LECTURES AT FUDAN UNIVERSITY

RAWLS AND MARX:

DISTRIBUTIVE PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTIONS OF THE PERSON

LECTURE TWO

CONCEPTIONS OF THE PERSON: THE 1980 RAWLS AND THE 1844 MARX

I. Introductory Remarks

In my last lecture I provided a very brief account of Rawls’s view, justice as fairness, at least as that view is presented in his book, *A Theory of Justice*. In the first half of this lecture I will focus on how such a view might be justified. Rawls’s own work shows an evolution in his understanding of how justice as fairness is to be justified. At moments in *A Theory of Justice* he puts weight on the role of *a moral conception of the person*. This is when he talks, in *A Theory of Justice*, of the “Kantian Interpretation” of justice as fairness. During the 1970s and 1980s, this idea – the idea of a moral conception of the person – comes to play a larger role in Rawls’s view. That is what I will discuss in the first half of today’s lecture. In the second half, I will shift ground and begin my discussion of the young Marx. I will focus in particular in this lecture on the account of *true communism* – as Marx calls it -- that one finds in Marx’s work of 1844.

II. The Original Position and the Issue of Justification

1. Now, it is all well and good to propose principles of justice, and it is of course nice if those principles are intuitively appealing. But that is not enough. We need to justify the thesis that these are the right principle -- that they are true or reasonable or are in some other sense warranted for us. Something of a justificatory kind must be said. Now, among the famous ideas in *A Theory of Justice* is its account of justification, the claim that principles of justice are justified if they would be chosen by agents who are placed behind, in Rawls’s phrase, a “veil of ignorance.” In many presentations of Rawls’s view, much weight is put on the role of this “original position” – which is constituted by the veil of ignorance – and much weight is put on the claim that particular principles of justice are justified *because* they would be chosen from the standpoint of the original position.

It often seems to be taken for granted that we understand the moral force of using the device of the original position. That is, it often seems to be taken for granted that if a set of principles would be chosen from behind the veil of ignorance, then it is morally obligatory on us to obey those principles. But that is not at all clearly the case. In fact, there are deep questions about the moral relevance of a choice from behind the veil of ignorance. The first part of this lecture will focus on those problems and on Rawls’s attempts to address them.

2. As I have noted, many writers have found Rawls’s two principles of justice to be intuitively appealing. However, Rawls aspires to give a rigorous argument for his two principles, and the original position is supposed to be the central part of that rigorous argument. Precisely how the argument *inside* the original position works was for a while a matter of great scholarly dispute. Indeed, it is still a matter of dispute. It is obviously an important issue and, if you like, we can talk about it in the question period. However, that will not be my focus here.

Let me briefly remind you of how the original position works. The parties behind the veil of ignorance are deprived of any knowledge of their characteristics – of their gender, their race, their height, weight, their preferences and beliefs about what is good in life. They know nothing at all about themselves. And behind the veil of ignorance they are supposed to choose the principles of justice that will regulate real human societies in which real people will live. That is, they choose in ignorance of anything about themselves but they expect that they will live in a society regulated by the principles that they choose. The idea is that after they have chosen, the veil of ignorance will be lifted and they will live their own individual lives. But they have to choose from behind the veil and so must choose in such a way that they have acceptable lives no matter who they turn out to be once the veil of ignorance is lifted.

Rawls believes that when the parties make their choice in this very odd and rarified condition, they will choose his two principles of justice in preference to other possibilities, especially in preference to the principle of average utility.

As I say, we could talk about the arguments that are supposed to apply *within* the original position. In the end, however, that issue seems to me to be of less philosophical importance than the issue of the *status* of the original position.

Right from the initial publication of *A Theory of Justice* there were puzzles about what sort of standpoint the original position is supposed to be. For a while it was taken to be a way to characterize something called “the moral point of view.” It was claimed that *any* true moral principle would be, in some sense, the output of the original position. Rawls, himself, was initially guilty of this way of thinking of it, but he soon shifted and soon claimed that the original position is merely the morally proper standpoint for choosing the principles of justice to regulate the central institutions of a modern society. That is, Rawls came to reject the claim that the original position is a way to handle *all* moral issues. In the end, for Rawls, the original position has a very limited range of application, namely to resolve a specific question about a specific type of society. In the end, he makes no claims for it beyond that.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting that in general we should be careful to determine what the range of application is of any sort of standpoint to which we appeal in moral and political philosophy. The appeal to a favored standpoint has been made by writers from very different philosophical traditions – for instance, within the British empiricist tradition by Adam Smith with his standpoint of the impartial spectator, and within the Hegelian-Marxist tradition by Georgy Lukacs with his idea of the standpoint of the proletariat. For any such proposed standpoint we need to ask, “What is its proper range of application? To what specific question is the use of this standpoint supposed to provide an answer?”

Putting the range of application issue aside, there were other complaints about Rawls’s original position. I will focus on two. I believe that, during the 1970s, Rawls’s response to these complaints led him to reformulate his understanding of the role of the original position and ultimately led him to reformulate his understanding of his own overall view, justice as fairness. And this involves bringing in a Kantian conception of the person as a basic element in the view.

4. The first of the complaints about the original position is that any agreement reached in the original position is a merely *hypothetical agreement*, a hypothetical contract, not an *actual contract* -- and it has always been a puzzle why there is any moral relevance, any reason-giving force, to a hypothetical contract. Now, when Thomas Hobbes invokes the idea of a social contract in *Leviathan*, he is invoking the idea of an actual contract, of an event in which people actually “covenant” with one another, as Hobbes puts it.[[1]](#endnote-1) They make promises to one another and, according to Hobbes they have an obligation to obey the sovereign that they install because they have *actually* promised to obey that sovereign. We may of course deny that there was ever a Hobbesian state of nature, and we may also deny that any one in any current society has made an actual promise to obey a sovereign. But Hobbes does seem on solid ground in believing that if you make a promise, then you are obligated to do as you have promised. There seems to be a great deal of moral force to an act of actually consenting to something.

The problem that Rawls faces is that the agreement behind the veil of ignorance is not an *actual* agreement but a hypothetical agreement. No one is actually behind a veil of ignorance. The whole construct is merely a philosophical device. Rawls’s claim is that if we were – hypothetically – to choose from behind the veil of ignorance, we would – hypothetically – choose his two principles of justice. But it seems quite mysterious why anyone should be obligated to do what they *hypothetically* would agree to do if they have never *actually* made any such agreement. The fact that I would agree to do X in some hypothetical context – even that it would be *rational* for me to agree to do X in that hypothetical context -- hardly entails that I am now, in my actual context, bound by what I would hypothetically do.

To see this, consider the following example. Suppose that some wealthy capitalist, call him Donald Trump, decides to become a philanthropist. Since Donald Trump believes in capitalism and since risk is the essence of capitalism, Trump decides to give away his money via a lottery. In this lottery, entry tickets cost a hundred dollars, but Trump will redeem 95% of the tickets for a thousand dollars each. The other 5% of the tickets – marked with a zero which appears twenty-four hours after purchase -- are worthless. Still, this is clearly a good risk to take. 95% of those who purchase the lottery tickets will get a thousand dollars back for the hundred dollars they have spent. That seems like a good bet.

Suppose now that I am present at the selling of these tickets, I buy one ticket for myself, and then, since I am also feeling philanthropic, I go to the phone book and at random I pick out a name – let’s say it is Barack Obama – and I buy a ticket on his behalf, writing Obama’s name on the ticket so as to distinguish it from my own ticket. Before buying Obama’s ticket I attempt to telephone him to obtain his consent to the purchase, but I cannot reach him. Still, since the risk is obviously a good one, it would be rational for Barack Obama to want me to buy him a ticket, and so I impute his hypothetical consent to the purchase.

