps. It simply cannot get off the ground. The reason is that this view of the individual is bound up with other social relations. What one is is due to his relations to others. Thus, simply to take the present view of the individual is to take into the heart of one's theory the present status quo — it is to prejudice the conclusions of one's ethics in favor of the status quo. Thus, though utilitarianism may urge reforms, be critical of present society, it can do this only within the bounds set by the view of the individual which the society gives it. To this extent it does not move us on to new fundamental relations; it does not and cannot demand a radical change which another concept of the individual might require. That is, even if utilitarianism can operate with the social individual, it provides itself no means to move towards that individual. It does not drive us towards that concept of the individual. It does not demand that kind of individual life from us. It cannot since it remains rooted in the present view of the individual. Only when some external force or movement with other values and concepts of the individual comes along will the present view of the individual change. Thus Marx looked to changes in the mode of production, their effects on various classes, and believed that a violent revolution may be required to institute a society of new men, of social individuals.

It might be noted, parenthetically, that many would take the preceding feature of utilitarianism, condemned by Marx, to be a positive feature of utilitarianism. 'It is thus that the utilitarian may guard against the claims of the moral zealot.'²⁷ Because it keeps contact with the present individual, it is an incremental theory, given to piecemeal changes, to reform, rather than sweeping, radical changes. However, by these same lights, according to Marx, utilitarianism is a static, conservative theory. It is parasitic upon the present, it does not take us beyond the present, so much as simply seek to correct and extend the present. What we need, Marx maintains, is a theory rooted in mankind's historical development which shows both how and in what direction present alienated society can be transcended. Such a radical theory would have the social or human individual as one of its foci.

Finally, utilitarianism is conservative in the sense that, given the preceding two points, it ends up defending private property, the division of labor, etc. Since it assumes — and must assume under

27 Rolf E. Sartorius, *Individual Conduct and Social Norms*, 28

capitalism — the private individual, it defends private property. This explains why utilitarian views, historically, have been not radical but reformatory, and why it is not simply that utilitarians have not calculated their utilities carefully enough, but that even if they had they still could not formulate a radical theory. A truly radical theory is beyond the grasp of such a theory because it remains wedded to the concept of the individual characteristic of present (capitalist) society. It does not realise, as Marx claimed, that the most basic questions hang on the notion of the individual. 'To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself.'²⁸ Marx's theory is radical because it seeks to get to the root of things and knows that man, the human individual, is the root. It is this that Marx's criticism of utilitarianism makes apparent and for this reason has merit.

It is correct that the above discussion also shows that utilitarianism is not necessarily conservative in the sense that it could logically have another individual linked with the principle of utility — e.g., under some form of communism. To this extent, as I have noted, Marx's criticism of utilitarianism as conservative is limited in scope. If somehow we were to get to 'communism' without the aid of utilitarianism, we might find a new utilitarianism had arisen, phoenix-like, which could use the new view of the individual. Thus, Marx requires another argument to show that utilitarianism is not compatible with his view of communism. Nevertheless, even though Marx's criticism is not wholly successful, the portions of it above which do seem plausible should themselves constitute significant reason to be dubious of any utilitarian interpretation of Marx's ethics. If Marx's ethics is to play a role in the transformation of capitalist society into communist society, then it could not fulfill that role if it were utilitarian.

II

Because utilitarianism rests its conclusions upon the preferences, etc., of people essentially as they are, it was said to have conservative implications. For this reason it was argued that there is an important difference between Marx's ethics and utilitarianism. However, the view

28 Karl Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law Introduction,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1975) 182

behind this discussion, the view — central to utilitarianism — that 'the purpose of morality is to forward the ends which people severally have, whatever they may be,'²⁹ was not itself discussed. According to this view the interests or desires, of anyone, bourgeois or proletarian, are prima facie worthy of satisfaction.³⁰ Apart from the criticism which Marx explicitly brings against the conservative implications of this view, he has other reasons for rejecting the view itself. Consequently, to consider this central aspect of utilitarianism is yet another way in which to test whether Marx is or could be a utilitarian. It is also to lend support to the argument of the preceding section.

