

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MARXISM

MARXISM is presented by its adherents as a coherent system of theory and practice from which no deviation may be tolerated. Such an attitude inspires Communists with the energy and the self-sacrifice of religious fanaticism, but it also causes them to misjudge concrete situations and to alienate many who might be sympathetic to their immediate aims. In reality Marxism is both a sociological method and a body of concrete doctrine. As a method it is of the greatest importance ; but as a doctrine it is a mixture of partial truths with the most irrational mysticism.

The characteristic of Marxism as a sociological method is that it takes as its point of departure the concrete needs of concrete human beings. The most fundamental human needs are economic. In the process of satisfying their need for food, clothing and shelter, human beings create different systems of production and different social structures, and become divided into classes. Since different classes share unequally in the distribution of economic goods, conflicts develop between them ; and these class conflicts have been the chief dynamic force in human history. According to Marx man's outlook on the world is a reflection of his class interests ; social existence determines consciousness, and religious philosophical and political ideologies tend to be disguised expressions of economic drives, having the effect of justifying either a ruling class which wishes to retain its privileges or a revolutionary class which is fighting to destroy those privileges.

Marx did not invent the economic interpretation of history, but his followers have been the first to apply it systematically to all social phenomena : and their claim to be scientific sociologists is not unreasonable. Marxism offers a most fruitful method of interpreting the past, and can be used to predict the future. Individuals may violate the interests or the ideologies of their class, but the eccentricities of individuals can be ignored by sociology ; like physics, it can base itself on statistical probabilities. Ruling classes always view the world largely in terms of their class

interests ; and if oppressed classes fail to do so, it is because they are dominated by the ideologies of their rulers. The reduction of idealistic pretensions to terms of class greed is apt to seem brutally cynical ; but the effectiveness of this key to political problems abundantly justifies itself in experience.

Marxists, however, like scientists of other kinds, have often been guilty of erecting a method into a dogma. Because sociological phenomena can be largely explained in terms of economics, it has been assumed that they are wholly economic. This assumption is unjustified.

That the economic interpretation has its limitations becomes plain when it is applied to the motivations of individuals. In any organized society the basic economic needs play a relatively small part in directly determining individual behaviour. Men are governed also by a desire for power and by drives which are sexual in origin ; and their egoistic impulses are normally modified by a need for social approval and for self-justification in terms of an objective ideal. The validity of the Marxist method is due to the fact that individuals are members of a society. Economic factors govern social systems and the main outlines of accepted codes of beliefs, and the non-economic activities of individuals occur within an economically determined framework. A millionaire engaged in doubling his fortune is not governed by a desire for food, clothing and shelter, or even for money for its own sake ; his mode of activity, nevertheless, is a product of the economic system. Under feudalism equivalent motivations produced a crusader or an archbishop. A volunteer dying in an imperialist war may be sacrificing himself in a spirit of the purest idealism, yet it was economic greed which created the situation in which he found himself. Though, however, non-economic drives usually take their directives from the economic system, it does not follow that they do not have an independent reality or that sociology can safely ignore them. The economic needs are the most fundamental, in that they must be satisfied first ; but human happiness depends on much more than on economic security. Nor would the abolition of economic conflicts necessarily prevent conflicts of other kinds ; love of power and sexual jealousy are, under capitalism, associated with property rights, but this does not mean that they would disappear if property rights were abolished.

Similarly the fact that an ideology can be largely reduced to terms of class interest does not prove that it is wholly determined by it. Marx himself (though not his Russian disciples who distinguish proletarian from bourgeois mathematics) believed in the objectivity of science ; and if there are scientific truths which are independent of class relationships, a similar claim may be made for truths of æsthetics, morality and religion. The content of works of art is often an expression of attitudes which have their origin in economic conflicts, but the æsthetic impulse itself, the laws which govern the formal organization of art, and the recording of types of experience which recur under any social system are independent of economics.¹

Concrete ethical imperatives, regulating property or sexual relationships, vary in different social systems, but the ultimate bases of morality—self-awareness and self-control and recognition of other individuals as ends and not as means—are not economic. Even in religious or metaphysical ideologies there is usually a residue of objective truth which defies economic interpretation. Marxism itself, indeed, becomes unintelligible unless it is regarded as an attempt to transcend class ideologies and arrive at human truths.