As luck will have it, however, the next day Obama’s ticket turns out to have a zero on it. It is a loser. It is worthless. I finally do reach Obama by phone and I explain what I have done and I ask for repayment of the hundred dollars that I spent on his behalf. He says indignantly that he never authorized my purchase and so he owes me nothing. He says that he does believe that I would have given him the thousand dollars had his ticket won, and he admits that he would have consented to the purchase had I reached him before buying the ticket for me. However, he says that because he never *actually* gave his consent he has no obligation to repay me. I go before a judge and I claim that because Obama would, hypothetically, have consented to my purchase, he now owes me a hundred dollars in repayment. The judge laughs and dismisses the case.

The point is that unless you actually choose, you have *not* chosen. Hypothetical consent of this kind is not morally binding. That is one problem with the use of the original position. Agreement there is *merely* hypothetical.

A second complaint came from the philosopher Thomas Nagel. As I have said, in the original position the parties behind the veil of ignorance are deprived of all knowledge about themselves, including knowledge of their own conceptions of the good. That is, they are deprived of knowledge of what they believe would constitute a good and flourishing human life. In an early review of *A Theory of Justice* Nagel argues that Rawls has not justified the requirement that the parties behind the veil of ignorance are to be deprived of knowledge of their conceptions of the good. The move here, Nagel argues, is very different from depriving the parties of knowledge, say, of their race or their gender.[[2]](#endnote-2) If I know my race or my gender, I might propose principles of justice that are slanted to benefit someone of that race or that gender. I might try to rig the principles of justice in my own favor. Or to take another example, if I know that I live in Chicago, I might propose the principle that everyone who lives in Chicago should get ten times the average income. That would be a self-interested attempt to slant the principles in my own favor. By denying me knowledge of where I was born, the veil of ignorance makes it impossible for me to try to slant the principles of justice in my own favor.

Nagel’s claim is that if I know my conception of the good, something different would be going on. If I know my conception of the good, what I know is my view of what a good life for a human being is – not just a good life for me but a good life for each of us. If I know that – if I know my view of what is a good life for human beings -- I might try to rig the principles to favor such a view of the good life, but here my motive would be to benefit everyone – I would be trying to make it more likely that *everyone* would live what I believe to be a good human life. Here, my motive would not be a self-interested motive. Perhaps Rawls is still correct that the parties behind the veil of ignorance should not know their conceptions of the good. However, Nagel’s point is that the reason to prevent them from knowing their conceptions of the good cannot be that it is important to exclude from the original position any knowledge that would enable someone to choose a principle that self-interestedly favors the agent in question. To justify excluding knowledge of one’s conception of the good, a different kind of reason would have to be provided. Nagel’s claim is that in *A Theory of Justice* Rawls does not provide any such reason.

5. In the articles that Rawls wrote during the 1970s we can see his response to both of the criticisms that I have listed. These articles culminate in his 1980 lectures, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory.” In essence, Rawls’s response to both challenges comes through relying on the idea of a *moral conception of the person*, and to a lesser extent on the idea of a *conception of society*. He affirms such reliance very clearly in the 1980 lectures. Rawls writes there that:

The task [of political philosophy] is to articulate a public conception of justice that all can live with who regard their person and their relation to society in a certain way . . . What justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent to and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Let’s focus for a bit now on the idea of a moral conception of the person. What is the content of the Rawlsian conception of the person? In the 1980 lectures, he says that it is as follows. Persons have what Rawls calls *two moral powers* along with what he calls two *highest-order interests* in exercising those powers.

[W]e take moral persons to be characterized by two moral powers and by two corresponding highest-order interests in realizing and exercising those powers. The first power is the capacity for an effective sense of justice, that is, the capacity to understand, to apply and to act from (and not merely in accordance with) the principles of justice. The second moral power is the capacity to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good. Corresponding to the moral powers, moral persons are said to be moved by two highest-order interests to realize and exercise these powers.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Moreover, Rawls says, at any given moment a moral person has “a determinate scheme of final ends, a particular conception of the good.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

All this requires comment.

(i) A conception of the person here is a moral conception, not a biological or psychological conception. Rawls’s conception of the person is moral in two senses. First, it is a conception of us *as* moral beings. This is clear -- Rawls is giving pride of place to what he calls two “moral powers.” Second, Rawls’s conception is moral in the sense that it is aspirational. It is a conception of the kind of person that we think we ought to be or ought to be in the process of becoming. This is shown by Rawls’s assertion that we have higher-order interests in exercising our moral powers. To have a power is not necessarily to exercise it and certainly not necessarily to exercise it well. To exercise it at all and certainly to exercise it well, certain conditions need to obtain. To exercise our two moral powers and to do so well, we need to live in a society that instantiates certain conditions. Rawls is asserting a social ideal, namely, the conditions under which human beings can exercise their two moral powers in a proper fashion.

I have said that this is a moral conception of the person. Of course empirical facts are relevant. Any conception of the person involves claims about our desires and our motivations (say, that we can in fact be motivated by considerations of justice), and a conception of the person is of little use if it is not a human possibility. Still, the empirical facts significantly underdetermine the content of a moral conception of the person. Many different moral conceptions of the person are compatible with what we know, empirically, about human beings. Empirical considerations will not enable us to choose from among these different conceptions.

(ii) Rawls assumes that his moral conception picks out features of our nature that can be motivationally efficacious. This is made explicit when he says that the first moral power is “the capacity for an effective sense of justice, that is, the capacity to understand, to apply and to act from (and not merely in accordance with) the principles of justice.” Rawls is deliberately agnostic here with regard to disputes about moral motivation. Whether a sense of justice is tied to what some philosophers call an “internal reason” or instead to what they call an “external reason” is not his focus. His point is that a moral person (however we understand this idea) is capable of being motivated by moral reasons, specifically, by a sense of justice. This is one of the premises of his account.

(iii) As I noted, Rawls assumes that persons have an “interest,” indeed, a “highest-order interest” in exercising their moral powers. This might seem obvious with regard to the capacity to pursue a conception of the good. As Rawls says, at any given moment, this capacity is tied to a specific conception of one’s good, and it seems clear that a person has a strong interest in pursuing her conception of her own good. What might seem less obvious is the thesis that one has a highest-order interest in exercising one’s capacity for a sense of justice. Rawls’s claim seems to be that it is in one’s interest not only that just social arrangements obtain but that one act in order to support those arrangements. One way to take this claim is as a claim that simply puts aside the worry about the free-rider. It has to do with what Rawls calls the *congruence* between the right and the good. I will return to this issue in my next lecture.

(iv) The original position *models* agents as free and equal rational beings with the two moral powers. For keep in mind the terms of the original position. The parties are all equal because behind the veil of ignorance no agent knows anything about itself other than that it possesses the two moral powers. The parties are free in the sense that nothing compels them to accept any principles of justice that are offered to them. They must freely choose to accept any principles. And they are rational in the sense that they are capable of judging which of the offered principles are most in their interest, where their interests are specified in terms of finding the proper social conditions for the exercise of their two moral powers.

(v) Finally, as a scholarly matter, this way of conceiving of persons is in some ways continuous with what Rawls says in parts of *A Theory of Justice*. In section §77 of that book, Rawls asks the question: What “sorts of beings are owed the guarantees of justice?”[[6]](#endnote-6) His answer is that *moral persons* are owed such guarantees, and he goes on to characterize moral persons in a way that is equivalent to his later discussion of the two moral powers. There is on the one hand a capacity for a conception of one’s own good, and on the other hand there is the capacity for a “normally effective desire to apply and to act upon the principles of justice.”[[7]](#endnote-7) So in some ways the view of persons articulated in the 1980 lectures is a development of and not a basic break from the view in *A Theory of Justice*.

6. I think that we are now in a position to see how the stress on a conception of the person address the two problems that I have mentioned concerning the use of the original position.

First, let’s consider the role of hypothetical consent. Remember, the problem with hypothetical consent is that it looks as if the appeal to such consent amounts to an appeal to the moral force of an *actual* agreement, a situation in which two or more people *actually* exercise their wills and make a real contract or promise of some kind. But of course with merely hypothetical consent there is no exercise of the will and so it is a mistake to think that a hypothetical agreement is binding in the way that an actual agreement is binding. I take Rawls’s response to be to dispense with the idea that what we have is a binding agreement. He no longer thinks that one is committed to the two principles of justice merely because one would, hypothetically, accept those principles. Instead, I take him to be making the following claims.