purpose of
morality
to serve
the people
not the
individual

The claim that the interests, desires or preferences of anyone, bourgeois or proletarian, are prima facie worthy of satisfaction is ambiguous. It might mean that Marx regarded the desires characteristic of the bourgeois and characteristic of the proletarian as prima facie worthy of satisfaction. This however is clearly ~~not~~ Marx's view. His own comments condemn those interests which are typically bourgeois. What else is he doing, for example, when he speaks of the bourgeois' 'boundless greed after riches,'³¹ when he refers to their desire for 'that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade,'³² or claims that 'the bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production.'³³ He certainly did not think that these typical bourgeois desires were worthy, other things being equal, of satisfaction. Of course, Marx did on occasion approve of various actions and programs which were in the (immediate, but not long range) interests of the bourgeois. His views on Free Trade are an example. But simply because he approved of such programs which were in the interests of the bourgeoisie does not mean that he approved of them *because* they were in the interests of the bourgeoisie.³⁴ Marx had other reasons for his approval which were not

29 Jan Narveson, *Morality and Utility*, 288

30 Cf. Derek P.H. Allen, 'The Utilitarianism of Marx and Engels,' and 'Reply to Brenkert's "Marx and Utilitarianism"'

31 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 153. The examples in this paragraph are taken from my article, 'Marx and Utilitarianism,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 5 (1975) 422.

32 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. VI (New York: International Publishers 1976) 487

33 *Ibid.* 502

34 Derek P.H. Allen makes this point himself in his 'Reply to Brenkert...' 518

based on any view that the interests characteristic of the bourgeois were *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction — specifically, he thought that such programs would, in the long run, lead to the end of the bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, the above claim that the interests or desires of anyone, bourgeois or proletarian, are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction might mean that Marx regarded the desires and interests of people as such, independent of whether they are bourgeois or proletarian, as *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction. This interpretation is supposedly supported by the distinction, Marx himself notes, between ‘the personal and the class individual.’ That is, we may differentiate between the personal or private interests of an individual and his class interests. Given that there are certain personal interests which a person who happens to be a bourgeois has in addition to, but separate and distinct from his bourgeois interests, then Marx might hold that the former are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction — regardless of the class interests of that person. Thus, one might claim that it is the interest of men as such that the communist revolution will benefit.³⁵

What is problematic with this second interpretation is its understanding of the nature of these interests and its use of them to justify communism. It is true that Marx thinks that under communism *all* people will live a ‘higher’ form of life. In this sense, the communist revolution will benefit all men — whether bourgeois or proletarian before the revolution. But, again, from the fact that this is true, that communism will benefit men who are presently bourgeois, it does not follow that Marx held that the interests of the private individual as opposed to the class individual are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction, or that communism is, in part, justified because it fulfills these private or personal interests.

To begin with, Marx rejected as corrupt the situation in which people are divided into private individuals and class individuals.³⁶ Communism is to overcome this condition. He could hardly appeal, then, to the fulfillment of the interests of the private individual as a justification for communism. Furthermore, Marx’s reason for distinguishing between the private individual and the class individual is to emphasize ‘the accidental nature of the conditions of life’ for the private individual as opposed to the necessary nature of the conditions of life which the class individual experiences. Life for the person who is bourgeois or proletarian has various accidental features: place of work,

35 Cf. Allen, *ibid.* 517-8

36 Cf. Section I above

health, success in personal and financial dealings. However, life for the bourgeois or proletarian dictates certain ways of acting and living: accumulation of surplus value, the attempt to expand surplus value, or wage labor and eventual destitution. In making the above distinction Marx's point is not to suggest that the interests of the private individual are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction. Indeed, having noted the accidental conditions of life for private individuals, he explicitly comments on the illusory view of their lives such individuals share: 'Thus in imagination, individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental; in reality, of course, they are less free, because they are to a greater extent governed by material forces.'³⁷ That is, it is just in that area of their lives which is private which people are mistaken to see a realization of freedom, or to see the end of alienation.

Now it is true that Marx also contrasts class interests with human interests or needs.³⁸ However, such human or universal interests are not the same as the interests of the personal or private individual of the above distinction. Human interests are those the proletariat comes to acquire. They are interests or needs for those ways of acting and living which characterise freedom, i.e., the life of man as man. There is no suggestion that those individuals who are bourgeois share these interests or aspire to those ways of living. The utilitarian might here distinguish between 'apparent' and 'real' interests. However, to remain a utilitarian his claim would have to be that the person who is a bourgeois would *himself* come to share those real human interests as opposed to his apparent or false bourgeois interests.³⁹ But there is no assurance at all that a person who was a bourgeois would ever *himself* come to have such real desires or interests. Indeed, it is for this reason that Marx claims a violent revolution may be needed.