What has been asserted is merely that, as a matter of scientific fact, economic factors determine social organization, and that the beliefs and activities of individuals will tend to become harmonious with the social organization. Recognition of these truths does not result in any system of values. Marxists believe that societies can be judged by the criterion of economic efficiency, and that economic progress causes cultural development ; but these beliefs cannot be deduced from the economic interpretation of history. Economic needs require satisfaction ; but above the primitive requirements

¹Marxist critics treat Shakespeare as a spokesman of the rising bourgeoisie. If he were merely this, then he would be of interest only to the historian. But the value of *Hamlet* lies not in its portrayal of a specific social situation—a situation which, so far from being bourgeois, belonged to that more primitive stage in human development when vengeance was still the duty of the individual—but in its study of a type of human experience which may recur in any social situation.

of food, clothing and shelter, these needs are highly elastic. Conceivably a relatively low level of economic technique may promote a high degree of cultural creativity. Individual freedom is a necessary condition for cultural development ; and it may be argued that there is more freedom in a society based on private property widely distributed than in a society, whether capitalist or collectivist, based on large-scale industry. The city-state corresponds to a relatively primitive phase in economic technique ; yet the city-state has always proved to be more stimulating to creative activity than the nation or the empire. We may believe, perhaps, that the dynamism of economic interest makes the growth of large-scale organizations inevitable ; but we may still deduce a Spenglerian rather than a Marxian conclusion.

An instructive parallel can be drawn between the method of Marx and that of Freud. The achievement of each man was to take one of the primal impulses of human nature, to show how it assumed disguised expressions in idealistic sublimations and ideological superstructures, and thereby to make men conscious of their real needs and desires. Each man can be criticized for denying all independent reality to æsthetic and intellectual constructions, and for interpreting all human activity in terms of a single basic physical urge. In Freud the sexual impulse, and in Marx economic need, are given such broad meanings that they almost lose their specifically sexual and economic characters and become identical with the undifferentiated flow of human vitality.¹

A thorough-going economic interpretation of history implies that there can be no universal, moral or political ideals. An ideal is merely an expression of a class-interest, and different classes will evolve different ideals between which there can be no reconciliation. For the proletariat, for example, capitalist profits consist of the surplus value created by the workers and stolen by the bourgeoisie ; for the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, they are the legitimate rewards of enterprise and organizing ability. Where then, after denying the possibility of general standards of desirability, does Marxism contrive to find political values? How can it show that certain social changes are good and that those who oppose them

¹After writing this paragraph I discovered that a similar comparison had been made in the pages of *Scrutiny* by Mr. E. W. F. Tomlin.

are to be condemned?

Marxism endeavours to evade this problem by proving that Communism is inevitable. Partly by means of metaphysical doctrine, and partly by an analysis of the economics of capitalism, it purports to show that the victory of the proletariat, and the consequent creation of a Communist society, are objective necessities which can be scientifically predicted. Marxism assumes, moreover, that the real is the rational, and that all human values are derived from objective social conditions ; there can therefore be no distinction between what must happen and what ought to happen. This monistic point of view appears to do some violence to human nature ; but it is buttressed, somewhat inconsistently, by the belief that there is an absolute law of development and that development in human society can be measured by the satisfaction of economic needs. Communism is thus desirable because it is inevitable and inevitable because it is desirable. Social processes are sometimes explained in terms of metaphysical and economic forces of which human beings are merely the instruments ; at other times it is implied that the economic needs of human beings are the original dynamic force in history, and that Communism is inevitable because it means the satisfaction of those economic needs. This combination of contradictory viewpoints is an essential part of Marxism and one of the chief sources of its strength. Emphasis on desirability alone would provoke arguments as to whether Communism was actually better than other systems ; emphasis on inevitability alone would lead to a fatalistic passivism. By fusing both conceptions, at a sacrifice of logical coherence, Marxism provides itself with an answer to any kind of criticism.