(a) The choice position, that is, the original position, *models* a specific moral conception of the person. Call this conception of the person *CP*.

(b) One accepts that this conception CP is the best available conception of the person, meaning that it embodies what one believes is the most desirable (or perhaps I should say the most desirable-yet-also-feasible) conception of the kind of person to be.

(c) One wants to realize in oneself and in one’s life the most desirable conception of the person, so one wants to realize conception CP in oneself and in one’s life.

Given (a), the output of the original position provides rules that constrain the conduct of a being that instantiates conception of the person CP. Given (b) and (c), I have good reason to act as conception of the person CP would dictate. So I have good reason to comply with the principles that would be chosen in the original position and to do so *because* they are the rules that would be chosen there. Compliance with those rules is in fact what is involved in realizing conception CP in myself and in my life.

Let’s look at what is going on. Suppose there is a conception or, really, an ideal of the person that I find compelling. I have a conception of a Moral Exemplar. I want to do those things that this Moral Exemplar would do and I want not do those things that this Moral Exemplar would refuse to do. Moreover, I want to do and not to do such things from precisely the reasons that this Moral Exemplar would want to do or not to do them and in the way that this Moral Exemplar would do or not do them. The content of all this could be filled in differently for different Moral Exemplars. For instance, “in the way this Moral Exemplar would do things” could mean one or more of: with the feelings that this Moral Exemplar would have, with the beliefs that this Moral Exemplar would have, with the bearing (say, the ease and grace) that this Moral Exemplar would have. In political philosophy, the focus is usually on actions, reasons and attitudes, but it would be possible to add further elements.

What is going on is actually a familiar move in moral thought, both ordinary moral thought and academic moral thought. To look at an example of ordinary moral thought, in the United States some evangelical Christians have recently appealed to “What would Jesus do?” as a way to specify both the action that a person should perform and the motives that she should have in performing it. That is, when considering what to do, these people do not apply Kant’s categorical imperative or the principle of utility. Rather, they ask what Jesus of Nazareth would do and they try to do that action. Academic moral philosophers do not appeal to religious exemplars in this way. Nevertheless, the Aristotelian strand of the western philosophical tradition has long tied the standard of proper conduct (the proper standard of actions, reasons, feelings and other things) to what Aristotle thought of as the *phronimos* or the person of practical wisdom. Once again, when deciding what to do one asks what a certain exemplary being would do, this time the Aristotelian person of practical wisdom. Thus if we see the original position as a way to model a particular ideal of the person, we can see that Rawls’s political philosophy actually fits within a long tradition.

7. So much for Rawls’s responds to the worry about hypothetical consent. How about Thomas Nagel’s complaint? In fact, the modeling-a-conception-of-the-person interpretation of the original position also provides a reason to deprive the parties of knowledge of their conceptions of the good. The parties are supposed to be modeled purely as free and equal rational beings with the two moral powers. However, if the parties know their conceptions of the good, the choice position would no longer model them solely as free and equal rational beings. It would instead model a range of persons, for instance, one person would be a free and equal Christian, another would be a free and equal Muslim, another a free and equal secular humanist. That would make finding principles that all those behind the veil of ignorance agree to much more difficult. Far more important, it would completely change the point of the original position. The original position is supposed to model persons under a description that each of us, that is, each of us as real persons in the real world after the veil is lifted, could accept. If it models persons by reference to their conceptions of the good, that will be acceptable only to persons who hold that particular conception of the good. The entire point of using the original position would be lost. It would no longer be a choice position that *each* of us could accept specifically because we do see ourselves as, among other things and fundamentally, free and equal rational beings with the two moral powers.[[8]](#endnote-8)

8. To summarize. The basic idea of justification as Rawls reconceives it in 1980 is to start with a conception of the person (in the terms that I have just been stating) and to proceed from there to the original position which is thought to model that conception of the person. Rawls can then use the earlier arguments from within the original position to reach his two principles of justice.

What is the function of the original position here? It is to specify the conditions that enable agents to be modeled merely as free and equal rational beings with the two moral powers – and so with the associated two highest-order interests in the exercise of those powers. The principles that are chosen within the original position are those that would be accepted by beings characterized in those terms.

As I say, this emphasis in 1980 on the role of a conception of the person actually has strong links to parts of *A Theory of Justice*. For instance, in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls writes, “The desire to act justly and the desire to express our nature as free moral persons turn out to specify what is practically speaking the same desire.”[[9]](#endnote-9) And he writes: “[T]he desire to express our nature as a free and equal rational being can be fulfilled only by acting on the principles of right and justice as having first priority.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Finally, he writes in *A Theory of Justice* that in a well-ordered society “moral personality” -- that is, the possession of what in the “Kantian Constructivism” lectures is referred to as the two moral powers -- is regarded “as the fundamental aspect of the self.”[[11]](#endnote-11) I take the well-ordered society of justice as fairness to represent the optimal conditions for the realization of this fundamental aspect of the self. The original position is the device that enables us to see precisely which principles would obtain in such a society and so to see which principles must be accepted and complied with if we are to have lives in which we do in fact realize this fundamental aspect of the self.

We have, then, a way to understand the role of the original position that relies on the specification of a certain view of what persons are. This performs crucial functions. For instance, it explains why we need the original position and why the original position must take a certain form. It also enables Rawls to answer the worry about the free rider. Any political philosophy must explain why citizens will have sufficient reason to comply with basic social rules. Mere coercion – having a policeman on every corner -- is not an adequate basis for social stability. Citizens must voluntarily comply with social rules. One basis for doing so is the belief that such compliance is morally required. Rawls’s view involves this belief. His citizens have a sense of justice and they are capable of acting from that sense of justice. That is, they are capable of complying with social rules because justice requires it. But because Rawls’s citizens see themselves as the kinds of beings who have an interest in exercising their capacity for a sense of justice, they do not regard compliance with social rules as merely a burden. For them, it is a form of activity in which they believe that they are realizing their nature. It is part of their good. As such, a potential free rider who sees himself as a Rawlsian person would *not* believe that it is in his interest to free ride. He, too, would voluntarily comply with just social rules.

9. So the reliance on a conception of the person does a lot of work for Rawls. However, such reliance raises two fundamental problems.

i. The first concerns the *scope* of Rawls’s conception of the person. A moral conception of the person is an ideal of the kind of person that one wishes to be. This could be more or less encompassing in one’s life as a whole. For instance, it could fill one’s ideal of the person to the brim, as patriotism does with the Spartan mother to whom Rousseau refers in *Emile*. Here is Rousseau:

A Spartan woman had five sons in the army and was awaiting news of the battle. A Helot arrives; trembling, she asks him for news. ‘Your five sons were killed.’ ‘Base slave, did I ask you that?’ ‘We won the victory.’ The mother runs to the temple and gives thanks to the gods. This is the female citizen.[[12]](#endnote-12)

This is also what Rousseau recommends in *The Government of Poland*. There he writes: “Upon opening its eyes, a child should see the fatherland, and see only it until his dying day.”[[13]](#endnote-13) In these texts, Rousseau sees one’s sense of oneself as a citizen as overriding all other components of who one is. In the example from Sparta, it is as if the woman is only a citizen and not also a mother.

But an ideal of the person could be less encompassing. The 1844 Marx attributes to his true communists a commitment to one another’s flourishing, but Marx also leaves space for each agent to pursue her own picture of individual self-realization -- as Marx says a few years later in *The German Ideology*, one can be a hunter, a fisherman, etc.[[14]](#endnote-14) The Rawls of *A Theory of Justice* talks of creating and maintaining a just society as “the preeminent form of human flourishing,” and he says that “persons best express their nature” by maintaining just institutions. Nevertheless, he, too, leaves plenty of room for individual projects.[[15]](#endnote-15) After all, that is the point of the liberty principle and its priority. Neither Marx nor the Rawls of *A Theory of Justice* emphasizes patriotism or any other *external end* (as I discussed last time) as crucial to their conceptions of the person. Their conceptions of the person are “thinner” than Rousseau’s conception.