Thus, communism is not justified because the interests of private individuals — whether capitalist or proletarian — are fulfilled — i.e. the utilitarian view. Indeed, the suggestion that there are people who happen to be bourgeois but who have private interests which are separate and unaffected by their class interests but which could serve as the justification of a future communism is undialectical. Marx does of course distinguish between the class individual and the person who is a

37 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' *Collected Works*, Vol. V, 78-9

38 Cf. Karl Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's...' 186

39 Cf. Narveson, *Morality and Utility*, 82-5

member of this or that class. He has to do this since some members of the bourgeois class may change their allegiance and join the proletarian class. But this is not simply a matter of taking off one coat and putting on another, so to speak, but rather a change of a whole set of world views and values which pervade one's entire life. This is why it is so difficult to get the bourgeois to agree to the changes in society which Marx seeks. It is not as if the bourgeois had desires, deep down, characteristic of communism but some overlay of bourgeois values repressed them — a set of values which they would only too willingly give up. Because the bourgeois is unwilling to give up his desires and values, he must be forced to do so. The values upon which he is forced to do this the proletarian comes to hold even before the communist revolution. Those who are bourgeois must be led or forced to have them. It is mistaken, then, to claim that Marx held that the interests of private individuals as such — independent of their class roles — are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction. Consequently, Marx cannot be said to accept a basic and central characteristic of utilitarianism. Not only does he explicitly condemn utilitarianism for the conservative implications of this characteristic, but he also implicitly rejects this characteristic. We have, then, a second reason to doubt the plausibility of Marx's utilitarianism.

III

The second of the two main criticisms which Marx explicitly and openly brings against utilitarianism concerns its attempt to calculate the net utility of actions.⁴⁰ It is a criticism which would hold, supposedly, against all forms of utilitarianism. Since that action is right which produces the greatest balance of good over evil, all forms of utilitarianism are committed to the possibility of balancing against each other the different goods which are being maximised. Only if we can legitimately measure and compare the amount of net utility which act A would produce with that which act B would produce is the entire utilitarian enterprise possible. Thus, actions which may be of radically different natures — composing poetry, committing murder, giving alms, etc. — must be comparable in terms of some intrinsic good(s) or preference(s) which is/are objectively comparable. The various relations, then, in which different actions and people stand are reduced

40 This is the first criticism mentioned on p. 195.

to the common relation of the utility they produce. Marx's objection to this basic characteristic and assumption of utilitarianism is the following:

The apparent absurdity of merging all the manifold relations of people in one relation of usefulness, this apparently metaphysical abstraction arises from the fact that in modern bourgeois society all relations are subordinate in practice to the one abstract monetary-commercial relation... These relations are supposed not to have the meaning *peculiar* to them but to be the expression and manifestation of some third relation attributed to them, the relation of *utility* or *utilisation*.⁴¹

In so formulating his objection, it might be said, Marx obviously had nineteenth century utilitarianism foremost in mind. Accordingly, his objection might be challenged as inapplicable to twentieth century utilitarianism which does not, or at least need not, reduce all activities, relations, etc. to a single intrinsic good, e.g., pleasure. Utilitarianism may allow that values, etc., are incommensurable so long as we may still speak of substituting or exchanging one for the other.⁴² Accordingly, we might ask what trade-offs between two values would leave a person equally satisfied or would be a trade-off a person is willing to accept. Thus, incommensurable values may be allowed so long as we speak of exchanging them such that the person/people involved would be willing to accept, choose, prefer, or be equally satisfied with the result.