The metaphysical arguments for the inevitability of Communism are derived from the Hegelian dialectic. It has sometimes been doubted that Marx himself used the dialectic in this fashion, but it was undoubtedly so used by Engels, and afterwards by Lenin ; and it has become a part of orthodox Marxist apologetics.¹

¹The chief exponent of the opinion that Marx did not preach dialectical materialism is Professor Sidney Hook. Professor Hook appreciates the absurdities of dialectical materialism and, perhaps, over-estimates Marx's intelligence in assuming that he must have

The Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism originated as an attempt to reconcile materialism and idealism. The materialism of the eighteenth century, with its belief in mechanistic determinism and its conception of the human mind as the passive recipient of sense impressions, had been unable to explain the capacity of the human mind to distinguish between truth and error, to organize sense impressions into systems, and to change the world through creative activity. Such difficulties had resulted in the growth of German idealism, which had taken as its starting-point the activity of mind and which—in contrast with the determinists who had interpreted mind mechanistically—had explained the capacity of the mind to discover truth by interpreting matter idealistically. Dialectical materialism abandoned idealistic interpretations of the universe, regarding mind as a product of matter, but at the same time it retained the idealistic belief in the activity of mind. Human beings were not merely the mechanically-determined products of natural processes ; they were also capable of creative action upon the world. Such a conception involved epistemological difficulties as to the relation of mind to matter, but these difficulties were brushed aside by Marx as of no practical importance. Man proved the truth of his ideas by testing them in practice.

The Marxists, however, have not been content with this pragmatic attitude. They have also retained from the idealism of Hegel a number of metaphysical doctrines which are incompatible with materialism. Hegel emphasized the weaknesses of mechanistic determinism—in particular, its inability to account for novelty and growth—and used them as arguments for idealism. The universe was supposed to be the expression of a divine mind, and the laws

been aware of them. Passages from Marx's writings can be quoted in support of this interpretation ; but Marx was not a very consistent thinker. According to Professor Hook Marx was almost a pragmatist, and his system of thought was determined by the class interests of the proletariat. Professor Hook abandons, therefore, the doctrine of inevitability. This attitude, like all varieties of pragmatism, is open to the objection that the ultimate interest or value by which intellectual operations are guided remains somewhat arbitrary. Why is the viewpoint of the proletariat preferable to that of the bourgeoisie?

of thought were also the laws of things ; by examining mental processes one could thus arrive at a genuine understanding of material realities. According to Hegel the universe was a unity whose parts were in constant movement and were constantly interacting upon each other. In studying movement and change the human mind discovered contradictions, and these contradictions were objective realities ; the universe was built out of pairs of opposites. Change was real ; and since the universe was the expression of a divine mind, change could be viewed eulogistically, as development. Such changes were of two kinds : a change in quantity might become a change in quality ; and two opposites might be synthesized into a higher unity. The human mind arrived at truth by synthesizing opposite conceptions, each of which was partially true ; and this ' dialectical ' process was characteristic also of the divine mind by which matter was animated. Thus the chief dialectical laws were those of interaction, of the unity of opposites, of novelty, and of development.

When Marx, according to his own statement, turned the dialectic right side up and interpreted it materialistically, there was no longer any justification for assuming that the laws of thought could be used to interpret nature. Obviously the doctrine that mind is material cannot mean that mental and physical processes are identical ; there is still a difference between psychology and physics, just as there is between organic and inorganic matter. The Hegelian dialectic continued to have a negative value ; the weaknesses of mechanistic materialism which had been emphasized by the idealists still existed. But the positive doctrines of Hegelianism no longer had any justification. Thus the real significance of the dialectical laws, when they are combined with a materialistic philosophy, is that they formulate those situations where chains of cause and effect cannot be discovered. In so far as they still have meaning, they are the limitations to scientific method. They do not enable us to predict the future, they show under what conditions the future cannot be predicted. They apply not to objective realities but to the methods by which the human mind apprehends those realities. Beyond this they degenerate into mystical verbiage. It is, however, precisely in this mystical verbiage that Marxism discovers its metaphysical arguments for predicting the inevitability of Communism.