In his second book, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls’s conception of the person is yet thinner. There Rawls insists that his conception of the person is what he calls a merely “political” conception. It specifies how we can see ourselves *only* as citizens and so it specifies the interests that we have *only* as citizens. In this second book, Rawls insists that we are also likely to have many robust interests that are quite distinct from those we have as citizens. We might see ourselves as having interests tied to other self-conceptions. For instance, if I am a devout Christian or Muslim I might believe that I have an interest in acting in such a way as to gain eternal bliss in heaven. For the Rawls of *Political Liberalism*, the moral conception of the person need only be an important enough part of one’s overall conception of the person to outweigh other considerations in central cases.

The issue that I have raised here about the scope of the conception of the person is crucial both for understanding Rawls and for political philosophy in general. However, one cannot talk about this issue briefly. It requires considerable time to deal with it properly, so, sadly, I must simply put this issue aside.

10. The second issue about the conception of the person is the one that I want to dig into. In a way, it is the central issue of these lectures -- namely, what is involved in justifying the appeal to some *particular* conception of the person? I have argued that after *A Theory of Justice* Rawls relies increasingly on a particular conception of the person. But of course political philosophers have always relied on conceptions of the person. That is, they have always relied on claims about what human beings are like. Indeed, one of the crucial early moments in the history of western political philosophy is Plato’s argument, in *The Republic*, that a human being has a tri-partite soul. And modern western political philosophy begins with Hobbes’s claims, in *Leviathan*, about the narrow limits to human motivational tendencies. So perhaps there is nothing new about Rawls’s appeal to a conception of the person as playing a fundamental role in his political philosophy.

Nevertheless, any such appeal does raise a question of justification. After all, the content of Plato’s moral conception of the person is incompatible with the content of Hobbes’s conception of the person – and neither fits with the content of Rawls’s conception. What could give us sufficient reason to accept any given moral conception of the person?

In *The Republic* Plato goes to great lengths to get us to accept his conception. He tries to get us to accept the thesis that if we can come to understand the structure of the state we will also be able to understand the structure of the human soul, and then Plato provides an argument that is supposed to show that in addition to appetite and reason the human soul contains something else, *thumos* or spirit. For Plato, the best soul, like the best polity, is supposed to have these three elements – appetite, reason and spirit -- in a proper balance. The last nine books of *The Republic* are, in effect, a long and complicated argument for Plato’s conception of the person and for the need for political institutions that fit with that conception.

Hobbes is more direct. He ends the Introduction to *Leviathan* with the following lines:

But let one man read another by his actions never so perfectly, it

serves him only with his acquaintance, which are but few. He that is

to govern a whole nation must read in himself, not this, or that

particular man; but mankind: which though it be hard to do, harder

than to learn any language or science; yet, when I shall have set down

my own reading orderly and perspicuously, the pains left another

will be only to consider if he also find not the same in himself.

For this kind of doctrine admitteth no other demonstration.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Hobbes appeals here to two things. On the one hand, the reader must “find the same in himself.” What Hobbes describes must fit with what the reader ultimately believes himself or herself to be. If you do not think that you are very much like the human beings that Hobbes describes in *Leviathan*, then his arguments will not convince you. Hobbes is well aware that he needs to convince his reader that the narrowly self-interested beings that he describes are in fact what human beings are like – he must convince the reader that the reader, himself, is precisely this kind of being. We can see this clearly in a long passage from Chapter 13 of *Leviathan*. Hobbes is worried that the reader will reject the very bleak description of human motivation that Hobbes has proposed. Hobbes then writes:

Let him [the reader] therefore consider with himself: when taking a journey, he arms himself and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions as I do by my words?[[17]](#endnote-17)

Here, we see Hobbes pressing that the reader *does in fact* accept Hobbes’s account of what persons are like. The reader might not admit this easily to himself, but if he looks at how he behaves in the world, Hobbes is saying, the reader will have to admit that he actually agrees with Hobbes about human nature.

But there is also a second element in Hobbes’s method. He writes “when I shall have set down my own reading orderly and perspicuously, the pains left another will be only to consider if he also find not the same in himself.” Now, I take what he sets down orderly and perspicuous to be *Leviathan* as a whole, Hobbes’s overall view. That is, Hobbes is presenting an account of what human beings are like that is tied to an account of what desirable and feasible political arrangements are like, and he is asking us – his readers -- to look into ourselves and to see whether, given our own understanding of human nature and its possibilities, it seems sensible to accept Hobbes’s political view as a whole.

What about Rawls? How does Rawls propose to justify his conception of the person? Let me quote again what Rawls writes early in “Kantian Constructivism.”

The task is to articulate a public conception of justice that all can live with who regard their person and their relation to society in a certain way . . .

What justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent to and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us.[[18]](#endnote-18)

I must regard my person in a certain way and I must see a particular conception of justice as fitting my deep understanding of myself and my aspirations. As with Hobbes, I must agree that the author of the work on political philosophy, here, John Rawls, has read me, the reader, properly, that Rawls has captured the kind of being that I take myself to be. And as with Hobbes and *Leviathan*, what is to be accepted is a conception of what a person is that is joined to an overall conception of what would count as desirable and feasible political arrangements.

Now, at this point, Rawls will run into a problem. Roughly speaking, it is the problem of showing that the conception of the person that one endorses is not a *distorted* conception in the sense that one does not hold it merely because of some sort of false consciousness. Rawls believes that his conception of the person is a conception that the reader will find familiar and recognizable, that it is a conception of the person that the reader will accept. Rawls might be wrong about this. It is, after all, an empirical question as to whether Rawls’s reader will accept Rawls’s conception of the person. But suppose that most of us do accept Rawls’s conception of the person. There is a further worry. The worry is that one accepts this particular conception of the person only because one has grown up in a particular society, and that one finds this conception of the person and the political institutions associated with it appealing only because one has, so to speak, been socially programmed to find all this to be appealing. Rawls is keenly aware that he might be challenged on this ground. We will get to this topic in the final lecture. Here, however, I want to note that Marx, too, is subject to this worry. Marx, too, has a conception of the person and Marx, too, has a deep problem concerning how his conception of the person is to be justified. So I will postpone addressing the issue of justification any further until we can see the content of Marx’s conception of the person.

In the rest of this lecture, then, I will talk about the 1844 Marx. In the next lecture, I will try to bring that old Marx, a Marx from the nineteenth century, into the twenty-first century. We will then be in a position to compare Marx’s and Rawls’s conceptions of the person, and I hope that we can then ask how far either of these conceptions is to be accepted. To put the point slightly differently, I hope that we can then ask whether we can have sufficient confidence that if we accept one or the other of them that we are not, ourselves, subject to false consciousness in doing so.

So I turn now to Marx.

III. Marx: Producing for Others

1. I have three goals in my discussion of the young Marx. First – and this is the task of this lecture -- I want to be clear on the content that, in 1844, Marx sees for a true communist society. Second – and this will be the task for the next lecture -- I want to adapt the views of the 1844 Marx to the conditions of scarcity that are likely to obtain for centuries to come. These are part of the background of human life and, therefore, part of the background of any useful political philosophy, no matter how idealized. Finally – and this is the task for the final lecture -- I want to note the way that the young Marx deals with the question of how to justify his own normative theses, in effect, his own conception of the person. I will argue that Marx’s conception of justification creates a serious internal problem for him. Combined with the problem that Rawls faces, this will set the stage for some final remarks about method in political philosophy.