Now though Marx's objection appears to have the narrower view of utilitarianism as its object, there is no reason why his objection cannot encompass the broader view. Though utilitarianism may allow for incommensurable values, still if it does it must equate such values through individual preferences, choices, etc., which must themselves be comparable so that the net utility of an action, relation, etc., can be calculated. Generally, if the net utility is determined by preferences such preferences are understood not mentalistically but rather in terms of people's choice behavior to obtain or to avoid. Consequently, the meaning and significance of the various alternatives are 'reduced' to or 'transformed' into such behavioral tendencies. That is, what is crucial in determining what is morally right are the behavioral tendencies, the satisfactions or the pleasures in terms of which the alternatives are measured. What is not crucial are the various particular characteristics

41 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' *Collected Works* 409; cf. also Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, (New York: Vintage Books 1973) 246

42 Cf. Brian Barry, *Political Argument* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1965) 4-8

of the alternatives themselves. Thus, however the process of calculation of net utility is accomplished the essential properties of the relations or activities must be abstracted from, translated into something(s) else. Accordingly, because utilitarianism equates and measures actions and relations in terms of that which is common or uniform amongst them, Marx claims that it only considers such actions and relations externally. Utilitarianism is not concerned with their particular, concrete qualities, but rather the intrinsic values they produce or the preferences for them people have. The character, the nature, or the meaning of that which is preferred is lost in the translation. This is illegitimate Marx claims:

The exchangeability of all products, activities and relations with a third, objective entity which can be re-exchanged for everything *without distinction* — that is, the development of exchange values (and of money relations) is identical with universal venality, corruption. Universal prostitution appears as a necessary phase in the development of the social character of personal talents, capacities, abilities, activities. More politely expressed: the universal relation of utility and use. The equation of the incompatible, as Shakespeare nicely defined money.⁴³

Marx's objection, it is clear, is part of a broader objection against the equation or exchangeability of activities, products, and relations. Capitalist society as a whole, Marx claims, runs afoul of this objection in that it is founded upon exchange value, the creation of surplus value, and money. Just as utilitarian ethics equates the diverse actions of individuals, so too capitalist society equates the diverse products (which are but the congealed activities of those individuals) with one another through the medium of money. In short, the capitalist notion of exchange value is but the utilitarian notion of intrinsic good or preference. Both dissolve, merge, and equate what should be kept separate and distinct. In doing so, they treat actions and relations abstractly, which is, Marx charges, a matter of universal venality, corruption — of alienation.

However, Marx does not merely hold that the determination of which action ought to be performed by the consideration of the net

43 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 163. Marx's view, discussed in this section, sounds similar to the view that Charles Fried recently expressed: 'The maintenance of the integrity of the individual as the locus of valuation and choice is more important than the abstractions of happiness, pleasure, or excellence. These latter are, after all, rather the *objects* of individual evaluation. And if the primacy of the individual is to be maintained, if it is individuality, personality, which is the point of departure of ethical judgments, then the "irrelevantly" particular must be allowed significance.' Charles Fried, *Right and Wrong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P. 1978) 34. Needless to say, Marx's views of the nature of individuality and those of Fried differ.

utility produced by each action denigrates the meaning and/or nature of the actions in question. He also holds that it denigrates the persons whose actions they are. When the utilitarian considers whether an action ought to be performed, he considers whether the net utility produced by an action exceeds that of any other possible action. If a particular action will produce the greatest good, then opposed actions must yield. However, actions are not indifferently related to the persons who perform them. Marx claims that individuals are what they are because of their various actions or objectifications. Now on the utilitarian view each person who would be moral must be prepared to give up any action or aspect of himself if the greatest good should demand it. Indeed, he must be prepared not simply to give up any such action but also to affirm that some opposed action is actually moral. Such a person, Marx might say, must follow the injunction of the political economist: 'You must make everything of yours saleable, i.e., useful.'⁴⁴ That is, the utilitarian concern for persons, or the various life-projects of persons as expressed in their actions, rests upon their usefulness in the production of the greatest good. Thus, Marx says of Bentham's theory, 'attention is paid solely to what I am for others, to my usefulness, I am dealt with as a useful creature.'⁴⁵ But to view oneself and others in this manner is an instance of estrangement or alienation. That is, estrangement is manifested in the treatment of one's peculiar characteristics (and actions) as means to ends external to them. This estranged manner of viewing oneself and others is part and parcel of a system which supports classes, private property, and the state.