The method of science is to isolate phenomena and thereby to discover invariable sequences of events. This, however, is impossible to the extent that the universe is characterized by interaction. When a number of different forces are all interacting upon each other, it is impossible to isolate any chains of cause and effect. In the natural sciences the interaction is often small, and a sufficient degree of isolation can usually be artificially created for experimental purposes. In sociology, however, no such isolation is possible. Different individuals, classes and nations, factors of economics, politics and philosophy, are all constantly interacting upon each other. Sociology, therefore, can never become an exact science. Every phenomenon must be studied in relation to the total situation, and our reading of events must be based not so much on scientific method as on a capacity to grasp the meaning of a situation, of a kind which is more intuitive than logical. The dialectical law of interaction is thus a warning against any excessive use of scientific method in human affairs. In practice—and this was a meaning frequently given to it by Lenin—it means reliance on common sense rather than on theory.

The law of the unity of opposites means partly that in attempting to describe movement and change the human mind discovers contradictions and partly that material phenomena can be analysed into opposing forces. The former of these meanings has reference merely to certain verbal paradoxes which have no practical importance. Thus, when an object is moving, it both is, and is not, in a particular place at a particular moment ; or when a man is becoming bald, there is a moment when he can be described as both bald and not bald. Such contradictions, which have fascinated metaphysicians since the time of Zeno, are merely tricks of verbal legerdemain. That opposite forces can often be distinguished at work in nature is an objective fact and not a verbal paradox. It cannot, however, be assumed that all phenomena are unities of opposites ; whether they are or are not is a matter for investigation. In practice, most phenomena can be analysed not merely into a single pair of opposites but into a much larger number of different forces. It is merely a metaphor to apply the word 'opposite' to many of the contradictions which Marxists discover with such profusion in nature—to the 'opposition' between life and matter, for example, or between animals and their environment. Marxists

frequently become intoxicated with a mystical passion for discovering opposites everywhere and show themselves incapable of distinguishing between mental operations and objective natural processes. Engels, for example, believed that the fact that two minuses made a plus was an example of a dialectical process actually at work in nature. But the fact that $a - b(c - b)$ is another way of saying $a - bc + b^2$ tells us nothing about the external world.

The dialectical emphasis on the appearance of novelties has a negative value, in that it involves a denial of materialistic determinism. The universe cannot be wholly explained in terms of mechanistic causation; genuine change is possible. Thus quantitative changes may become qualitative; when water reaches a certain degree of heat it changes into steam.¹ Of greater significance is the fact that a whole, such as a living organism, may be more than the sum of its parts. Matter, organized in a certain way, becomes a living creature; a living creature operates in accordance with laws which differ from those which apply to the matter of which it is composed. Dialectical materialism does not, however, enable us to understand such changes, nor can they be predicted when we have no previous experience of them; the manner in which matter becomes organized into new compounds, with new properties, remains mysterious. Marxism endeavours to explain novelty and growth by means of its doctrine of opposites. A thesis is negated by its antithesis, which is followed by a negation of the negation, in other words by a synthesis. A seed dies, and from its death springs new life. Such statements are merely metaphors, which explain nothing. The original core of truth in this verbiage was the fact that the human mind often discovers truth by synthesizing contradictory ideas. This process can also be traced in the pendulum swing of action and reaction between

¹The chief fallacy in Marx's prophecy of a Kingdom of Freedom, to be achieved through state socialism, lies in his failure to take account of a change of this kind. When half-a-dozen men work together, there may be both co-operation and freedom; extend the principle to an entire nation, and there is a qualitative change; bureaucracy and dictatorship become necessary. Genuine freedom is possible only in a society of small units, with a minimum of centralized control.

opposing tendencies in society. But it cannot be applied to nature unless one believes, with Hegel, in the immanence of a divine mind.