I should be clear about the limitations on my treatment of Marx. I will be looking at him primarily as a normative thinker, not as an economist, a theorist of history or a sociologist. And I will certainly not be looking at him as a metaphysical thinker concerned with the relation of being and consciousness. He is, of course all of those, but I believe that his interest as a normative thinker has been much underrated. That is the aspect of Marx that I would like to bring back into the conversation of political philosophy.

Of course, Marx has been underrated as a normative philosopher in part because he seems explicitly to reject normative philosophizing. Indeed, he seems to have contempt for such a thing. To be sure, there is ambiguity about the role of normative judgments in Marx. The claim that the first volume of *Capital* is somehow value free seems to me just plain silly. One can simply read the discussion of the working day and feel Marx’s molten moral ire. But my real point will be that the young Marx has a distinctive view of the good human society. That he wants to justify that view non-philosophically is, I will argue, internally problematic.

2. You probably all know Marx’s biography so I will simply mention its main points up until 1844. Marx was born in 1818 in Trier, a small city in the German Rhineland. His family was Jewish by origin. Indeed, for generations the family had supplied the city of Trier with its rabbis. However, Marx’s father was a lawyer, and to pursue that career within Prussia at this time one had to be Christian. So in 1816 or 1817 Marx’s father converted to Lutheran Protestantism. This seems to have been a conversion in name only. Marx’s father was a devotee of the Enlightenment and he seems to have had no real religious beliefs of any kind. Karl Marx, himself, was an atheist. Marx went to university initially at Bonn and then in Berlin, eventually completing a dissertation comparing the views of Democritus and Epicurus. On completion of his doctorate in 1841, Marx hoped for an academic job. However, by then he had become involved with the group of radical thinkers – located mostly in Berlin – that were thought of as left Hegelians and are now often termed “young Hegelians.” Among these was his mentor Bruno Bauer. At that time Bauer was a junior professor in Bonn. He had been thought to be a rising star among the right wing Hegelians but his research on the Bible became increasing radical and came increasingly to have atheistic implications. By 1841, Bauer was writing a series of polemical analyses of and polemical attacks on Christianity. These ultimately led to his dismissal from his academic position. And the end of Bruno Bauer’s academic hopes also meant the end of Marx’s academic hopes. In 1842 Marx took over the editorship of a liberal newspaper, the *Rheinische Zeitung.* After about a year the Prussian government suppressed the paper. In late 1843 Marx moved to Paris where “On the Jewish Question”, “Comments on James Mill, *Élémens d'économie politique*” and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* were written. Marx eventually ended up in London where, except for brief periods, he remained for the rest of his life, where he wrote *Capital*, raised his children and died in 1883.

3. I want to jump quickly into the account that Marx gives in 1844 of what he calls “true communism.” I think that the proper way to see this account is as Marx’s picture of the most desirable form of human interdependence. In the first lecture I quoted John Locke and Adam Smith on the vast extent of human beings’ economic interdependence even two or three hundred years ago. These days we are interdependent not just in terms of the objects of daily use but also in terms of ideas, cultural themes, and so forth.

We are, then, deeply and pervasively interdependent. But Marx claims that under capitalism this interdependence occurs primarily through our mutual instrumental use of one another in the market. In the market we each try to get the most for own products and to pay the least for everyone else’s.[[19]](#endnote-19) Marx’s alternative state of affairs – true communism, as he calls it, in order to distinguish it from the communist views of certain French thinkers – is a condition in which individuals both would identify with the human species and would understand which kind of activity realizes one’s nature *qua* human being. Marx believes that individuals would then have no reason -- at least no reason with regard to the production and consumption of objects -- to treat one another purely instrumentally, and we would have solid reasons not to do so.

This requires elaboration. It can best be provided via a bit of commentary on a long passage from Marx’s “Comments on James Mill, *Élémens d'économie politique*.”

Suppose we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have, in his production, *doubly affirmed* himself and the other person. (1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality*, its *specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *life-expression* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, sensuously perceptible* [*sinnlich anschaubare*] and hence a power raised *beyond all doubt*. (2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* [*unmittelbar*] enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *human* nature [*Wesen*], and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *human* being [*Wesen*]. (3) I would have been for you the *mediator* [*der Mittler*] between you and the species, and therefore would become recognized and felt by you yourself as a completion [*Ergänzung*] of your own nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. (4) In my individual life-expression I would have directly created your life-expression, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realized* my true nature [*wahres Wesen*], my *human* nature, my *communal* nature.

Our products would be so many mirrors reflecting our nature.

This relationship would moreover be reciprocal [*wechselseitig*]; what occurs on my side has also to occur on yours.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Marx’s numbers in this passage are puzzling, since in the passage he asserts that there are two ways of self- and other-affirmation but he then goes on to list four items. One might try to see him as listing two ways from each agent’s perspective, but the text does not support such a reading. All four items proceed from a first person perspective. The other agent’s perspective is accounted for by the remark that “what occurs on my side has also to occur on yours.” Perhaps two of the elements are supposed to be more connected to what one does for oneself, and two are supposed to be more connected to what one does for others (for “the other person”), although this also seems textually hard to support. Let us put such issues aside. Overall, I think that it makes most sense to read Marx as having in mind first, the individual’s self-affirmation as an individual, which is dealt with in (1). His idea here is clear enough: in a communist society agents would find individual fulfillment in the process of production, both in the particular activity that one chooses to engage in and in the fact that this activity’s result is something external in which an individual can see a concrete manifestation of her individuality.

The rest of the passage focuses on the individual’s relation to other individuals. Marx seems to have two connected concerns: a concern with individuals’ relations to each other one-to-one, and a concern with individuals’ relations to each other as members of the group, the human species.

In (2) - (4) Marx emphasizes human interdependence but he puts this in a specific way. Here and elsewhere he says that in a communist society agents would “complete” one another.[[21]](#endnote-21) This is an interesting claim. The simplest interpretation of this idea is that, in true communism, agents would enable one another to attain their ends. Cooperation generates benefits for all, namely, additional goods and services that agents can use to pursue their particular ends.

Yet this cannot be a fully adequate reading. After all, keep in mind that, from a bird’s eye view, such reciprocal bestowal of benefits would also obtain in capitalism. In a capitalist society goods are produced in response to consumer demand and so we do in a sense produce for one another. Marx must mean something more.

In fact, Marx stresses that in purely market relationships we are not producing *in order to benefit one another*. The fact that through market relationships I do actually provide others’ with benefits is irrelevant to me or it is at most a means to my ultimate end of making money, of pursing my own interest. In market relationships, Marx says, people try to get the better of one another:

The social relation in which I stand to you, my labor for your need, is therefore also a mere semblance, and our reciprocal completion [*wechselseitige Ergänzung*] is likewise a mere semblance, the basis of which is reciprocal plundering. The intention of plundering, of deception, is necessarily present in the background . . . If I have sufficient physical force, I plunder you directly. If the realm of physical force is broken, we seek to impose illusions on one another, and the more adroit defrauds the other. Who defrauds whom is, for the totality of the relationship, a matter of chance. The ideal, intended defrauding takes place on both sides, i.e., each in his own judgment has defrauded the other.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Agents in the market want simply to get the most for the least and to do so they are willing to deceive or to coerce if they can get away with doing so. This deception or coercion need not be intended to frustrate other agents’ ends but that is its likely effect. If I am deceived or coerced into a deal, I am likely to be making a deal that I would not make in the absence of coercion and deception. That is why our reciprocal completion or *Ergänzung* is a mere *semblance* and not actual. One party winds up with fewer means to attain her ends than the appearance of a mutually beneficial trade suggests.

4. I think that Marx actually muddies his deeper point here by stressing agents’ intentions to deceive or to coerce, for that suggests Marx might not object to non-coercive, non-deceptive capitalist exchanges. And that seems very unlikely. In fact, what Marx primarily objects to about the market is that in market relationships agents fail to have, in addition to their more self-directed ends, the end of providing something useful for others, something that will facilitate others’ attainment of *their* ends. By contrast, Marx believes that in a communist society individuals would produce partly as a form of individual self-realization but that they would *also* produce *in order* to benefit others. The intention to benefit others would be among their intentions in producing.