The basis of the preceding objection to utilitarianism is Marx's views on human objectification and freedom.⁴⁶ According to Marx, what human beings ultimately are — and hence what they both must and should be — is the result of the historical development of man into a humanly objectified — i.e., a free human — being. Such a free or human being is one who is fully developed. This is, in brief, to say three things: (a) One is self-determining, i.e., one plays a significant role in rationally

44 Karl Marx, 'Human Requirements and Division of Labour under the Rule of Private Property,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1975) 310. Bernard Williams's criticism of utilitarianism on the grounds of the notion of integrity is closely related to this. Cf. J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge U. P. 1973) 108-18.

45 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The German Ideology,' 408

46 Marx's views on dialectics with their emphasis on concreteness are also relevant.

deciding those issues which substantially affect one's life. (b) One is concretely objectified in his powers, abilities, and talents — that is, one fully develops one's powers, talents, and abilities according to the inherent, concrete characteristics of the objects of one's will. Thus, one does not develop oneself in terms of the abstract qualities of things or people, such as exchange value or money, but rather in terms of their sensuous, rational, and/or essential characteristics. (c) Finally, one is harmoniously related to others and to nature, i.e., one identifies with others, treats others as a necessary part of one's own nature. To live in this threefold manner is for man to live as man, for his relationship to the world to be a human one. To live in this manner is for one's actions and relations to be specific expressions of oneself, others, and nature; it is for one's actions and relations to be meaningful and significant in themselves rather than in some external end or consequences they might produce. As such, Marx takes one's actions and relations to be not only characteristic of man as man, but also intrinsically morally right. Thus Marx claims

Assume *man* to be *man* and his relationship to the world to be a human one: then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc. If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you want to exercise influence over other people, you must be a person with a stimulating and encouraging effect on other people. Everyone of your relations to man and to nature must be a *specific expression*, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real *individual life*.⁴⁷

Now Marx is not simply saying 'that it is possible to be loved only if one loves,'⁴⁸ or that it is possible to be trusted only if one trusts — for surely these claims are false. One may be loved and trusted even if one does not love or trust in return. Were this not possible and frequent the course of literature would have been significantly altered. Rather Marx emphasizes that as a free human being — as a moral being — one's actions and relations must be a concrete expression of oneself. In the case of self-determination, as I have said, this means that one plays a significant role in determining those issues which substantially affect one. This is not a teleological notion since it does not mean that an individual ought simply to do what he desires to do.⁴⁹ It could not mean this since one's

47 Karl Marx, 'The Power of Money, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1975) 326

48 Allen, 'Reply to Brenkert...', 523

49 Allen gives this interpretation of 'self-determination' in 'Reply to Brenkert...' 520

desires might be false.⁵⁰ On the other hand, it is not, as stated, an empty notion since it demands that one ought to eliminate those situations in which one does not or cannot play such a role — situations which notoriously predominate under capitalism. Thus, that one ought to be self-determining demands the elimination of private property, money, the division of labor, etc. Similarly, to take but one other instance, to concretely objectify oneself is neither a teleological notion nor an empty notion for Marx. To concretely objectify oneself, it was noted, is to treat things according to their inherent, concrete qualities. The reason for doing this is not that it puts one in a better position to fulfill one's desires, but that this is how one humanly, morally, relates to things and to people. Marx's well-known comments are apropos:

The care-burdened, poverty-stricken man has no *sense* for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and the specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense. Thus, the objectification of the human essence, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, is required to make man's *sense human*, as well as to create the *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance.⁵¹

The point obviously is not to put oneself in a better position to get what one desires, but to live and act as one humanly, morally, should.

On Marx's view, then, regardless of which characteristic of human objectification one picks, there is no question of comparing the consequences and products of one's actions with those of other people to determine their moral quality. Nor is Marx maintaining that the kinds of actions which would be the objectification of human freedom are simply of a kind which are non-morally good or even of moral value, but which, in either case, we might decide either to realise or leave alone. Marx is not simply saying that the state of affairs constituted by such activities, by the human or social individual, is intrinsically good, or better than that state of affairs constituted by the private individual.⁵² Marx's view is clearly stronger than this. Marx's human or social individual is the individual he believes that should be brought about, and which it would be wrong not to bring about. There is, that is, a moral demand, a moral necessity to his view of the social individual, independent of any context in which one might apply the utilitarian principle. For the

50 Recall the argument of Sections I and II. When Marx says that desires are 'false' he means more than simply that they happen to be based on misinformation.