Similarly dependent upon belief in a divine mind is the dialectical law of development—a law which, according to Lenin, is ‘absolute.’ This Hegelian conception was an inheritance from the Christian tradition, and in particular from the mystico-heretical faith in a coming Age of the Holy Ghost when men would obey the impulses of God in their hearts, and laws and institutions would become unnecessary—when, in other words, the state would wither away and mankind would enter the Kingdom of Freedom. But for a materialist there can be no absolute law of development. A materialist has no objective standards by which he can measure growth and decay ; he can assess events only in human terms which have no cosmic validity. Development, moreover, can be absolute only if time is limited ; an endless development is impossible ; if time is infinite, then cosmic processes must be cyclic. Actually Marxists judge development by the standard of economic power. This, however, is a human value, which can claim no metaphysical support ; and since the only justification for such a standard is the assumption that human behaviour is primarily governed by economic need, there is no reason for supposing that development of this kind is inevitable. Economic growth may be prevented by objective natural conditions—an exhaustion of the world’s raw material, for example, or thwarted by destructive conflicts and by a failure of human intelligence to solve them. The course of human history has not hitherto been characterized by any unilinear development. On the contrary a dozen different civilizations have progressed up to a point and then degenerated.

In so far, therefore, as the dialectical philosophy is true, it offers no support for Communism ; and in so far as it serves to justify Communism, it is not true. It is true that the universe is characterized by interaction, and that natural and historical processes exhibit certain discontinuities which cannot be described in terms of mechanistic causation. It is not true that the universe is composed of pairs of opposites, that these opposites tend always to become synthesized into higher unities, and that development is absolute. It is true that society can be analysed into a number of different interacting forces, that the clash of these forces must produce constant changes, and that such changes may be qualitative

and dialectical and not merely quantitative and mechanistic. But there is no metaphysical justification for dividing society into a single pair of opposites—bourgeoisie and proletariat—or for assuming that their conflict must produce the higher synthesis of Communism.¹

The economic arguments for the inevitability of Communism were, according to Marx, the result of an open-minded study of capitalism. By purely economic investigations Marx purported to show that society was divided into two classes, that the gulf between them would grow steadily broader, and that the proletariat must eventually seize power and expropriate the bourgeoisie; if this analysis proved to corroborate the Hegelian philosophy, that was not because Marx had studied capitalism in Hegelian terms; it was because that philosophy was unescapably true.

This assertion may be doubted. There are errors in the Marxist analysis of capitalism—errors which have been of enormous practical importance—and these errors appear to have originated in an attempt to prove that society conformed to the Hegelian formulæ.

In the first place society is not, and never has been, divided into a single pair of opposites. This is plain enough in the case of pre-capitalist systems. The French Revolution, for example, was certainly no conflict between opposites. The emergent bourgeoisie were not in any intelligible sense the 'opposite' of the feudal aristocracy. The purpose of the Revolution was to expel from the body politic a privileged class which had become parasitical, and the groups who achieved this can be roughly classified as wealthy bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat and peasants. In capitalist society the proletariat may perhaps be regarded as the 'opposite' of the bourgeoisie, but to view capitalism in terms

¹Lenin discovered a class struggle—*i.e.*, a 'conflict' between positive and negative electricity—in every particle of matter, and used it as an argument for Communism. If, however, we are to deduce our politics from our physics, it would seem that we should be Fascists rather than Communists. Negative electricity does not destroy positive electricity; matter is composed of the two together, in perpetual 'conflict.' This resembles the Fascist theory of the state.

of a single class-conflict is dangerously misleading. A realistic sociology must take account also of the persistence of farmer peasant and petty bourgeois elements, of the growth of a salaried middle class, and of the various conflicts of interest between skilled and unskilled workers which are concealed by the abstraction 'proletariat.' By analogy with the French Revolution, the true object of twentieth-century revolutionary movements should be, perhaps, not to give power to a single class, but to overthrow a privileged class which has become parasitical—the bankers, monopolists, and wealthy rentiers. It was the refusal of Marxists prior to 1935 to take account of such facts which was the primary cause for the victory of Fascism. By forcing all non-proletarian elements to classify themselves as either for the dictatorship of the proletariat or against it they drove the majority of them into an alliance with finance-capitalism.