For Marx, an important part of an agent’s ends is supposed to be to provide what others need to attain *their* ends. In a true communist society, he thinks, I would not only provide you with the tomatoes for your dinner. Beyond this, in growing those tomatoes my goal would be to provide you (anyway, to provide someone) with tomatoes to use. Your use of those tomatoes would thus contribute to attaining one of my ends – that someone use the tomatoes I have grown -- as well as to attaining one of your own ends. Our ends would not only not conflict, they would be complementary. And since you, on your part, would make something which I (anyway, which some other human being) would use, the complementarity would be reciprocal (at least within the community as a whole).

We should note that such a relationship is an anticipation of the famous dictum from the “Critique of the Gotha Program” of thirty-one years later: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.”[[23]](#endnote-23) On the 1844 Marx’s view, my productive activity would be a good thing for me. It would be a part of my self-realization. The phrase “From each according to his abilities” does not point to an obligation to make my talents benefit the public. Nor does it involve the claim that I must compensate society for goods that I have received. It is, I think, simply a description of what Marx believes true communist life would be like. In such a society, the exercise of my abilities would be simply a component of my own good.[[24]](#endnote-24) This is important. There is no duty to produce. It is, however, what one would do.

In the “Comments on James Mill,” Marx goes on to say that in a communist society when another person uses my product I would find satisfaction in “having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *human* being.”[[25]](#endnote-25) The idea here is straightforward. Suppose that I have no personal financial worries, since I take what I need from the public commissary. I spend my time carving a chair. It is my form of self-realization. However, I also want that chair to be used. My self-realization would be undermined if the chair were to rot in an attic. As with the tomatoes that I grow, I want someone to use the chair that I carve. Only then would I have helped to satisfy a human need, and only then, as Marx puts it, would I “become recognized and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own nature.”[[26]](#endnote-26)

In a communist society there would thus be a link between my production according to my abilities and your use according to your needs. My production would be *for* your needs, and your need satisfaction would be the final stage in my production. To help meet your (anyway, someone’s) needs would be among my ends. Actually meeting your (someone’s) needs would be a component of my good.

5. Now Marx’s premise here is that society is beyond material scarcity, and we will soon want to challenge that premise. Before doing so, however, we should examine another aspect of Marx’s picture of true communism. For the 1844 Marx, completing one another means more than just producing for one another’s needs. In a communist society, he says, we would also *mediate* for one another with the species. Marx says, more specifically, that the producer would mediate between the consumer and the species. I take the idea to be that under communism when another person uses my product she sees me as *a representative* of the species generally. In her use of the product she no doubt recognizes the specific kind of value that I have produced, but she also recognizes that *a human being* has produced something with *the intention* that she use it. It is as if the species generally has produced something for her. I take the idea to be further -- although this is not explicit in the text -- that in seeing the species produce *for her*, she regards herself as having her species membership affirmed.

Actually, I think that Marx should reverse the mediating relationship as well. Insofar as I am a producer under communism, couldn’t the consumer similarly represent the species, and mediate between me and it? The consumer’s consumption with the recognition that I have produced something for human beings to use could be seen as the validation of my activity of producing (both to express my individuality and) for others. This too could presumably count as a way that I can see my species membership being affirmed. I suspect that Marx has something like this in mind when he says that “therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realized my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal nature*.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

An agent’s species membership would be affirmed in these production/consumption interactions because these interactions involve the activity through which Marx thinks that human beings realize their nature *qua* human beings. In such interactions agents would affirm one another not just as members of *some* group or other, but as members of the *human species*, as the beings for whom such production/consumption interactions are the way to realize their nature. Production and consumption would have a certain resonance. In their daily activities individuals would see their essential nature and their group (their species) membership writ large.

Now both Ludwig Feuerbach and the 1844 Marx believe that there is a particular mechanism -- a mechanism of “mediation” -- by which agents affirm their humanity through establishing strong ties to the species as a whole. Feuerbach thinks that in general our interactions with other human beings can play this role, but the particular activity that he highlights is, interestingly enough, love making. In this process, Feuerbach says, the woman stands for and makes the man conscious of the larger group and his membership in it.[[28]](#endnote-28)

At first glance Marx seems similar to Feuerbach. He says that “[t]he direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person [*des Menschen zum Menschen*] is the *relation of man to woman* [*des Mannes zum Weibe*].”[[29]](#endnote-29) And as with Feuerbach, Marx thinks that one connects to the species through this natural relationship to an individual.[[30]](#endnote-30) Nevertheless, Marx’s point is very different. For Feuerbach says that one of the things that I learn through love is “that only community constitutes humanity.” However, in the “Comments” Marx says that under capitalism human beings’ communal nature (*Gemeinwesen*) “appears in the form of *alienation*.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Marx’s contrast is between our genuine communal nature – what he calls human beings’ “reciprocal completion [*wechselseitige Ergänzung*] the result of which is species-life, truly human life”[[32]](#endnote-32) -- and our communal nature as it exists under capitalism. Even if, in principle, community does constitute humanity, for Marx it does so under capitalism “in the form of *alienation*,” and love cannot change that fact.

Moreover, in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx argues that sexual relationships under capitalism replicate the “infinite degradation” of human relationships generally under capitalism.[[33]](#endnote-33) From the character of the relation of man to woman, Marx says, one can see how far social relations are from being properly human relationships. It shows “the extent to which the human being’s need has become a human need . . . [that] the other person as a person [*Mensch als Mensch*] has become for him a need, the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a communal being [*Gemeinwesen*].”[[34]](#endnote-34) On Feuerbach’s picture of the relation of man to woman, individuals relate to one another in such a way that their mutual humanity is affirmed. Marx’s claim is that under capitalism this is *not* the case. Like other relations, sexual relations under capitalism are relations of purely instrumental use.[[35]](#endnote-35) But then within that relation individuals *cannot* be each other’s mediator with the species. Perhaps the relation of man to woman *could* play that role under communism -- however, under communism so would other things, most obviously economic relations.

6. According to Marx, the central form of mediation between an individual and the species takes place in the activities of producing and using objects. He talks of the reciprocal mirroring of our nature via our products. “Our products would be so many mirrors reflecting our nature.”[[36]](#endnote-36) Now suppose that the activity through which human beings realize their nature is in fact – as Marx believes it to be -- the production of objects in order to express one’s individuality and to provide the means for others to attain their ends. And suppose that in a true communist society everyone would believe this. Then it would make sense for true communists to see the objects they produce as embodiments of their nature. And as such embodiments, the objects could be said to “reflect” their nature.

The image of reciprocal mirroring is worth pursuing: the reflection in mirror *A* includes the reflection in mirror *B*, as well as *B* including the reflection in *A*, as well as *A* including *B* including *A*, etc. Now products are Marx’s mirrors, but they can function as mirrors only if they are *interpreted* in a certain way. To reflect human beings’ essential nature they must be interpreted *as* embodying it. Presumably, communists would so interpret them. And with products reciprocally mirroring our nature, it is not only that I would see both my product and your product as embodying human beings’ essential nature; I would also see that you see my product and your product as embodying human beings’ essential nature; and I would see that you see that I see, etc.

So, in general, communists would see human nature reflected in their products -- and they would be aware of this fact about one another, and of one another’s awareness, and so on. And communists would believe that human nature involves producing for one another. They would regard the objects of economic exchange as the expressions of their common essential nature (and believe them to be regarded as such). The mirroring would express communists’ belief that they share a common nature and that their current (and essential) relation is that of intentional and reciprocal completing. Under such conditions, strong communal ties would presumably obtain.

7. Now, for Marx, one’s identification with the human species leads to a sense of ownership of the species’ output or product. When the group to which one belongs is small, the idea is fairly easy to see. Suppose that four or five people work together to build a house. One of them might tell a friend, “This is a house that I built.” Such a statement would not be elliptical for, “This is a house where I framed the dining room and the small bedroom, put on the northwest side shingles and laid the bathroom tiles.” Rather, the person would likely regard herself as having participated in building the house as a whole, and would see the house as a whole as her product.