51 Karl Marx, 'Private Property and Communism,' 302

52 Cf. Allen, 'Reply to Brenkert...' 533

utilitarian, what makes it wrong not to realise or bring about some intrinsic good or moral value is that we are obliged to promote the greatest good. For Marx, what makes it wrong not to realise or bring about the human objectification of man is the historically developed and necessitated nature of man. It is in this sense that Marx claims that 'the true realm of freedom' is 'the development of human energy which is an end in itself.'⁵³ Such a view is surely more plausibly deontological in nature, than utilitarian. This is further evidenced by his attack on the private individual as well as his defense of the social individual. The life of the private individual is corrupt, venal, alienated, one-sided, etc. That is, such a life, in contrast to the life of a social, human individual, is not merely less productive of intrinsic good, nor is it itself simply a lesser good or moral value, but rather it is in itself, mistaken, wrong — not how humans should live. The inherent moral necessity of Marx's view of the social individual is also witnessed in such comments as: 'The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being...*'⁵⁴ It is to be found in his view that if, under communism, one acts contrary to the manner of a social individual, one will punish oneself.⁵⁵ That is, once again, it is not simply better for one's life to be characterised by the kinds of activities which define the social individual; rather, it would be wrong to live otherwise.

As opposed to utilitarianism, then, Marx seeks to develop a system in which people live such that their actions and relations are meaningful and morally correct in themselves — not because of their relations to something else (e.g., the greatest good or exchange value). This most certainly does not mean that Marx omits consideration of one's needs, wants and interests. Indeed, for Marx morality is based on man's attempts to fulfill those needs, etc., but to fulfill them in a certain way — a way consistent with and constitutive of human freedom. That is, their fulfillment is not right or morally proper because it promotes an end outside of themselves so much as because it occurs in a particular self-expressive manner. However, if this be so, then Marx could not be a

53 Karl Marx, *Capital: The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers 1967) 820. Cf. also, Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488

54 Karl Marx, 'Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law Introduction,' 182

55 Cf. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'The Holy Family,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. IV (New York: International Publishers 1975) 179

utilitarian since no utilitarian could advocate the maximisation of, the realisation of, such an individual as the criterion of right and wrong. For to do so would be to use a criterion which already contained as an element within itself, i.e., in the individual to be realised, the answer of right and wrong which was sought. In short, the criterion would be circular. Thus Marx's view of the social individual, of objectification and freedom, preempts the very attempt which is basic to the utilitarian method.

Now clearly there are difficulties with Marx's own view which the above brief characterisation does not explore. What limits, if any, does such a view place on the actions of individuals? Which aspects of a person's individuality is one, or is one not, to seek to express in actions? How is an individual to decide between different possible actions? None of these questions is answered here. The present section has had the more modest object of showing why it is implausible to see Marx as a utilitarian. It has done this by connecting his views on utilitarianism with other unmistakably fundamental views of Marx. Throughout Marx's work the importance of considering people, their actions and relations, in terms of their concrete and particular qualities rather than any abstract and common quantities is of greatest importance — both for a consideration of the actions and relations, as well as the persons, involved.

What, however, of those occasions on which Marx does consider the consequences of various actions? Do not such instances refute the above argument? Two examples will suffice. Marx held that repeal of the Corn Laws in Britain in 1846, i.e., the institution of Free Trade, would cause workers' wages to fall. Nevertheless, he argued in favor of the repeal of the Corn Laws: 'The Free Trade system works destructively. It breaks up old nationalities and carries antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie to the uttermost point. In a word, the Free Trade system hastens the Social Revolution. In this revolutionary sense alone..., I am in favor of Free Trade.'⁵⁶ Marx's views on India are similar. Though the immediate effect of the British in India was disastrous, still the long range effect Marx supported:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever

⁵⁶ Karl Marx, 'Speech on the Question of Free Trade,' in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, Vol. VI (New York: International Publishers 1976) 465

may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.⁵⁷

Such examples seem to be cases in which Marx did indeed consider the consequences of certain actions, and approve of them because of the particular consequences they would have. Those who interpret Marx as a utilitarian rely heavily on such examples.