In the second place the gulf between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is not becoming broader. The Marxist prophecy of increasing misery among the working class is based on certain economic fallacies which few, even among the Marxists, to-day take seriously. Capital, according to Marx, was divided into the variable capital used to pay wages and the constant capital used to buy new means of production ; according to the theory of surplus value all profits were made on the variable capital ; as the capitalist system progressed, however, the proportion of constant capital would increase, the result being that the rate of profit on the total capital would diminish, and in order to prevent it from disappearing, the capitalists would be compelled to lower the wages and intensify the exploitation of the workers. The chief weakness of this argument is the assumption that profits are extracted from the workers, so that the lower the wage, the higher the profit ; actually profits are extracted from the consumer, and the rate of profit depends on the market.¹ It should be added, moreover, that if capitalism is viewed as a unit the distinction between constant and variable capital is meaningless—ultimately all capital is variable—and that the Marxist theory makes the fact that capitalists do increase the

¹The theory—now adopted by most left-wing economists—that capitalist crises are caused by low consuming power comes not from Marx but from Mr. J. A. Hobson.

proportion of constant capital, and do so in the expectation of larger profits, quite inexplicable. As a matter of historical fact the working class have become more insecure but not more miserable ; and even their insecurity has been considerably modified by state intervention. The Marxist vision of two opposites, a bourgeoisie growing richer and fewer and a proletariat growing more miserable and more numerous, culminating in a catastrophic dialectical transference of power, is further from realization than when Marx wrote.

In the third place the proletariat is not in its nature a revolutionary class ; it may, more easily than other classes, be converted to revolutionary ideals, but it is not, as Marx asserted, revolutionary by virtue of its economic status. It is dangerous to draw analogies between the working class movement to-day and the rise of the bourgeoisie before the French Revolution. The bourgeoisie were engaged in constructing a new social order, the growth of which was impeded by Feudal survivals but which was wholly independent of feudalism. The working class, on the other hand, are a part of capitalism ; their natural tendency is to fight not for a new kind of system but for a different distribution of profits under the existing system. According to Marx socialism was not an intellectual invention but a real force objectively active in society. Actually, however, the combination of socialism with the working class movement has always been an alliance rather than an identity. The primary-purpose of the working class movement has always been to win higher wages and better living conditions under capitalism ; and to the extent that it accomplishes this, it becomes—as in the United States and, to a lesser degree, in Great Britain and in the Germany of the Weimar Republic—a conservative rather than a revolutionary force. Insecurity may make the working classes converts to socialism, but this is almost equally true of the middle classes. *Bona fide* revolutionary socialism, as distinct from social-democratic reformism, probably has as many supporters among the middle classes as inside the trade unions.

That a revolutionary transformation of society is not inevitable does not mean either that it is impossible or that it is undesirable ; it means, however, that the argument for it must be stated in terms of value rather than of metaphysical and economic fatalism. And though such an approach is condemned by all disciples of the

master as utopian, it is, in reality, true to the spirit of Marxism. The question of motive is consistently ignored in Marxist literature. Marx became a socialist before he set out to discover cosmic support for his faith ; his own conversion was an expression of moral idealism, and his writings are shot through with a moral indignation against the injustices of capitalism. It is its Hebraic passion for social justice, and not its dreary and often fallacious chains of reasoning, which has made *Das Kapital* the bible of twentieth-century revolution.