To the extent that agents identify strongly with a group, it does seem possible for them to relate to the group’s products as their own, even when the group is large and, therefore, individual contributions are minuscule. Marx globalizes this psychological capacity. His claim is thus more or less the same as Bruno Bauer’s assertion – an assertion that I referred to in my first lecture when discussing Rawls’s idea of a social union of social unions – that, as a member of the human species’ Self-consciousness, I can come to “know even geniuses and their creations as my own determinations.”[[37]](#endnote-37) Marx would agree that group members *qua* group members “have” the capacities of the group as a whole and can see the resulting products as “theirs.” For Marx, of course, the relevant group, at least in 1844, is the human species.

8. Now, could our products in fact ever really mirror our shared species nature? The question concerns the psychological plausibility of the strong identification with the species that the 1844 Marx has in mind. We should take the question seriously. Consider, for instance, that part of what we register in appreciating a painting of a mountain vista, as opposed to looking at the vista itself, is that the painting is a form of human expression. Marx’s point in claiming in 1844 that “the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the *open* book of human *essential powers*”[[38]](#endnote-38) is that we *could* take a similar attitude toward the products of industry, agriculture, and so on. I do see the tomatoes from my neighbor’s garden in a different light than those from the supermarket, and not just because they taste better and I appreciate my neighbor’s generosity. The tomatoes from my neighbor’s garden are more palpably products of someone’s labor. Marx’s claim is that were we to identify strongly with the species and to have the right conception of human nature, the tomatoes at the public commissary would also resonate with that nature.

In thinking about relationships in a true communist society, we should look also at Marx’s invocation of love in the long passage that I read from the “Comments on James Mill.” In describing economic relations in a true communist society Marx says “I . . . would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love.”[[39]](#endnote-39) Is he asserting that in a communist society there would be intense affective bonds among citizens? Is that really a plausible picture?

What I think Marx has in mind is not individual intimacy or the depth of feeling that goes with individual intimacy. Rather, I think that Marx has in mind the replication of the structure of personal relationships at a more abstract and general level. It is a feature of friendships that it is good for friends to give one another things. It is better that I buy you a scarf and that you buy me gloves than that we agree not to give gifts and that I buy myself gloves and you buy yourself a scarf. What is confirmed in the gift exchange is our relatedness or, if one likes, our solidarity, the fact that we do matter to one another. Communist production is supposed to have this structure. Individuals produce *for* one another. So one might say that there would be widespread relationships of “friendship,” but that these would be *structural* rather than personal.[[40]](#endnote-40) In the next lecture I will discuss this sort of attitude at greater length. However, it must be stripped of its association with the kinds of robust affective relationships that individuals can have only with other individuals. Still, I do think that Marx is getting at a human possibility that should be taken seriously.

IV. An Excursus on Mid-Nineteenth Century Thinkers

1. Marx’s 1840s views are in many ways quite original. Nevertheless, they also correspond to views held by other writers in the mid-nineteenth century. In closing today’s lecture, I want to expand briefly on this theme. I believe that if we are to understand Marx, and especially if we are to find elements of his view that we can use today, it is important to see clearly his relation to the mainstream of modern political philosophical thought.

In looking at other mid-nineteenth century writers I will focus on three things. First, there is their criticism of the present. It is actually a commonplace of that period that the new commercial, industrial and democratic civilization was producing a debased form of human being and a debased form of human life. Marx’s 1844 discussion of the alienation of labor is just one example of this very broad tendency. Here, for instance, is Matthew Arnold talking about the Puritan middle class: “[It] presents a defective type of religion, a narrow range of intellect and knowledge, a stunted sense of beauty”;[[41]](#endnote-41) and John Stuart Mill on his contemporaries: “their human capacities are withered and starved”;[[42]](#endnote-42) and the American Henry David Thoreau writes: “[W]e live meanly, like ants.”[[43]](#endnote-43)

The complaints that the critics make are varied. Some complain that agents are pressed into a single mold. For instance, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that “Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members . . . The virtue in most request is conformity.”[[44]](#endnote-44) Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville worry about a despotism of public opinion. Mill writes that “In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship.”[[45]](#endnote-45) Other writers complain that people have become occupied with the obsessive pursuit of money. Thomas Carlyle writes that “Cash Payment has become the sole nexus of man to man.”[[46]](#endnote-46) De Tocqueville writes that social solidarity has altogether disappeared. He says, “I see an innumerable multitude of men, alike and equal, constantly circling around in pursuit of the petty and banal pleasures with which they glut their souls. Each one of them, withdrawn into himself, is almost unaware of the fate of the rest.”[[47]](#endnote-47)

2. Yet, and this is my second focus, despite such severe criticism of the present, many of these same writers express a great optimism about the future. I will take Mill as my example here although similar things are said by many other writers.

The chapter, “Of Individuality,” in Mill’s book *On Liberty* (published in 1859) presents a picture of the sort of life that it would be best for a human being to lead. It presents an ideal of the person, an outline of the general form of the dispositions, desires, and kinds of decision-making that would represent a significant human achievement. “[O]ur desires and impulses should be our own,” Mill says. They should not be those imposed by others’ opinions.[[48]](#endnote-48) Mill advocates “experiments of living” and “varieties of character.”[[49]](#endnote-49) And he endorses Humboldt’s assertion that the “end of man . . . is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.”[[50]](#endnote-50) In line with this, he compares the fully realized individual to a work of art.[[51]](#endnote-51)

What we have then is the goal of bringing about the institutional conditions under which each individual would be in a position to develop a wide range of capacities and would be in a position to do so through her own free choice of which capacities to develop.

3. Yet Mill also presents another and seemingly different picture of a human ideal in his small book *Utilitarianism*. This is my third point of focus. In *Utilitarianism* Mill explains that the actions of the proper utilitarian agent would be motivated partly by conscience but primarily by sympathy, that is, by identification with the pleasures and pains of other human beings – at the limit, by identification with the pleasures and pains of all other human beings. Mill writes that such an agent would gladden and sadden with others, would “identify his *feelings* more and more with their good” and so would have a direct motive to promote universal happiness.[[52]](#endnote-52) Mill is convinced that this is a genuine psychological possibility. He writes of Auguste Comte’s *Traité de politique positive*:

[I]t has superabundantly shown the possibility of giving to the service of humanity, even without the aid of belief in a Providence, both the psychical power and the social efficacy of a religion; making it take hold of human life, and colour all thought, feeling, and action, in a manner of which the greatest ascendancy ever exercised by any religion may be but a type and foretaste.[[53]](#endnote-53)

This passage of Mill’s echoes a claim from his earlier essay, “Utility of Religion.” There, he says that for the devotees of the “Religion of Humanity . . . the sense of unity with mankind, and deep feeling for the general good, may be cultivated into a sentiment and a principle capable of fulfilling every important function of religion and itself justly entitled to the name.”[[54]](#endnote-54)

Here, Mill’s ideal is of a person who cares deeply about humanity. Her thoughts and feelings are carried out of herself and fixed on what Mill calls “an unselfish object, loved and pursued as an end for its own sake.”[[55]](#endnote-55) And in such love and pursuit the agent finds her own satisfaction. Moreover, while Mill insists that such concern for others should be for its own sake, he also insists that its presence in fact brings a large reward. “[I]f the Religion of Humanity were as sedulously cultivated as the supernatural religions are . . . all who had received the customary amount of moral cultivation would up to the hour of death live ideally in the life of those who are to follow them.”[[56]](#endnote-56) One would receive a psychologically satisfying substitute for personal immortality. Strong identification with humanity thus provides a second picture of the sort of life it would be good for a human being to lead.