However, that Marx takes consequences into account does not show that he is a utilitarian. The question is *how* he takes these consequences into account. Does he claim that Free Trade or Colonialism, in contrast with their alternatives, will produce greater net utility than not? Or does he claim that Free Trade and Colonialism in contrast with their alternatives will produce or bring about a certain moral way of life? Now, if (as is plausible) Marx means by 'social revolution' not simply a rupture with the past but also the communist form of society which it will bring about, Marx's statements above seem to support the latter view. Further, insofar as this way of life is morally correct in its own rights, not because it fulfills this or that desire people may have, then Marx's account is *not* utilitarian. That is, a non-utilitarian need not reject principles of efficiency — principles which approve of something being done because it promotes a certain end. The crucial point is that the end promoted is not itself justified simply on the basis of its consequences. This point can be illustrated by reference to Kant, whose ethics (I assume) is non-controversially non-utilitarian. In 'Perpetual Peace' Kant argued that governments should be representative because such governments are less likely to make war.⁵⁸ This is an argument which takes consequences into account; but it does not therefore follow that the ethical theory which underlies Kant's views on war, governments, human actions, etc., is a utilitarian one. So it is with Marx's views. True, he does consider the consequences of various actions. It would be absurd for him not to do so. But such considerations do not undercut the argument of this section that Marx was not a utilitarian.

57 Karl Marx, 'The British Rule in India,' in ed. Robert C. Tucker *The Marx-Engels Reader*, (2nd ed., rev.; New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1978) 658

58 Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual Peace,' in *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (New York: The Library of Liberal Arts 1963) 93-5

IV

In conclusion, there would seem to be several weighty reasons for rejecting the utilitarian interpretation of Marx. First, Marx himself explicitly rejects utilitarianism for reasons which, we have argued, are plausible — at least given Marx's other non-moral views. Accordingly, utilitarianism though not logically wedded to the private individual is significantly linked to it under capitalism. Further, utilitarianism itself does not generate — but must take from outside — its concept of the individual for whom questions of utility arise. Thus utilitarianism is plausibly condemned by Marx for being conservative. As I noted above, many utilitarians would not find this criticism objectionable; they would see it as the means whereby utilitarianism remains realistic, not utopian. The merit of Marx's objection then would rest not only on his views of historical materialism and ideology, but also on one's assessment of the moral condition of contemporary society. Be that as it may, the objection surely signals a distance between the views of Marx and utilitarians. Secondly, Marx's view of the individual was argued to be unacceptable to utilitarians. On the one hand, Marx does not hold that the desires of people are *prima facie* worthy of satisfaction. On the other hand, whatever kind of utilitarianism one may consider, no form of utilitarianism can accept as a good to be produced one which must be characterised as morally right or obligatory. But Marx's social individual, which might be argued to be the good which he advocates we realise, is not simply a kind of individual it would be good, or better, to be, but one which people ought to strive to be. Under communism, I take it, it would be mistaken, wrong, a failure not to be that kind of individual. Hence, the incompatibility of Marx and utilitarianism on this score. Finally, Marx is opposed to the kind of calculation of net utilities which is at the heart of utilitarianism. To compare actions and relations in terms of intrinsic goods or preferences is to substitute the particular qualities and nature of the actions or relations for external, abstract considerations. According to Marx, morality demands that actions, relations, as well as individuals be considered according to their own individual self-expressive natures. To fail to do so is to remain alienated, not to be free. Such a view does not prohibit, in toto, the use of teleological and even maximising judgments. It does, however, exclude them from forming the basis of morality.

It should not be concluded from the preceding contentions and arguments that Marx and utilitarianism are opposed on all issues. They both view man at the center of their ethics, even though their concept of man is significantly different. In addition, Marx agreed with nineteenth century utilitarians on the socially dynamic nature of Western society

as opposed to the static nature of Asian society.⁵⁹ Further, for both utilitarians and Marx the problem of scarcity, the lack of development of material resources, played a significant role in explaining moral issues. Nevertheless, these common views cannot be the basis for interpreting Marx to be a utilitarian.⁶⁰

59 Cf. Bryan S. Turner, 'The Concept of Social 'Stationariness': Utilitarianism and Marxism,' *Science and Society* 38 (1974) 12

60 Research for this paper was supported by a summer grant from the Faculty Research Fund, University of Tennessee, and by a grant from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.