The future is partly determined and partly contingent. The economic interpretation of history defines the limits within which choice is effectively possible ; we cannot expect, for example, that a privileged class should abandon its privileges without a struggle, or that the tendency of capitalism towards monopoly should be reversed and the *laissez-faire* competition of Cobdenism re-established. Economic determinism is not, however, absolute, nor is it inevitable that private capitalism be followed by centralized state capitalism on the Russian model. Classes are not governed directly by their economic interests but by those interests as interpreted by the intelligence and modified by ideals ; and to the extent that actions are influenced by ideologies, there lies the possibility of altering the course of history. The battle between Communism and Fascism, for example, is inexplicable in purely economic terms. It is a struggle not merely between classes but also between rival ideologies, between the idea of racial imperialism and that of the classless society, in which the original core of economic conflict becomes almost invisible.

It remains true, as the Marxists have insisted, that an idea is futile unless it is embodied in an interest ; but it does not follow that the idea is a mere reflection of the interest or that the interest alone has reality. The idea is always broader ; it must, in fact, claim universality, for without such a claim to universality no interest can act with full self-confidence. Human beings, in other words, are not governed solely by the economic interests of their class ; they also have a sense of the unity of the race and of the role of humanity in the cosmos. All movements which have played any important part in history have done so because they have fused an economic interest with a universal ideal, and have been of lasting significance to the extent that they have set the ideal

above the interest. Eighteenth-century liberalism would have been futile if it had not corresponded to the interest of the bourgeoisie, but it was no mere reflection of that interest. Its ideal of a universal personal freedom was broader than the bourgeois demand for a free market. It was an expression of an ultimate ethical ideal—the sense that human beings should be ends and not means—and it was occasionally capable of enforcing that value even when it conflicted with bourgeois economic interest. It was his loyalty to the same value which made Marx a socialist. By proclaiming as its goal the emancipation of humanity Marxism sanctifies the economic struggle of exploited classes and endeavours to transform the working class movement, which in itself is merely a movement for better conditions under capitalism, into a crusade for a world in which human beings shall not be treated merely as instruments of the economic machine. But if this moral basis constitutes the real appeal of Marxism, its refusal to make that basis explicit is, correspondingly, its cardinal weakness. For a movement which rests merely on the economic interest of a class and which finds its justification not in ethical values but in historic fatalism cannot win loyalty and self-sacrifice, even among the class to which it appeals ; and when it proceeds to the building of a new social order, it will be likely to violate that sense of the freedom and dignity of individual men and women which constitutes the only valid reason for demanding the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a classless society.

H. B. PARKES.

BAUDELAIRE

I.

BAUDELAIRE is in many ways so remote from us—we do not like his age, nor his more obvious reactions against the age—that we need, I think, to be specially careful when we study him. It is easy to mistake his word and gesture.

For example, it is sometimes assumed that, because he frequently mentions the devil, he was not only a Christian, but a sort of Christian ascetic ; or, to use the humbler and more appropriate term, a Puritan. A number of well-known poems can be taken to imply this ; and there are notorious phrases from the *Journals*, such as : *Faire l'amour, c'est faire le mal*. But it will be suggested in this paper that the poems, if they are not to be largely emptied of their meaning, cannot be read in this way ; and as for the *Journals*, it may be doubted whether they can be appropriately discussed by a critic at all. They are rather matter for the psychologist or the biographer. Baudelaire had not that habit of systematic reflection, at least on moral subjects, which alone makes *obiter dicta* immediately instructive : in his case they tend to be accompanied by sound and smell, rather than by light. They are explosions, provoked by a momentary joy or pain. It is they which need to be interpreted with the aid of considered utterances such as the poems, rather than the other way round.

If we read the poems closely, we see that Baudelaire does not always talk about the same kind of devil. One he describes as above all cunning—*rusé, savant*—and his sole business is to deceive ; another can spare himself this labour, for he has the power of a despot over slaves ; while yet a third is a sort of honest merchant, the excellent quality of whose wares secures him clients. The importance of these distinctions is that whereas the first devil is a part of Christian tradition, which has satisfied centuries of thinking men ; the second and third are drawn—ultimately perhaps from the Manichees, but immediately—from the Satanist or diabolist poets, who have satisfied few men but themselves.

Accordingly, the quality of Baudelaire's poetry making mention of the devil varies considerably. At times he does not much differ from Swinburne, at least in the paradoxical mood.