This sort of idea was held by several French writers and by quite a few English writers, including the novelist George Eliot. Something like this idea was also held by Feuerbach. Feuerbach affirms the idea of immortality through identification with the species when, in *The Essence of Christianity*, he writes, “He therefore who lives in the consciousness of the species as a reality, regards his existence for others, his public, his socially useful existence, as that existence which is one with the existence of *his* nature -- as his immortal existence.”[[57]](#endnote-57) As with Mill, in Feuerbach’s view, the goal of personal immortality should be abandoned but identification with the ongoing species can provide a satisfactory substitute.

4. Now, as I say, the views of the 1844 Marx are in line with much of what these other writers say. Marx certainly believes that current society degrades basic human possibilities. And he certainly believes that in a good society people would have the opportunity to develop a wide range of capacities, and that they would do so in accordance with their own beliefs about what is valuable. Moreover, Marx even shows a similarity to Mill’s thought that we can take satisfaction in others’ well-being. Marx stresses that under true communism it will be possible, as he puts it, to share in others’ pleasures. Under true communism, Marx says, “the senses and enjoyment of other human beings have become my *own* appropriation” and “the affirmation of the object by another is likewise one’s own enjoyment.”[[58]](#endnote-58) In effect, Marx is saying, your enjoyment will become mine; your enjoyment will give me satisfaction. Of course Marx does not use the concept of sympathy. Nor does he use the terminology of pleasures and pains. Still, agents in a true communist society would in fact feel one another’s pleasures (and their pains, were they to have any) and be gladdened (and saddened) by those pleasures (and pains).

There is even a moment in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* where Marx seems to endorse the Feuerbachian and Millian idea of achieving a kind of immortality through identification with the human species. “*Death*,” Marx writes, “seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the *particular* individual and to contradict their unity. But the particular individual is only a *particular species being*, and as such mortal.”[[59]](#endnote-59) The word “seems [*scheint*]” suggests that Marx believes that death is not really a victory over the individual, except so far as the individual is merely an individual and not also a member of the species.

5. I certainly do not want to ignore the differences among these thinkers. As I said at the beginning of the first lecture, I especially do not want to ignore the fact that Mill is a utilitarian and that utilitarianism is an aggregative view that I believe Marx would reject. The point of this little bit of background history is merely to make us keep in mind that Marx’s views about a good human life are not unusual or isolated views. In the next lecture I will urge us to recast Marx in order to bring certain elements of his views into our current conversations, so it is good to see that in many ways Marx was very much a part of mainstream mid-nineteenth century debates. In particular, we can see that other writers share with the young Marx two key things: an insistence on the great importance of individuality and all-around individual development; and a great stress on having concern for other individuals’ well-being.

1. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 18, p. 121. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See Thomas Nagel, “Rawls on Justice,” *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, no. 2, 1973, pp. 220-234. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77, no. 9, 1980, p. 519. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” p. 525. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” p. 525. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 505/442. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 505/442. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See John Rawls, “Fairness to Goodness,” *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 84, no. 4, 1975, pp. 536-554. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 572/501. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 574/503. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* p. 563/493. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979), p. 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Considerations on the Government of Poland* (GP) in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 189. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Canonical texts here are Karl Marx “Auszüge aus James Mills Buch *Élémens d'économie politique*. Trad. par J.T. Parisot, Paris 1823”/“Comments on James Mill, *Élémens d'économie politique*,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband i/*MECW*, vol. 3 ; Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, MEW,* Ergänzungsband I/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW*, vol. 3; and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, *MEW*, vol. 3/*The German Ideology*, and *MECW*, vol. 5. For a discussion of the theme of commitment to others’ flourishing, see my “Producing for Others,” in C. Zurn and H. Schmidt am Busch eds., *The Philosophy of Recognition: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 529/463. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, introduction, p. 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter 13, p. 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” p. 519. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband i, pp. 459-462/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, pp. 224-227. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I, pp. 462-63/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, pp. 227-28. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The German I have translated as “completion” is “Ergänzung.” [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I, pp. 460-61/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 226. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Karl Marx, “Kritik des Gothaer Programms” (1875), *MEW*, vol. 19, p. 21/”Critique of the Gotha Programme,” *MECW*, vol. 24, p. 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Gerald Cohen makes this point. See Gerald Cohen, “Marxism and Contemporary Political Philosophy, or: Why Nozick Exercises Some Marxists More than He does Many Egalitarian Liberals,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Supplementary Volume 16, 1990, pp. 381-82. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I, p. 462/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I, p. 462/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. For a reading stressing themes similar to those that I highlight, see David Archard, “The Marxist Ethic of Self-realization: Individuality and Community,” in J.D.G. Evans ed., *Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially pp. 32-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. See, for instance, Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841, rev. 1843, rev. 1849), edited by Werner Schuffenhauer. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1956, p. 266-267/*The Essence of Christianity* (1841), translated by George Eliot. New York: Harper & Row, 1957, pp. 168-169. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844,* in *MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 535/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, p. 295. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. See Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 535-36/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, pp. 295-96. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I, p. 451/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 217. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I, 451/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 217. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 535/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, p. 295. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 535/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, p. 296. The context here is Marx’s contrast of “a human need” with the aim of “crude communism” simply to universalize instrumental relations (“*woman* as the *spoil* and handmaid of communal lust . . . a piece of communal and common property”; *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 534-535/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, pp. 294-95). This crude communist ideal is said to be merely an extreme expression of the relationships actually existing under capitalism. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. The structural equation of sexual and work relations is made explicit at Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische* Manuskripte, *MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 534/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, p. 295. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I 463/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. See Bauer, “Leiden und Freuden des theologischen Bewußtseins,” p. 173. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische* Manuskripte *MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 542/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, p. 302. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Marx, “Auszüge,” *MEW*, Ergänzungsband I 462/“Comments,” *MECW*, vol. 3, p. 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. In his book, *Alienation*, Richard Schacht claims that “Marxian sociality . . . is direct and personal” (Schacht, *Alienation*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1970; p. 90). Schacht’s point is that, in contrast to Hegel, Marx rejects institutional roles -- e.g., citizenship -- as the basis for solidarity among individuals. Marx does reject such roles, so Schacht is right that Marxist sociality would be direct, not mediated. On the other hand, it need not be personal, at least not in the implausible sense of involving intimacy on a wide scale. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Matthew Arnold, “Irish Catholicism and British Liberalism” (1878), in Matthew Arnold, *The Works of Matthew Arnold in Fifteen* Volumes (London: MacMillan and Co, 1903-1904), vol. 10, p. 97. See also Matthew Arnold, *Friendship’s Garland* (1871), in Arnold, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 378: “Your middle-class man thinks it the highest pitch of development and civilization when his letters are carried twelve times a day from Islington to Camberwell, and from Camberwell to Islington, and if railway-trains run to and fro between them every quarter of an hour. He thinks it is nothing that the trains only carry him from an illiberal, dismal life at Islington to an illiberal, dismal life at Camberwell; and the letters only tell him that such is the life there.” [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 18, p. 265. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854) (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance” (1841), in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press), vol. 2, p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Mill, *On Liberty*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 18, p. 264. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Thomas Carlyle, “Chartism” (1839), in Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1896-1901), vol. 29, p. 164. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Alexis de Tocqueville*, De la Démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1990), vol. 2, p.265/*Democracy in America*, translated by George Lawrence (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), vol. 1, part iv, chapter 6, pp. 691-92. The passage is from the final volume, published in 1840. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Mill, *On Liberty*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 18, p. 263. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Mill, *On Liberty*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 18, p. 269 and 261. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Mill, *On Liberty*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 18, p. 261. The quoted passage is from Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Mill, *On Liberty*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 18, pp. 263 and 266. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 231 (emphasis in original). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 232. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Mill, “Utility of Religion,” in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 422. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Mill, “Utility of Religion,” in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 422*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Mill, “Utility of Religion,” in Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 426. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, p. 269/*The Essence of Christianity*, p. 171 (translation amended, emphasis in original). [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, pp. 540 and 563/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, pp. 300 and 322 (emphasis in original). [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, MEW,* Ergänzungsband I, p. 539/*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *MECW,* vol. 3, p. 299. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)